Production
in a State of
Abundance

Valuation and Practice in the
Swedish Meat Supply Chain

Jonas Bååth
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Abstract

This thesis is a sociological contribution to the study of abundance. It discusses the case of Swedish meat producers and how they persist in producing pork and beef despite a lack of demand and competitive disadvantages compared with foreign suppliers. In doing so, this study answers how abundance is perpetuated in the production of a foodstuff in over-supply. This monograph further adds new empirical and theoretical knowledge to the fields of food studies, economic sociology, and the social sciences studying problems of abundance.

The study explores how Swedish meat producers deal with problems stemming from supplying more than demanded volumes of food. The inquiry into this topic combines pragmatism, economic sociology, and qualitative fieldwork. The empirical materials mainly consist of in-depth interviews with 41 informants and more than one month of participatory observations from the Swedish meat supply chain.

The evidence supplied shows how farmers, meat processors, and retailers continue supplying an abundant foodstuff by studying the valuations used in their production practice. The conclusion is that meat is not supplied to meet the consumers’ demand for food. Instead, this foodstuff is supplied as a marketing tool to meet the producers’ demand for commerce as an aesthetic of market exchange, or sustained production in line with Swedish agrifood policy, distinguished by high animal welfare and low antibiotics use. It is further argued that abundance is perpetuated because these producers rely on valuations which distinguish certain qualities of a good, rather than sufficient quantity of supply. Without using a quantitative, commensurable measure, it is not possible to limit the supply. This study contrasts existing theories of abundance by stating that problems thereof depend on how sufficiency is valuated, not the existence of some excess. These findings further support the argument that supply chains must be granted more attention in food studies primarily preoccupied with consumers. They also suggest further investigations into the relationships between markets in supply chains, and the role of production sites in economic life, would benefit economic sociology.

Keywords: abundance, production, valuation, Swedish meat industry, supply chain, post-scarcity society, economic sociology, food studies, agriculture, grocery retail, pragmatism, practice theory, ethnography

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urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-341801 (http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=nbn:se:uu:diva-341801)
To my grandparents,
who lived the dawn of material abundance
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When and where do things start? As a sociologist, I am painstakingly aware of the fact that defined starting points for human experiences are close to impossible to define. In my view, Andrew Abbott (2016) captures the reason for this problematic fact when he calls human history “processual”. If I attempt to point out when my own interest for studying food emerged, a number of occasions spring to mind. It may have been when my paternal grandfather “poked in the soil, and out came potatoes!” which I, as an astonished four-year-old, told my parents. It may have been the (grammatically odd) newspaper clippings in my maternal grandparents’ kitchen saying “Father was served the best food, mother ate standing” alongside the counter-statement “Ulla [my maternal grandmother’s name] boss of the house”. It may have been present from the beginning, given the fact that I always looked forward to Thursday’s grocery shopping. In the end, food – as a symbol and resource – makes the processual character of my life, and humanity alike, make sense. That may also be why I chose to write a doctoral thesis about food. The first people who should be thanked in this acknowledgement are the farmers, butchers, retail workers, shop owners, lobbyists, consultants, and managers who participated in this study. You made it possible in the most concrete sense; you fed it with lived experiences.

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Thank you all!

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Prickig korv och randig korv ifrån löpande bandet
Matas ut åt alla håll och översvämmar landet
Alla måste köpa den fast ingen har beställt
Vill du inte äta den så dör du av svält¹

- Cornelis Wreeswijk
  Till Riksbanken

¹ Literal translation: Spotted sausage and striped sausage from the conveyer belt // Produced in all directions and flood the nation // Everyone must buy it, albeit nobody has ordered [it] // If you do not eat it, you [will] starve to death.
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Abbreviations

BSE: *Bovin Spongiform Encephalopati*, or “mad cow disease”
CAP: European Union Common Agricultural Policy
DN: The Daily News, a major Swedish daily (Dagens Nyheter).
FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
HACCP: Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points
HGS: Hennesy Grading System
KCF: Swedish Meat Industry Association (Kött och charkföretagen)²
LRF: Federation of Swedish Farmers (Lantbrukarnas Riksförbund)
NFA: National Food Administration (Livsmedelsverket)
SAW: Swedish Statute on Animal Welfare (Djurskyddsförordningen)
SBA: Swedish Board of Agriculture (Jordbruksverket)
SCA: Swedish Competition Authority (Konkurrensverket)
SEPA: Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (Naturvårdsverket)
SR: Swedish public service radio (Sveriges Radio)

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² Industry here means abattoirs and meat refinement industries, called “meat processing” below.
1 The Problem of Abundance

One winter’s day in early 2014, hog farmers in mid-Sweden realized that their slaughtering contracts had been discontinued. The critical situation emerged after Russia closed its borders to European imports. As an effect of that embargo, meat suddenly became increasingly abundant within the EU. With an increasing supply came falling prices. With falling prices came Swedish farmers suddenly getting their contracts for slaughter cancelled, effectively leaving them with their stables full of unsold animals. This scenario is the crisis Agneta refers to above, constituted by an abundance of meat in Sweden. To deal with this situation, some farmers made the unusual (for Sweden) decision to export their animals from Sweden to Poland. Doing so, hog farmer Jonas Petersson also found that exporting his piglets “did not feel good at all” (quote in DN 2014; see also SR P4 2014; Lantbruk & Skogsland 2014). To make such a radical change of production practice disrupted both material and emotional values.

The scenario provided here paints the present state of meat production in Sweden as an industry on the brink of survival. Such a state is, at least on the surface, paradoxical. Swedes consume more meat, and food in general, than ever before. This extensive consumption coincides with the fact that Swedish meat producers are less regulated than ever before, punctuated by their unprecedented access to the global markets for meat. This is the context of the “crisis”, in Agneta’s words, which is exemplified by Jonas Petersson; his terminated contract and the dissatisfactory solution to the problems it generated implies that there are problems stemming from an oversupply of Swedish meat. The following 246 pages explore the production of abundance as a sociological problem, and the contested role of agriculture and food supply in a wealthy society under liberal globalization.

The title of this study implies its dual aim. The full title reads “Production in a State of Abundance: Valuation and Practice in the Swedish Meat Supply Chain”. This reading distinguishes the empirical aim of this monograph: to investigate how Swedish meat producers continue producing a foodstuff that is excessive compared to its consumption, by studying how meat, animals and
production regimes are valuated in their everyday practices. For example, how a farmer like Jonas Petersson deals with his oversupply of piglets, and stays on as a producer instead of terminating the operation.

The second part of my aim comes forth by reading only the darker letters, which read “Production of Abundance”. This reading denotes the underlying theoretical ambition of this study: to explain how the production of abundance is perpetuated. Situating this study in the field of economic sociology, my argument begins by defining what abundance is and how the problems thereof are approached in economics and sociology.

1.1 Abundance in Social Science

Is having too much really a problem? According to popular myth, Josef Stalin commented that “quantity has a quality all its own”, regarding the supply of numerous, yet ill equipped, soldiers for the Red Army. The value of oversupply is also implied in the IT industry, where “knowledge redundancies” are argued to improve the rate of innovations (cf. Fægri, Dybå, and Dingsøyr 2010; Sivakumar and Roy 2004). An abundance of knowledge is argued to make the people working in that industry better at finding solutions for shared problems. Another, more general value of oversupply, is that it enables strategic selection. A more than sufficient number of offers in markets, either from buyers or sellers, is a premise so that “competing offers can be compared to each other” (cf. Aspers 2011:7–8, quote on p. 7). However, this study is concerned with problematic cases where the oversupply has to be managed in order to avoid negative effects.

By the word “abundance”, I mean a totality which may be distinguished into two parts, called “sufficiency” and “excess”. Abundance further implies that the existence of some excess is related to problems, because there is insufficiently much of something. In studies of material culture, such problematic effects of oversupply become evident as “overflow”, an excess of, e.g., possessions (Löfgren 2012), carbon emissions (Callon 1998), or food (Evans, Campbell, and Murcott 2013; Ferrell 2006). Such studies inquire into certain problems stemming from abundance, but say little about how abundance itself continues to exist.

By investigating the production of abundance, this study addresses an economic phenomenon from a sociological angle. The problem of abundance

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3 For consistency, I use the word “excess” to imply the problematic part of abundance in all cases, in contrast to sufficiency. For example, a price can be excessively high for a buyer, or excessively low for a seller. By calling these prices excessive, I imply that they are insufficient offers in a market exchange in a state of abundance. While this use of the word “excessive” may occasionally seem odd, I use it throughout for consistency in the argument. While uses like “drinking to excess” may imply a positive value, it should be noted that it implies going beyond the limits of sufficient consumption.
concerns “economy”, in the word’s most fundamental sense, because an oversupply is part of the concrete material fundiment of everyday life that are managed in line with cultural and social conceptions of value (see Swedberg 2008). Economy is more than just quantities of resources, it also involves how societies organize and manage those quantities. This definition of economy implies that I study a specific kind of abundance: goods in oversupply. To approach this issue, I turn to how economic theory treats abundance and problems thereof.

1.1.1 Economic Theories of Abundance

Economic theory is the scientific basis of resource allocation under scarcity (see Daoud 2011a:13–22). In classical economics, abundance is hardly a problem at all. On the contrary, both Adam Smith and Thomas Malthus are troubled with how to rid society of scarcity. For Smith, abundance will be kept at bay by the invisible, but frugal, hand of the market. This invisible hand, Smith argues, ensures that nobody is able to get paid for producing abundance, because there are no buyers for it (2007:349–50). It follows that abundance cannot occur in a sustained manner according to Smith’s theory. Malthus, however, is a skeptic of even achieving sufficiency as he finds that populations grow faster than productivity (1798:138–41). However, and as John Kenneth Galbraith (1998:18–28) argues, classical economic theory was developed for a society where the productivity of 20\textsuperscript{th} century industrial production was hardly imaginable, the times in which over-production is made possible.

Economic theory changes when problems of abundance emerge in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. A fundamental argument therein is that, given a free market, competition among economic actors will lead to the harmonization of supply and demand. This condition is called “market equilibrium”, under which neither excess or dearth is an issue (Caravale 1997:12–15; see also Lancaster 1966). Abundance, it follows, may not be perpetuated under such conditions. However, unemployment, i.e. abundance of labor power, in tandem with aggressive inflation, i.e., abundance of currency, shook a number of countries in Europe and the USA. Economists set out to solve the problem by approaching it as an issue of allocating scarce resources. I outline two examples of such attempts.

John Maynard Keynes reasons that increased productivity in the industry leads to lower demand for labor, which leads to falling wages. From the assumption that “consumption […] is the sole end and object of all economic activity” (Keynes 2012:104), he draws the conclusion that by subsidizing less-than-profitable employment, aggregate demand may be increased (Keynes 2012:129–31). Effectively, abundance is re-defined as sufficiency and problems stemming from abundance are due to a scarcity of consumption power. This argument is not unimportant for economics, because it suggest that supply is not enough – the demand side is as much a problem that
economic theory has to solve in order for a society to function and solve problems of scarcity. More problematically though, it assumes that abundance is equivalent to affluence (cf. Chernomas 1984). Affluence implies wealth, but wealth is a particularly prestigious or well managed form of sufficiency (cf. Galbraith 1998). Alternatively, it is problematic in terms of the material scarcity that unequal distribution of wealth implies (cf. McGoey 2017). Abundance is, in contrast to wealth, too much to be considered unproblematic. However, the problem of abundance for Keynes is essentially inefficiently distributed affluence, a scarce supply of “resource” consumption power.

Austrian economist F. A. Hayek is one of Keynes’s fiercest academic critics. The previous outline of the Keynesian approach to abundance opens up for Hayek’s pro-capitalist critique thereof. In bright contrast to Keynes, Hayek argues that government intervention creates a problem of abundance – inflation. It does so, because states are inefficient at utilizing knowledge, which leads to the distorted prices that hampers any producer’s ability to adjust to the sways of the market (Hayek 1945:519–20, 25–26). Hayek’s critique of state intervention is, in its own way, sociological. It argues that “the economy” is not a separate part of reality. Instead, economy is constituted by the activities carried out in people’s everyday lives, making “their limited individual fields of vision sufficiently overlap” (Hayek 1945:526). This conception opposes Keynes’s, who envisions the economy as an abstract mechanic governed by economists and politicians. Hayek does however distinguish an actual abundance-related problem: inefficient production of what people (actually) want because of distorted knowledge of their demand. This problem is, however, still a conception of abundance as a consequence of scarcity – a scarcity of knowledge. Given undistorted prices, i.e., “signals” of individuals’ actual supply and demand in a given market, Hayek seems to assume that abundance would never occur.

These two examples are telling for the prevalent assumption of scarcity in economic theory. As Adel Daoud (2011a:15–16) argues, this assumption effectively places abundance outside of the scope of economic inquiry. An example from empirical economics underpins this view: the resource curse, i.e., the democratic failures of states with ample natural resources, is explained in terms of a scarcity of institutional quality (cf. Roy, Sarkar, and Mandal 2013). While some explanations of abundance as a symptom of scarcity may certainly be correct, it is a dangerous assumption. For example, an abundance of carbon emissions is hardly sufficiently explained by the scarce demand for such emissions or government interventions inflating the impression of such a demand; such negative environmental effects first and foremost depend on someone actively producing them. As economic theory regards abundance merely as a causal effect of scarcity, this phenomenon may not be explored in and of itself. In the search for stand-alone explanations of abundance, I turn to social theory.
1.1.2 The Sociology of Abundance

Abundance, as a social problem, starts from the premise that when there is too much of something, that oversupply plays a part in peoples’ lives. Sociological and sociologically informed research paint the problem of abundance as the process of distinguishing sufficiency from excess. In sociological theory, the excess share of abundance has been defined as “overflow” (Callon 1998, 2007a), “redundancy” (Thompson 2004), and “waste” (Bataille 1988:31, 72–73; Bauman 2001:90–91; Veblen 2008). These words imply that excess is something problematic in itself; the “over” of “oversupply”, which has negative effects. By studying these effects, abundance is approached independently of assumptions of scarcity. Instead, social theory raises questions about how excess is related to sufficiency (see Abbott 2016:123; Bauman 2001; Callon 1998:247–48; Czarniawska and Löfgren 2012:1–3; McGoey 2017:2–3).

Problems of abundance are described in sociological theory as negative effects of an excessive share, which, in combination with sufficiency make up the totality of abundance, e.g., of carbon emissions or labor power. The problems ascribed to this share is present in everyday life, e.g., as “overload, habituation, value contextuality, group disruption, and socialization overload” (Abbott 2016:123). To eliminate such problems, they have to be dealt with in manners either solving the problem or keeping its negative effects at bay. In that sense, abundance is also a problem of sociological pragmatism, placing the practical solutions to problems through, e.g., “tests” or “practices” at the center stage. The intersection of peoples’ ideas about problems of abundance, and practical attempts to solve these problems, are thus informative for understanding what abundance is. I distinguish two such intersections in how problems of abundance are dealt with in the literature: thriftiness and wastefulness.

Max Weber’s (2005) analysis of the protestant forefathers of capitalism show how they treated their abundance with modesty, and avoided spending beyond basic needs. While their abundance could be turned into affluence, they, instead, invested their excess, reproduced norms against affluent spending, and were effectively left with sufficiency. I call this approach to abundance “thrift”, because it uses the “sensibility” of long-term capital growth as a solution to abundance, despite the thrifty person not suffering from poverty (Miller 1998:102–4, 134–37; see also Lehtonen 2011; Podkalicka and Potts 2014). Thrift is a way of turning abundance into future affluence or security by, e.g., saving or investing excess money (Beckert 2016; Harrington 2016; Lehtonen and Pantzar 2002), or utilizing excess time by planning for the future (cf. Streib 2015:192–94). Alternatively, thriftiness may be conceived of as reducing or refraining from some want or supply in order to achieve sufficiency, e.g. excluding certain “unhealthy” foods for upholding a diet (Bourdieu 1984:179–90; Levenstein 1994; cf. Daoud 2011b; Sahlins 1974:1–2). To act in a thrifty manner is thus not confined to the investment of
resources for economic growth. The material aspects of thrift are indistinguishable from (re)producing the ethic and aesthetic of restraint, heading the call of Weber’s secular, capitalist version of protestant asceticism (cf. 2005:108–9).

Torstein Veblen’s (2008) theory of the extravagant “leisure class” pictures the opposite of thrift. Instead of reducing their supply or saving their excess, Veblen finds that this class engages in “conspicuous leisure and consumption [where...] the purposes of reputability lies in the element of waste [...] of time and effort [...] and] of goods” (2008:60). Its “wastefulness” means destroying excess, instead of profiting from it in the future through investments. For example, the deliberate destruction of food, both in times of over-production to battle falling prices and through the use of conservative expiry dates, destroys nutritional and economic values of the food, as well as negates the effort put into producing them (Gille 2013; Meah 2014; Milne 2013). Such deliberate destruction is also present in the review processes of texts for both scholarly and commercial publication, which may make the time, effort, and inspiration installed in writing them go to waste (cf. Fürst 2016; Lamont 2009). Wastefulness is, as Veblen implies in his critique of the leisure class, as morally entrenched as thrift. While a deliberate destruction of value, wastefulness is justified by the values of fashion, quality improvement, or political goals (see also Simmel 1957; cf. Schumpeter 1976).

Both thrift and wastefulness are ways of reducing abundance to sufficiency, at least temporarily. The sociological conception of the problem of abundance is thus best described as the issues of distinguishing problematic excess from (unproblematic) sufficiency. The most distinct definition implying this conception is Michel Callon’s argument that “overflowings [i.e., excess] occur when goods act unpredictably, transgressing the frames set for them and then passively imposed on them” (2007a:144, italics added). These frames are but one example of how sociology has treated abundance as an à priori condition of social reality, which limits them to peoples’ “rescaling” and “reduction strategies” as the object of analysis (see Abbott 2016:147). I will try to avoid the limitations of both social economic theories of abundance, by refraining from assumptions of a certain form of supply as the à priori condition of social reality. I now turn to how the production of abundance may be conceptualized as a research problem in itself.⁴

⁴ To be clear, to produce scarcity or abundance is not necessarily intentional or deliberate. What I mean is that, e.g., a certain level of water in a lake must be defined as “drought” in order for it to be a form of scarcity. It follows that an avalanche is an abundance of snow because it is defined as problematical excess. These quantities neither change in make-up from those definitions, but the human treatment of them does change.
1.1.3 Approaching the Production of Abundance

It almost goes without saying that production is fundamental for human societies to exist, at least beyond the Neolithic era (cf. Sahlins 1974; Scott 2017). It is therefore hardly surprising that a historical materialist like Karl Marx uses production as his point of departure for explaining capitalist society (and its discontents). However, his theories are limited to societies where property, and especially means of production, are scarce (cf. Marx 1845, 1973). Consequently, Marx offers little explanation of the existence of a continuous state of abundance under capitalism. On the contrary, he concludes that this mode of production is determined to fail, due to how capital accumulation makes the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, and abundance is impossible to perpetuate. It is thus necessary to consider explanations that do not assume production to be organized within in a society of scarcity.

A community experiencing that productivity or material shortage is no longer a problem for the vast majority of people in a “post-scarcity society”, borrowing an undefined term from Robert Chernomas (1984; see also Berger 2015:34–37; Czarniawska and Löfgren 2012:2). Contemporary capitalist societies are generally distinguished by such an excessive supply of goods, to the extent that the supply becomes problematic in itself (Prasad 2012:45, 76; Serafim 2015:107–11). By maintaining over-production, governments and industries in capitalist societies attempt to meet people’s desires. The question I ask is therefore: How is a state of abundance perpetuated? Someone, or some force, must see to it that production continues.

The concept “production” is at the center of this study, meaning both the supply of goods and of social reality, as the valuation of material objects such as, e.g., food, commodities, or waste are interwoven in the process of making them. By studying “valuations” employed in the activities of producers, both values and material reality can be taken into account studying the social reality of the production of abundance. Valuations enable both normative boundaries, distinguishing good from bad, and descriptive boundaries, defining the material placement and use of a good. In existing studies, the negotiation of such boundaries has been investigated to further explain the tension between, e.g., the economic and aesthetic values of contemporary art and fine dining (Gerber 2017; Leschziner 2015; Velthuis 2005), and environmental and economic value in the pricing of natural environment (Fourcade 2011a, 2011b). The literature further suggests that quality-differentiation is a sign of abundance, transformed into a variety of different, but complementary, qualities (Beckert and Musselin 2013:1–3; Callon, Méadel, and Rabeharisoa 2002:198–99). A greater variety makes abundance “very rarely directly visible or accessible” (Callon 1998:244). Therefore, it is rather experienced as a large

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5 Other ways of referring to a post-scarcity society are “affluent society” (Galbraith 1998:1–6) and “consumer society” (Bauman 2005:24–26).
selection of commodities or an air of affluent supply (see also Barrey 2007; Cochoy 2010; Dubuisson-Quellier 2013, 2010).

In this brief review, I find that abundance is studied as a quantity which is relative to a real or imagined form of sufficiency.\(^6\) It follows that the difference between the sufficient and the abundant quantity is the excess part. The word quantity, however, should be treated with some care. The excess does not have to be quantified to be excessive, but “excess” implies that there are “more”, and more implies a quantity. Abundance is problematic in terms of the consequences, or effects, of a “more than sufficient” supply. Such a supply is insufficiently large, because there is no use for all of it.

The sociology of abundance supplies the observable indications of an empirical case of abundant production: an oversupply that generates a share treated as problematic excess, enabling distinctions between sufficient and excessive goods (including sub-standard goods). The puzzle is then how the production of abundance is possible, including how problems thereof are inhibited from forcing down the supply to sufficient levels. In addition, the sociology of abundance displays an empirical preoccupation with consumers rather than producers. Problems related to excess are indicative of abundance, but they have so far only been studied in terms of how individuals deal with an \(à\) \textit{priori} oversupply. Hence, little is known about how abundance is produced, because the producers have not been studied from the perspective of oversupply. In other words, what it entails to produce something that is abundant, as is the case for the aforementioned hog farmer Jonas Petersson, who unwillingly turned to exports to rid himself of excess piglets.

### 1.2 Meat: A Precarious Food in Abundance

To understand what the production of abundance entails, I launched an empirical case of production in a state of abundance. As the previous section implies, for a good to be abundant, there has to be some kind of excess that creates problems in society. I henceforth argue that food is in abundance in Sweden, that the supply of food is understudied, and that Swedish meat production is a particularly fitting case for understanding how abundance is perpetuated.

Food is in absolute abundance, albeit not evenly distributed. According to The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)\(^7\), the global agrifood system produces foodstuffs suitable for 2,868 kcal/capita/day (2014). This amount of energy is almost 60% more than the World Health

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\(^6\) Such a form of sufficiency may be either relative or absolute. An absolute form of sufficiency would be, e.g., the basic calorie intake needed for a person to survive and, while relative, one would be, e.g., the mean income in a certain country. For a more detailed discussion on these two forms of sufficiency, see Daoud (2011a:41–42).

\(^7\) A list of abbreviations is supplied on p. viii.
Organization’s (WHO) daily requirement of calories per person (cf. FAO, WHO, and UNU 2001). However, this abundance of food does not keep the 800 million poorest inhabitants of the world from starvation. Their artificial food scarcity implies that the abundance of food is far greater than the aforementioned production per capita in a post-scarcity society like Sweden. The social scientific study of food has however preoccupied itself with consumers and consumption, mirroring the sociology of abundance. An example of this preoccupation is found in Routledge International Handbook of Food Studies (Albala 2013), where only one (1) out of 32 chapters is primarily concerned with food production. Such a preoccupation is also evident in public policy. An example from a public investigation is that the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) attributes 90% of all unnecessary food waste to households (2016:6). However, this agency does not address, e.g., the effects of how food is portioned, packaged, or marketed (see also Hawkins 2013; Milne 2013). The preoccupation with consumers is thus evident, and the production of abundance is neither targeted by public measures, nor by scientific inquiry.

Following up on the aforementioned trend, abundance is also approached in terms of consumer or consumption problems in the social scientific studies of food production, meat included. Such studies are primarily concerned with either how producers can adjust to consumer preferences (e.g., Grunert et al. 8).

8 98% of all starving people live in the global south. Thus, while the food system produces abundance – and has done so as long as its global output has been measured – it does not live up to article 25 of the UN’s declaration of human rights, stating that every human being is entitled to “a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food…” (UN 1948; see also FAO, IFAD, and WFP 2015). Hunger is thus not due to a deficit in production, but a power asymmetry between those who starve and those who have food (Daoud 2007; Sen 1983).

9 Looking at some statistical measures of living standards, Sweden ranks among the most well-off societies in the world. In 2015, Sweden ranks number 14 in the Human Development Index, and is univocally mentioned as a positive example for human development by the UN (UN Development Programme 2016:198 cf. p. 123, 151). Sweden also ranks as the 10th happiest country in the World Happiness Index (Helliwell, Layard, and Sachs 2017:20), and because of its low levels of political, economic, and everyday risks, it is considered “irredeemably boring” by The Economist Intelligence Unit and is ranked the 4th best place in the world to be born in 2013 (Keick 2012).

10 Other overview volumes present a similar picture, e.g., A Sociology of Food and Nutrition (Germov and Williams 2008) and Sociology on the Menu (Beadsworth and Kiel 1997). The two counter examples would be The Handbook of Food Research (Murcott, Belasco, and Jackson 2013) and The Sociology of Food and Agriculture (Carolan 2012). While both of these volumes do cover food production, the former one addresses food supply primarily as a case for historically oriented studies. The latter one, in turn, limits its scope of food production to globally northern niche producers and post-colonial exploitation through exports of environmental and social problems to the global south. The vast field of consumption studies is further implied by The Journal of Consumer Culture, ranking it the 4th most cited periodical in sociology of 2016 (Thompson Reuters 2017).
2011), how the asymmetry of global power relations lead to exploitation of the south under capitalism (e.g., Bush 2012; Lawrence and Dixon 2015), and niche production of luxury goods in the global north (for a critical overview, see McWilliams 2009).

Facing an abundant foodscape, it is however evident that in Sweden, and other post-scarcity societies, consumers have become obsessed with choosing the “right” products out of the present abundance of food – organic, healthy, fair trade, local, exotic, etc. (Johnston and Baumann 2010; see, e.g., Levenstein 1994; McWilliams 2009; Murcott, Belasco, and Jackson 2013). Recent decades have also granted Sweden a “gastronomic revolution” in terms of haute cuisine, commodity differentiation, and food media in line with other affluent countries (Jönsson 2012; cf. Johnston and Baumann 2010; Leschziner 2015). Both the commodity differentiation and the emerging presence of restaurants are indications of the fact that abundance is obscured as an affluence of choices, following the sociology of abundance. However, problems of food abundance become more directly visible in other parts of Swedish society.

The increased consumption of food in Sweden is implied by the fact that each adult inhabitant wastes almost 50 kg of edible food in a year (SEPA 2016:4–6). FAO states that food waste in “industrial countries” stems from oversupply, strict appearance standards for groceries, vast quantities of groceries on display, and wanton consumer attitudes (2011:10–14). Food abundance also correlates with unprecedented levels of obesity and welfare diseases, such as Type II Diabetes (Public Health Agency of Sweden 2017:11; see also Danaei et al. 2011; Meetoo, McGovern, and Safadi 2007; WHO Europe 2015:1–4). There are thus numerous indications that food is consumed in quantities where the excess causes, or at least correlates, with societal problems.

Turning from food to meat specifically, it cannot be denied that Swedish people consume increasingly more and cheaper meat than ever before. The Swedish Board of Agriculture (SBA) has shown this trend throughout the last three decades (2009). In the years 1990–2012, the annual mean consumption of meat per capita increased by 25 kg in Sweden, i.e., 41% (SBA 2013:6, see also 2015c:29), despite the increased popularity of vegetarianism (SBA 2015c; cf. Fine, Heasman, and Wright 2002:201–17). Pork consumption has increased over 50% during this period. That said, the total quantity of beef

11 According to the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA), the mean food waste per capita in a Swedish household is ca. 100kg/year, of which 50% is considered edible (SEPA 2016:4–6). The FAO, however, do not make such a distinction on a global level. Assuming that the ratio of edible-to-indelible is the same across the board, Sweden is on par with the rest of Europe, the second most wasteful continent after North America. In comparison, the mean food waste per capita in Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern and Southeast Asia (Japan, Singapore, and Taiwan excluded) is 6-11 kg/year, i.e., 12-22% of the regular Swede (FAO 2011:4).
consumed is almost 10 kg more *per capita* each year than pork, making it the most popular meat-based foodstuff in Sweden (SBA 2013:6). The retail prices of meat in Sweden have also fallen far more than the average costs for groceries (SBA 2011a:52–53, 2017c:11–13, 2017b:12–14). The National Food Administration (NFA) also advises especially Swedish men to reduce their consumption of beef and pork for health reasons (Brugård Konde et al. 2015:37–41). However, all problems cannot be attributed to meat consumption.

The production of meat implies problems of abundance in itself. While 40% of the global agricultural gross GDP comes from meat production, it uses 70% of the world’s cultivated agricultural land (Steinfeld et al. 2006:xx–xxi). Meat production, and especially the rearing of cattle and hogs, has a significant negative impact on the global environment. Such farming is a major driver of global warming, and both consume and pollute vast amounts of land and water (Gerber et al. 2013; Steinfeld et al. 2006). While Sweden is argued to lead the forefront of reducing carbon emissions in meat production, the average Swedish beef farm is still far from close to the possible minimum carbon footprint (see Pierrehumbert 2016; cf. Pierrehumbert and Eshel 2015:2–3). Environmental problems are thus closely tied to an excessive production of meat.

Swedish meat production is placed in this context of supplying an environmentally hazardous, unhealthy, and increasingly unprofitable good; a foodstuff which consumers eat in such increasingly large quantities that existing studies and reports witness environmental and health hazards in its path. Neither the Swedish government nor the EU support increased meat production financially (cf. European Commission 2013; SBA 2015b, see also 2017a). While many Swedish hog and cattle farms, as well as meat processors, have gone out of business, there are still enough producers around supplying a steady output of meat (cf. SBA 2012, 2017c, 2017b). These conditions suggest that Swedish meat production is a good case for this study, because it seemingly violates the economic theory that supply and demand harmonizes into market equilibrium.

1.3 Approaching the Study of Abundant Supply

Up to this point, I have argued that abundance is understudied in terms of how it is produced, and further distinguished Swedish meat production as a good case for studying that phenomenon. The production of meat in a small, wealthy, sparsely populated, and heavily regulated country like Sweden hardly makes the headlines outside its borders. So how may studying this

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12 Agriculture causes 26% of global greenhouse emissions, of which at least 62pp are defined as direct effects of livestock production (Tubello et al. 2014:22).
particular case supply any general sociological insights? I suggest three areas that may benefit from this study.

First, this study provides new insights for economic sociology. In contrast to other studies of agricultural production under liberal globalization, Swedish pork and beef production is a unique case. Except for the trade rules of the EU’s common market, global competition has neither led to de-regulation and export orientation of the Swedish meat supply chain (cf. Burch and Lawrence 2013; Carolan 2011; Dixon 2002; Dobeson 2016a; Holm and Halkier 2009; Nestle 2007). Swedish meat producers have neither attained authenticity policies, which, in other member states, awards certain “traditional” foods a legal distinction, e.g. Parma ham (DeSoucey 2010; cf. Harvey, Quilley, and Beynon 2002; Paddock 2015c). In effect, Swedish meat producers compete with imported, usually cheaper meat, while also being subject to national legislation which foreign producers do not have to comply with. The study of abundance may further economic sociology regarding how industries may maintain their production, despite lacking both price and quality advantages.

The empirical contribution is that the materials generated from agricultural industries in the global north have been granted little interest in contemporary economic sociology (cf. however, Aspers 2013; Çalışkan 2010; Dixon 2002; Dobeson 2016a; Kohl, Dobeson, and Brandl 2017). Despite a burgeoning field of “new economic sociology”, primary production has been sparsely studied compared to less concrete economic phenomena, e.g., finance and labor markets (cf., e.g., Smelser and Swedberg 2005). Swedish meat production is certainly not solely a rural activity – the larger slaughterhouses and most retailers are found close to the end consumers, i.e., in cities. However, the presence of rural economic activities in this case may supply economic sociology with further insights; how economic activities engage with the production environment, and how the relations between domestic markets in a supply chain are managed.

Secondly, this study provides new insights for food studies. Globally, northern societies usually approach food-related problems – regarding anything from status reproduction to environmental hazards – as a problem of consumption (see, e.g., Bildtgård 2002; Johnston and Baumann 2010; Levenstein 1994; Mead 2013; Paddock 2015a, 2015b, 2015c). However, the consumers’ ability to make such “choices” are limited and often over-stated (Evans 2011; cf. Holm 2003; Meah 2014). Alan Warde (2017:155–224) argues that the last 30 years of consumer studies has made “consumption” the magic bullet for all kinds of social and political problems, but with unsatisfactory outcomes. By focusing on production as the pre-requisite for food consumption, the study of how an abundant foodstuff is produced in a commercial environment highlights how consumption is enabled by producers, and how producers engage with and affect consumers.
Third, this study furthers the study of abundance in society, in relation to both social and economic theory. As outlined initially, existing studies of abundance either approach it as an \textit{a priori} condition of social life or a consequence of some kind of scarcity. Studying the production of a good that is supplied in greater quantities than demanded, this study distinguishes the “origin” of sufficient and excess parts in production activities. Instead of making assumptions about such constructions as excess and scarcity, I scrutinize the viability of such assumptions.

1.3.1 \textit{Research Questions and Aim}

This study aims to explain how it is possible to continue supplying something that is in abundance. Following my previous definition of abundance, this study engages with the totality made up of the parts sufficiency and excess is produced. Ethnographic methods reinforce this aim, by supplying evidence of both the practical doings of producing meat and how these are made sense of by Swedish meat producers, who faced a sudden spike of meat abundance in 2014-15. This framework is employed seeking a unified answer to the two following questions.

The empirical question is: \textit{How do Swedish meat producers deal with producing an abundant foodstuff?} This question concerns the specific case of this study, but is further imperial for guiding the general question in order for it to be answered. The Swedish meat producers are those who “deal with”, i.e., manage and attempt to solve, problems stemming from the fact that they produce an abundant foodstuff. To answer this question is to inquire into how sufficiency and excess are distinguished by the producers in the Swedish meat industry. This question therefore addresses how valuations are used in Swedish meat producers’ everyday practice, and how certain forms of meat and meat production become sufficient therein. The answer, it follows, bears witness how to an abundant good can be supplied while simultaneously dealing with problems stemming from that activity.

The theoretical question is: \textit{How is abundance perpetuated?} This question aims for a general explanation of how it is even possible to continue supplying something that is in abundance. Asking this question implies my explicit assumption that abundance is neither a natural state nor a mere consequence of the fact that something else is in scarcity, e.g., a shortage of correct information or consumption power as previously implied in economic theory. In other words, I approach abundance as a human-made phenomenon in its own right, albeit not necessarily deliberately attained. The word “perpetuated” implies the pragmatist epistemology of this study. I maintain that people are pragmatic, implying that abundance is perpetuated by everyday, shared routines aggregating historical processes; neither structurally determined nor rational achievements of goals (see also Abbott 2016; Joas 1996; Reckwitz 2002; Swidler 1986; Thévenot 2001b, 2001a). By answering this question, I
approach the “origin” of abundance – a sociological explanation of how the “natural state” of material scarcity, assumed by economics, is defied while also failing to achieve market equilibrium.

Asking these two questions, their relation should be clarified. The empirical one seeks an answer to how abundance is produced in a case of ongoing oversupply. In other words, how the Swedish meat supply chain, willingly or not, perpetuates abundance. The findings from the empirical question will suggest how the producers’ “dealings” are unable to reduce abundance to sufficiency, producing a foodstuff in oversupply. Based on those findings, I may answer the theoretical question. To arrive at those answers, the study makes use of the following definitions and limitations.

1.3.2 Definitions and Limitations

In order to make a tangible argument and to distinguish what this study actually sets out to do, some initial definitions and limitations are laid out. Their purpose is to distinguish the empirical scope of this study, and how that scope enables a study of the production of abundance.

First, by “meat” I mean beef and pork if nothing else is stated. These two types of meat also imply that they originate from cattle and hogs. Thus, this study of meat production is as much a study of how hogs and cattle are bred, slaughtered, cut, and marketed as food in grocery retail. Because beef/cattle and pork/hogs are the two main types of meat produced in Sweden, and are also produced by the same companies to a significant extent. Taken together, they may be considered “meat production” while their differences are taken into consideration as they become relevant for the research questions. The meat of interest for this study is that which is produced to be sold fresh to an end consumer, feeding herself or her close community. A consumer is distinct from a customer, in that the latter is solely concerned as someone who acquires meat in a retail outlet. While charcuteries and semi-manufactured foods make up a fair share of the meat commodities made and consumed in Sweden, these goods are produced under distinctly different conditions than fresh cuts. The problem of abundance studied here foremost concern fresh meat, limiting the scope to the most commonly supplied version of meat for consumers in Sweden. Otherwise, the scope of this study would possibly go beyond comprehension. The further outreach of the Swedish meat supply chain, regarding anything from hygiene standards to the use of imported goods, is therefore studied to the extent that these phenomena become important in the production of fresh meat commodities for grocery retail.

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13 I use feminine pronouns throughout this study, acknowledging the fact that a human being is more likely to be female than male.
Second, by “meat producers” I mean: hog and cattle farmers, meat processors (abattoirs and butchery operations), and retailers in both grocery chain stores and butcher’s shops. These three groups are all considered meat producers, because they are involved in the process of transforming animals into meat in order for a consumer to purchase it (cf. Callon et al. 2002). Retailers may not seem as obviously involved in such transformation as farmers and processors, but they both cut and pack meat on a regular basis. The large grocery store chains also manage a vast share of the infrastructure of the Swedish meat supply chain (see also Burch and Lawrence 2005; Lawrence and Dixon 2015; Richards, Lawrence, and Burch 2011). “Producers” therefore imply the people and organizations involved in supplying Swedish consumers with fresh, domestically produced pork and beef, those who make up the Swedish meat supply chain.

Third, meat production involves the processes of transforming an animal into meat; breeding, butchery, packing, etc., which makes a fresh cut of meat or commodity emerge in a retail space. The concept “supply chain” stresses the producers’ different but interrelated practical activities which make up the process of producing meat. There are however multiple “streams” down a supply chain, and the image of a chain as singular, linear links should not be taken too literally. Meat production is better imagined as a more-or-less modular set of segments, organized as a teleological process which transforms animals into meat (cf. Callon 1987; Callon et al. 2002). What happens before a defined place in the supply chain takes place “upstream” from that activity, and what happens after becomes its “downstream”. For the supply chain as a whole, however, the upstream is where primary producers breed and wrangle hogs and cattle. The downstream, it follows, is where meat is cut, packaged, and retailed. In other words, what happens on the respective sides of the abattoir kill-box. Approaching the supply chain as a process stresses the ongoing practical production of meat and possible negotiations and contestations between producers. Since I approach my research questions from a pragmatist outset, this more dynamic view of production stands in contrast to the more structuralist and abstract conception of food systems (see also Thévenot 2001a, 2001b; cf. Burch and Lawrence 2009; Marsden, Banks, and Bristow 2000; Perez, Castro, and Furnols 2009).

Following up on the previous paragraph, restaurants and other food refineries are excluded from this study. The industry of “meal services” in Sweden use a supply chain that on many accounts is parallel, and distinctly different, from the one supplying meat for grocery retail. Restaurants in Sweden also buy and sell meals on a market that is vastly different from, and often parallel to, grocery retail regarding anything from regulations to consumer culture (cf. Jönsson 2012). The supply of ready-made meals in grocery stores is therefore excluded beyond their emergence in relation to the production of fresh meat.
Fourth, I find that the focus on consumers in both existing research and public discourse leads to unwarranted assumptions about the production of food – or simply omits it. Michel Callon et al.’s (2002) argument that “production” includes both producers and consumers is certainly convincing. It is also true that what is called “consumption” is a somewhat culturally dependent label for an activity which may not be relevant for all possible societies (see Graeber 2011). However, to limit this study to the supply chain is the only way to shed light on the conditions of consumption generated by producers. By looking at producers on their own, it is possible to study what they do – and take consumers into account to the extent that producers make them relevant (cf. Dixon 1999; Friedland 2001). To include consumers would, ironically, make it harder to understand what it means to produce foodstuffs for a consumer that has an abundance to choose from. I also exclude advertising, the individual farmers, meat processing workers, and retailers, who have little-to-no involvement with marketing outside of retail outlets. Henceforth, “marketing” implies a producer’s practical work carried out to convince a buyer or customer to purchase a certain good. By excluding consumers and advertising, this study sheds light on the relations between producers. That way, it is also possible to understand the roles of consumers and advertising for the supply chains’ internal relations. With these limitations in mind, this study’s argument may be outlined.

1.4 Outline of the Study

The research questions of this study are intertwined in the sense that I explore an empirical case in order to supply evidence which suggests an answer to my theoretical question. The first three parts of the study each encompass a step towards that answer, which is concluded in the fourth part.

Part I explores the production of meat as an abundant foodstuff in order to distinguish what problems emerge in such a food supply. In Chapter 2, I review existing sociological and sociologically relevant studies of meat (as food) in post-scarcity societies. Based on these studies, I argue that there are three problems stemming from such abundant production of meat. (1) “Overproduction”, which demands different edible and safe meats to be distinguished in terms of tastes. Tastes that in meat consumption studies distinguish “healthy”, “ethical”, and “exclusive” as refined categories of meat. Effectively, vulgar meats may be discarded, making food into waste. (2) “Diminishing revenue”, implying that the profit margins of producing meat decreases when meat becomes increasingly abundant, while rationalization and technology increases economies of scale. (3) “Disrespect”\(^{14}\) for producers’ ability to supply responsibly produced meat emerge when meat becomes

\(^{14}\) This concept comes from Axel Honneth’s (1996) theory of recognition, and is further explained in Section 8.2.
increasingly abundant. Such issues show production standards and policies demand more rigorous responsibility-taking among producers. At the same time, meat processors and farmers are increasingly questioned, neglected, and even ridiculed, implying bleak recognition of their work. I henceforth refer to “the three problems” to imply how the aforementioned issues of producing an abundant foodstuff guide the course of this study.

In Chapter 3, these three problems are used to further explain why Swedish meat production is a fitting and relevant case for investigating the production of abundance. It outlines the history and institutional framework for the Swedish meat supply chain, and the recent development for farmers, meat processors, and retailers, respectively. The chapter concludes the first part by stating that the three problems implied by existing research are implied by the present state of Swedish meat production. These insights also suggest that to study the practical endeavors of Swedish meat producers is not only theoretically justified by the scope of this study, but also absent in the existing research of meat in post-scarcity societies and publicly accessible reports regarding the Swedish meat supply chain.

Part II discusses the exploration and analysis of how Swedish meat producers experience the problems implied in Part I. In Chapter 4, I argue that an ethnographic approach is the best course forward for this study. A qualitative approach to Swedish meat producers’ practical distinctions between sufficiency and excess, in relation to the problems of producing abundance, enables an inquiry of how abundance is produced. The chapter then outlines the sample of informants, how they participated in the study, and how the empirical materials were generated, analyzed, and selected for this monograph.

In Chapter 5, I outline sociological pragmatism as a theory of social reality and how valuations imply how producers deal with supplying an abundant good, which may then be used to explain how abundance is perpetuated in the Swedish meat supply chain. By drawing on sociological theories of valuation, I distinguish two types of valuation: aesthetic ones distinguishing similarity to a conventionalized aesthetic, and critical ones distinguishing criteria-fulfillment in terms of a common good, as sufficiency, or value. Consequently, dissimilarity or failure to fulfill defined criteria impels excessiveness, or waste.

Part III encompasses the empirical analysis of how Swedish meat producers deal with producing an abundant foodstuff in their everyday activities. In Chapter 6 is “the problem of over-production” approached by studying valuations of palatability, i.e., how animals and meat are distinguished as sufficiently palatable or unpalatable, in terms of how they are anticipated to be appreciated by consumers. This chapter provides evidence of how the producers discriminate between food and waste, and how they add value to some meat by transforming its aesthetics in order make it palatable. It further
shows conflicting valuations between meat producers as there are two opposing forms of excessively unpalatable meat: the commodities which fail to supply a palatable aesthetic, and the meat violating political definitions of palatable meat production.

In Chapter 7 is “the problem of diminishing revenue” approached by studying valuations of economic value, or pricing activities, i.e., how prices are set on animals and meat, and how those prices relate to production costs. This chapter provides evidence of how the producers valuate meat and animals monetarily along the supply chain. By looking at a whole supply chain, it supplies evidence of how valuations of economic value in markets may obscure or regard costs of production: opaque pricing activities disregard prices in other markets in the supply chain, producing prices which are sufficient by translating a commodity aesthetic into figures, affirming its status. Transparent pricing activities, in contrast, take the producers’ costs into regard, but depend on distinguishing themselves from the mainstream supply chain through contracts or frame their supply in (exclusive) commodity aesthetics. Effectively, the economic value of (fresh) meat is not distinguished by consumer demand or profits, but either in terms of commerce or an output keeping production sites operational.

In Chapter 8 is “the problem of disrespect” approached by studying the producers’ valuations of responsibility, i.e., how the producers find that supplying an abundant foodstuff is valuable. This chapter provides evidence for how meat production – despite supplying an abundant foodstuff – is valuable for the producers engaged in the supply chain. In other words, how it can be meaningful, and to some extent justified, to produce an abundant foodstuff. It concludes that the production of an abundant foodstuff is valuable in two regards: it is valuable as marketing for the producers who use it to display an aesthetic of commerce. Alternatively, the abundance produced becomes valuable due to the explicit justification of the Swedish meat production regime as the only sufficient one, fulfilling the criteria of high animal welfare and low antibiotics use. Both of these values are, however, qualitative. Therefore, the valuations used in Swedish meat production may not distinguish a sufficient volume of meat to produce.

Part IV concludes the whole study. In Chapter 9, I conclude the answer to how Swedish meat producers deal with producing an abundant foodstuff. I find that they do not distinguish a sufficient volume of food to meet the consumers’ demand. Instead, they distinguish how meat supply enables the producer to attain an aesthetic of commerce, or fulfill criteria indicative of the Swedish meat production regime. I then turn to how abundance is perpetuated, concluding that a lack of commensurable measures of sufficient supply inhibits abundance to be reduced to sufficiency. Abundance is thus perpetuated by a reliance on qualitative valuations. The chapter concludes with this study’s contributions to existing research. I argue that food studies
and food systems research may benefit from engaging with production processes, knowing that the consumption of individual foodstuffs may not explain how and why they are produced. I further argue that economic sociology would benefit from considering economic practices, relations between markets, and the role of production sites in supply chains. Finally, I discuss how this study’s contribution to the sociology of abundance raises questions about the sociology of sufficiency.
## 2 Meat in Post-Scarcity Societies

Meat, the nourishing food par excellence, strong and strong-making, giving vigor, blood, and health, is the dish for the men, [...] whereas the women are satisfied with a small portion.


In sociology and neighboring social sciences, meat is primarily studied from a consumer perspective, often in the vein of Pierre Bourdieu’s (1984) theories. By studying “the judgement of taste”, he shows that the boundary between sufficient and excessive meat consumption depends on the consumer’s gender, as the quote implies. In Bourdieu’s France of the 1970s, meat is valued in terms of energy and health of men, while these values are supposedly less relevant for women in their eating practices. This gendered boundary is one example of how the value, or use, of meat is negotiated in a post-scarcity society. It follows that producers have to supply meat that enables such boundaries to be routinely present in everyday life.

In this chapter, I discern the problems that emerge in the production of meat in post-scarcity societies by reviewing existing social scientific literature on this foodstuff. I first review existing research on meat consumption in order to find out what distinctions between sufficiency and excess meat consumers in post-scarcity societies make. I then turn to existing research on meat production and what such studies tell us about the supply of meat in abundance, in relation to its consumption. I conclude the review by defining three problems of producing meat as an abundant foodstuff in a post-scarcity society.

### 2.1 Meat Consumption

The consumption of meat bears witness to what items the producers of this foodstuff supply. It follows that studies of consumers in post-scarcity societies may be studied to understand how abundance is received and managed by the general population. Meat consumption involves the “acquisition, appropriation, and appreciation” of meat as food (cf. Warde 2017:66–71, **15**). To some extent, I also draw on more general studies of food consumption and production, because these hold relevant insights into the totality of how food abundance is dealt with.
quote on p. 19). This field of study is especially concerned with the display and judgement of tastes. I first discuss how meat-eating changes when meat abundance emerges, both its symbolic meaning and the practice of eating. Thereafter, I lay out how taboos and tastes distinguish meat consumption, both inside and outside of post-scarcity societies.

2.1.1 Meat Eating in Post-Scarcity Societies

Post-scarcity societies become increasingly concerned with food, and endows food choice a particularly distinguished status (see, e.g., Beagan et al. 2014; Johnston and Baumann 2010; Levenstein 1994; Warde 2016). With meat abundance comes the study of the contemporary carnivore culture, i.e., the practices and symbolic meanings of eating animals in post-scarcity societies. Such studies have led to meat, as food, being held up now in a special regard among human and social sciences. Nick Fiddes suggests why meat eating is distinguished both as a food practice and as a scientific topic:

[Meat eating] represents human control of the natural world. Consuming the muscle flesh of other highly evolved animals is a potent statement of our supreme power […] modern scientific civilization is no exception to this; meat still derives its peculiar significance from these basic ideas. (1991:13–14, italics in original)

Meat has primarily been studied from the vantage point outlined in this quote; the symbolical aspects of choosing, cooking and ingesting animal proteins, usually encompassed as consumption or eating (see also Warde 2013, 2016; Klein and Murcott 2014; cf. Wilk 2004).

Existing studies of meat in post-scarcity societies primarily discuss class and gender patterns of its consumption.16 Following Bourdieu’s lead, meat is traditionally held up as a symbol and source of power; real food for hard working men (e.g., Ekström 1990; Fiddes 1991:88; Lupton 2000; Metzger 2005:128–30; Murcott 1982). This gender pattern is evident in contemporary post-scarcity societies, where women are found to eat less meat than men. While studies of such societies show a general and increasing disgust for the meat’s “animality”, i.e., qualities reminiscent of the meat’s animal origin, this attitude is primarily expressed by females (Kubberød et al. 2006; Kubberød, Ueland, Tronstad, et al. 2002; Kubberød, Ueland, Rodbotten, et al. 2002; O’Doherty Jensen and Holm 1999; cf. Sobal 2005). Consequently, the consumption of hearty meat dishes in large portions have come to increasingly symbolize “unhealthy” and “unethical” traits of a conservative, working-class

16 The food consumption of ethnic and cultural minorities in Europe is generally restricted to concepts of traditions and taboos in existing research, e.g. Halal meat. Consequently, minority peoples’ tastes are assumed to be limited to such collective frameworks and individual taste hardly discussed (Metzger 2005:65–71, 109–25, 347–55; Williams-Forson and Walker 2013; cf. Bergeaud-Blackler 2004; Lever and Miele 2012).
masculinity (Beagan et al. 2014:142–47, 152–55; Charles and Kerr 1988:231–32; Ekström 1990:152–56). This type of masculinity is distinguished as particularly pleasure-oriented when it comes to eating, both meat and in general, as well as tarnished by obesity and other meat-related health issues (Roos and Wandel 2005). As this form of masculinity is increasingly treated as excessive, post-scarcity societies display new forms of masculinity distinguished by abstaining from meat eating, e.g., vegan body builders (Sobal 2005).

Following on these new masculinities, domestic cooking becomes an increasingly male activity. To cook at home has historically endowed women influence over the home as a part of female “care work”, albeit male food preferences have generally dominated the everyday fare of heterosexual families (Charles and Kerr 1988:39–63; DeVault 1994:94–96; McLean 2013:255; cf. Lupton 2000; Sobal 2005:142; Murcott 1982). In contrast, men’s cooking is, just as their eating, more concerned with personal pleasure than (traditionally female) care work in post-scarcity societies (Aarseth and Olsen 2008:281–83; Cairns, Johnston, and Baumann 2010; Ekström 1990:194–95; cf. however, Neuman, Gottzén, and Fjellström 2016; Neuman et al. 2016; Szabo 2014).

Conclusively, meat eating in post-scarcity societies has transformed from being a symbol of power to increasingly being considered a sign of a dangerous, i.e., conservative, working-class, male. In some studies, the carnivore tendency of this type of masculinity is used to argue that it is a threat, or danger, for society (cf. Adams 2010; Calvert 2014; Rothgerber 2013). This form of masculinity combines the dangers of poor health outcomes for working class men with the one stemming from oppression and violence traditionally exerted by men against women, children, and less dominant males. Cooking meat, however, seems to redeem men of that dangerous capacity to some extent. Reviewing the literature of meat consumption shows that the contemporary carnivore distinguishes meat in excess, the foodstuff as well as the practice of eating it, as a source and symbol of danger. However, the precarious status of meat consumption implied by this body of literature stands in paradox to the fact that meat is eaten in greater volumes than ever in post-scarcity societies. With this status in mind, I turn to how taboos and tastes organize meat consumption.

2.1.2 Taboo: Safe and Dangerous Meat

Boundaries produced between safe and dangerous meat, i.e., food and non-food, is what the main body of meat consumption studies concerns. Meat has been a scarce source of protein in all known carnivore societies17, up until recent decades (Smil 2002; see also Silvertown 2017; cf. Elias 2000:95–105).

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17 Societies that regularly eat meat as a source of sustenance.
However, no known society have consumed non-human meat indifferently. There has always been some kind of boundary between the meat sufficient for food and the excess meat which may not be consumed (Fessler and Navarrete 2003). Such a boundary is a taboo, and it makes the meat outside of it into “non-food”, either sacred or dangerous (or both).

A taboo indicates difference in kind; ritually separating meat into food and non-food, where eating the latter is outlawed or disrespected, breaking a cultural boundary. A person caught violating a taboo is subject to sanctions, and may also feel shame or disgust (Douglas 1984; see also Turner 1966:1–44). Meat taboos are observed by producing symbolic boundaries between, e.g., animal meat vs. human flesh, or beef, lamb, and poultry as “halal” vs. pork as “haram” in Muslim food practices. (Bergeaud-Blackler 2004; Douglas 1984:49–56, 1992; Fessler and Navarrete 2003; cf. Turner 1966:38–41). Beyond distinguishing food from non-food, taboos generally imbue the legal forms of meat with a positive, symbolic status of masculinity, wealth, and power (Aarseth and Olsen 2008; Elias 2000:99–101; Fiddes 1991; Lupton 2000; Sobal 2005). As implied previously, existing studies find that this symbolic status changes in post-scarcity societies.

Taboos are neither restricted to societies of dearth nor those using a non-industrial food supply. Post-scarcity societies uphold their own taboos against collective dangers, meat as well as people (cf. Douglas 1984, 1992). Such taboos are considered “modern” or “disciplinary”, because they use scientific, technological, and political distinctions producing individualized boundaries of “safe” and “dangerous” food. Such institutions thus prevail over religious taboos engendered by supernatural authorities (Bildtgård 2002; cf. Foucault 1994, 1995). During the 20th century, such modern taboos were primarily upheld by science, through technological devices, and government institutions, through public policy (Bildtgård 2008; cf. Latour 1993).

Trust in food increasingly turns in favor of individualized and commercial sources in 21st century post-scarcity societies. Studies of eating in post-scarcity societies therefore show an increased individualization of eating practices. Their findings show a reduced public authority over what foods and meal patterns people use, in tandem with increased influence from commercial organization, voluntary brands, and personalized diets in eating practices (Warde 2016:144–45; see also Levenstein 1994). Such private authorities distinguish voluntary diets as “safer”, “cleaner”, or “healthier” alternatives to eating (see Bildtgård 2008:100; Kjaernes, Harvey, and Warde 2007:4–6; Verbeke and Viaene 2000). This development is coupled with a (romantic) naturalism that increasingly questions the safety of science and technology.

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18 See Appendix A, Section 10.1.

19 While of little relevance for this study, post-scarcity societies also maintain taboos against eating “pets” (see e.g. Lévi-Strauss 1969; Sahlins 1976).
and their underlying intentions (Bildtgård 2008; see also Gunnarsson and Elam 2012; Kjaernes et al. 2007; Paxson 2008).

In the wake of individualization comes the liberal globalization of food supply. That process has “financialized” foodstuffs into primary resources, traded like stocks on international commodity markets (Foster 2007; Milne 2013; see also Burch and Lawrence 2009; Friedmann and McMichael 1989; Ponte and Gibbon 2005). This privatization of trust in food also shows an increased skepticism of industrial food production (cf. Nestlé 2007), often expressed as an increased praise of nature and natural authenticity in foods (Hess et al. 2016; Johnston and Baumann 2010; Levenstein 1994; Paxson 2008). While the institutional framework of food safety has changed during the last century, the secular taboo still prevails, but in a new form.

The maintenance of taboos in post-scarcity societies show how they organize themselves by creating and enforcing political and scientific boundaries towards danger, employed by an increasingly profit-oriented group of authorities (Kjaernes et al. 2007:24–26). European consumers’ trust in meat is usually studied in relation to the mid-1990s BSE-outbreak.\(^{20}\) The findings from that event shows that nations which proactively maintained institutional trust in food safety mitigated “meat scares” (Kjaernes et al. 2007:163–77; see also Verbeke and Viaene 1999; Vincent 2004; Wales, Harvey, and Warde 2006). While smaller-scale food scares are common, the literature shows that post-scarcity societies seldom have problems supplying safe meat. Since non-taboo meat is in abundance, a plurality of tastes distinguishing the status of foods and their eaters become increasingly important.

### 2.1.3 A Taste for Meat

Taste, in contrast to taboo, means a difference in degree; a hierarchy of (more or less) individualized distinctions within the boundaries of safe, or non-tabooed, foods (cf. Bourdieu 1984:1–2; Elias 2000:101–3; Levenstein 1994:245–55; Staples 2014:81–83). Tastes are upheld in everyday consumption through the acquisition, cooking and eating of foods with certain aesthetics, treated as symbolic statuses of foods and consumers alike (Warde 2016:122–66). Taste categories of meat thus distinguish “refined” goods and meals from their “vulgar” counterparts among the totality of meat supplied. Meat consumption patterns around the world vary significantly as well as between post-scarcity societies (Beadsworth and Kiel 1997:193–202; Klein and Murcott 2014). However, some more general tastes may still be distinguished, emerging across numerous studies.

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\(^{20}\) Popularly called the “mad cow disease”, Bovin Spongiform Encephalopatia (BSE) is a neurodegenerative disease in cattle. It may spread to humans through eating contaminated beef, especially brains or bone marrow, and manifest itself as Variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob’s Disease.

Meat is distinguished as healthy by being lean and consumed in moderation (Beagan et al. 2014; Brunsø et al. 2005; Ekström 1990:152–56; Kuberød, Ueland, Tronstad, et al. 2002; cf. Bouvard et al. 2015; Gunnarsson and Elam 2012). This status is especially pronounced by younger women, who relate fatty meats to low status, “unfeminine” attributes, e.g., being overweight and lacking self-control (Audebert, Deiss, and Riusset 2006; Kuberød, Ueland, Rødabben, et al. 2002). The status of lean meat as healthy singles out fatty meat as vulgar, dangerous as well as repulsive to consume. In other words, an excessive type of meat.

Ethical meat symbolizes, and is held as a symbol of, production regimes that are less harmful than “industrial” or “mainstream” meat production. Effectively, ethical meat enables moral distinction through consumption, at least symbolically (Paddock 2015c). Certified organic and locally sourced meat is therefore regarded as more authentic and sustainable (Cairns, Johnston, and MacKendrick 2013; Johnston and Baumann 2010; Paddock 2015b, 2015a; for a critical overview, see McWilliams 2009). Animal welfare standards are expected to warrant that certain norms are upheld in the breeding and slaughtering of animals. Ideally, making the production process more “humane”, i.e., safer and less perilous for people and animals alike. Consumers relate animal welfare to the meat’s national origin, using their idea of the country in general to comprehend the meat’s trustworthiness (Hoffman 2000; Lagerqvist et al. 2014; Lusk 2011; Verbeke and Viaene 2000; cf. Buller and Roe 2014, 2012; see also European Commission 2007).

A much-discussed issue for “ethical meat” is that consumers’ appreciation of such production regimes do not match their consumption patterns. The attitudes of European consumers imply that they appreciate, and are willing to pay for, increased animal welfare and environmental sustainability (Denver,

21 Vegetarianism and veganism distinguish all kinds of meat as excessive, and therefore all of them are considered a kind of taboo, which does not say much about meat in itself (cf. Adams 2010; Singer and Mason 2006; Twine 2010).
Sandøe, and Christensen 2017; Garcia, Loureiro, and Nayga 2011; Napolitano et al. 2010; cf. Verbeke and Viaene 2000). However, their actual consumption does not match that attitude. This issue is called the “attitude-behavioral gap”, and is generally explained by consumers being confused by unclear brands, the steeper prices asked for ethical meat products, and consumers being hypocrites (Abrams, Meyers, and Irani 2010; Denver et al. 2017; Foster 2007; Grimshaw et al. 2014; Napolitano et al. 2010; Vermier and Verbeke 2006; see also Boström and Klintman 2017:7–8). However, further studies suggest that this problem does not lay among the consumers, but that “civic values” are absent from the retail environment (Thorslund, Aaslyng, and Lassen 2017; Thorslund and Lassen 2016). The taste for ethical meat thus implies an issue for meat producers in a post-scarcity society; the demands on the production process do not necessarily translate into consumer demand for the goods produced.

Exclusive meat implies a different type of refinement than the previous two tastes. Both healthy and ethical meats do, to some extent, distinguish safe from dangerous meat. Exclusive meat, however, is related to knowledge and experience of gourmet dining, which includes the use of both time and money for eating unusual and adventurous food (DeSoucey 2016; Weber, Heinze, and DeSoucey 2008; see also Jönsson 2012; Leschziner 2015; Metzger 2005). Because exclusive meat has to be distinctive in order to be appreciated, these goods are included in a great variety of goods, used both to distinguish the eater and the meal as a “food experience” (cf. Johnston and Baumann 2007, 2010:40–41, 92–96, 104–18).

It follows on the complexity of exclusivity that “common” meat lacks any distinctive features to be appreciated as refined, consequently making it vulgar.22 These features are, however, less related to the meat itself and more concerned with eating for the experience, rather than to redeem hunger or indulge in want. To treat sustenance-eating as vulgar surely implies that food is in abundance, available to the vast majority, and splurging may therefore no longer symbolize refinement as it once did (see also Elias 2000; Levenstein 1994). Vulgar meat is also cheap. Hence, it is a symbol and means of necessity among those who can afford little else (Baumann, Szabo, and Johnston 2017; Beagan et al. 2014:137–47; Holm and Møhl 2000), while a means to thrift for those who refuse to pay a steeper price for refined tastes (Beagan et al. 2014:135–37, 142–47; see also Miller 1998:102–4, 134–37; Streib 2015:192–94; cf. Carolan 2011). Some types of meat are regarded not only as vulgar, but also unappetizing to the point of being on the brink of edibility (see Sahlins 1976:175–79). Cheap and unrefined meat implies the dangers and low status of traditional, working class masculinity, symbolized by the foodstuff itself.

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22 It may be relevant to point out that “vulgar” derives from the Latin word “vulgaris”, i.e., common.

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being the contrast to all refined foods and eating: unhealthy, unethical, and common (cf. Adams 2010; Ruby and Heine 2011; Sobal 2005).

Reviewing the taste for meat in post-scarcity societies reveals how refinement relates to safety, and consequently vulgarity to danger. The most refined taste is efficiently summarized by Michael Pollan’s three rules of eating “Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants.” (2008:1). Meat sourced from ethical and refined suppliers has a small, but undeniable, place in such a diet. Vulgar meat is, consequently, unhealthy, immoral, common, and mindlessly consumed. However, the distinction of meat eating as increasingly vulgar and dangerous has not reduced meat consumption. Instead, meat is consumed in unprecedented quantities, a development which existing literature does not explain and which also raises questions about the prevalence, or influence, of the lion’s share of meat as a less refined food.

The question henceforth is how (safe) meat is produced in a post-scarcity society. While consumers may eat meat in accordance with a distinctive taste, the producers have to enable all of these tastes to exist. The aforementioned paradox suggests that both refined and vulgar goods must be supplied, and that they are of equal relevance for the scope of this study (see also Allaire 2004).

2.2 Meat Production: The Chain of Supply

Farming, meat processing, and grocery retail make up supply chains, which enable the vast majority of people to consume pork and beef without being involved in producing them (cf. Dixon 1999). Both refined and vulgar tastes are supplied by meat producers, implying that they distinguish sufficient from excess meat in a different manner than consumers. In addition, producers influence consumers’ tastes, both through marketing and by supplying a selective, albeit vast, assortment of commodities (Cochoy 2010; Dubuisson-Quellier 2013; Holm 2003; see also Daoud 2011b).

Meat production, as most agrifood supply chains, were historically controlled by industrial processors and landowners, under government-managed systems of national food supply. However, these supply chains have undergone rapid globalization and “financialization,” meaning that they have gone from domestic food suppliers to objects of financial speculation (Friedmann and McMichael 1989; Nützenadel and Trentmann 2008; Prasad 2012:25–46; see also Kohl et al. 2017). The globalization of food thus comes with a decreased political, or public, control over what foods people may consume (Belo Moreira 2015; Campbell, Murchott, and MacKenzie 2011; Halkier and Holm 2006). One prime example of the aforementioned development is the food and agricultural policies of the EU. The union’s attempts to maintain a common market without national borders is generally found to reduce public governance and quality standards, with the exception of “national specialties”
The globalization of food supply has made multinational retail corporations increasingly influential. The decreasing number and profits of farmers simultaneously imply their marginalization (Burch and Lawrence 2005, 2009, 2013; Carolan 2012:15–65; Hattersley, Isaacs, and Burch 2013; see also Ritzer 2014). Mechanization and biotechnological development make farming in post-scarcity societies less labor-intensive, but also financially less stable because of global competition (Brown and Argent 2016; Bruniori and Bartolini 2016; Carolan 2012:16–39; see also Fitzgerald 2003). Food abundance is thus dependent on a globalized system of food supply, where wholesale and retail operations procure foods from all over the world.

To ensure consumers of safety and quality in this global food supply, standards and brands become increasingly important in marketing (e.g., Schulze-Ehlers and Anders 2017; for an overview see Perez et al. 2009). “Corporate owned brands” are possibly the most extreme case. Such brands are criticized for obscuring the origin of foods and for pushing down prices on primary producers’ goods, because packaging and marketing is independent from agricultural producers (Burch and Lawrence 2005; Carolan 2011). Some consumers and producers do, however, attempt to opt out of the globalized and financialized food system and erect alternative or “niche” markets (Goodman, DuPuis, and Goodman 2012; Woods 2016). However, there is little evidence of the general success or failure of such ventures. Consumers’ tastes are thus generally maintained and managed by large-scale retailers, which I turn to first as they are the producers who meet and manage consumers.

2.2.1 Food Retail and Consumer Management

Supermarkets, which are part of large-scale grocery chains, are the main outlets of foodstuffs in post-scarcity societies. Business studies distinguish the success of such companies in terms of customer loyalty, assumed to be a sign of high levels of trust (overviews in Arnold 2002; Palmer 2005; Rampl et al. 2012; cf. Kjaernes et al. 2007). The sociology of retail work further shows that grocery stores attempt to sell food which is cheap and consistent in quality, as well as being inviting and nice in their interaction with customers (Leppänen and Sellerberg 2010a, 2010b; Sellerberg and Leppänen 2014; cf. Pettinger 2006). While loyal customers may be the ideal to strive for, the

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23 Farmers are, however, not as powerless as peasants, who lack any property rights to the land they farm (Djurfeldt 1994).

24 It should be noted that all possible reasons for “consumer loyalty” are not necessarily considered in these studies, e.g., network effects or unchecked habit.
reality seems to be that retail is as much about adjusting to consumers as making these consumers appreciate the retailer’s supply.

Because of the globalized food supply, the retailers use “categories” and standards to supply different tastes for their consumers. The ongoing “shaping” of consumption in grocery store marketing is to a large extent a practical categorization of abundance into a variety of qualities, signaled by brands and physically distinguished in the stores layout (Cochoy 2005, 2010, Dubuisson-Quellier 2010, 2013). Food retailers market a great variety of food commodities, which brands display, and packaging gives distinctive looks that enable them to be recognized in consumer practices (see also Barrey 2007). However, the edible foods that retail outlets discard are both physically and legally removed from the realm of food, making them waste and criminalizing attempts to gather these worthless items to keep consumers paying for the abundance supplied (Barnard 2016; Edwards and Mercer 2012; Thomas 2010).

Some brands promise consumers food safety, in line with the modern taboo against dangerous meat. Such brands promise safety by indicating that the producer adheres to certain standards, designed and audited by trusted institutions. As meat scares tend to reflect negatively on the supply chain, they generally make consumers and governments demand further standardization and to use brands declaring that meat commodities – and even outlets – warrant safe consumption (Bildtgård 2008; Holm and Halkier 2009; Kjaernes et al. 2007; Wales et al. 2006). By using such brands, consumers are ensured that both the meat and the outlet is safe, recognizing the brand as indicative of a trustworthy institution distinguishing a safe from a dangerous outlet of meat.

The marketing of ethical meat is considered to some greater extent, in light of the aforementioned “attitude-behavioral gap” among consumers. The branding of, e.g., certified organic (Napolitano et al. 2010), animal welfare regimes (Buller and Roe 2012; Garcia et al. 2011), or country of origin (Grebitus, Menapace, and Bruhn 2011; Lagerqvist et al. 2014), does not seem to translate into purchase to the extent demanded. However, studies of consumers’ valuations and how they translate into purchase imply that the retail experience obscures the ethics behind a brand (Thorslund and Lassen 2016; see also Thorslund et al. 2017; Holm 2003; cf. Klintman and Boström 2008). Ethically distinguished commodities may thus have other uses, especially as a part of a retail worker’s job is to display attractive aesthetics in the store (Cochoy 2010; Dubuisson-Quellier 2010, 2013; see also, Pettinger 2004; Venkatesh and Meamber 2008). However, the literature includes sparse explanations of how meat (or other foods) are made, or “aestheticized”, into commodities beyond the retail space.

A category in retail is a “family” of commodities, e.g., (fresh) meat, bakery goods, or dairy.
Goods sporting brands, especially supermarkets’ “own-brands”, make an increasingly standardized supply of food commodities seem like a greater variety of offers. The versatility of brands and standardization in combination with increasingly standardized and consistent quality in the supplied groceries enables retail chains to easily change and discontinue their supplier relations (Bjerhammar 2011:117–20; Burch and Lawrence 2005). The management of consumers, consequently, depends on producing an impression of a vast range of refined and trustworthy foods supplied in a limited, but not scarce, quantity.

The studies of retail marketing may be concluded as a problem of producing meat in a post-scarcity society: to transform animals into commodities with different, complementary, and attractive aesthetics that resemble the consumers’ tastes. While retailers market meat, and influence what commodities to display in retail spaces, these goods have to be produced through butchering animals.

2.2.2 Making Meat

Animals are processed into meat in abattoirs and cutting industries before they are retailed. It is within this process that safe cuts of meat (and other meat products) may be distinguished as vulgar and refined, and the refined categorized using suiting brands to mediate their distinction. It is also in this process that unsafe and dubious meat can be wasted, and safe but distasteful cuts or animals transformed into a good that is appreciated. Meat processing, i.e., butchery, is sparsely studied outside the engineering literature (e.g., the academic journal *Meat Science*). It is also hard to draw any general conclusions regarding the institutional framework of meat processing in post-scarcity societies, because the legal framework differs distinctly between different states (cf. Holm and Halkier 2009). There are, however, a few useful insights.

The technological and organizational development of meat processing present some general insights for how animals are transformed into meat. Standardized quality grading, for example, has been increasingly employed by processors during the last several decades. These grades enable commodity differentiation and reduce quality uncertainty when pricing carcasses and meat (Mann and Erdin 2016; Martinez 2012; Olsson and Pickova 2005; Perez et al. 2009:263–65). Some kinds of meat are also discarded because they are regarded as “dangerous” or “distasteful”, e.g., intestines (cf. Sahlins 1976:170–79). As the abundance of meat demands a greater variety of meat-based foods to be consumed, standards to generate such distinctions are increasingly employed in supply chains based on economic research.

Economic models of “consumer preferences” imply that meat ought to be “lean”, “tasty”, and “juicy” to be appreciated by European consumers (see de Barcellos et al. 2010; Bredahl, Grunert, and Fertin 1998; Brunsø et al. 2005; cf. Grunert 1997, 2006; Grunert et al. 2011; Grunert, Bredahl, and Brunsø
However, such a combination of qualities is next-to-impossible to produce; lean meat is seldom juicy, and juicy meat is usually fatty and therefore assumed to be distasteful (Brunsø et al. 2005; Olsson and Pickova 2005; cf. Holm and Møhl 2000). In order to supply the most sufficient meat for such paradoxical tastes, these studies use economic experiments to limit the range of relevant “preferences” – rather than exploring the limits of consumer choice (cf. also, Allaire 2004; Gronow 2004; Holm 2003). Effectively, these economic studies reproduce Hayek’s argument that abundance is a consequence of distorted signals in markets, although widening the scope beyond prices, i.e., a scarce knowledge about consumer demand (cf. White 1981b).

The sociology of meat processing is sparsely studied outside Critical Animal Studies. Such studies tend to focus on the killing of animals, and what that practice means for the people and animals involved, generally argued to be a degrading activity for all involved parties (Ballard 2010; Gouveia and Juska 2002; Pachirat 2011; Pedersen 2013; Twine 2010; Vialles 1994; see also Parry 2010). The literature on “dirty jobs” further suggest that butchery is a disrespected vocation, which demands those working as butchers to re-value their work in terms of a (comparably) big salary for a working class job, or a positive counter-identity (Ashforth et al. 2007; Ashforth and Kreiner 1999; Thompson 1983). Meat processing is treated as an immoral and distasteful activity, both in science and in general. The low status of butchery mirrors the general criticism towards killing animals for human sustenance. The welfare of animals in the meat supply chain is thus readily criticized. Humane practice is pitted against globalization, industrialization, and economy of scale, including religious slaughtering practices (cf. Belo Moreira 2015; Buller and Roe 2012; Gunderson 2013; Lever and Miele 2012).

Conclusively, production standards seem to be how meat processors differentiate tastes as well as uphold food safety. In order to battle their competitors, scientists and meat producers attempt to optimize meat processing to increase revenue and supply retailers with a wide range of commodities. Together with globalized competition and the use of brands for signaling refined tastes, the treatment of meat processors seems somewhat contradictory. Previously, I pointed to consumers finding the “animality” of meat distasteful. This section implies that butchers and meat cutters working in this industry are generally unrecognized for upholding animal welfare and food safety. Instead, they are disrespected for performing a maculate activity – killing animals. Meat production in a post-scarcity society thus seems to detach suppliers and consumers from each other. By reviewing the literature on hog and cattle farming, some further clarity regarding these problems may be rendered.
2.2.3 Breeding and Herding Animals

Before entering the abattoir, animals are bred on farms by farmers. In tandem with urbanization and trade globalization, animal farming has changed from domestic sustenance production to become an international business (Worosz, Knight, and Harris 2008; Winter, Fry, and Carruthers 1998; cf. Granberg 1999). As food policy has undergone these transformations, economies of scale and labor-saving technologies have followed in its path towards an abundant supply (Fitzgerald 2003; Hinrichs and Welsh 2003; Striffler 2005; Gunderson 2013; cf. Djurfeldt 1994:71–74, 213–15). Especially in the US, the icon of export-oriented agrarian capitalism, has this abundance created problems of price fluctuation and unstable markets for primary producers, i.e., farmers (Prasad 2012; Striffler 2005). In general, globalization and financialization of agriculture decrease the number of farms and farmers in post-scarcity societies. The diminishing revenue that a farmer makes from producing a given unit of food, including meat, is thus a major problem (Marsden 2013:138–42; see also Bruniori and Bartolini 2016; Fitzgerald 2003). Consequently, many remaining farmers have turned to economies of scale, including more industrial methods, to stay in business and battle the tendency of the rate of profit to fall.

Studies on farmers in meat production primarily concern animal welfare policies and practice. “Farm animal welfare” implies the scientific and legal base line for tolerable, or sufficient, livelihoods of farm animals. However, the interpretation of “welfare” is far from consistent within the EU alone, leading to heterogeneous standards and legislation (Bock and Buller 2013). Farmers negotiate their animal welfare practice, especially regarding the financial costs of upholding it, generally refraining from changing how they breed animals to attain voluntary standards (Hansson and Lagerqvist 2012, 2014, 2015; Kling-Evillard, Dockes, and Souquet 2007; Tuyttens et al. 2008; Tuyttens, Van Gansbeke, and Ampe 2011). There is, however, a group of farmers who attempt to maximize animal welfare, independent of voluntary standards, while the majority exclusively adjust to legal demands (Bock and Van Huik 2007).

Farmers’ work enables both ethical and exotic tastes, as distinguished forms of animal breeding may translate into brands, niche goods, or marketing campaigns. A few farmers approach “niche production”, i.e., some regime for animal breeding which supplies, e.g., certified organic or locally sourced meats (Carolan 2012:49–70; Goodman et al. 2012). Other niche producers supply exotic meats for the exclusive tastes, e.g., heritage breeds or animals fed specialty feed (Weber et al. 2008; see also DeSoucey 2010). However, farmers are heavily criticized for delivering “insufficiently humane” animal welfare, inconsiderate of the animal as a living subject (Boivin et al. 2003; Bock et al. 2007; Buller and Roe 2012; Gjerris and Klingenber 2012; de Krom 2015; Wemelsfelder and Lawrence 2001; cf. Ledin and Lema 1997; Thiermann and Babcock 2005). Consumers do also perceive an increased use
of technology in animal farming as a threat to animal welfare, as well as food quality and safety (Bennett 1997; Bock and Buller 2013; Buller and Morris 2003; Lassen, Sandøe, and Forkman 2006; Winter et al. 1998).

Some more general studies suggest that “rural masculinities” are constructed as undeserving, i.e., conservative, vulgar, and help-seeking, in popular culture – not that different from the vulgar meat eater discussed previously (Stenbacka 2011; see also Brandth and Haugen 2016). Farmers seem to have a similarly contradictory status as butchers. While people consume more and cheaper meat produced under animal welfare regimes, they also show disrespect and a lack of recognition for those who produce it (cf. Carolan 2011; Levenstein 1994; Nestle 2007).

Concluding this chapter, there are three problems that run through the supply chain: to produce meat matching consumers’ tastes, smaller (direct) profits from meat supply, and a treatment of meat processors and farmers as questionable moral agents in relation to consumers and public policy.

2.3 The Problems of Post-Scarcity Meat Production

Reviewing the existing literature, this chapter has shown that meat consumption is encompassed by a taboo against dangerous meat and meat eaters, distinguishing “safety” as the inherent trait of consumption-worthy meat. Within the boundary of this taboo, there are three distinctive refined tastes: healthy, ethical, and exclusive meat. Their vulgar counterpart is not as clearly distinguished, but encompasses the meat considered fatty, unethical, and common. It is also evident that both health and ethics relate to the taboo, distinguishing particularly “safe” versions of meat. Consequently, vulgar meat is treated as a precarious fare for those embodying a conservative, working-class masculinity; men who are as dangerous to others as their fare is for themselves.

Meat tastes are, however, limited to the consumer practice (see Warde 2016, 2017). It is therefore not the producers’ tastes that the literature on meat production concern, nor the more general globalization of agrifood production. Instead, existing studies imply how suppliers enable consumers to maintain their tastes. Following on this review, three distinctive problems that meat producers face in a post-scarcity society are outlined:

1. “Over-production” of meat comes with the problem that producers need to differentiate meat and animals before the meat reaches a consumer. This problem surfaces in the use, and limited success, of a large number of brands to differentiate meat in grocery stores. It is further implied as meat processors and farmers are demanded to distinguish meat into categories of refined and vulgar varieties, and possibly also waste some meat. The use of quality grades and certified production regimes imply that meat is produced according to these
categories. However, the problem that remains unresolved is how meat becomes valuable as a market good or how it matches consumer tastes in relation to over-production, it is as yet unclear what meat and animals make the cut.

2. “Diminishing revenue” from meat production comes in the path of food abundance and liberal globalization. This development has also empowered retail chains on the pains of processors and primary producers. As a supply chain is dependent on all its segments to supply meat, they co-depend on each other’s survival. The matter that remains unresolved is of how to relate monetarily to the diminishing revenue from supplying meat, i.e., how such an operation makes money.

3. The “disrespect” that comes with the paradoxical status of butchers and farmers suggests that meat producers struggle for some kind of recognition (see Honneth 1996:79). This third problem concerns the experiences of meat producers as, on the one hand, people who take responsibility for (a part of) a society’s food supply. On the other hand, a diminishing and estranged group of people that make a living from supplying an abundant and precarious foodstuff. As far as existing studies go, retailers do not seem to struggle with disrespect in a similar manner to other producers. The problem of disrespect implies that there must be some other value than customers’ appreciation in supplying an abundant foodstuff, making it meaningful.

These three problems are the consequences of producing meat as an abundant foodstuff. Existing studies do not provide any answers to how abundant production is perpetuated in the face of the problems of overproduction, diminishing revenue, and disrespect. But the problems seem to prevail. The producers must have some way of, at least temporarily, keeping these issues at bay. Otherwise, production would be reduced to sufficient levels, i.e., an equilibrium between supply and consumer demand. It follows that by investigating how these problems are dealt with in a supply chain, present in a post scarcity society, it is possible to answer how abundance is perpetuated. Therefore, I turn to the emergence and state of meat abundance in Sweden.
3 The Swedish Meat Supply Chain

Swedish agricultural imports consist mainly of bulk commodities and are almost twice the size of exports [...]. The chances for Sweden to compete with world market prices for [unprocessed] agricultural commodities\textsuperscript{26} are small.

- Swedish Board of Agriculture (2012:ii)

Sweden, together with other Scandinavian countries, is often distinguished as a successful combination of capitalist and social democratic dynamics. While meat production is not a significant part of Sweden’s GDP, the Swedish Competition Authority (SCA) finds little-to-no differences to other countries in the EU of the economic viability of the Swedish food supply chains, meat included (2011b). Sweden’s relatively large dependence on imported meat, and food in general, stand out together with limited institutional support of the domestic supply chain. This state of affairs is the premise arguing for studying the Swedish meat supply chain to explore the production of abundance.

In this chapter, I outline the history and contemporary institutional framework of Swedish meat production, drawing primarily on public data and reports.\textsuperscript{27} Lastly, I distinguish the state of the Swedish meat supply chain concerning how farmers, meat processors, and retailers respectively fare at the time of this study.

3.1 The Path to Swedish Meat Abundance

The history of meat production in Sweden since the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century bears witness to how this historically scarce yet appreciated food becomes abundant. Sweden has no history of being a major meat producer as the dominant industries have supplied iron, lumber, and later cars, and industrial machinery. The supply of meat, as food in general, has been directed towards domestic consumption. The supply of meat drastically increases with the emergence of industrialization in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century, when increased productivity and

\textsuperscript{26} Excluding timber and wood products.

\textsuperscript{27} “Vulgar” tastes are not discussed as these are absent from the source materials reviewed.
technological development enabled people to leave small holdings and peasantry for more urban lives (Morell 2011:165–66, 188–89). The “modern diet” of industrial workers, using their salaries to buy food instead of growing it themselves, drove an accelerated meat consumption compared to these workers’ parents and grandparents (Morell 2011:166–69). An increased everyday consumption of meat by ordinary people thus demarcates Sweden’s transformation into a modern society.

Underpinning the increased consumption of meat is the rising productivity of Swedish farms. The improved breeding of dairy cows led to more old cows being butchered, both to reduce feed costs for expanding farms, and because these cows were far larger and of better quality than earlier generations (Morell 2011:192–93). The expanding domestic markets for meat also lead to farmers, especially in the far south of Sweden, starting to specialize in hog breeding (Morell 2011:193–94). It is also during this period that meat processing is industrialized. Historically, butchers travelled from farm to farm, but with modernity comes mechanized and stationary abattoirs growing in size for every decade (Hansson 2001). The Swedish meat supply chain thus emerges as a business in and of itself during the early 20th century.

It was during the mid-20th century that the supply and procurement of food in Sweden began to show signs of being abundant. Product differentiation, greater concerns for food safety and animal welfare, and an increased preoccupation with consumers in public policy are all signs of an ample supply, giving consumers’ preferences more influence. Simultaneously, Swedish farms grow to unprecedented sizes, albeit modest compared to the present day (Flygare and Isacson 2011:214–16). The industrial abattoirs, owned by farmers’ cooperatives, become increasingly powerful in the supply chain at that same time (Hansson 2001; Westerlund Lind 2011). Retailers also follow this development, as specialized grocery outlets, e.g., milk stores and butcher’s shops, also begin a rapid transformation towards supermarkets (Kjellberg 2007; Morell 2011:208–10; cf. Cochoy 2010).

While the Swedish government, labor unions, and industries strived for, and achieved, greater economic profits from exports in these times, food production was consistently treated as a source of domestic sustenance, neither a source of export income nor pleasure (Flygare and Isacson 2011:219–21; see also Hasselgren 2010). In order to feed the Swedish people, national agricultural policy sought further industrialization of agriculture. Until the 1970s, this process also sought to transform the farmer into an agricultural worker, rather than a smallholder (Flygare and Isacson 2011:222–32).

In the 1970s and ‘80s, the emergence of abundance become significantly visible in Swedish meat, and food, provisioning. An increased awareness of environmental and social issues on a global level lead to food and agriculture becoming increasingly political issues (Flygare and Isacson 2011:232–38). A
clear sign of meat abundance is that Sweden in 1988 passes a new law on animal welfare, which effectively outlaws the use of preventive antibiotics and other technological means used for increased productivity. While increased animal welfare is suggested to have a positive impact on productivity, the justification of the new law was the concept of “natural behavior”, which has now become a requirement. Hogs and cattle are not only to be protected from unnecessary pain, as the old law dictated, but also acquired a legal right to eat, move, and socialize according to their natural wants and needs (Elofsson, Larsson, and Åhl 2011:198–99; see also Sveriges riksdag 2014; cf. Svärd 2014).

Two implications of meat abundance have so far been distinguished in the history of Swedish meat supply: the increased concern with consumers and the demands for stricter animal welfare. Both of these historical occurrences match the kind of late-modern trust through the use of brands and the skepticism towards industrial technology that was discussed in the previous chapter.28 They also imply the problems of overproduction, as (then) conventional means of increased productivity were outlawed, and disrespect, as the attempts to change farmers into workers effectively treated smallholdings as an outdated way of living (cf. Bruniori and Bartolini 2016).

However, there is one further important development of the Swedish meat supply chain adding to its relevance as a case for studying abundance: the globalization of meat in Sweden.

### 3.1.1 Globalization: EU Membership and the BSE Crisis

The Swedish meat supply chain embarks on its path towards liberal globalization in the 1990s, followed by increasing food abundance and competition among producers (cf. Fine et al. 2002:17–18). The first part of that development is when Sweden joins the EU in 1995. The years leading up to becoming a full member meant trade deregulations creating a sudden influx of imported meat. The government, however, supplied little in terms of competitive advantage for the domestic suppliers (Flygare and Isacson 2011:241–43; Nilsson and Björklund 2003:25; Schwaag Serger 2001:61–63). Politics aside, the historical development shows a government unconcerned by the fact that the number of hog and cattle farms, and to some lesser extent meat processors, decreased rapidly without any public attempts to hinder it.29

After 1995, the Swedish meat supply chain was supposed to be “market oriented”, meaning that “[f]ood production was supposed to be treated like any other form of production” (Flygare and Isacson 2011:241). The realization of this ambition led to a transformation from a domestic and cooperatively

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28 See Section 2.1.

29 The number of cattle farms have decreased by 54% and hog farms by 85% during the years 1990 – 2009 (SBA 2011a:14, 17). See also Sections 3.3.1 and 3.3.2.
owned industry to an increasingly globalized supply chain with multinational companies buying the former cooperatives. However, falling prices and ineffective competition drove Swedish meat production into a rapid decline (SCA 2011b:109–11). Farmers were certainly the most affected, while processors and retailers managed the fiercer competition to a greater extent (SBA 2011a:56–59). Beyond individual producers, globalization also affected the supply chain’s organization.

Global competition transformed Swedish meat processing. The farmers’ cooperative Swedish Meats was successively dismantled and acquired by multinational meat processing companies (Nilsson and Björklund 2003:196–97; Schwaag Serger 2001:83–86). The last remaining parts of the cooperative was abandoned in 2007 (Westerlund Lind 2011). As Swedish Meats dismantled, the supply chain faced a global market made up of private business, distinctly different from the domestic and protected industry of the 20th century.

Beyond the industry itself, abundance and globalization have changed Swedish agrifood policy. From coordinating the domestic food supply of a 20th century industrial nation, it now promotes environmental and aesthetic values, such as “cultural landscape, biodiversity, [and] animal welfare […] as ecosystem services” (Flygare and Isacson 2011:243). Sweden distinguishes itself as a post-scarcity society by privatizing not only the cooperatively owned slaughter, but the domestic food supply in general.

What is usually called “transnational meat crises” started to make the headlines in the late 1990s, stating that some form of (usually) imported meat is dangerous to consume. The BSE-crisis30 is possibly the most extensive one hitting Sweden after entering the EU. As BSE was found to be contagious for humans, as Variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob’s Disease, the trust in beef production food safety plummeted. Hence, this crisis forced the EU to develop new institutional frameworks and standards for meat production safety (Kjaernes et al. 2007; for details on the BSE outbreak see Seguin 2003; Vincent 2004; Wales et al. 2006). Studies of the BSE outbreak’s effects on European food policies shows that the institutional measures taken to ensure food safety thereafter have shifted the responsibility to suppliers and private companies, especially grocery retail chains (Belo Moreira 2015; Halkier and Holm 2006; Holm and Halkier 2009).

The existence of meat abundance internationally usually shows an increased marketization and liberalization of domestic food supply for exports (cf. Dixon 2002; Dobeson 2016a), and by promoting and protecting domestic foodstuffs by making them authentic specialties (DeSoucey 2010, 2016). However, Sweden has not gone down any of these routes. The consequences of what came with Sweden’s EU membership has, to be frank, been allowed

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30 Bovin Spongiform Encephalopati, or “mad cow disease”.
to take its toll. Beyond the initial deregulation of trade, harmonizing with the EU’s common market, governments both to the left and right have kept Swedish policies and legal demands beyond the EU’s base line. These conditions make a core argument for why the Swedish meat supply chain is a fitting case for studying the production of abundance; the problems have largely been left to the supply chain itself to deal with. The institutional framework of Swedish meat supply further supports this argument.

3.2 The Institutional Framework of Meat in Sweden

The institutions and legal-political framework of meat production has changed drastically in Sweden from 1995 and onward. Swedish government agencies are tasked with maintain both EU and domestic policies. The EU drafts the lion’s share of policies that affect Swedish producers. In line with the previous review of meat consumption literature, the following outline shows how the taboo against dangerous meat (food) is maintained, and to what extent the different taste categories (healthy, ethical, and exclusive) are supported by the institutional framework.

3.2.1 EU Food Safety: Hygiene and Traceability

The EU’s food safety policy is a union-wide legal framework installed to prevent and battle health hazards (The Commission of the European Communities 2009). It is enforced through audits and by disciplinary measures against those who fail to fulfill these standards. In Sweden, the enforcement of the EU’s food safety policy is managed by the National Food Administration (NFA). This government agency oversees the audit of meat processors and food retailers in order to maintain safe foods, redeeming and counteracting food hazards (NFA 2016). The safety measures consist of two parts: standardized hygiene and traceable origins (cf. NFA 2010; SBA 2011a).

The standard used for upholding food hygiene in the EU is called Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP), a standard developed by the UN. These guidelines cover both how to evaluate potential health hazards in food supply chains and how producers should organize their operation so as to live up to the standard (NFA 2016; UN and WHO 2005:11–24). The HACCP is a clear example of how the EU upholds the “secular taboo” between safe and dangerous food through a scientific standard, but one that has yet to take on the late modern tendency of grades and brands for commodity differentiation.

Beyond the hygiene standards, meat producers are mandated to designate the national origin of meat products which have emerged in the years after the BSE crisis. Beef has to be traceable to the individual animal and farm where it has been bred. Pork products, however, only have to be traceable to the country where they are bred and slaughtered (NFA 2010). Combined, the HACCP and the demands for origin traceability display an increased demand
for individual producers to maintain a safe meat supply, and for consumers to review where their meat comes from.

### 3.2.2 The Common Market and Agricultural Policy

For meat to be freely traded, the EU provides a common market and agricultural policy for its 28 member states. The effect of trading within the EU is, it follows, that as long as an animal is bred, slaughtered, and packed inside the union, the meat can be sold anywhere therein (National Board of Trade 2012:3–4). The common market means that, since 1995, Swedish meat producers have been competing with suppliers from throughout the EU, independent of domestic policy and legislation. A common market also means that the shared borders of the union abide by the same laws and customs for imports from the rest of the world (SBA 2011a:25). The only exception from the common market’s rules is if the animal breed or meat commodity is deemed a regional or traditional specialty by the European Commission (Tosato 2013; see also DeSoucey 2010).

The laws governing the EU’s common market demand that national governments abstain from any means of supplying a competitive advantage for domestic producers of any good, beyond abolishing legislation that deviates from the EU’s base line (National Board of Trade 2012:3–4). Effectively, the Swedish government may not support or subsidize domestic meat producers for following stricter laws than their competitors.

Together with the common market comes the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), a significant share of the public spending and policy processes throughout the union’s history (for a general discussion, see Fligstein 2008:38–60). The history of CAP mirrors the development of Swedish meat abundance. The post-war period of increased productivity eventually led to abundant supply. After initially reducing production and destroying the excess, the early 1990s saw a turn for political support of increased food quality and environmental sustainability. These new goals were approached through rural development programs, e.g., support of small farms and organic certification, and a shift from subsidizing agricultural productivity to subsidizing environmental services (European Commission 2012, 2013:4; Flygare and Isacson 2011:242; cf. Belo Moreira 2015). The latest version of

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32 Of the 1,407 foodstuffs that are registered as traditional or local specialties, eight are produced in Sweden and Falukorv (a traditional sausage) is the only meat product among them (European Commission 2017).

33 There may be the possibility to lower domestic taxes and tariffs on indirect costs of abiding by the law, as the EU does not have a common national tax policy, but that is hardly discussed in the public reports.
CAP was installed in 2014 and furthered the path towards increased quality and environmental sustainability, albeit including ambitions for competitiveness and agrifood exports outside of the EU (European Commission 2013).

In 2014, when the fieldwork of this study was conducted, one EU-wide subsidy affected Swedish meat producers in a general sense. It is called the *Area Grant*, and is paid according to land size to farms of more than four hectares for maintaining its agricultural environment. This grant does not require any productive activity, but is paid for conserving, e.g., grazing land (European Commission 2013:7–9; SBA 2015b). Beyond this grant, there are also targeted grants and subsidies for organic farming, silage cultivation (i.e., grass for feeding cattle), agriculture in geographically disadvantaged areas, and keeping cattle older than one year (SBA 2017a). The only one of these subsidies that supports production is the cattle grant, which primarily benefits dairy farmers who hold their cattle for longer periods of time (SBA 2017a:88). However, the *Swedish Board of Agriculture* (SBA) states that the “primary function [of these grants] is income subsidy” for producers, not increased or maintained productivity (2017a:46). Effectively, production regimes deemed unethical or common are penalized by a structural advantage for producers supplying meat for certain refined tastes. However, public subsidies are not the only policies that affect Swedish meat producers.

3.2.3 The Animal Welfare State

Beyond food safety and subsidies, the EU states a common baseline of animal welfare that applies throughout the union, outlined in the *European Convention for the Protection of Animals kept for Farming Purposes*. This legal statute is, in conclusion, based on “the five freedoms”, which states that domestic animals should not suffer, and be able to “behave normally” (The Council of Europe 1976).

However, Sweden has kept the aforementioned legislation from 1988, which is possible because a member state may enforce a stricter version of EU legislation, targeting only its own population. The *Swedish Statute on Animal Welfare* (SAW, 1988:539) adds the following legal statutes beyond the EU’s baseline:

- §2 Animals ought to be treated well and be protected from unnecessary harm […]
- §3 Animals ought to be awarded enough feed and water and enough supervision. The feed and the water should be of good quality and accommodate the kind of animal fed […]
- §4 Animals ought to be treated […] [in a way] which gives them the opportunity to behave naturally. (Sveriges riksdag 2014, author’s translation)
While the quoted legal statutes may seem vague, they have distinct practical consequences. In §2, the law demands a stricter baseline for what kind of treatment an animal can legally be subjected to, as it includes the concept of “treated well”. In §3, the demand for supervision is added to the EU’s demand of food and water, and also states that there is a bottom line for feed quality. The primary difference to the EU’s common legislation is however the concept of “natural behavior” in §4. This concept further stands out in comparison to legislation in other European countries, demanding more space to roam per animal, including grazing during several months for cows and calves, as well as a more stimulating environment (SOU 2011:75, Elofsson et al. 2011).

Overall, these legal demands are argued to generate added costs for Swedish meat producers, and comprise an unusual mix of market liberalism and domestic protectionism (Annerberg et al. 2015:75–86; Elgström and Rosén Sundström 2016:31–37; see also Schwaag Serger 2001). However, these statutes also mean that the requirements for breeding animals are stricter in Sweden than in any other EU member state. Swedish farmers’ ability to be the most restrictive users of antibiotics in the EU, and keep relatively modest economies of scale, is also explained by their experience of stricter legal demands (Annerberg et al. 2015:104–8; European Medicines Agency 2013:20).

The last decades have seen Swedish meat producers facing a major institutional change, as the coordination of meat has become dominated by market actors. The abundance of safe meat leads to refined and niche production regimes being promoted. The institutional framework of the EU reproduces the consumers’ refined tastes by supporting them with policy and subsidies. The three problems from the conclusion of Chapter 2 are visible in the institutional framework of Swedish meat producers: overproduction is battled primarily by subsidizing production regimes which do not increase productivity, but the supply of ethical and exclusive meats.\(^{34}\) The problem of diminishing revenue by subsidizing “income loss”. Lastly, the problem of disrespect, while the least visible, is to some extent addressed by the means of transforming agriculture from an industry into an environmental service, and by supplying grants for people to stay on living on their farms, independent of their productivity. However, abundance is more visible in Sweden than in other EU member states because a number of domestic legislations are stricter and more expensive to uphold. To further map out how these problems distinguish the Swedish meat supply chain, the following sections outline its different segments.

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\(^{34}\) It may also be pointed out that the health effects of meat eating, beyond certain hazards, are void in the supply chain policies and reports.
3.3 A Chain of Meat Producers

Producers in the Swedish meat supply chain engage in a number of different operations, enabling animals to be bred, butchered, and retailed. The people involved in these activities fare quite differently under the aforementioned “marketization”. The following sections map that process starting upstream, at the farms, and then follow the chain downstream through meat processing operations, ending at the retail outlets. Thereafter I conclude them in a model of the Swedish supply chain.

3.3.1 Farms and Farmers

Hogs and cattle live at farms from the day they are born until they are sent to slaughter. There are two types of farms that breed animals for meat production: “integrated farms”, where animals are born and bred, and “specialized farms”, which buy calves or piglets from a breeder, or the male calves from a dairy farm.

As Swedish agrifood production has changed from a domestic sustenance base to an industry competing on a globalized market, farmers and farming practices have taken on a new form. In the post-war era, Farmer’s League was the main political party who challenged the Social Democratic Workers Party over urbanization policies and the industrialization of agriculture (Flygare and Isacson 2011:231–32). Now, half a century later, Farmer’s League has become Center Party. In tandem with the transformation towards global markets, they describe themselves as: green, liberal, and small-business friendly (Centerpartiet 2013:3; see also Niléhn 1980). The non-party branch of organized farmers is found in the Federation of Swedish Farmers (LRF), which call themselves a representative for the “green industries”, and their members’ “businesses” (LRF 2016; see also Flygare and Isacson 2011:240–41). Looking at SBA’s data and reports bears witness to how Swedish farmers have fared, facing emerging abundance and global markets.

The 1,281 farms breeding hogs in 2014\textsuperscript{35} comprise about 60% of the hog farms in business in 2005.\textsuperscript{36} However, they have increased their productivity and in 2014 supply ca. 75% of what the farmers in 2005 did (cf. SBA 2006:92, 2016:80). The Swedish hog farms house on average ca. 1,100 hogs, which dwarfs, e.g., Denmark by comparison with its ca. 5,000 hogs per farm.\textsuperscript{37} It is worth mentioning that close to all Swedish hog farms are found in the southernmost third of the country (SBA 2017b:3–4, see also 2011a:20). Hog

\textsuperscript{35} The same year as when this study’s fieldwork was initiated.

\textsuperscript{36} While the number of farms decreased by 11% in Sweden from 2005-2014, 40% of the hog farms active in 2005 have terminated their operations during that period (cf. SBA 2006:23, 2016:26).

\textsuperscript{37} Denmark houses ca. 16.2 million hogs on 3,293 farms, i.e., almost 5,000 hogs per farm (Danish Agriculture and Food Council 2014:3).
breeding as the main productive branch of a farm is thus a regionally concentrated venture in Sweden.

In the years 2005-2014, 25% of Swedish cattle farms terminated their operation. However, dairy farms have decreased 44% in that same period, implying that “beef-farms” have fared relatively better, and that dairy farms have added or changed to meat production (SBA 2011a:17, cf. 2017c:4, 2014d:20, 2011b:6–7). The ca. 17,000 cattle farms operational in 2014 house on average 80 animals, almost twice as many as in 2005 (SBA 2017c:4, cf. 2006:84). As these numbers imply, the productivity per farm has also increased, making the total supply in 2014 ca. 95% of 2005’s (cf. SBA 2017c:1).

The majority of Swedish cattle farmers run dairy farms, and an estimated 65% of the cattle slaughtered in beef production are either old dairy cows or steers born on dairy farms (SBA 2011a:14). Cattle farms are more dispersed throughout the Swedish countryside than hog farmers. However, the vast majority (ca. 90%) of the farms housing some kind of dedicated breeding of cattle for beef supply is still found in the southernmost third of Sweden (SBA 2011a:17).

During recent decades, Swedish hogs and cattle have also become significantly heavier due to the farmer’s use of standardized breeding processes and genetically designed semen (SBA 2014a, 2017b). As the use of antibiotics is also relatively small compared to the rest of the EU, this development implies that the animals are either healthier, or bred in a different manner than in other member states (Annerberg et al. 2015:104–8; European Medicines Agency 2013:20).

38 While the Swedish dairy supply chain has fared comparably worse under liberal globalization, it is a less fitting case for studying the production of abundance. First, the fact that Arla, the dairy farmers’ cooperative is still running makes dairy a messier case because of historical and organizational particularities that are still in place (cf. Nilsson and Björklund 2003). Second, the domestic consumption of fresh, low pasteurized milk is the economic basis of the Swedish dairy industry, a foodstuff which Swedes consume in historically small quantities (SBA 2015c:31–33). Thus, the dairy industry does not supply abundance in an equally clear-cut manner.

39 This development should to some extent be attributed to the “special beef premium” paid by the EU to farmers breeding male cattle, terminated in 2012 (cf. SBA 2010a).

40 Cattle includes cows, steers, heifers, calves, bulls and oxen. Both milk and meat breeds are included.

41 Ireland is one of the major foreign competitors to Swedish beef-cattle farmers. With the reservation that the numbers supplied are quite confusing, the mean herd size for cattle in Ireland is argued to be 58, slightly below Sweden (Department of Agriculture, Food and the Maritime 2013:54). The mean annual total income of an Irish cattle farm is, however, slightly above €6,000, a sum hardly suitable to run a farm on in Sweden (Teagasc 2014).

42 These steers may either be bred on the same farm or sold to a specialized one.
Facing global competition and increased meat abundance, Swedish farmers have taken measures to further market their meat (Nilsson and Björklund 2003:194). LRF developed the brand Swedish Meat43 (Svenskt kött) to distinguish which meat commodities are domestically produced in retail. The brand promises that:

The meat in the [branded] commodity comes from animals born, bred, and slaughtered in Sweden. The good is also processed and packed in Sweden. (Svenskt kött 2016, authors translation)

In addition to this brand, LRF supplies standards such as IP Livsmedel, IP Gris and Swedish Seal (Svenskt sigill) to mediate and market the values of Swedish meat and food production. At least one producer in the supply chain of a meat good has adhered to the Swedish Seal-standard in order to use the Swedish Meat-brand (Svenskt kött 2014; Svenskt sigill 2014). These standards are voluntary, but do primarily ensure that the producer lives up to the legal demands, while only in some cases demand further animal welfare or environmental deference. It should also be pointed out that these standards do not take the physical qualities of the meat into regard.

The number of certified organic hog and beef cattle farmers has increased in Sweden during the last decades. However, while 17% of Swedish cattle farms are certified organic in 2014, the hog farm counterpart is slightly below 2% (SBA 2015a). While the EU substitutes organic farming, hog farms do not seem to approach such certificates, which is left unexplained in the public reports. A distinction should further be made between the two different regimes of certified organic in Sweden: EU-organic is symbolized by a green leaf and uses the European Council’s legal definition of organic production as the basis of its standard (cf. The Council of the European Union 2007). The other one is KRAV, the Swedish organization for organic farming, using their own standard, audits, and brand (Krav 2014). An important similarity of these standards is, however, that they almost exclusively apply to farms.

The state of Swedish hog and cattle farming suggests that the abundance of imported meats and the pressure to compete on a global market have made a large minority of them go out of business. The ones that are left increase their productivity and scale of operation. The emergence of origin branding and the increasing certified organic supply show how the abundance of meat is also present for Swedish farmers, and that they increasingly supply refined tastes, supported by public authorities.

43 Shortly after the fieldwork, the brand was changed to “[Kött] från Sverige” (…from Sweden). “Swedish meat” is however what the producers refer to during fieldwork, not to be confused with the defunct cooperative slaughtering company Swedish Meats.
3.3.2 Meat Processing

When the animals leave the farm, they are in general put on the trailer of a truck and driven to an abattoir less than eight hours’ drive away (i.e., the Swedish legal limit of abattoir transports, SBA 2010b:12–29). The forwarding agent, i.e., transporting company, is responsible for the animals’ lives and welfare during transport. When the animals are euthanized in the abattoir, they ought to be calm and healthy according to both Swedish law and company policies.\(^{44}\)

The Swedish meat processing cooperatives “de-mutualized” into private enterprises during the last two decades, primarily because of their lack of ability to compete and increasing internal tensions among the owners (Westerlund Lind 2011:36–38; see also SBA 2011a; Nilsson and Björklund 2003).\(^{45}\) The two major meat processors in Sweden are, however, the privatized heirs to these cooperatives. SCAN and KLS/Ugglarps both hold on to the names of the cooperatives they once were, while they now have foreign owners.\(^{46}\)

In 2014, the two major hog processing facilities were located in the far southeastern of Sweden, in Kalmar and Kristianstad. The lion’s share of hog farms is also located in this area. For cattle slaughter, the large facilities are found somewhat further north, in Linköping, Skara, and Kalmar. These are, in turn, close to the majority of Swedish cattle farms (SBA 2017b:3, 2011a:17, 20).

The recent decades have seen small- and mid-sized abattoirs and other meat processing gain market shares from SCAN and KLS/Ugglarps. This is especially the case for hog slaughter. The large-scale processors seemingly control a greater part of hog than cattle slaughter (SBA 2014b:4, 2014c:4; cf. KCF 2013:2). However, many smaller abattoirs make money from “lego-slaughtering”. This activity means that large-scale processors contract smaller ones to slaughter animals before they are transported to a cutting facility, so as to stay within the legal eight hours for live animal transports (SBA 2011a:34). It should thus be taken into account that cattle farms are much more dispersed geographically, which would make them benefit more from lego-slaughter. It follows that lego-slaughter may inflate the numbers of how much of the beef supply that small-scale producers actually control, as it is not reported in the available data (cf. KCF 2013).

Meat processing companies carry out slaughter and butchery; the process where animals are killed and transformed into carcasses, and eventually meat goods. This job is carried out by stable hands who wrangle the animals, and

\(^{44}\) If the animal is stressed or unhealthy when euthanized, it may lead to the meat produced being inedible for both safety and quality reasons.

\(^{45}\) For an elaborate analysis of the emergence of cooperatives and industrialization of Swedish slaughter and meat processing, see Blod och Stål by Hansson (2001).

\(^{46}\) SCAN is owned by Finnish HK Scan Oyj and KLS/Ugglarps is owned by Danish Crown.
butchers who control the euthanization of the animals and then butcher them into carcasses. The animals wait for slaughter in a stable, which is organized so that it leads up to the abattoir. The animals are, under Swedish law, required to be stunned before being bled. For hogs, the stunning is done with gas, i.e., carbon dioxide. For cattle, a bolt is fired into the forehead as they stand in a kill-box (SBA 2008). However, the combination of stunning (which in effect can be lethal) and bleeding (which is lethal if the stunning does not kill the animal) means that the exact moment of death becomes indistinct (see Vialles 1994). Consequently, the legal demand for sedating animals makes Kosher slaughter illegal in Sweden, while the Halal version may be legally performed, using a liberal interpretation of the rituals involved (cf. Lever and Miele 2012; Miele 2013).

In the abattoir, hogs and cattle are classified according to public standards, and priced according to their awarded classes. The processors post “grids” outlining the quota set-off paid per kilo of an animal. These grids are for the farmers to review when choosing a processor. The standards for classifying hogs and cattle in this case are both called EUROPEAN. These two standards have been drafted by the EU and are demanded to be used throughout the union, but are upheld by the SBA. These standards define measurable quality attributes of carcasses and how they are to be evaluated. The standards in themselves, however, are quite differently constructed and have no internal similarities beyond measuring fat and muscle (SBA 1998). To enforce these standards, SBA train and audit the classifiers working at the abattoirs (SBA 2003:4–6). Beyond the EUROPEAN-classification, there are also a few additional variables that influence the set-off, such as if the animal was organically bred (SBA 1998:6–7). An abattoir is also demanded by law to have an NFA-employed veterinary assessing all slaughtered animals for possible health hazards, e.g., measuring bacterial growth in certain organs.

After slaughter, the meat is cut and trimmed by butchers or meat cutters to fit a retailer or other buyers’ demands. This process can be carried out both in the same facility as the abattoir, in a cutting plant, or in a retail outlet. Some meat is made into fresh cuts, while the rest is processed into prepared goods, e.g., cold cuts or meatballs. Some meat may also be awarded a distinguished status, such as premium quality or certified organic. What is left of the animals becomes waste, either burned in a heating plant, or made into bio-gas or compost (see Corvellec 2013). This section implies that the development of meat processing follows the decline of farms in a post-scarcity society, albeit to a lesser degree. The number of processors has diminished, while the ones

47 At the time of this study’s fieldwork, there is one Halal meat processor in Sweden involved in beef slaughter. However, they do not sell their meat in retail outlets but only to restaurants and food processing companies. There is thus no religious slaughter performed in the supply chain studied.

48 These standards are outlined and discussed at length in this study, especially in Section 6.5.
still operational have increased their productivity and become further marketized.

3.3.3 Meat and Grocery Retail

After the animal has been processed into meat cuts, these are forwarded to retailers. Most Swedes buy all their fresh meat in supermarkets and grocery stores, part of one out of four major grocery chains or two discount chains. Of the meat produced by Swedish farmers and meat processors are an estimated 75-80% sold in retail, of which a majority is fresh, whole cuts or ground meat (SCA 2011b:110–11). Swedish meat is thus primarily marketed as a part of a greater whole of groceries, which comprise foodstuffs, semi-finished foods, household chemicals, etc.

The largest outlet for meat in Sweden is by far ICA, which controls 50.7% of the market for grocery retail. Together with the three other main grocery chain companies, COOP, Axfood (who run Hemköp and Willys), and Bergendahls (who run CityGross) they control over 90% of the market for groceries (DLF, HUI, and Delfi 2013). These four major retail chains are organized differently. ICA is a franchise business. COOP, as the name implies, is owned by a consumer-cooperative and centrally plans their retail. Axfood AB and Bergendahls are both family owned, and the former to a small extent use franchise contracts. These four companies’ stores are where the vast majority of Swedes buy their food, meat included, and also the outlets that upstream producers must sell to if they are to be part of the mainstream. Butcher’s shops and other niche retailers are but a small fraction of the Swedish meat retail, and there are no publicly available reports of their activities.

As scholars of food systems have pointed out previously, grocery retail is an increasingly powerful part of food supply in a globalized world abundant with food (e.g., Burch and Lawrence 2013). The concentration of grocery retail in Sweden to a small number of actors is regarded as “normal” in a globalized economy, while the degree of competition between these chains is considered small (SCA 2011a:23–25). In addition to marketing Swedish meat, these grocery chains are also the primary suppliers of imported meat, both fresh and as prepared goods (SCA 2011b:114–17). Since the 1990s, Sweden has become a net importer of both beef and pork. At the time of this study, one-third of

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49 While there are good statistics on the development of farmers and processors, retailers are much harder to assess (cf. SBA 2015c:11). The only available market share data comes from the private research institute DFL. This data is however regarded as reliable among Swedish retail researchers (Professor Ulf Johansson, Lund University, personal correspondence).

50 Beyond the four main grocery chains, the discount chains Lidl and Netto hold most of the 10% left of the market. These discount grocery chains and have been part of Swedish grocery retail since the early 2000s (DLF, HUI, and Delfi 2013; Lidl 2016; Netto 2016). It was also in the early 2000s when domestic production began to drop and the consumption of imports began to increase. Thus, imports have changed not only what is bought and sold, but also which businesses sell them and how they are marketed.
all pork – and almost half of all beef – that Swedes consume is produced abroad (SBA 2013:7–8, 2017c:1, 2017b:1).

To conclude, the grocery chains supply Swedish consumers with the vast majority of the meat they buy. These companies also trade in the globalized market for food, being the large suppliers of imported meat. As the supply chain has now arrived at the “consumer end”, it may be concluded by outlining its structure, and what the insights of its layout hold for the further study of how abundance is perpetuated in a post-scarcity society.

3.4 The State and Supply of Abundance

While the general Swedish consumer is on an all-time high in her meat consumption, the Swedish meat producers struggle with problems from supplying (a part of) that abundance. Figure 3:1 concludes the layout of the Swedish meat supply chain; the process of breeding animals, butchering them, and retailing the meats to consumers is organized in a flow of private businesses.

Figure 3:1 Outline of the Swedish Meat Supply Chain

Figure 3:1 should be read as a flowchart that moves from the upstream, where farmers breed animals and then flows downstream through the different parts of the supply chain and ends up in retail. The arrows imply the direction of the flows in between the segments, albeit not the relations between individual producers. The supply chain starts with a large number of small operations, as Swedish hog and cattle farmers are, comparably, small-scale. Successively,
the operations become larger, more globalized, and also more sparsely investigated by public authorities. The quantities supplied increase drastically with imports, while the exported quantity is not even measured in the public reports. As a supply chain in a post-scarcity society, the Swedish is laid out similarly to the global ones, despite being subject to the same institutional framework and standards throughout (cf. Dixon 1999; Marsden 2013). In that sense, inquiring into the Swedish meat supply chain may also gather insights in relation to the studied food supply chains in general.

While this chapter has discussed the Swedish meat supply chain as a whole, it is, for further argument, useful to distinguish between the mainstream and niche producers in the supply chain. Niche producers do not use the mainstream, large-scale abattoirs, and only trade with grocery chains independent of major processors or self-branded goods (cf. Goodman et al. 2012; Paddock 2015b, 2015c). However, niche producers are a small but heterogeneous group of suppliers, absent in public reports except for those farms being certified for organic production.

Returning to the three problems of abundant meat production, these become further distinguished reviewing reports and data on the Swedish meat supply chain. The refined tastes are somewhat subsidized, and may thus hold some means for managing overproduction. However, Swedish farmers are also obliged to uphold stricter laws than their European competitors. The demise of farms in recent decades also indicates meagre economic prospects. Because certified organic production is more subsidized, non-organic farmers are of particular relevance for this study; they have less public support for dealing with problems of producing an abundant foodstuff. When it comes to the problem of disrespect, little is said regarding this problem in the sources reviewed, beyond the finding that institutional subsidies of farmers target personal finances, rather than enabling business opportunities or maintaining a domestic supply. In short, there is little support to continue producing meat in the mainstream of the Swedish meat supply chain.

This chapter has rendered the three problems of producing an abundant foodstuff more empirically tangible. With Chapter 2 in mind, it is evident that these problems do not emerge in the same manner along the supply chain, and that some producers may even be exempt from dealing with them directly. It follows that the whole of the supply chain has to be studied to understand how abundance is perpetuated, and that the production activities have to be taken into account. The following chapter opens up Part II, in which I discuss the fieldwork carried out and the theoretical framework applied to use the empirical materials generated for studying the production of abundance in the Swedish meat supply chain.
4 Fieldwork

Me: What is that? A calf? It is huge!

Harald: It is a boar⁵¹ – but why have they sent it here? It should just go to destruction [...] but someone will have to butcher it, that is no pleasant job.

- Discussion at Mr. Meats’s loading bay

Producers, like butchering foreman Harald, have to make distinctions between sufficient and excessive meat on an everyday basis. A boar is, as the field note above implies, excessive and should “go to destruction.” Getting one delivered, this procedure is renegotiated, leading to the agreed upon truth that “someone will have to butcher it”. A boar is not deemed sufficient for food, but someone will have to take care of this excessive carcass anyway. The fieldwork of this study has been designed to explore such distinctions between sufficiency and excess in everyday meat production. Harald distinguishes the boar’s carcass as excessive meat, but meat which still has to be butchered. It is in such episodes that Swedish meat producers show how they deal with the problems of overproduction, diminishing revenue, and disrespect while supplying an abundant foodstuff.

In this chapter, the methodological approach for exploring the production of abundance in the Swedish meat supply chain is laid out. First, I explain why ethnographic fieldwork is the best choice for studying a production process. Thereafter I explain the selection of informants, how they were engaged in interviews and participatory observations, and research ethics. Lastly, I outline my analysis of the generated materials.

4.1 Studying the Qualities of Quantities

To manage an abundant quantity, it has to be distinguished into sufficiency and excess, in line with existing sociological theories mentioned in the introduction of this study. To answer how the production of abundance is perpetuated requires materials which enable me to analyze the qualities distinguished (and ignored) in the production of both sufficient and excessive

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⁵¹ A mature male hog, usually kept for breeding.
meat. More concretely, how the three problems of producing meat in a post-scarcity society are dealt with by Swedish meat producers. The choice of ethnographic methods rests on the aim to explain how people engage with a quantity, without taking any measures of it for granted.

4.1.1 A Case for Ethnography

Ethnography is the study of people’s everyday lives, aiming to understand how those living that life also makes sense of it. Using this method appreciates that “ordinary life is pretty complex stuff”, but is still the reality that social sciences aim to explain (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:3–5; quote in Pekar 2003). As a research method, it uses such insights to produce scientific explanations.

Ethnography is usually categorized as a “qualitative” method, which implies that it generates materials which distinguishes different “qualities” of a case. In the context of methodology, a quality is best described as an experienced aspect of engaging with a certain phenomenon, including the persons’ conceptions and wordings of such experiences (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:24–31). The everyday activities of Swedish meat producers, as producers of abundance, is thus the focus of this study henceforth; addressing the experiences spanning between the physical world and personal impressions that make up the producers’ reality.

The value of a qualitative approach to the production of abundance is the possibility to study the “sequential unfolding” of the producers’ experiences (Abbott 2016:3–16, 33–75, quote on p. 4). These experiences may then be investigated as abundance in the making. A statistical analysis is limited to measurable results or outcomes, so a qualitative approach is necessary to answer questions about the origin of those outcomes (see also Abbott 2016:195–98; Dixon 1999; Halkier and Jensen 2011:110). In other words, the production of abundance is a phenomenon which does not lend itself to a rigorous procedure of quantification. That is the case, because the production of something involves making it into a defined object, and to measure it demands definitions of what quantifiable aspects of the object are relevant to analyze (see Espeland and Stevens 2008).

The existing research on food supply chains, and the public reports on Swedish meat production, are predominantly based on statistical data. These studies do therefore depend on pre-defined categories that can be measured, i.e., observed numbers of à priori defined types of meat, animals, meat producers, etc. Such quantifiable categories are useful for a vast number of purposes. However, it is also evident that these categories are created in order to enable “commensuration” between phenomena, i.e., comparison through a common measure, which can be presented as frequencies and probable outcomes (Espeland and Stevens 1998). Such à priori categories risk setting a normative frame for a study. For example, whether a farmer is categorized
as a worker or a small-business owner has consequences for how she may be compared to other producers (Scale 2006:81–82; see also Hacking 2006; Miller and Rose 1995). Effectively, it would be necessary to know, or at least have a working hypothesis of, what qualities make up meaningfully comparable categories to quantify the production of abundance in a useful manner. However, there are no such qualities or categories supplied by existing research. Consequently, there is no sound basis for distinguishing variables relevant to measure and use in a statistical analysis in this case (cf. Creswell 2009:49–55).

A qualitative study of abundance further enables an analytical independence towards the standards and measurements used in the empirical field of inquiry. That independence is valuable, because the use, negotiation, and meaning of a measure, may explain how the production of abundance is enabled (or inhibited). Quantification is a human activity which “requires considerable work, even when it seems straightforward” and the measures produced are not mirrors of reality, but “reactive; they cause people to think and act differently” (Espeland and Stevens 2008:410, 412). Qualitative methods are therefore the best fit for this study, offering the possibility to investigate “the construction of social realities in the first place” (Holstein and Gubrium 2008, quote on p. 375).

Existing studies using ethnographic methods for investigating both food and economy in society have also contributed important insights for sociological research (e.g., Aspers 2001; Çalışkan 2010; Dixon 2002; Dobeson 2016a; Zelizer 1994b). The use of ethnographic methods in existing studies is an indication that such methods are useful for resolving questions of similar nature, albeit not explicitly addressing abundance (Dixon 1999:153–55; Halkier and Jensen 2011:113; see also Creswell 2009:190–91). The evidence supplied by this method may thus further the sociology of food and agriculture, economic life, and abundance in dialogue with existing studies. With the case for ethnographic methods laid out, I turn to its limitations.

4.1.2 The Limitations of Ethnographic Research

Ethnographic methods are not without their faults and limitations. Howard S. Becker discusses how he derived what have proven to be faulty, or at least distorted, conclusions in his own ethnographic fieldwork (2017:190–205). He suggests that such “qualitative inaccuracies result from taking one or more ideas […] for granted, […] not question them, when a more skeptical outlook would have shown them wrong” (Becker 2017:190, italics added). In line with Becker’s reflections, the limitations of using ethnographic methods in this study should be considered.

This study is, inevitably, limited to those Swedish meat producers who are in business, and may be distinguished as meat producers. This is a limitation in two regards. First, because this study design excludes former producers who
have left the Swedish meat supply chain. Second, it does not study any other cases of producers supplying something in abundance, such as those facing the destruction of crops to “[meet] the problems of underconsumption” during the Roosevelt administration (Prasad 2012:46–51, Roosevelt quoted on p. 50). A historical-comparative method could, for example, expand the notion of supply in relation to abundance. While some scholars argue that excess in some form signifies most of human history (cf. Abbott 2016:123–26; Bataille 1988), others have outlined significant changes in how things are valued in terms of sufficiency and excess over time. For example, Viviana Zelizer’s (1994a) study of child insurance implies that excessive spending on children are almost opposite things in the late 19th century compared to the 1970s (see also Sahlins 1974:14–32). While a historical comparison would be interesting, the cultural dependence of abundance makes the concept too fuzzily defined for such endeavors. Existing research on abundance or meat production does not justify the choice of independent variables or comparable cases that would benefit the explanation this study set out to make. In contrast, the strength of using a single case for this study is that it enables me to minimize the use of assumptions about how abundance is perpetuated, or the context in which that is the case. While the conclusion offered by such a research design is more empirically limited, it offers this study an analytical independence for answering its questions (Flyvbjerg 2006:237–41). That independence is important for supplying an answer that furthers the study of abundance with little restriction from existing research.

The second limitation is that some categories are necessary in order to distinguish relevant sources of empirical materials. It is thus important to treat categories of producers, e.g. “retailer”, or of meat, e.g. “premium quality”, carefully. Such categories have been employed in a preliminary manner, to distinguish and select informants. However, it is therefore also important that these categories are not assumed, but discussed and anchored in the producers’ reality. These categories are not given, and how they are defined among the producers themselves should not be taken for granted; it is what some ethnographers call “emic” (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:194–95; Ladner 2016:17–20). An “emic” approach is a limitation to the conclusions drawn from ethnographic research, because it is hard to validate whether, e.g., “retail work” implies the same practical activities or meanings in the Swedish meat supply chain as in other cases of food supply. However, I argue that this limitation is justified, because a more technical, and generalized, categorization of the participants would risk distorting the generated materials’ depiction of how they engage with the production of abundance (see also Gubrium and Holstein 2006:269–70; Seale 2006:381–82). In this case, I cannot assume that it is, e.g., the placement of a producer in the supply chain that answers how she deals with the problems stemming from an abundant foodstuff. If that is the case, it can only be distinguished by the producer’s own activities.
Third, the answers supplied in this study are certainly limited by a material generated from a relatively small number of participants. Effectively, no empirical generalizations may be drawn that a statistical method would supply, i.e., frequencies or probabilities. The conclusion of this study is confined to supplying an answer for how abundance is produced, suggesting (conceptual) types of human engagement that perpetuates abundance. It is therefore important to remember that the exact number of interviewees or hours of participant observation are in themselves not a guarantee of a certain result, in contrast to, e.g., the minimal number of observations needed for a sufficient result on an $\chi^2$ test (cf. Yates 1934). A qualitative study is thus not a study of a defined number of people, but of the (maximum) variation of engagements within the field of inquiry (Patton 1990:72). As experimental psychology has shown repeatedly, small numbers easily deceive and give impressions of empirically meaningful distributions (see Kahneman 2011:109–19). Therefore, the numbers of informants etc. that are outlined henceforth are illustrations for enhancing transparency, not commensurable figures.

To conclude, using ethnographic methods approaching the production of abundance enables a study of the qualities of abundant quantities, demarcating sufficiency from excess. The effects and treatments of these qualities are what makes a quantity abundant, following on existing research. The main limitation of a qualitative study is that no empirical generalizations may be used for drawing conclusions. However, that limitation is symptomatic to the rationale of this study, as existing research does not allow for distinguishing relevant variables to measure, and statistical methods are inhibited from analytical independence to quantification. I thus now proceed to the actual fieldwork.

4.2 Informants from the Supply Chain

My starting point for ethnographic fieldwork lies in the question “how?”, which in this study concerns how Swedish meat producers perpetuate abundance. This question emphasizes what the individuals and groups in question do, and how those activities translate into to their experiences. The informants, i.e., participants in this study, are meat producers whose everyday activities are depicted in the empirical materials that this study uses as its main object of analysis: interview transcripts and field notes.

The informants are Swedish meat producers who work more-or-less directly with breeding and transforming animals into meat commodities, to be sold to consumers: farmers breeding cattle and hogs for meat production, meat processors that employ butchers, cutters, and packers, and finally retailers that

52 Dairy farmers who do not actively breed cattle for the meat industry, but only send dairy cows to slaughter as a residual activity, are thus excluded from being categorized as producers.
sell and market fresh meat to customers in food retail. In addition, some consultants and lobbyists have been included. Exploring such a heterogeneous group of people demands certain choices of what informants to engage with during fieldwork. At the time of fieldwork, all informants were active in the southernmost third of Sweden, below Dalälven. This area encompasses over 90% of the hog and cattle farms, meat processors, and consumers in Sweden. Because of the vastness of the northern parts, internal differences are significant between farms and processors there (cf. SBA 2017d). Southern Sweden is further small enough to enable, e.g., farmers to transport animals to numerous abattoirs within the legal time limit of animal transport, which at least in theory enables some competition between producers.

Covering the entirety of an agrifood supply chain, this study uses a “maximum variation sample” to cover the tensions and variations of Swedish meat production (see Patton 1990:72). This kind of sample enables the variations and limits of meat production to be taken seriously (cf. Halkier 2017:138–39). While categories have to be treated with care in an ethnographic study, the reports and data from the *Swedish Board of Agriculture* (SBA) and the *Swedish Meat Industry Association* (KCF) supply a frame for meat producers that are present in the Swedish meat supply chain (KCF 2013; SBA 2014d). Retailers are however less systematically investigated, but the “Grocery Map” was used to review the business models and market shares among the major retail chains (see DLF et al. 2013). Butcher’s shops have been included on top of the chains, while not being discussed in industry data or reports to any length (cf. SBA 2011a). These sources enabled me an overview of farmers and meat processors according to their size of operation, and to what extent they engage in standardized forms of niche production. To cover the variation of financial and legal engagements with Swedish meat production, I included both employees and business owners from throughout the supply chain. I further sought to broaden the age span as much as possible, and to actively include both men and women. To include a new producer into the sample of participants has been justified primarily because that producer added a new dimension to the informants’ experiences of supplying meat – anything from gender to production regime.

Consultants who advise meat producers, and lobbyists representing the Swedish meat industry were also included as informants. They all hold some practical experience of producing meat, but they were selected to enable more general understanding of the Swedish meat supply chain, including important issues and debates therein. Locally sourced meat, for example, is readily discussed among consultants and lobbyists, while still a marginal mode of production. Their general view thus serves as a complement to reports and statistics, adding a perspective on what different producers may be relevant

53 A table outlining the interviewed informants is found in Section 10.2.
for maximizing variation in the sample. Some of these informants also supplied information about the industry meetings I discuss later in this chapter.

In total, 41 informants participated in in-depth interviews during the course of this study. I also conducted participatory observations, amounting to ca. 35 days of active fieldwork, primarily in a mid-sized meat processing plant. In addition, informal chats and conversations have been carried out with further informants at production sites in proximity to interviews, and at five industry meetings. Such informants remain unnamed, as they either did not present themselves to me or emerge briefly in the empirical materials. The informants are mentioned as, e.g., farmers or retailers. These labels should, however, not be taken too literally. Only among the interviewed informants are 21 engaged in more than one distinct activity relevant for the Swedish meat supply chain, and previous such experiences are even more common. For example, a grocery store meat manager whose parents run a farm or a lobbyist engaged in hobby-based cattle breeding. With the sampling strategy laid out, I turn to the actual informants who participated in this study.

4.2.1 Farmers

Animal breeding and husbandry are the activities which enable pork and beef to be produced in the first place. Hog and cattle farmers were interviewed on their farms, to better understand how they breed these creatures. Upon gaining access, initial contacts were established with seven farmers through a farming consultant. By comparing these farmers’ activities and geographical placement with the SBA’s reports, the different kinds of farms to include were defined. To broaden the sample, eight other farmers were interviewed. For these interviews, I deliberately enrolled informants based in different areas of southern Sweden, maximizing geographical variation.

These 15 farmers are between 24 to 70 years of age, and six of them are women. These farmers run hog and cattle farms of all sizes present in Sweden. A few of them are engaged in niche production, and their farms lay in both remote and (relatively) urban areas. However, there is a preciously small number of organic hog farms, and other kinds of niche hog farmers, in Sweden 2014-5. None of these farmers agreed to participate in this study.

\[54\] One of the farmers is employed by the passive owner of the farm, i.e., an acting farmer, which is rare in Sweden. For ethical reasons, that information has been obscured, since it is possible that this specific farmer could be recognized otherwise.

\[55\] This outcome is somewhat unexpected as niche suppliers are generally found to be more inviting to researchers (cf. DeSoucey 2016; Singer and Mason 2006; Weber, Heinze, and DeSoucey 2008).
4.2.2 Butchers, Cutters, and Packers

Eight informants from meat processing participated in interviews. These informants were selected to mirror the different sizes of operation in meat processing, and to include both employees and business owners. An observation of the relevant processing facility was included in the interview procedure. Either I was given a tour, or simply left to walk around and talk to people according to my own devices. It is worth mentioning that I never killed an animal (nor was I offered to do so) while observing the slaughter of cattle at four, and hogs at three, different facilities.

The interviewed informants all hold some kind of managerial or senior position, while also being involved in the everyday running of abattoirs and butchery. However, no workers “on the floor” of such facilities agreed to participate in interviews. Therefore, I conducted 25 days (ca. 200 hours) of participatory observation in a mid-sized meat processing plant under the pseudonym Mr. Meats. While there were ca. 25-30 people working in the facility during my fieldwork, eight of them are named in this study. These producers also worked with the activities most relevant for this study in the facility: butchery, cutting, and packing. Beyond these eight butchers, I also worked alongside three Polish butcherers for a significant portion of this period. However, because of language incompatibilities, I was not able to have any detailed dialogues with them and they are therefore neither quoted nor mentioned under pseudonyms.

The materials generated from the 16 informants from meat processing, bearing pseudonyms, come from both participatory observation and from interviews. Their experiences range from home slaughtering and plants with just a few employees to large-scale industries with hundreds of workers, in both urban and rural areas. The informants are between 19 and 71 years of age. They are all men, because none (of the few) female meat processing workers or managers found would agree to participate.

4.2.3 Retailers and Butcher’s Shop Owners

Retail covers both grocery store chains and butcher’s shops, beyond farmers who cater directly to consumers. Retailers are included in this study to understand how consumers end up with the meat they bring home from the store. Also, to explore the integration of processing and retailing, as some goods use the processors’ brands while others are sold under the retailers’

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56 See Section 10.3 for an overview.
57 Swedish meat processors routinely hire butchers and meat cutters from other EU member states, e.g., Poland and Lithuania (see Petersson 2012:25, 74–75).
58 These farmers are marked “DTC” in Section 10.2.
ditto. Some meat is also cut and trimmed in the store building, making those retailers meat producers in the most concrete sense.

There are 12 interviewed informants from retail. They come from retail operations ranging from amongst the largest supermarkets and the smallest butcher’s shops, including both discount stores and premium outlets. The informants are between 25 and 53 years of age, and two of them are women. One of the informants work primarily in restaurant supplies, but previously worked in retail wholesale for a long time. While this study does not include restaurants, that interview enabled further insight into the differences in contrast to (regular) retail.\textsuperscript{59} The retail outlets are placed in both rural and urban areas in southern Sweden.

4.2.4 Consultants, Lobbyists, and Industry Meetings

Six consultants and lobbyists participated in this study. In contrast to the aforementioned informants, this group does not primarily work in the meat production process. However, they informed the study with their overviews of the Swedish meat supply chain and its current issues as well as structural make up. While their interviews have been treated in the same manner as the rest when it comes to coding and analysis, they are less present in the examples used below as they are less explicit when it comes to the practical production of meat. It should however be mentioned that all these informants hold a background in meat production to some extent.

To understand the general relationships within the Swedish meat supply chain, I also made observations at five industry meetings.\textsuperscript{60} The participants at these meetings were producers as well as representatives of government agencies, political organizations, scholars, and commercial ventures. In these meetings, current issues and possibilities for the supply chain were discussed. Talks and presentations, as well as informal conversations from these meetings are informative regarding how the industry approaches and defines their shared problems and possible solutions, but also their expectations and worries for the future. The relations between the different “segments” of the supply chain also show as representatives and producers interact with each other, both in consensus and conflict. Knowing the sample of informants, I turn to the practice of generating materials covering their experiences, discussing some field access issues, how interviews and participatory observations were conducted, and research ethics.

\textsuperscript{59} A chef and a restauranteur were also interviewed in the initial stages of the study, but those interviews are not included in the materials for that same reason.

\textsuperscript{60} For an outline of these meetings, see Section 10.4.
4.3 The Process of Fieldwork

The interviews and participant observations of this study were carried out during ca. 18 months, January 2014 to August 2015. During this period, I encountered two major issues of field access. The first issue emerged in connection with an interview of the manager of an abattoir, which included a day of observation in the facility. At this occasion, I got my first insight into processing workers, especially butchers, not being that keen on participating in research. When I enter the lunchroom, a butcher (who may have spotted me earlier) asks what I am doing in the abattoir, since he does not recognize me. When I tell him and his colleagues that I study Swedish meat production, it spurs a heated debate.

The heated debate, in which I do not participate, amounts to a situation where the butchers unite against being interviewed or otherwise participate in my study. First, they want to do it on paid worktime. Secondly, they repeatedly tell me that they will not talk about work if they do not have to, because they find it “boring”. This dismissal is further solidified when the butcher who initially asked about my presence makes it clear that to participate in “some kind of research” would be more or less to oppose him personally. While I do not know if these demands were genuine, they clearly functioned as a way to make further research impossible in that facility.

When I later interview Eskil, who worked as a butcher in his youth, he tells me: “a butchering team is like a biker gang – you don’t let anyone in.” This group dynamic is possibly what I experienced in the aforementioned processing plant lunchroom, even though I did not realize it then. Later interviews with processing plant managers further validate this picture, implying numerous issues of getting butchers to participate. Hasse, who runs a small-scale abattoir, tells me: “I have worked in a number of different industries, but I have never met so sparsely educated people as butchers – you would not believe how few of them who can read a two-page contract, let alone finished elementary school.” Existing research does also imply that the possibility that butchers, doing a disrespected kind of job, oppose outsiders to stay in power over the situation (cf. Ashforth et al. 2007; Ashforth and Kreiner 1999). To counter these issues of interviewing butchers, I turned to participatory observation.

The opportunity for doing participant observations opened up when I got in contact with Mr. Meats, a mid-sized meat processing company. Meeting with the company’s owner Arnold, he proposed spontaneously that I could come and “work for some time, to understand what it is all about.” With past experiences in mind, I was happy to take him up on this offer. In hindsight, it is very possible that Mr. Meats’s then-recent economic success may have made Arnold more open to hosting an outsider on the premises. However, as some of the examples used later imply, it would be hard to argue that my
observations were distorted to present a rosier version of meat processing (cf. DeSoucey 2016; Singer and Mason 2006).

The second access issue emerged in my attempts to establish contact with grocery chain retailers. From the first interview with a retail employee, I had gotten the impression that many of them would be reluctant to participate. This suspicion turned out to be true, since about 80-90% of the retailers approached actively or passively declined participation. At first, I elaborated with the assumption that I had run into the same problem as with the butchers. However, the reluctance prevailed on a management level as well, in bright contrast to the processing plants (and farms). After many phone calls and unanswered emails, I however enrolled a sufficient range of retail informants for this study, but without finding a conclusive answer to this reluctance.

In hindsight, it is possible that the largest grocery chains’ disinterest may be explained by their involvement with other research projects at the time which these companies co-fund, partly to develop their operations.61 Also, the fact that consumers are generally distinguished as the key issue for commerce in post-scarcity societies may have made my study seem irrelevant to these producers (see also Warde 2017:157–79; cf. Tonkiss 2006:95–101). With these access issues spelled out, I turn to the processes of interviewing and participatory observations.

4.3.1 Tales of Production

Transcripts from in-depth interviews make up the majority of materials in this study. The interviews are best described as conversations, where informants explain to me how they conduct their everyday work. They also encompass what the informants believe I have to know about meat production to understand what they do. The core topics of these interviews concern how the informants practice animal breeding and/or the cutting, packaging, and marketing of meat on an everyday basis.

The question “how?” frames the interviews, in order to get insights into the producers’ practical reality, e.g., how the morning routine for feeding hogs or cleaning store shelves are carried out. Asking informants to explain how they go about “doing what they do” is a strategy for accessing the layout of practical processes and how they are understood by those carrying them out (Sundberg 2005:54; Halkier and Jensen 2011:109). To talk “about doing” has previously been used in, e.g., the sociology of science to grasp how the experience of practical activities is linked to the thought and impressions of said activity (see, e.g., Latour and Woolgar 1986:277–84). The use of

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61 Much later, I was by chance invited to a seminar on grocery retail where it was made clear that some of the major grocery chains co-fund research projects with business and engineering departments. This information was not, however, posted on the involved research groups’ nor grocery chains’ homepages at the time of this study. It is thus possible that ongoing involvement with research could explain their lack of interest.
interviews for grasping practical reality is further distinguished by the informants’ use of categories, boundaries, etc. showing how sufficiency and excess are distinguished (cf. Lamont 1992:19–23). The important episodes in the interviews distinguish how, e.g., a “nice steak” is distinguished from a “bad” one in the process of making them. By asking about practical conduct instead of justifications for it, the answers are also less likely to show socially agreeable opinions, rather than experienced reality (cf. Boltanski and Thévenot 2006:10–12, 25–42).

I regard the language used for outlining and explaining practical activities as parts of them, because the use of words encompasses the informant’s understanding of a practice. Interviews may therefore capture “shared cultural understandings and enactments of the social world” (Atkinson and Coffey 2003:119). To put it bluntly: people can talk about their practical reality because they deal with it on an everyday basis (Hitchings 2012; see also Sundberg 2005:54; Rouse 2006:655–63). Asking about how an informant practices meat production – rather than why she does it – is important to inhibit the informant from feeling judged or questioned. Therefore, the interview guide does not state specific questions to any greater extent, but different themes to cover. The guide is thus designed to manage the possibility that some topics may come up in different contexts, depending on the informant and the interview setting.

To understand the context of producing an abundant foodstuff, the interviews cover the informants’ everyday lives and previous meat production experiences in a more general manner. Asking the producers to tell me about how they produce thus set the frame for order and temporality in the generated materials, to get a “thicker” description of the case studied. This frame is important for studying how abundance emerges and is treated from the producers’ perspective, while the informants may not consider the meat or animals they supply abundant (cf. Holstein and Gubrium 1995:38–51). The three problems, i.e., overproduction, diminishing revenue, and disrespect, thus also manifest in the practice of those producers who distinguish other suppliers’ meat or animals as excessive, but their own as sufficient. Therefore, I never discuss meat explicitly as abundant. Instead, the interviews focus on the practical distinction of values in meat production activities, and how problems arise and are dealt with therein. In short, the three problems become explicit if and when the informants relate to them in their experiences of meat production.

Potential informants were contacted via phone or email, or approached at industry meetings. Those who agreed to participate were also sent a more formal letter presenting me and my study. The interviews each range

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62 See Appendix E, Section 10.5.
63 See Appendix F, Section 10.6.
somewhere between 60 and 200 minutes. With the informant’s informed consent, I recorded the interviews with a digital recording device. Part of informing them included an explanation of their anonymity, their right to abstain from answering questions, and to terminate the interview if they so wished. In addition, I also explained how the recoded files are stored safely offline, and offered the interviewees a personal copy of the interview as an audio file on a USB drive, if they wanted it.64

The interview guide was developed by reviewing existing studies, government reports, contemporary debates on meat production, and popular media depicting meat production and producers both in positive and critical ways (e.g., Andersen and Kuhn 2014; Andersson et al. 2012; Anon 2002, Anon 2011; Fällman 2009; Moson 2005; Pollan 2006; Singer and Mason 2006). During the course of the fieldwork, the interview guide, however, came to play more the role of a checklist for covering all relevant topics.

The informants did however comment on questions which do not really fit how they perceive what they do, which is important for the “emic” approach of this study. For example, asking cattle farmer Karl about how he “runs his business”, he replied “well, we are a business, sure, but it is not like I am ‘running’ a business, like some shop owner.” He contests my definition of his farm as a “business”, because he does not experience it in that manner. Such contestation is informative for understanding the reality of the producers, and to avoid forcing the materials into an à priori frame.

Among the 41 interviewed informants, 27 were interviewed individually and 14 in pairs.65 These two means of organizing interviews do not have any significant impact on the topics or questions covered, but rather on the social dynamics of the interview situation. Interviewing pairs usually meant a less present role for me as an interviewer, occasionally more of a prompter to the informants’ own discussion. As it turned out, the interviews with pairs are usually the best ones for understanding how meat is produced, because they are less limited to my ability to ask the right questions. The informants also seem more relaxed in those interviews (cf. “focus group interviews” in Halkier 2010).

The informants were considerate and explained when their dicta were showing signs of becoming too involved or technical, and they suspected that I would not understand them. By saying, e.g., “I am not really sure if you understand all this, but…” the informants seem to allow themselves to speak in industry jargon, and are less affected by my potential ignorance. Such dictums were often useful for that reason, because they took the time needed to explain complex procedures, but without omitting industry technicalities. These

64 None of the informants asked to get the file, despite being reminded of the possibility after the day of the interview.

65 Some of these pairs are life partners as well as business partners, but not all of them.
passages were later made sense of using secondary materials in the coding phase, as well as materials from participatory observations.\footnote{An example interview is outlined in Appendix G, Section 10.7.}

The recorded interviews encompass oral descriptions of how the respective interviewees carry out their everyday production activities, and what they mean for them. In addition, they also explain how they generated and manage their relationships to other producers in the supply chain, and how meat and animas is valued in the production process. Adding to those materials, the production sites are also included through taking notes, drawing sketches as well as recording audio when shown around the premises. Especially at the large processing plants, a substantial part of the interviews is conducted while walking around the facility, including brief conversations with the people working there. Observing at production sites in this manner enables more developed insights into the practical conditions of meat production, e.g., how waste is physically separated from food in a grocery store, or how hogs and cattle are practically managed in the stable of an abattoir. These observations are further important for understanding the environment that informants refer to in interview dicta (see also Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:103–15).

4.3.2 Meeting the Meat, and the People Who Make It

While the interviews may be the largest quantity of materials of this study, the observations are of equal importance. I have used two types of observations: participatory observations, quasi-participatory observations at industry conferences. The first type is discussed more at length here, because of its greater impact on the study.

The main participatory observation was carried out during the 25 days I spent working at the mid-sized meat processing plant, Mr. Meats. This company is part of a larger organization of small- to medium-sized meat processors – including abattoirs, cutting industries and processing of prepared meat. Mr. Meats is the largest employer in the group. Starting on June 1\textsuperscript{st} 2014, I show up at 08.00 for my introduction. I then work the same schedule as the other employees in the plant, take breaks with them, and discuss the ongoing FIFA World Cup.

Doing participatory observations, I tried to be a “participant” as much as an “observer”. In my view, this means sharing the everyday activities of the people involved and attempting to do them as well. Attempting to pass as (not become!) an insider, I engaged in the work similarly to an apprentice (see Downey, Dalidowicz, and Mason 2015). In other words, trying to understand what is taken for granted and how things are expected to be done in order to integrate myself into the everyday work of Mr. Meats’s employees (see also Becker 1998).
I spent the first week as a trimmer, slicing meat into smaller parts and packing those smaller parts into trays. Thereafter, I spent four days as a bulk packer, putting meat into large vacuum bags or plastic trays. The last two weeks I worked the sorting station, putting prime cuts into different crates as they are cut by the butchers. Alongside these primary tasks, I also participated in a plethora of different activities which “have to be done” for the day.

While I did know some things theoretically about meat production before entering this part of the fieldwork, my practical skills were those of a home cook. This meant that some informants took time to train me, especially Ronny, who was assigned to do so. Packing cuts according to the procedures and aesthetic profile of Mr. Meats was far from intuitive. Consequently, I made substantial errors, which generated more work for me and the other workers. Ronny bursting out “Jonas – you disaster! [sic]” was heard more than once during this period. College education certainly does not guarantee excellence at practical work (see also Ehrenreich 2010), but my skills somewhat improved over time, and the orders got sent out at the end of the day.

Producers who work in a processing plant seldom talk that much about meat it seems, at least outside of the actual work process. The ongoing FIFA World Cup in Brazil was instead the main topic of discussion. I thus had to find a way to get into conversation with them. My previous interest in soccer was bleak – to say the least. However, I started watching the games, read up on the rules and began rooting for a team to keep up with everyday conversation at the plant.\footnote{A special thanks to Dominik Döllinger for taking the time to help me understand the game.} This strategy was, in hindsight, the most important choice made to engage in conversation at the field site. In the lunchroom, I also got into occasional discussions about the ads for meat in newspapers and leaflets laying there. These discussions granted important insights into Mr. Meats’s employees’ relationship with the fruits of their labor.

For each new day during the first two weeks, I focused on one new person on the floor. I took time talking to him and asking about his background and what he was doing when working (everyone in the butchering, cutting and fresh meat packing divisions at Mr. Meats were male). Usually I talked to them about how it came about that they worked at Mr. Meats, and their experiences of working with meat in general. To make notes, I used my cell phone. I was forced to take notes primarily during breaks, since there were few opportunities to break from work to do such things and to use a mobile phone, or pen and paper, in that manner would also be problematic for hygiene reasons. In addition, I kept a diary where I noted the events of every day after the shift was over.\footnote{While other ethnographers use photographs to aid in their research, I chose to refrain from this method (cf. Aspers 2001; Dobeson 2016b). A reason for this choice is that many producers}
One issue for this study was that all of Mr. Meats’s primary butchers were Polish, and did not speak Swedish nor English to any greater extent. Their team leader, Harald, neither shared any language with them, and depended on a list of words in Polish posted on the wall. These butchers were all hired through an international staffing company and commuted between Sweden and Poland on a bi-monthly basis. While I did not have the ability to communicate with them verbally to any extent, I spent a substantial amount of time sorting their cuts at the butchering station, working alongside them to see what they do and how they deal with on-site problems. The materials generated during this period are certainly the most detailed on how meat is valued in the butchery process; distinguishing waste from food, expensive cuts from the cheaper “bulk”, and the underappreciated cuts “regular people do not buy” from the “overrated” ones. The field notes also cover the everyday dealings of this lesser known part of the supply chain and how such things as hygiene and safety standards are upheld to stay within the legal boundaries.

After my month at Mr. Meats, the foreman, Dan, told me that my work had actually helped out. I value this conclusion in relation to this study in two senses. First, it can be interpreted as my having to a limited extent learnt the craft of butchery, enabling a practical understanding of this line of work. Secondly, it also relates to research ethics, and that the scholar should “give back to the field”, albeit in an unorthodox way (cf. Rupp and Taylor 2011). Being a positive impact on Mr. Meats’s profits was of course not an ambition for my participant observation, but having that impact implies that my presence did not harm the operation. The other, much briefer, observations will now be outlined.

I visited five industry meetings doing quasi-participant observations as audience, listening at presentations and talking to different organizations and producers about their work. Market squares, where producers and industry organizations represent themselves in their own booths, were also part of some of these meetings. My main focus was to get an idea about the interaction between different groups of meat producers that seldom meet otherwise.

The field notes on what the audience as well as the presenters do during these meetings show the tensions and relationships between representatives for different producers’ organizations and government institutions, e.g., the Federation of Swedish Farmers, the KCF, and the SBA. The problems of producing an abundant foodstuff are prevalent in these meetings, e.g., they often include presentations on how to approach niche production, or what a

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do not allow cameras to be used in their facilities. More importantly though, many meat producers find that photographic depictions of farms and meat processing facilities easily misrepresent them, or are plainly misunderstood by an outsider. Thus, by refraining from photographs, I showed respect for the field and (hopefully) gained trust (Ryen 2006:222–23). That said, it would surely have been informative for the analysis and arguments of this study to have pictures of machinery, work processes, and the environment of production.
certain brand and standard may offer a producer as a competitive advantage. Such topics are also used as the focus for debates and talks on anything from marketing to hygiene.

4.3.3 Ethnographic Ethics

During the course of fieldwork, ethical considerations have been part of every step of the process. When generating materials ethnographically, research ethics first and foremost concern how a study can be carried out in a way that neither endangers nor demonizes the informants (Ryen 2006:218–19; see also Swedish Research Council 2011:45).

Ideally, a researcher should also “give back to the field”. Beyond avoiding bringing harm to the informants, the researcher should also attempt to provide something positive (Rupp and Taylor 2011). If this study lives up to that ideal, it does so by mediating what a usually unheard group of people deal with in their everyday lives. Hopefully, this study may grant some nuance as well as critique oversimplified ideas about their work which flourish both in media and the supply chain itself. Good research also gives something to society in general (Swedish Research Council 2011:29–31). The study of how abundance is produced is certainly, in the long run, essential for understanding a vast number of social issues (cf. Abbott 2016:157–59). Studying this specific case may also inform the development and policies of agrifood industries, enabling more sustainable as well as less exploitative agrifood supply chains, while also reducing the number of futile initiatives. However, I do not deem it reasonable that a single study may supply evidence or insights sophisticated enough to benefit society alone.

A specific ethical consideration regards the access to abattoirs and other meat processing facilities. Previous scholars of meat production, it seems, have gone “under cover”, been denied access or limited to production sites designed for public image (cf. DeSoucey 2016; Pachirat 2011; Pedersen 2013; Singer and Mason 2006; see also SR P1 Vetenskapsradion 2012). It may thus be of relevance to stress that I never attempted to involve people in this study without their consent. In line with the Swedish Research Council’s guidelines, I never disclosed or obscured my study during fieldwork. I also actively informed the informants about my ambitions, and that their participation was at their own liberty, including that they could withdraw at any moment (Swedish Research Council 2011:42–43; see also Ryen 2006:219–21).

The informants and their production sites have all been anonymized, using pseudonyms, and by taking out certain personal information that could be used to identify them. Taking previous researchers’ issues of access, and the political sensitivity of commercial slaughter and food safety into consideration, anonymity is imperial for securing an ethically sound study (cf. Swedish Research Council 2011:68–69). It is surely better to have honest yet anonymous sources than increasing the risk of a distorted sample of
participants, or that informants are exposed to risks because they participate in a study. In a worst-case scenario, such exposure could harm the credibility of scientific research on a general level.

4.4 Coding and Analysis

After the fieldwork, audio-recordings and field notes were transcribed and coded using Atlas.ti.\textsuperscript{69} I coded in two cycles. The first-cycle coding mainly focused on the different topics, i.e., types of activities, in the interviews and my field notes. Such topics would be, e.g., “running a business”, “tasting meat” or “animal welfare.” This coding-principle combines what Johnny Saldaña calls “descriptive” and “in vivo” coding (2013:87–97). It is descriptive because of its use of specific themes, but also used the interviewees conception of said topic, e.g., “bad business practice”. This way, the materials may also be structured and re-structured in the analysis process.

To use a descriptive coding in this manner had two aims: to structure what these materials contain, and to get a sense of what the interviewees tell me as they, in practice, are asked to help me understand how meat is produced. The main purpose of combing descriptive and in-vivo coding in the first cycle was to weed out how the interviewees outline and value their own production activities. This conception draws on the constructionist understanding of the research situation as a socially constructed situation in itself (Holstein and Gubrium 2008; see also Gubrium and Holstein 1997). No method will cover everything, and the informants certainly also made a selection themselves of what to tell me, which is not to say that they actively withheld relevant experiences. I coded the interviews and field notes as follows.

The first-cycle coding shows what different themes and topics that the informants raise in the materials. The findings implied to some extent differ from existing research and public reports on food in a post-scarcity society. For example, almost none of the informants display any concern with the health effects of meat eating, making the supply of a “healthy taste” more or less void in the materials. The environmental effects of meat production according to “Swedish” standards, are not criticized at any length. It may also be pointed out that vegetarianism and veganism are in general seen as harmless lifestyle choices, rather than as a political issue or provocation. These examples imply that some aspects of meat abundance are distinguished as “outside” of the meat supply chain, left to the consumers’ own devices.

In the second cycle, I aggregated the first-cycle codes into categories reflecting the problems of producing an abundant foodstuff; overproduction, diminishing revenue, and disrespect. This part of the analysis was the most

\textsuperscript{69} Atlas.ti is a commercial software for coding and analyzing qualitative materials in either text or picture form.
sensitive, as the three problems extracted from existing research should not be
taken for granted. It is therefore important to stress that neither the interviews,
nor the interview guide, are founded on an à priori assumption that all
Swedish meat producers deal with these exact problems. It should be further
noted that there are problems Swedish meat producers experience, but which
are not related to meat production, e.g., diminishing welfare services in rural
areas. Such issues have been excluded from the analysis.

To make sense of the materials during analysis, a number of secondary
materials were consulted. Store shelves and deli counters have been studied in
(at least) 50 retail outlets throughout southern Sweden. The field notes from
those observations cover prices, the assortment of meat commodities on
display, the placement of the counters and shelves in the store, discounts, etc.
These notes are not outlined at length, but overall show a high degree of
redundancy between outlets. In addition, marketing materials, homepages,
government reports, instructions for production standards, packaging
methods, public production data70, debates, podcasts, trade manuals, and
physical cuts of meat have been used to make sense of interviews and field
notes as these occasionally cover topics that were novel to me at the time of
recording. Such materials cover anything from the 20th century institutional
history of Swedish food production to the physical make-up of different kinds
of meat and meal preparations. While coding and analysis mean making sense
of the materials, the following section shows the process of selecting quotes
and field notes reproduced in this monograph.

4.5 From Study to Text

The methods outlined up to this point have concerned how materials have been
generated, what they encompass, and how I analyze them. However, all 1,623
pages of coded materials do not hold relevance for answering the questions of
this study. Hence, the examples used are the specific parts of my materials
which hold the most relevance for the questions of this study: episodes where
distinctions between sufficiency and excess are made explicit, or when they
imply a distinction contested elsewhere in the supply chain.

The choice of examples was made on the basis of being informative, and often
so because they clearly demonstrate a certain side of the present problem –
ether as an example of, or contrast to, what in the materials is suggested to be
“regular practice”. Therefore, I use fewer and longer excerpts from the
materials, rather than many shorter ones. This choice also means that some of
the interviewees are significantly more present than others, because they have

70 SBA post market and production data for farming and processing of meat. The NFA posts
meat consumption data. No public body posts retail data since these are treated as business
secrets, confirmed by Prof. Ulf Johansson at the Dept. of Business at Lund University (personal
correspondence).
supplied more demystifying explanations. This principle of selection follows my undertraining of qualitative research, using the example’s “quality” to explain the questions at hand while somewhat keeping the producers’ experiences in their empirical context (Rapley 2006:16–17).

I use examples from interviews and participant observations in a present tense, because that is how they were generated. A past tense would imply that something has changed since the interviews, which is outside the scope of this study. To demarcate when a new episode from the empirical materials is introduced or a new informant enters, the pseudonym is (henceforth) italicized. Also, when longer quotes are broken out of the text, and when quotes are not explicitly related to an informant in the text, I use, e.g., “[Interview, Berit]” or “[Field note]”, to demarcate the source and type of empirical material of that quote. In some cases, I use “[Interview + field note]”, implying that field notes were used to fill in a spotty audio recording (farms and processing plants are often loud environments). It should also be pointed out that episodes from operational production facilities, such as Mr. Meats, come from observations.

In Part III, interview transcripts dominate the examples from the empirical materials. I use interview transcripts because they enable the producers’ own explanation of what they do to be taken into account in my analysis. However, the choice of these quotes is however informed by observations of practical, non-verbalized activities. To put words on what other people do, to some extent, risks misrepresenting the informants experience of that situation. By relying on their descriptions of how meat is produced, the risk that I have misunderstood their activities is reduced. As Paul Atkinson and Amanda Coffey (2003) argue, informants’ own explanations are often treated with an unwarranted suspicion in ethnographic research. Hence, users of this method risk producing a romantic ideal of “pure” practical conduct. As this study draws on a pragmatic conception of social reality, it would be in conflict with that theoretical approach to disallow the people who do things the possibility to put those “doings” into words (see also Halkier 2011; Hitchings 2012). They, if anyone, can explain what they do – and how they do it.

To conclude, the materials generated for this study depict the vast range of interrelated activities that make up the Swedish meat supply chain: from how to load cattle onto a trailer, to the design of brands of meat packages. I have generated these materials, because they are evidence from an actual process that perpetuates the production of abundance. Using these materials to explain how that is possible, the following chapter discusses my pragmatist approach to production, and the decisive role of valuations therein.

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71 Also, small numbers can be persuasive and thus three quotes instead of one may look more valid, despite that not being a reasonable assumption (see Kahneman 2011:109–19).
One reason we may have trouble thinking about the value of craftsmanship is that the very word in fact embodies conflicting values, a conflict that in [certain…] settings […] is raw and unresolved.

- Richard Sennett (2008:51)

To produce something is a simultaneously material and symbolic activity, implied by calling it “practice” or “practical”. Practical activities encompass both objective and subjective aspects of making something, e.g., butchering a carcass into different, named cuts. Values are produced as objects are transformed into shapes used in accordance with a certain value. The simplest example may be a coin, used in accordance with its monetary value. As Sennett implies in the quote, values may be in conflict, which puts the onus on the producer to deal with them. To “deal with” something is the basis of a pragmatic approach to social reality, because both subjective impressions and objective circumstances are part of human practice; the pragmatism of production implies the fact that a producer manage conflicting values, in the process of producing a sufficient good, while discarding any excess.

In this this chapter, my focus on the “how” of producing an abundant foodstuff placed in an analytical framework of pragmatic sociology, and the study of valuations. I first make a general outline of pragmatism as social theory and how it approaches production as a human activity. From that outset, I discuss how the concept valuation explains the production of value in practical activities, in this case by distinguishing abundance into sufficiency and excess. Lastly, I draw on existing theories, primarily from economic sociology, rendering two types of valuations from existing social theory: aesthetic and critical ones.

5.1 Sociological Pragmatism

The philosophical tradition “pragmatism” emerged in the late 19th century as a reaction to the ontological polarization between the idealistic principles of rationalism and the crude facts of empiricism (cf. James 1987:490–93). This reaction is implied in the following quote from Charles S. Pierce, and holds the ontological outset for a pragmatic sociology: the practical.
Thus, we come down to what is tangible and practical, as the root of every real
distinction of thought, no matter how subtile it may be; and there is no
distinction of meaning so fine as to consist in anything but a possible difference
of practice. (Pierce 1878:293)

Pierce’s rejection of the dichotomy “thought” and a “practical and tangible”
reality imply the ontology of pragmatism. Thoughts and actions are a unit,
only meaningful as truth in terms of how they translate into human
“experience”. This concept implies the anti-dualistic approach to
thought/action in early pragmatist philosophy. Pierce denotes that pragmatism
regards “the experience of an event” and “being experienced” as two aspects
of the same phenomenon (1878:295–97; see also Kloppenberg 1996:101–8).
Practice, it follows, is where experience emerges and thus the basis for
distinguishing truth from falsehood, or value from waste in human conduct.

A pragmatic sociological analysis holds practical “attempt[s] to resolve our
doubts” as the most fundamental object of analysis for understanding social
reality, following Émile Durkheim’s reading of William James (Durkheim
1983, quote on p. 5). Consequently, boundaries between thought and action,
symbolic and material aspects, normative and descriptive statements, or value
and waste, are regarded as products of human practice. Such distinctions are
therefore the *explanandum* for answering questions about (social) reality. *Explanans*, it follows, must provide explanation for how the existing
boundaries have come to exist and their relationships to peoples’ attempts to
resolve doubts. Sociological pragmatism thus acknowledges the “overall
commitment to problem solving” from the early pragmatist philosophy;
explaining social life by studying individuals’ and groups’ conduct as they are
“testing the truth of ideas in experience” (Kloppenberg 1996, quotes on pp.
101-2; see also Joas 1993:4; Paulsen Hansen in Thévenot 2016:11–13, 15).
For this study, pragmatism means that practical experience is fundamental for
explaining how problems of abundance are dealt with; how abundance is
perpetuated may then be explained by studying the boundaries produced to
sufficiency from excess in human attempts to solve problems thereof.

5.1.1 *Pragmatic Sociology: Production in Practice*

Approaching production in a pragmatic-sociological manner means the
exploration of “practice”. Reckwitz’s definition of this concept may be the
most clear cut: “a routinised type of behaviour which consists of several
elements, interconnected to one another” (2002:249; cf., e.g., Schatzki
2014:18–19, 1996:89). This approach ties in with my research methods,

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72 The word “action” is used in a corresponding manner to practice in sociological theories
drawing on American pragmatism, e.g., “action is seen in pragmatist terms, as a process in
which ends and strategies are formed and revised based on contingent and changing
interpretations of an emerging situation” (Beckert 2016:14, italics added). In some instances,
the sequentiality of action is stressed by referring to “action process” or “line of action”, e.g.,
“a teleological action process, that is, a progression in which each previous step is considered,
because both ethnography and pragmatism focus on how people actively engage with their (experienced) reality. Empirically observable practices are thus the analytical focus of this study, because that is where both problems and attempts to solve them show, including how such attempts are negotiated, accepted, or contested (Joas 1993:4, 247–51). The value of pragmatism for understanding the production of abundance is, I argue, primarily that it takes the productive activities seriously. However, how production in practice constitutes social reality is further clarified by turning to pragmatic critiques of social theory.

For pragmatism to be employed in sociological inquiry, it should be outlined in the light of social theory. Exploring the convergence between early pragmatic thought and contemporary social theory further the usefulness of this theoretical approach. Comparing John Dewey’s pragmatism and Theodore Schatzki’s practice theory, Anders Busch and Bente Elkjær distinguish two analytical points of convergence. First that “experience/meaning and intelligibility […] is construed through actors’ practical and often habituated doings and engagements with the world” (Elkjær and Buch 2015:9). The nature of “doings and engagements with the world” is the second point of convergence, where:

[...] Experience/intelligibility is produced by purposive socially mediated doings saturated with affects and emotions and tempered by the physical arrangements that embed bodily activity (Elkjær and Buch 2015:9).

To summarize: (1) people (re) produce their experiences in practical routines and (2) these routines are carried out within a continuum that ranges from the most subjective emotion to the most objective material condition. These two convergence points underline the relation between pragmatism and practice theory which I outline henceforth.

The convergence between Dewey and Schatzki follows Pierce’s argument that thought and action are aspects of a practically experienced social reality, rather than ontologically distinct entities. It follows that, in both cases, practical experience is the foundation of truth about reality (see also Dewey 1908; Schatzki 2001a, 2016). Sociological pragmatism distinguishes practical engagements with the world as both the object of analysis and the engine of social reality, often conceptualized as practice.

A number of different approaches to social theory have, more or less knowingly, converged by critiquing the polarized extremes of sociology: *homo economicus*, the rationally subjective profit maximizer of mainstream sociology, to be the means of achieving a future goal” (Joas 1996:206, italics added; see also Abbott 2016:33–34; Swidler 1986:275).

These points of convergence demand to “disregard their [Dewey’s and Schatzki’s] different terminologies”, as they use quite different vocabularies and draw on different theoretical sources (Elkjær and Buch 2015, quote on p. 9).
economics, and *homo sociologicus*, the structurally determined cultural dope who unknowingly reproduces her social position. Pragmatist critiques of the aforementioned theories imply the anti-dualism proposed by Schatzki and early pragmatists alike.

*Homo sociologicus* has primarily occupied pragmatist social theorists. Usually, Bourdieu’s theories of habitus and forms of capital is the common point of departure for such criticisms (e.g. 1984, 1992). Cultural sociology and French pragmatism criticizes Bourdieu’s use of capital and habitus as *a priori* dispositions of value judgements. The basis of this critique is that these concepts ignore people’s conscious, practical engagements with justifications and moral boundaries (e.g., Berthoin Antal, Hutter, and Stark 2015:2–4; Lamont and Thévenot 2000:4–8; Boltanski and Thévenot 2000:208–9; cf. Bénatouïl 1999). A similar unease is displayed in practice theory. Warde, for example, criticizes Bourdieu for understating people’s “self-understanding”, which makes “habitual and cultural and economic capital do all the interpretative work” (2017:108–18 quote on p. 110; see also Reckwitz 2002:258–59; Schatzki 1996:144–53; cf. Rouse 2006:646–53). Among scholars inspired by American pragmatism, Talcott Parsons’s concept “socialization” is subject to the same critique of over-formalized, structural causation of human action (see Abbott 2016:50, 199–200; Joas 1993:218–21, 1996:171–72; Swidler 1986:274). Together, these strands of contemporary social theory imply a pragmatic approach to social reality; a reality which harbors both objective structures and subjectively purposeful actions as *effects* of shared, self-aware practice. The pragmatic alternative implies a dynamic tension between structure and action, which distinguishes the role of productive activities in making a social reality.

The critique of *homo sociologicus*-theories stress the processual character of social structure. Abbot, for example, argues:

> The origins of [social] order [are found] in orderly processes, they are rooted in the dynamism of the present. […] Thus order is not a state of society, but a state of the process by which the actual present makes the potential future into the new actual present. (Abbott 2016:216)

To conceive of social order as a process implies that individual conduct is carried out in similar manners among groups of individuals, but that this conduct is somewhat irregular: “[h]abitual order is compatible with enormous local variation. It is only when that variation becomes systematic or is systematically selected that habitual order is threatened” (Abbott 2016:216). The habitual processes of individuals, groups, and societies are thus neither continuous structures, nor individual rational action in some ever-changing

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74 All pragmatist social theorists do not use these exact concepts. For example, Hans Joas (1996:224–38) distinguishes functionalist “theories of differentiation” from non-functionalist “constitution theories”, e.g., Anthony Gidden’s (1984) theory of structuration, but follows a similar line of critique.
flux. Production is a phenomenon which envisions this processual character of social order. To transform one thing into another version may be done in a vast number of manners, but still holds some shared characteristics making the process recognizable. Cooking, for example, transforms groceries into food, and is recognizable while practices in a vast array of manners across cultures. The variations of a shared practice thus hold insights into what parts of a process is more stable and changes at a slower pace. Pragmatism thus enables me to distinguish production practices that may be both similar and deviant and relate those variations to the routine ways producers deal with producing an abundant foodstuff.

The processual view of social reality demands practice to be further distinguished as the object of analysis. Andreas Reckwitz outlines a similar view of social reality as Abbott, but as a theory of social practice:

Social practices are routines: routines of moving the body, of understanding and wanting, of using things, interconnected in a practice. Structure is thus nothing that exists solely in the “head” or in patterns of behaviour. (Reckwitz 2002:255)

The different wordings in these quotes are evident, but Reckwitz enables a movement from the general processes to the individual producer’s part in that process; habits and routinized practices thus imply the same thing for analyzing social reality: people carry out shared, routinized practical conduct and these generate general processes that are structure-like in their effects on a given event. The example of cooking, to stay consistent, has some shared aspects that reproduces tangible patterns in people’s everyday life, e.g., a gendered division of labor or certain meal times. These patterns depend on people actually carrying out shared routines, but also on the routines being experienced by those sharing them. All households do not cook food in the same manner, but the process of cooking engenders relational patterns by this activity being carried out in an everyday manner, producing both food and social reality. Such an approach to production enables this study to regard the relationship between producers’ dealings with producing abundance, and how the supply chain’s structure mirrors them.

While practices engender the processual patterns of social structure, they also distinguish “rational action” – the usual antipode of structure. Since pragmatism maintains that people are aware of their everyday activities, it follows that some practical routines involve a defined purpose. However, the “rationality” or “goal” of a purposeful activity misses out on its routinized and non-teleological character.

The practice trajectory urges us to go beneath the formal representations of work […] to study that which busts at their seams. The latter often goes unnoticed in rationalistic descriptions […]. These rationalizations are precisely those reifications that practice theory aims to expose as such, and from which the real action is hoped to be rescued. (Vann and Bowker 2008:53)
Hans Joas poses a similar argument, that the rationalist concept of action:

> Isolates the individual action from its context […]; that every action, firstly, takes place in a certain situation and, secondly, presupposes an actor who performs not only this one action. (Joas 1996:146)

These two quotes posit the same criticism of rational action: social reality is unsatisfactorily captured in the formalisms of a utilitarian means-end schema, because it ignores the context in which a certain action becomes rational. Pragmatic sociology may consequently take purposeful action into account. However, “purposeful” does not imply the narrow meaning of “rational”, but a routine conduct based on the experience that certain means may be used to attain certain ends. Such a practice may be justified or explained as “rational”. Using the aforementioned example of cooking, there may be many purposes of cooking – anything from nutrition to social renown. But, for one these “goals” to be the “reason” for cooking practice, it has to be routinized as a shared understanding of the purpose of cooking, which makes it recognizable as “rational” for other people. Pragmatism is thus not a form of methodological individualism, because individuality must be engendered by shared practices of personhood and personal identity (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006:10–12; see also Honneth 2010; cf. Nozick 1977) Approaching the production of abundance pragmatically may thus take individual goals and ambitions into account, but without assuming them to explanation what and why a person carries out a certain action.

The question of how abundance is perpetuated relates to the practical as an antipode to both structural order and rational action. Placing production in-between these poles of social theory implies its role in making things valuable, by distinguishing the usefulness of a good, or the process making it. To further distinguish the process of production in the case of abundance, I turn to valuations. Valuations are telling of how reality is actively and routinely dealt with by reducing complexity into manageable units that are both normative and descriptive. In this case, how abundance is produced by studying the valuations that distinguish sufficiency from excess in the making. Valuations in practice may thus explain how abundance is perpetuated, by highlighting the engine realizing both social structure and subjective action of producers.

### 5.2 Valuations in Practice

A valuation is an aspect of practice which makes things valuable. I find Laurent Thévenot’s definition of this concept the most precise one: “a form of attachment between human beings and their environment (both human and material)” which encompasses a generalized mode of “comparison […]that systemizes more local and idiosyncratic attachments, and builds equivalence between entities across situations” (2001a:409–10, italics added). The word “form” is imperative for how valuations work in practice.
A valuation engages with the material, cognitive, and symbolic aspects of reality and “formats” it by making a part of it “valuable”. A valuation is shared by the fact that it distinguishes this value in a manner which others understand, either agree with or contend, which makes the treatment of the object become visible. In order to make that process tangible, I use a pragmatist definition of value; “usefulness”. Something that is treated as useful is valuable, and the value is constituted by how it is used, including the justifications thereof (cf. “worth” in Boltanski and Thévenot 2006:14–16; Jagd 2011:246; Stark 2000:6, 2009:7–8). Meat, for example, may be useful as sustenance or to display social distinction by eating an exclusive meal. These two uses of meat imply different values, making the use equivalent to value. In the context of this study, sufficiency is interchangeable with value, implied by treating meat or animals as (sufficient) goods, and things without value consequently as excess or as waste.

To make a simple example of the aforementioned definition, assume a butcher is presented with two pieces of meat. Valuating them, e.g., looking, feeling, and possibly trimming them into a more conventional shape, one is distinguished as a rib-eye and one as a chuck roll. This process “formats” the meat objects by distinguishing them univocally in physical and conceptual manners. The cuts produced are now defined by the respective uses of rib-eye and chuck roll. Thus, the butcher’s valuation produces these pieces of meat as “goods”, inseparable units of value and matter (treated as sufficient). Meat which has “no use” is waste, treated according to its lack of value – thrown away or neglected (cf. Callon 1987; Callon et al. 2002).

Being a practical form of attachment with reality, valuations may be present across different practices. Joas’s definition of “creativity” mirrors this relative independence of valuations. He suggests that creativity is a possible “analytical dimension of all human action” and not “a particular type of action” (Joas 1996:116). It then becomes possible to “[firstly,] view all action as potentially creative and […] secondly, to ascribe structural features to human action as such, which can be summarized under the label of “creativity” (Joas 1996:116). Joas’s conception of creativity implies how valuations are shared across practical conduct; routine engagements with reality that produce values by distinguishing value from waste; a boundary between sufficiency and excess in cases of valuating abundance. A valuation may further distinguish degrees of value among sufficient goods, i.e., more or less valuable ones. This definition implies that if two goods are used in the same manner, they hold equal value. Discrepant values are, consequently, 

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75 Some studies denote this process using the concept “(e)valuation”, or “valuation and evaluation”. Evaluation means the processes of using standardized methods of producing measures of value. In such contexts, valuation is limited to estimated subjective judgements of incommensurable value (see, e.g., Aspers 2009; Lamont 2012; Thévenot 2015). There is, however, no reason to use this distinction of valuations at this point of my argument because it implies empirical versions rather than (theoretical) types.
implied by different treatments of the goods in practice. Ideas of value and practical treatment are thus routinized and linked in a valuation.

Defining a valuation as a “form” of engagement means that it can be shared by many producers and that it is defined by the “formatting” of value, not the value in itself. What I coin a “type of valuation” implies the produced value’s format rather than the value in itself. To use an illustrative example, a type of book is implied by its format, e.g., paperback or e-book, not by its genre or content. A type of valuation, it follows, is implied by the format of the value it produces in the same manner.

By sharing a type of valuation in a given context, such as a supply chain, the employment of it in practice “coordinates” the producers (and consumers) into relational patterns. Such patterns are what may come off as social structures, but I maintain that they are effects of routine practice (see also, e.g., Rouse 2006; Thévenot 2015, 2001b, 2001a). For example, the markets in the Swedish meat supply chain are coordinated by the producers’ practical employment of valuations because they distinguish what goods are traded with whom and why. Without making and exchanging meat and animals according to their experienced and shared valuations, there would be no such relational patterns generated in the first place.

To conclude the definition of valuation laid out in this section, it stresses that how a producer distinguishes abundance into sufficiency and excess depends on the type of valuation she routinely employs and shares with others in that same context. It follows that there must be more than one type of valuation for this definition to be useful. Drawing on existing sociological theory, primarily from economic sociology, I outline two such types: aesthetic and critical valuations.

5.2.1 Aesthetic Valuations

An “aesthetic valuation” distinguishes perceived similarity into a shared understanding of value. In this case, the shared understanding implies the aesthetic of a sufficient good, or producer thereof. The word “aesthetic” implies that it is the immediate sensory experience of a good which is valuated. As part of a practical reality, “aesthetic perceptions or objects of such perceptions are produced repeatedly, routinely, or habitually” (Reckwitz 2017:10–13, quote on p. 13). The perception of sensory impressions is thus this type of valuation’s “form of attachment” to the valued object or person (cf. Thévenot 2001a:409–10). Veblen’s (2008) theory of the leisure class, mentioned initially in this study, is an example of a group of people whose conspicuous consumption make them display a certain aesthetic. An aesthetic valuation distinguishes a person displaying this wasteful form of consumption as part of the leisure class, given that it is immediately perceived.
Georg Simmel’s theory of fashion takes this idea further, arguing that subjugation to “elite tastes” makes people “imitate” certain expressions, reproducing status order (1957:554–57). It follows on the concept imitation that there must be a shared conception, what I coin a “conventionalized aesthetic”, to imitate. Simmel’s elite taste is but one of many possible aesthetics that may be conventionalized and distinguished as value in an aesthetic valuation.

In her study of the market for fashion modelling, Joanne Entwistle outlines such a conventionalized aesthetic in the valuation of potential models. She calls it “the look”, which means “the total sum of the models’ bodies: their hair, face and body and how they photograph” (Entwistle 2002:326). She also quotes an interview, explaining that a model is distinguished by resemblance to the look: “[it] is quite difficult to put your finger on it […], but I can say that when I see it, I usually know it” (Entwistle 2002:326, italics in original).

What Entwistle shows is that a body is distinguished as valuable in the market for fashion modelling because it displays what Ludwig Wittgenstein calls a “family resemblance” with “the look”. He uses this concept to describe how “sameness” is the result of an examination which finds “a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail” (Wittgenstein 1986: §66). Such an examination is an aesthetic valuation, distinguishing value by the sum of resembling sensory impressions compared to a conventionalized aesthetic. Value in the market for fashion modelling is thus distinguished by a person’s similarity to “the look” of a fashion model. However, an aesthetic valuation is also what distinguishes a piece of meat’s sufficiency in terms of its resemblance to e.g. the conventionalized aesthetic of a tenderloin. There are two distinct indicators of the use of aesthetic valuations in practice, outlined as follows.

The first indicator is “implicit boundaries”. There is no rule or principle that explicitly distinguishes sufficiency from excess in an aesthetic valuation, so it is not exactly clear where one ends and the other begins. As Wittgenstein points out, the boundary of resemblance is “blurry” because there is not one specific similarity that may be used as a common denominator to distinguish, e.g., the sufficient from the excess part of abundance (1986: §65-77; see also Schatzki 1996:49–51). This “blurriness” means that the antipode to imitation, or family resemblance, is absurdity. More than being indistinct, an implicit boundary is also unconcerned with the excess. That is what makes this boundary implicit, producing the excess part of abundance simply by not treating it as potentially sufficient. It follows that there is no explicit opposition between sufficiency and excess, but an increasing dissimilarity which constitutes the (implicit) boundary between them. Simmel (1957) distinguishes how such a dissimilarity works, arguing that fashion includes those who imitate it. It follows that all who do not resemble it are excluded,
and irrelevant in relation to fashionable people (see also Aspers and Godart 2013:179–80).

The second indication, following on implicit boundaries, is “incommensurable values”. Aesthetics, following the aforementioned definition, cannot be comprehended in terms of a commensurable measure or criteria. That is why the immediate perception is valuated. Aesthetic values such as refinement, beauty, or fashion, cannot be assured otherwise. A criteria or measure of aesthetics simply makes no sense. A conventionalized aesthetic is therefore treated as valuable in itself, unconcerned with whatever becomes excess. Entwistle maintains that for “the look” to become valuable, it must be “valorized”, routinely perceived as a “winning and prestigious” aesthetic (2002:319–20). Aesthetic valuations thus distinguish sufficiency, or any other form of value, as an intrinsic value. By studying how conventionalized aesthetics are valuated, it will eventually be possible to discern what that aesthetic is and why it is valuable to those producing it.

A concrete example of how aesthetic valuations produce implicit boundaries and incommensurable values is “hiding behavior”. For pedagogical reasons, considered this crime an example of excess. Oskar Engdahl uses the concept hiding behavior to explain how a financial broker conceals “his failure and feelings of anxiety” losing a client’s money, and consequently committing an economic crime (2009:754). Hiding a “bad deal” in this manner is “a deliberate effort to actively regulate and control the image one wants to project to others” (Engdahl 2009:756, italics added). When the broker labels the flawed transactions as “ongoing business” he produces an implicit boundary between the excessive risks, and losses, taken. The evidence of his failure is “removed out of sight of both the client and the firm” (Engdahl 2009:753, italics added). By changing the label of the transaction, the monetary values become incommensurable. That is the case, because only the result of a finished transaction can be meaningfully measured in terms of profit or loss. The re-labelling makes the bad deal resemble an unfinished one, irrelevant for valuating financial loss. In my words, this example shows how an aesthetic valuation is used to produce the conventional aesthetic of a successful broker which others perceive as sufficiently successful, obscuring the cause for alarm the excessive losses would provoke. The aesthetic is, consequently, treated as value in this case. While this example is a case of fraudulent behavior, it should be stressed that both an honest and a criminal broker has to resemble a conventionalized aesthetic of success to be treated accordingly. But they would do it by valuating aesthetics in different practical manners. Aesthetic valuations, it follows, are not necessarily used to manipulate.

The routine employment of aesthetic valuations in a given context generate structure-like patterns of social relations. When aesthetic valuations are employed routinely in economic exchange, they may coordinate “status markets” that form a hierarchy among buyers and sellers. Such hierarchies are
dependent on conventionalized high- and low-status aesthetics, which enables the market actors to valuate goods according to their perception of the buyer or seller (Aspers 2009:116–18; cf. Pettinger 2004). Complexity is reduced for consumers because economic value is defined by perceived similarity to a conventionalized aesthetic, especially when non-standardized goods are traded. For example, the value of locally sourced meat on a farmers’ market may depend on the status of the buyer; a celebrity chef may pay a different price than a regular consumer for the same cut. In that manner, routine use of aesthetic valuations engenders social order through practice, because the celebrity chef’s appearance resembles the image of fame, enabling her to be treated differently (cf. Aspers 2008:312–13, 2009). It follows that goods may be aesthetically valuated in the same manner, e.g., priced according to a perceived aesthetic value rather than measurable qualities or market value.

To conclude, aesthetic valuations distinguish conventionalized aesthetics as value, and produce implicit boundaries between sufficiency and excess. Such a boundary is implied by incommensurable values, making the excess invisible, irrelevant, or absurd. Having defined this first type of valuation, I turn to the type using explicit criteria.

5.2.2 Critical Valuations

A “critical valuation” uses some set of criteria for distinguishing sufficiency from excess, or value from waste, e.g., a standard or principle. The word “critical” refers to “criterion”, by which I mean a (pre-defined) shared denominator of value. Value, here sufficiency, is thus implied by criteria-fulfillment. A failure of criteria-fulfillment consequently demarcates excess. In addition, the use of a critical valuation makes it possible to criticize the excess, or producer thereof, for not fulfilling the criteria. By explicitly pointing out the lacking qualities of the object or its production process, and treating it accordingly, it becomes excess (see also Boltanski and Thévenot 1999, 2006). A criterion is the “form of attachment” with reality used in this type of valuation, distinguishing a critical breaking point between sufficiency and excess (cf. Thévenot 2001a:409–10). Initially in this study, I mention Weber’s (2005) inquiry into the protestant ethic, and the thrift it promotes in order to avoid wastefulness. Such thrift implies a critical valuation, placing an exact breaking point between the sufficient amount of resources to spend, and the excess to save, according to certain criteria of, e.g., living standards.

Thévenot, together with Luc Boltanski, outlines valuations as “critical operations” in their theory of justification. By using a criterion, a producer may “establish equivalence” between goods (or people) by comparing them and justifying their value according to general principle of some sort, e.g., economic value or a moral standard (cf. Boltanski and Thévenot 1999:359–64, see also 2006; Thévenot 2001a). Two goods (or producers) that fulfill the relevant criteria are equally valuable, or sufficient, despite any other
differences between them. There are two distinct indicators of the use of critical valuations in practice, outlined as follows.

The first indicator is an “explicit boundary”. Distinguishing sufficiency from excess using a defined criterion, the boundary between these parts of abundance becomes sharp. Critical valuations therefore make it possible to criticize the flaws of excessive goods (or producers making them) and how to redeem or mitigate them (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999:373–75). The ability to define what criteria a good, or its producer, is unable to fulfill makes the excess explicitly demarcated, in contrast to an aesthetic valuation.

The second indicator is a “commensurable value”, distinguished by a common denominator, a measure or other principle of equivalence, as implied previously. Commensuration enables comparisons of goods in terms of how they fare according to a (more or less) objective standard, and the ability to justify a value. As pointed out in existing studies, commensuration is far from a straightforward process. The development of a principle of equivalence demands people to agree on what characteristics of the valued good are that imply value, and how they translate into generalized criteria (Espeland and Stevens 1998; Fourcade 2011a; see also Karpik 2007). A higher principle is therefore necessary to avoid the criterion in question becoming an end in itself, contrary to the “intrinsicality” of aesthetic values.

A critical valuation compares, or “tests”, an object by discerning whether it fulfills criteria indicative of a “common good”. This concept means a claim of universal justice, or legitimacy, in a valuation (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999:355, 2000:210, 2006:7–16; Thévenot 2001a:410). The use of explicit justifications makes this “value format” contrast with how aesthetic values are indicated. Boltanski and Thévenot (1999, 2006) further suggest a limited number of “worlds of worth”, i.e., the most generalized types of “common good” which may be invoked to justify the distinction made by a critical valuation. However, the questions investigated in this study primarily concern how critical valuations affect the production of abundance, instead of looking for certain pre-defined versions of “common good”. By studying the use of critical valuations, I may eventually distinguish what common good is invoked in the production of Swedish meat. However, the exact formulation of such a common good is an empirical phenomenon in this study, limited to its local form in the Swedish meat supply chain.

The structure-like patterns of relationships that critical valuations engender differ from aesthetic ones. Here, the use of objective standards to differentiate goods according to commensurable values, such as a defined quality per monetary unit, coordinating a “standard market” (Aspers 2009:115–16). By using critical valuations, market actors coordinate their exchanges around standardized, objective values of the type of traded good, usually enabling some form of price competition. Ideally, the statuses of buyers and sellers are negligible in such a market (see also Ponte and Gibbon 2005; Thévenot 2001a,
For example, the market for cattle uses the *EUROP* standard to pay a defined premium for high-quality cattle, independent of the statuses of buyers and sellers. The standard is a form of attachment with cattle carcasses, and systemizes a mode of comparison that reduces the complexity of setting a price on an individual carcass that both meat processor and farmer accepts. The routine application of that standard produces explicit boundaries between different quality classes, commensurable in that a certain quality is equivalent to a certain monetary value, paid to the farmer. It is thus possible to compare the class “E” with “R” in terms of what a farmer is paid for the respective classes. The *EUROP*-standard is designed to pay the farmer a premium for higher quality meat. The quality is therefore the justification for the price set on a given carcass. Improved, or optimized, meat quality and fair pricing may thus be defined as the (albeit local) common good of this critical valuation.

To conclude, critical valuations use explicit and generalized criteria to distinguish abundance into sufficiency and excess. The goods which fulfill the same criteria are equivalent in value, in terms of a common good. Valuating in this manner makes the boundary between sufficiency and excess explicit, because it can be justified and the excess criticized for its flaws. The values produced in such a valuation are therefore commensurable. Either a measure or a binary, i.e., qualitative, criterion may be used to distinguishing what qualities the excess lacks in order to become sufficient. Having outlined both types of valuations, the relationship between them should be considered.

### 5.2.3 Negotiating Boundaries and Values

Aesthetic and critical valuations are distinct from each other in three regards. The former valuates resemblance to a conventionalized aesthetic, producing implicit boundaries and incommensurable values. The latter valuates criteria-fulfillment of a common good, producing explicit boundaries and commensurable values. In practical reality, it is possible for multiple valuations to be employed in the same context. Therefore, I outline how the use of these two types of valuations are discernable in practical reality.

A boundary produced in a valuation of abundance is a simultaneously normative and descriptive distinction between sufficiency and excess. It follows that the production of implicit or explicit boundaries bears witness to the type of valuation employed (cf. Gieryn 1983; Holmberg 2005:35–41). What demarcates an implicit boundary is the neglect or ignorance of the excess; normative because it treats it as worthless, and descriptive because the boundary makes the excess seem absent. An explicit boundary, on the contrary, is demarcated by the critique or refusal of the excess; normative because it treats it as worthless, and descriptive because it removes and distinguishes the excess, exposing its shortcomings. It follows that types of valuation are explicit in how sufficiency and excess are formatted; practically distinguished as value and waste.
The relationship between commensurable and incommensurable values follow on the same principle as the boundaries. Incommensurable values have no common denominator, in opposition to commensurable ones. The distinction of an incommensurable value shows whether the value itself is treated as intrinsically valuable without any justification invoking a common good, consequently treating that which becomes excess as irrelevant. An aesthetic of economic value, as implied by the previous example of economic fraud, is thus not an economic value *per se*. It is something that resembles the image of economic value, e.g., a luxury packaging. There is no way of making a luxury good commensurate with a more pedestrianly one, because an aesthetic valuation only distinguishes their images. They resemble high and low economic value, but that distinction does not warrant that the goods actually have different economic values according to a common measure, e.g., a pricing standard.

If the excess lacks certain explicit indications of value, and its insufficiency is justified in terms of a common good, the value in question is commensurable. A criterion of economic value may be a defined profit margin, but also a binary criterion implying that all goods which fulfill it are valuable, e.g., that there is a demand for the good is a criterion for economic value, in opposition to there being no demand for it.

In reality, the value of a good is not always a given, which means that the boundaries may be negotiated or contested, especially when the object itself may also be transformed to better resemble or fulfill criteria of value (cf. Callon et al. 2002). Stressing that types of valuations are distinguished by how value and waste are formatted, the concrete use of aesthetic and critical valuations in production become central. By using the concepts of aesthetic and critical valuations, I may distinguish how meat producers engage with their practical reality and the production of an abundant foodstuff therein. The possibility to negotiate value further shows the relevance of sociological pragmatism for analyzing the production of abundance, as what becomes excess for some producers may be sufficient for others. I conclude this chapter by outlining my theoretical framework for studying the production of an abundant foodstuff.

### 5.3 Conclusion: The Pragmatics of Producers

In this chapter, I have outlined sociological pragmatism and how valuations produce values making distinctions practically real. I have further distinguished two types of valuations: aesthetic and critical. Turning to the production of abundance in the Swedish meat supply chain, the question is how the producers treat meat, animals, and other producers when they valuate them. It is in the distinction of abundance into sufficiency and excess that the types of valuation show, and where I seek an answer to how this state is perpetuated. More concretely, whether the goods produced are treated in terms
of resemblance or dissimilarity to a conventionalized aesthetic, or whether they are treated in terms of criteria-fulfillment of a common good, answers how the excess part is related to the sufficiency aspect of abundance. That relation may further explain how it comes that the excess is not reduced so to only produce sufficient volumes of meat.

The pragmatism of valuations relates to the research questions of this study as follows. To explain how abundance is perpetuated, the use of valuations in the meat producers’ everyday activities have to be analyzed. Doing so, it is possible to discern how aesthetic and critical valuations of abundance distinguish sufficiency from excess without inhibiting oversupply. Using a pragmatist approach, I hold it up as reasonable that the Swedish meat producers may use both types of valuation. However, I also maintain that the producers themselves are aware of how they carry out production activities, and their explanations of that process, together with participatory observations, bears witness to the valuations used in terms of values and boundaries. In the following chapters, my analysis primarily focuses on the use of conventionalized aesthetics and criteria fulfillment in valuations, implied by the distinction of incommensurable and commensurable values, and implicit and explicit boundaries.

As I now turn to Part III, it is outlined to explain how abundance is perpetuated studying how the Swedish meat producer’s valuations enable, or even promote, this state of affairs. I study how sufficient and excessive meat and animals are distinguished from each other by looking at the problem of over-production, focusing on how producers valuate whether and how consumers may appreciate their goods as food. How animals and meat are valuated in terms of economic value is studied by looking at the problem of diminishing revenue, focusing on how qualities are related to production costs monetarily. Lastly, I turn to the producers’ valuations of responsibility, studying how their methods of dealing with the problem of disrespect may answer what values that the producers themselves find in producing an abundant foodstuff. Taken as a whole, start from the pragmatist understanding of problem solving as the fundamental activity producing social reality. By looking at attempts to solve specific problems stemming from producing abundance, how that abundance may exist can be answered.
III
6 Producing Palatability

Meat quality for me is tastiness – marbling, surrounding fats, and such things.
- Ellinor, lobbyist and former cattle farmer

Producing an abundant foodstuff, it is of essence to distinguish what part of that abundance that is sufficiently good for food. Otherwise, it risks not being consumed, i.e., bought and eaten. Ellinor suggests that certain types of fat can be assessed to anticipate whether the meat may be appreciated by a consumer. By distinguishing these fats, she further implies the inherent problem of valuating the meat’s taste in the production process; the consumers experience can only be assessed indirectly by using indicators of the eaters’ anticipated appreciation of the meat as a meal, what I call its “palatability”. There is thus an element of uncertainty regarding consumers’ appreciation, which the producers’ attempt to resolve when they produce meat. This issue is what I call “the problem of overproduction”; to distinguish the (sufficiently) palatable meat from the unpalatable without tasting it. It may go without saying that overproduction is necessary for abundance, but that is also why I begin my analysis addressing this issue; neither taking abundance nor scarcity for granted.

To explain how sufficiency and excess are distinguished in the Swedish meat supply chain, the most informative boundaries are those produced by valuations treating some (safe) meat as sufficient for food, and other meat as non-food. Food may be distinguished from waste either by a sufficient aesthetic or criteria fulfillment. By studying how meat is produced as food, making goods of different values distinct from non-food items, this chapter shows how aesthetic and critical valuations are employed in the production of an abundant foodstuff.

6.1 Approaching the Problem of Over-Production

The problem of overproduction concerns the process that supplies consumers with meat as a grocery. The majority of existing studies on meat quality imply that consumers appreciate healthy, ethical, and exclusive meats (see Audebert et al. 2006; Bourdieu 1984; Holm and Møhl 2000; Kubberød, Ueland,

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76 The pseudonyms of informants and producers from field sites are italicized to indicate the change of interview or field site. See Section 10.2 for a list of interviewed informants and 10.3 for named informants from participatory observations at Mr. Meats.
Tronstad, et al. 2002; Kubberød et al. 2006; Sobal 2005; Kjaernes et al. 2007). To supply such demands, an increasing variety of goods is developed and supplied; making oversupply into a greater assortment of foods through “commodity differentiation” (Cochoy 2010; Dubuisson-Quellier 2013, 2010; see also Miller 1998; Stuart 2009:24–59; cf. e.g. Grunert et al. 2011; Schulze-Ehlers and Anders 2017). Complementing such studies, this chapter investigates how the Swedish meat supply chain produces palatable meat to match these consumers’ appreciation.\footnote{I distinguish between eaters and customers, to distinguish between those consumers who eat or buy meat. These may be, but are not necessarily, the same people. For example, small children seldom buy and cook their food – but may still refuse to eat it (for a critique of the contemporary use of “consumption”, see Graeber 2011).}

The evidence supplied in this chapter supports the following argument: Swedish meat producers valuate palatability either by distinguishing physical qualities, commodity aesthetics, or production regimes. However, valuations of physical qualities hardly affect the production of meat. In effect, the problem of overproduction is dealt with either by valuating the meat’s resemblance to palatable commodity aesthetics, or what criteria the production regime fulfills.

In this chapter, the Swedish meat producers’ valuations of meat as food, i.e., distinctions between sufficiently palatable and unpalatable meat, are explored to understand what part of the abundance is discarded. I first define “palatability” and how valuations thereof distinguish the meat consumers will appreciate from excess. Valuations of palatability are then analyzed by following animals and meat along the supply chain, from farm to retail outlet. In the final part, I outline aesthetic and critical palatability as they are produced in the Swedish meat producers’ valuations.

6.2 Palatability: Qualities and How to Distinguish Them

A meat producer has to produce meat that consumers both buy and eat in order to have a value as food. Otherwise the meat becomes excessive – waste. The meat that is produced therefore has to be “palatable”; sufficiently appetizing to be consumed and appreciated as a meal. Palatability is thus the tentative taste value which a piece of meat or an animal holds at a given point in the production process.

To valuate palatability means to produce boundaries between sufficient and insufficient (i.e., excessive) meat qualities. A quality is a characteristic that is treated as sufficient, or valuable. Qualities may be both aesthetic, i.e., resembling a conventionalized aesthetic, and critical, fulfilling a criterion of a common good. Callon et al. outlines how qualities are actively produced in a process involving valuations, which they call “qualification”: 
All quality is obtained at the end of a process of qualification, and all qualification aims to establish a constellation of characteristics, stabilized at least for a while, which are attached to the product and transform it temporarily into a tradable good. (Callon et al. 2002:198–99)

The use of a valuation is how the “constellation of characteristics” may be distinguished as sufficient. Meat and animals alike are transformed into goods in this manner, to the extent that they have the qualities needed to be treated as food (cf. Callon et al. 2002; see also Beckert and Aspers 2011; Beckert and Musselin 2013; Karpik 2007:211–19). It follows that what is sufficient at a given point in a supply chain may be deemed excessive later, as well as the fact that some meat or animals may demand more transformation than others to be treated as sufficient for food.

Valuations of palatability are what I will analyze henceforth. In the case that the producers use a standard measuring palatability, I call the valuation an evaluation. I demarcate this kind of valuation because the use of a standardized measure implies a highly routinized valuation, and the use of such measures are of particular interest for discerning how palatable meat is distinguished from the unpalatable. I start by distinguishing how palatability is produced as an indication of consumers’ appreciation.

6.3 A Palatable Assumption

Swedish meat producers assume that palatable qualities imply that a meat product will be appreciated when it is later eaten as a meal. This section outlines how palatability is valuated by starting on the farm end and presenting examples from along the supply chain.

Boar slaughter shows how these creatures are routinely treated as unpalatable, i.e., excessive, on the farms. Johanna, who runs a large-scale, integrated hog farm, describes to me that instead of sending a boar to the abattoir, it is killed at the farm and sent “directly to destruction [because] you would have to destroy the meat anyway – you cannot eat them.” Boar meat is distinguished as “vile”, Johanna continues, since “the hormones give off a pungent, urine-like flavor.” The boar is routinely disqualified as excessive for food, assumed to lack sufficiently palatable qualities. The animal sent to “destruction” becomes waste, physically removed from the supply chain. While meat with a pungent flavor may seem like something that only famished people would

78 A farm which houses its own sows for piglet breeding, and then breed the piglets for slaughter (except for the female piglets kept as future breeding sows).

79 Byproducts from animal cadavers may be used in, e.g., bio-gas production (cf. Corvellec 2013). However, there is no evidence suggesting that non-food uses of meat are viable alternatives as the main outlet for meat producers. The premise of such production is that they use cheap-to-free “by products” (cf. Krywozyszynska 2013).
eat, to valuate palatability implies more than avoiding such obviously unpalatable products.

Pork belly is a significant portion of a butchered hog, and supplied in abundance. This type of cut is usually not palatable enough to be sold as a fresh cut of meat. Therefore, the majority of pork bellies are transformed by adding or enhancing qualities, e.g., by making bacon. In the following example *Ivar*, the former\(^{80}\) manager of a large hog-processing facility explains how pork bellies’ palatability is valuated, distinguishing the destiny for the respective qualities of this type of cut.

In Sweden, pork belly is more or less only used for bacon, and we choose those bellies that have the right size and meat content for that good – the meatier ones which make nice slices. They cannot be too fatty, because people do not want that. [Interview, Ivar]

Ivar’s valuation distinguishes the pork bellies’ palatability as an aesthetic, how they resemble the “nice slices” which is the conventionalized aesthetic of bacon. The cuts’ fattiness and thickness are related to the consumers’ anticipated appreciation, in order for the good to look appealing. By distinguishing these aesthetic qualities, Ivar also designates the pork belly’s destiny downstream in the supply chain.

The looks of some pork bellies are however flawed, which makes Ivar deem them unpalatable. “A [very] fatty pork belly,” he continues, “can occasionally be used for hot dogs, but usually makes the sausage meat too fat.” Here, Ivar combines an aesthetic valuation with a critical one, the fattiness (despite the looks) is explicitly defined as incapable of fulfilling the criteria for sausage production. An abundance of such pork bellies has previously left Ivar and his colleagues no alternative but to “throw them away.” Fatty meat is treated as excessive, i.e., non-food, because Ivar’s routine valuation distinguishes it as unappreciated by consumers. Such pork bellies become waste, and leave the boundaries of the supply chain, just like the boar discussed previously.

Aesthetic valuations are, however, dependent on what meat is conventionalized as palatable in a given culture. This is evident when Ivar tells me that his (former) employer has “started to export the fattier pork bellies to China and South Korea, [because] they are a delicacy there”. By equating “fatty” with “delicacy”, Ivar displays the assumption that Chinese and Korean consumers do not eat these (in Sweden) unpalatable pork bellies out of necessity. On the contrary, they are consumed because fatty pork bellies constitute a unit of sensory and symbolic palatability; a conventionalized aesthetic of sufficiency from a Chinese or Korean vantage point. This example

\(^{80}\) He literally retired the day before the interview, but was still involved at the meat processing factory.
clearly shows that palatability is assumed to translate into appreciation, but one which may be distinguished both by aesthetics and criteria.

To conclude, both aesthetics and criteria may be used to valuate palatability. However, the producers distinguish a quality’s palatability in a “sensory language”, implying that symbolic qualities are also assumed to translate into sensory experience. It is also evident in the examples above that valuations of palatability become increasingly granulated in terms of the product that is valued; from a whole animal to the individual cuts. The simultaneous valuation of symbolic and physical characteristics of palatability is essential for the following argument. By looking at how they are treated, I discuss the production of palatability in the valuations used along the supply chain.

6.4 Anticipating the Animals’ Palatability

When Swedish meat producers valuate their products’ palatability, they attempt to resolve which part of their supply is sufficient for downstream producers and consumers. These valuations distinguish the sufficient animals that may stay in the supply chain and become food from the ones which become waste. The latter ones are treated as excessive, placed outside the boundaries of the supply chain and effectively non-food. The following sections outline how boundaries between sufficiency and excess are produced and negotiated when animals’ palatability is valuated.

6.4.1 Making Animals Palatable

While a visual assessment may show if an animal is healthy, the producer has to eat its flesh to valuate palatability in a direct manner. It is however self-evident that a farmer cannot taste all their livestock and still forward them downstream. Klas and Berit run a hog farm which supplies hogs to a mainstream meat processor. The only way for them to valuate the palatability of their animals is to slaughter and eat an animal which, for the moment, is palatable.

To bring a palatable animal outside the supply chain to eat it implies a dilemma. The dilemma is that it would cross the boundaries of palatable animals, effectively make it into “waste”. When I am shown around the premises of Klas and Berit’s farm, these boundaries become evident. A hog’s corpse lies on the ground behind one of the stables. The death of this hog, Klas explains, was “of course unintentional, but you can never anticipate everything”. Since it died during the night, under uncontrolled circumstances, “it has to go to destruction, you cannot eat that meat.” A similar line of reasoning is supplied by Lennart, a dairy and beef cattle farmer, who tells me about how he treated a young calf which caught pneumonia, and eventually

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81 This is thus not (primarily) to slaughter a hog for household needs.
died. While this episode had an emotional impact on him, he also says: “you cannot even use that meat for dog food, it is just waste.” These quotes imply an explicit boundary between sufficient and excessive deaths of animals, and a categorical valuation routinely employed. These dead animals are treated as non-food, distinguished by the practical removal of them from the supply chain as they are sent off as “biological waste”, in Lennart’s words.

When Berit and Klas make a joint description of how they put down a hog at the farm, they imply how to solve the dilemma that they must bring an animal out of the supply chain. The hog in question suffered from “a severe umbilical hernia”. This condition, they explain, “does not affect the meat’s quality in any way, but it [the hernia] may rupture during the transport to the abattoir, so it [the hog] could not be transported”. Such a hog is palatable as long as it stays within the boundaries of Klas and Berit’s farm, and does not grow older than the other hogs. By eating such a hog before it becomes older and fattier than a regular one, Klas and Berit may valuate their herds’ palatability. They can do so without making sufficiently palatable animals break the boundaries of the supply chain, as the hog they eat can be distinguished as excessive in relation to its future, but is presently sufficient.

Valuating palatability in the aforementioned manner, the farmers generalize extrapolate from the individual experience. Klas tells me that he eats only the “pork from our own farm”, so he does not have many experiences to use as a comparison. However, since Klas finds that “it tastes good” he sees no reason to doubt that the eaters consuming meat from his farm, “whoever they are”, will also find it “tasty”. Klas thus assumes the role of the consumer, comparing the taste to a conventionalized aesthetic of pork taste, valuating the palatability of his meat. As he finds the meat tasty he distinguishes the hogs throughout his farm as sufficiently palatable, as long as they are within the boundaries of the supply chain.

The aforementioned valuation does, however, not resolve all the doubts about the livestock’s palatability. As shown in other agricultural industries, the temporality of “growing” a living organism makes quality unpredictable (see Aspers 2013). The hog with the umbilical hernia, Klas and Berit explain further, was “put down when we moved them [the hogs] between the pens”. The procedure is quick, Klas explains, “you just put a rifle-round in its head, there is no build-up”. Berit suggests that this procedure makes the meat “tastier [because] it is totally stress free – the hog never suffers”. Stress-free slaughter and minimal suffering is important for Klas and Berit’s valuations of palatability. Klas concludes that “we know that all hogs we eat ourselves have lived good lives, and that of course makes it [the meat] taste better – don’t you think?” The previous aesthetic valuation is thus not the primary one used, but a critical one dominates it. This example shows how a production regime’s animal welfare is used as a criterion that all palatable meat has to fulfill.
All animals slaughtered in the abattoir, and which do not transgress the size or health boundaries for slaughter are treated as sufficiently palatable. However, the valuation of palatability makes them suffice because they have been bred according to a regime that fulfills certain criteria. Distinguished animal welfare is thus equated with palatability.

6.4.2 Producing Palatability in the Abattoir

If an animal is not properly prepared for slaughter, the stress hormones may destroy its palatable qualities and produce “stressed meat”. Meat that is affected by stress is assumed to be unpalatable, increasing the levels of lactic acid in the animal’s muscles. This acid makes the meat “more perishable and taste sour” [Interview, Christer]. Especially hogs, but also cattle, are therefore valuated to distinguish stressed from unstressed animals, managing these creatures so as to get animals that are as unstressed as possible in the kill-box.

The abattoir stablehands are responsible for controlling the animals’ conditions up until the moment of slaughter. In the large-scale meat processing facility where Ivar used to work, I am shown how the stablehands valuate animals’ stress levels, keeping them calm enough to be slaughtered. The stablehands’ job is to minimize the uncertainty of the animals’ palatability by reducing stress. One of them explains this procedure as follows:

What we do here is make sure that the hogs go into the carbon dioxide bath as unstressed as possible – to minimize the risk of stressed meat. [Field note + interview]

The stablehand then displays a large, plastic, paddle-like device – “a hog rattle”. He explains that “we use this rattle to make them [the hogs] move, and then we do not have to push or prod them; they move by their own devices.” This way, the hogs “do not get as stressed.” To move the hogs “in groups” is also important, the stable hand suggests, because “hogs like to stay with their buddies, and if we isolate them, they [will] get stressed.” By distinguishing how the hogs ought to be treated in order to stay calm, the valuation of palatability is practiced continuously in the stable hands’ work.

While you could always wait for a hog to calm down, the stablehands must also regard the other hogs in the stable. The stablehand continues, on this note, saying: “if the stable becomes crowded, they [the hogs] will never calm down.” There is thus a limit to the amount of time the stable hands have at their disposal, making a hog calm down. By combining skills of animal handling with valuations of palatability, a hog (or a group of hogs) can be distinguished as they resemble a conventionalized aesthetic of “calm enough”

82 While both cattle and hogs can be stressed, and thus become stressed meat, this is a problem that is more prevalent among hogs according to the stablehands and farmers who partook in this study.
animals to be slaughtered. However, the stablehand emphasizes that such valuations are always uncertain, by telling me that there are “individual variations” among the hogs and that “all processors produce stressed meat occasionally.”

In the beef processing plant where Gustav works as a manager, the track for moving cattle need to make them seem calm at the point of slaughter. Using pictures of a cattle’s rear end at the gates in the track towards the kill-box “makes the cattle less stressed, because they do not feel alone, and since [it seems like] the cow in front does not care about the bang from the kill-box, the cow is less prone to get scared,” a stablehand explains. The valuation of animals translates into practice by producing these boundaries between animals that keep them calm and raise the likelihood for them to resemble an animal fit for slaughter. The methods used to calm the animals in the abattoir have the effect that more animals display calm behavior, and can be distinguished as palatable.

At this point, the granulation of how palatability is valuated and produced starts to show, from the whole herd’s palatability at the farm to every individual creature in the abattoir. Stress levels, and animal welfare, depend on how the animals are treated in the production regime, and the valuations used translate into different treatment of animals. On the farm, animal welfare is treated as a common good, a universal claim of both right and true animal breeding. A certain level of animal welfare must be maintained that makes the creatures live good lives in a sustained manner, and which may be appreciated by all people aware of the production regime. In the abattoir, in contrast, animals are aesthetically valuated for their ability to resemble a calm, and thus palatable, animal at the point of slaughter.

6.5 Standardizing Palatability

In the abattoir, the transformation of an animal into meat takes place. When an animal is killed, it is first stunned and then euthanized by bleeding. The lifeless bodies of hogs and cattle are then hanged on a butchery line and the transformation from animal to carcass begins. The body is cut in half and excessive parts are removed: intestines, heads, hoofs/trotters, blood, and tails. Cattle get their hides removed, and hogs are scolded to remove bristles.

Not only the animal body, but also the words used to talk about it changes at this point; from cattle and hogs to beef and pork – or simply “meat”. The qualities of the carcass are now valuated in terms of the carcass’ present state. A health inspection is conducted by a veterinarian from the National Food

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83 A chain or track in the ceiling with hooks, or other fastening devices, that is used by hanging the animal by the hind leg.

84 While these excess parts are not necessarily wasted, a negligible quantity get to continue down the supply chain without any kind of additional processing.
Administration (NFA), who evaluates the animal’s intestines according to a medical safety standard. This valuation is employed to distinguish whether any carcasses are unfit for staying in the supply chain, essentially a health risk for eating.

Slaughter and butchery involves valuations of the carcasses’ meat qualities, distinguishing more and less palatable carcasses and cuts. All classified carcasses are thus treated as palatable to some extent. However, the standardized evaluations employed to classify carcasses differ strikingly between beef and pork. While the former is significantly more elaborate, both distinguish the same indicators of palatability: fat and muscle tissue.

6.5.1 The Classification of Beef Carcasses

The qualities of beef carcasses are visually evaluated by designated classifiers, trained and certified by the NFA. The beef carcass is first weighed and then the classifier awards it a “class” according to the EUROP-standard. To do that, the classifier compares the carcass to a reference sheet with pictures of “model carcasses,” a standardized rather than conventionalized aesthetic. When employed, the EUROP standard awards standardized classes according to two 15-degree ordinal scales. One scale for “meatiness”, i.e., muscle roundness, and one for “fat content”. Taken together, these variables consolidate carcasses into a common standard of measure. The classifier may then compare the individual carcass with other ones, using the classes as commensurable measures (see SBA 1998:3-6).

I meet one of these beef classifiers, a huge man in his 40s or 50s, in the noisy midst of a large cattle processing plant’s slaughtering wing. His job is to evaluate each beef carcass according to the aforementioned standard. When I ask him naively, “so, what is good meat?”, without any hesitation, he shows me the EUROP reference sheet. He then points to the model pictures for the E, U, and R classes, which imply the plumper carcasses. He then tells me that “those carcasses [...] are the good ones, there you will get a good steak.” He continues to explain his reference sheet, stating that “O and P mostly become ground meat and meatballs and such goods, they are usually too tough and dry [for whole cuts; field note]”. Because the standard produces commensurable classes as the value of each carcass, the classifier may explicitly distinguish its palatability and anticipate its path down the supply chain.

The classes indicated by the individual letters of EUROP, mentioned in the previous example, indicate the “meatiness” of a carcass. Meatiness is always assumed to be an indication of palatability; “E” is the most palatable class. However, “fattiness” is more volatile. The classifier explains to me: “[you need to] find a carcass with the ‘right’ amount of fat [to get] ‘tasty’ meat.” “Right” here implies sufficient, because a carcass may be both excessively over-fat or meagre. Both cases imply less palatability. The classifier further explains valuation of fats as follows: the “correct amount of fats” yields “a
great taste”. However, if the meat is too fatty “people will think it looks repulsive”. The insides of the muscles are also “hard to evaluate” because the classifier cannot cut into the meat. Effectively, some carcasses that “look meaty [may] have an ugly bulb of fat in the middle [of the muscles; field note]”.

To classify palatability according to the EUROP-standard however demands the classifier to negotiate the relationship between fat and meatiness. The standard is thus not a straightforward measurement, but demands that the classifier negotiate the variables of meatiness and fattiness into a unified class. Since there are two 15-degree scales, there are 225 theoretically possible classes that can be awarded a carcass. The relationship between these two scales becomes a question of the classifiers more subjective valuation of the whole carcass, the NFA therefore controls the consistency of classifications through unreported audits.

While using an aesthetic standard, the classification of carcasses is a critical valuation. This is the case because boundaries between different classes are explicit, justified by the ratio of fat and muscle. The classes are further commensurable, and the least palatable carcasses are distinguished by classes, just like the premium ones are. Finally, there is an explicit common good, meat quality, which the standard explicitly measures. Hogs’ carcasses are, however, evaluated through a distinctly different procedure.

6.5.2 Pork: Technological Evaluation

While beef carcasses are classified visually by a trained classifier, muscle and fat is evaluated with a probe using the Hennessy Grading System (HGS) when hog carcasses are classified. This device is inserted into the back-fat of a hog carcass in order to measure its class. Former hog processing foreman Ivar explains this classification: “the HGS generates a numerical value by electronically measuring the ratio of meat and fats.85 This measure is presented as a percentage value, i.e., a carcass classified as “55” implies that its soft tissue has 55% muscle and 45% fat. This figure is generated by the HGS automatically, and does not demand that the classifier interpret or estimate the hog’s palatability, but instead only report the numbers on the display. The evaluation of a hog’s palatability is thus fully standardized and automated, minimizing any ambiguities.

Except for the extreme cases, both “fatty” and “meagre” hog carcasses have their uses downstream. By valuating a criterion using a univariate scale, a defined range of classes may be used to group more and less palatable carcasses. Such a criterion is evident when Ivar explains that the carcasses classified as “60-63 […are] probably the best [for fresh pork products],

85 Asking about why these were different, the only two answers I found was “it is the EU's decision” and “the hog is more standardized”.
because they are a little meatier than the mean hog". The hog carcasses’ palatability, in contrast to beef carcasses, are quantified into a commensurable measure. This evaluation also maintains the fact, suggested by Ivar and other pork producers, that “hogs are uniform” in contrast to the more heterogeneous qualities of cattle. The palatability of all classified hogs can thus be compared and distinguished by using this measurement of quality, and critical valuations used to distinguish the palatable from the less, or un-palatable ones.

This example shows that to evaluate the value of a hog is significantly less elaborative and complex than to classify cattle, because the valuation of hogs employs a univariate standard, with minimized influence from subjective judgement. However, both these evaluations imply the “social process” demanded for a criterion, here a commensurable measure, to exist (cf. Espeland and Stevens 1998). Especially in the EUROP standard for cattle, it is clear that an aesthetic valuation has been transformed into a critical one with explicit boundaries and commensurable values. The fact that the classifiers employ this standard routinely, and that auditors enforce the consistency of that procedure, maintains a “common good” in terms of meat quality (cf. Boltanski and Thévenot 1999). The classification of hogs, however, have systemized the standard into machinery, ensuring the valuation’s consistency (cf. Aspers 2009:115). I point out how the “criticality” of these valuations are maintained to demarcate their difference from the aesthetic ones used in the butchery process.

6.6 Producing Aesthetics: The Meat Jigsaw

When carcasses are butchered, they transform from a totality into a range of cuts. Hasse, who runs a small abattoir, uses the metaphor “meat jigsaw” to describe the relationship between an animal’s constitution and the cuts made out of it. The word “jigsaw” implies that the butchering of a carcass produces a finite number of distinct cuts, and that these cuts are valuated to distinguish their individual qualities. Reviewing a cutting sheet, and how the cuts relate to the carcass as a whole, surely resembles a jigsaw as clearly shaped and defined cuts seemingly fit together as pieces of a puzzle do. The meat jigsaw does however produce a puzzle for the meat processor, but in the opposite manner; a number of different cuts, with different aesthetics, which may be either sufficiently palatable or excessive. This section explores the aesthetic valuations used to solve that puzzle, dealing with an abundant supply of meat.

86 This standard is, confusingly enough, also called the EUROP standard, but does not use the letters as part of the grading system (SBA 1998).
87 See Section 10.8 for Swedish cutting schemas of pork and beef.
6.6.1 Butchery: Producing the Meat Jigsaw

During participatory observation, I am working at the sorting station at Mr. Meats’s butchering unit, administrating the pieces of this “meat jigsaw”. The butchers cut a carcass into prime cuts in a matter of minutes. They then put these cuts on a rolling hoop so that I can place them into their designated bins. These bins, and how they are positioned in the room, are in themselves a routine valuation of palatability; distinguishing the further use and expected appreciation of the respective cut types. The material boundaries of stainless steel containers mirror the values of different cuts at Mr. Meats producing the following hierarchy: high demand cuts, (tenderloin, pork shoulder and loin), low demand cuts (e.g., pork bellies, whole deboned hams, picnic shoulder, spare ribs), and bins with mixed residual cuts and off-cuts, used for ground meat and sausages. A separate container is used to place vile meat, and all bones and other excessive parts of the carcasses outside the boundaries of the supply chain; those become “biological waste” according to the sign on the garbage room door.

The “high-demand bins” are supposed to be kept easily accessible in the butchery hall, so that the trimmers and packers can come pick up such cut types when they need them, completing the daily orders. The “low-demand bins” are less accessible, and stacked until they are filled to the brim. I then roll these bins into the adjacent cooling room, where these cuts can be used in due time. The “mixed bins” are placed under the butchering stations, so that the butchers can throw off-cuts and trimmings into them. These bins are only rolled into the cooler room on the individual butcher’s request. As the bins are distinguished according to cut types, they imply the aesthetic valuations of palatability that emerges when the carcass is transformed into different cuts.

The cut type treated as the most palatable one is the tenderloin. Harald, a butcher since the 1970’s, explains the practical effects of the tenderloins distinguished palatability: “we must always be careful with the tenderloins, because we cannot produce enough of them to satisfy people”. Thus, he removes them himself and puts them aside – before the butchers at the cutting stations start to work on the carcasses. The bin for tenderloins distinguishes these cuts’ conventionalized aesthetic, distinct from the other cuts because of the resemblant physical shape and name used to imply it.

Butchery distinguishes meat cuts according to their aesthetics, implied by the word “cut” as both a noun and a verb. The meat resembling the same aesthetic is a cut type, and therefore also shares its name. To distinguish cut types, however, demands that each cut produced is sufficiently similar to a conventionalized aesthetic, which shows in the following example.

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88 Mr. Meats works differently from larger and more industrialized facilities, where a group of cutters stand along a (dis)assembly line and repeatedly make the same one or two cuts, revolving between stations according to a schedule. The cuts they cut are, however, the same.
As I am sorting cuts into their respective crates, Harald comes by and inspects them from time to time. Occasionally he finds a cut he is dissatisfied with, and complains to the butchers that they “work too fast”. This complaint usually means that one of the butchers has made a stray or uneven cut. The deviance from how such a cut is expected to look means that the butcher, in Harald’s wording, has “destroyed” the cut. Effectively, the aesthetic of the cut is not similar enough to a conventionalized type.

From time to time, Harald shows me a “destroyed” cut and explains why it is insufficient, as in the following example: “you see, here” he says and points to a considerable unevenness in a pork shoulder “he [the butcher] has cut away this large chunk; when we pack this [cut], it will look dull, not something you would like to serve guests at your house, right?” The stray cut degrades the aesthetic from similarity to dissimilarity. Consequently, this pork shoulder is void of a palatable aesthetic compared to its type. Therefore, Harald throws the cut in the bin for sausage meats, where it can be redeemed by transforming it into a different, sufficiently palatable, aesthetic. It is evident that when the conventionalized aesthetic of a pork shoulder is “destroyed”, the piece of meat is treated like it is void of such qualities – despite its physical qualities being unchanged. The aesthetic valuation is implied as the lacking aesthetic makes the good incommensurable to a cut type, treated as any residual meat.

Producing the “meat jigsaw” means valuating palatability according to what cut types the meat resembles. The boundaries between different types are maintained by treating the deviant, i.e., excessive, pieces of meat as if they do not resemble any distinct cut at all. As the crates at Mr. Meats fill up with cuts named according to their type, the layout certainly resembles strategically organized piles of similar jigsaw pieces. However, both the “non-cuts” and some whole cut types are too unpalatable to be forwarded as whole pieces of meat to an outlet. I therefore turn to the valuations used when transforming them into sufficiently palatable goods.

6.6.2 Transforming Aesthetics: Resolving the Meat Jigsaw

The problem of resolving the meat jigsaw is that the relative quantities of cut types in a carcass leads to an excess of unpalatable ones, as well as meat lacking a distinct type. Hasse, the small-scale processor, argues that excess is the fundamental issue for him to solve. He suggests that “people hardly want most of the cuts that one could make out of a cow or a hog […] you get one hock, one kidney and so on for every rib-eye and tenderloin,” leaving a number of cut types unpalatable. This discrepancy between supply and demand is negotiated by transforming (presently) unpalatable meat into goods with palatable aesthetics in the following four manners.

The first, and least obtrusive transformation, is “portioning”, i.e., making slices or other smaller pieces of cuts that are ready to cook. The process is quite straightforward, as the aesthetic produced is “portion size”. For example,
loins are cut into cutlets. The high demand for meat that has undergone this transformation makes Harald wonder “if regular people ever make a proper roast these days, or if the only people who can cook nowadays are chefs – and immigrants [field note].” The portioning of meat enables one prime-cut to resemble a number of different commodities, depending on how it is cut and what kind of named commodity it resembles. However, this transformation is also found to obfuscate the meats’ physical quality, as the following example implies.

The second transformation is to make what Mr. Meats’s employees call a “make-believe cut.” Olle, a younger meat cutter at Mr. Meats, implies this reluctance for producing such goods when he suddenly bursts out “we are supposed to make make-believe tenderloins today!” Then he asks me:

You know that “outer loins” are not real tenderloins, right? It is just a regular de-boned [pork-] loin where you take away most of the fat and make four rectangular chunks out of it. [field note, Mr. Meats]

Thereafter, Olle grabs one of the loins we have previously de-boned and cuts it into four rectangular pieces, roughly the size and shape of a tenderloin. When Harald notices the four chunks, he comments: “when I was young, these were called ‘pork hare’, but the tenderloin was usually not made a cut back then, you left it on the pork cutlets.” Olle, while waggling one of the cuts in the air, says in response: “then, at least, you did not try to pretend that it was a ‘nicer’ cut – I cannot understand how people can find this even similar to tenderloin”.

This episode shows how Olle distinguishes “outer loin” as a dishonest cut type because by manipulating its aesthetic without supplying a sufficient physical quality, it imitates a more refined aesthetic. Other such transformations produce, for example, “weekend tenderloin” made out of the ham’s core part, and “pork entrecote”, a slice of the fattier part of the pork loin. The value of making such goods is, however, implied by Mr. Meats’s foreman Dan, who reasons: “as long as people get their ‘Friday tenderloin’, they’re happy – right?” The aesthetic of the cut – not its quality – is what consumers are assumed to appreciate, and therefore used to valuate the cut’s palatability.

Grinding meat is the third transformation to produce palatability. As implied previously, some parts of the animal do not display a sufficient aesthetic to be sold as a cut. Gustav, who manages parts of a large meat processing facility, shows me their meat grinder and explains how grinding makes palatable meat: “you can use more or less any [de-boned] meat for the primary product, as long as the fat content is correct.” The ground beef “cannot have more than 15% fat, because then you will have a pool [of fat] in the saucepan, so usually

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89 The wordplay involved in these names are somewhat lost in translation. A tenderloin is called a “filé”, while a loin is called a “chop” or “chop row”. The outer loin is thus named “outer file” and not chop in this vicissitude, making it seemingly more similar to the tenderloin.
we aim for 10-12% [interview + field note].” To grind meat destroys the insufficient names and shapes of meat into a homogenous unit, distinguished only by weight or the package and fat content. Ground meat is thus a palatable aesthetic, irrespective of what meat went into making it.

The fourth and most obtrusive transformation of meat is making prepared goods; anything from hot dogs, to TV dinners, to gourmet cold cuts. Such goods are palatable by resembling meals rather than meat. One of my jobs during fieldwork at Mr. Meats is to shave the surface skin and bristles of loin rinds. These rinds are then packed in crates to be used as part of sausage filling. While rinds are safe to eat, they lack any palatable aesthetic in itself. Consequently, it is transformed by obscuring the cut types used, or even that it is a form of animal tissue (cf. Sahlins 1976:101–7; Kubberød et al. 2006). Many prepared goods, like smoked ham, certainly still somewhat resemble the original cut. However, this process produces an aesthetic of a different commodity, marketed in a different manner than the fresh cut type (cf. Fine 1992; Venkatesh and Meamber 2008:45–47).

By transforming meat into these new shapes, including new names, previously unpalatable meat now resembles conventionalized aesthetics of palatability, i.e., food. The abundance of fresh meat from carcasses is transformed into a variety of sufficiently palatable aesthetics, i.e., commodity differentiation. The aesthetic valuation is especially distinct in these transformations, as the ability to resemble distinguished looks and names is used to make meat more valuable, rather than some measured quality. The meat which cannot be sold fresh is transformed into foods incommensurable with fresh meat, e.g., TV dinners or cold cuts. The problem of overproduction is thus dealt with by increasing variety, rather than by decreasing quantity. However, the palatability of some aesthetics is seasonally dependent. Therefore, meat processors save certain cuts throughout the year to market when they are the most appreciated.

### 6.6.3 Saving Aesthetics

Mr. Meats uses a huge freezer storage for saving seasonally palatable meat (cf. “domestication” in Callon 1987). As the barbecue season is bustling during my fieldwork, the demand for pork shoulder slices and cutlets is practically bottomless. However, during the winter months, these cut types are supposedly unpalatable, and effectively in excess. Ian, a younger cutter and packer at Mr. Meats, and I bring out two crates from the freezer storage on Dan’s request just before getting off work. These contain pork shoulders and cutlets which have been vacuum sealed and frozen during the winter. While this method may sound unproblematic, it further shows how aesthetic valuations distinguish palatability.

Frozen meat is considered safe, so these cuts are supposed to be edible. However, freezing also destroys some physical qualities. After defrosting the
meat, it is therefore more dubious. When I, Ian, and Kevin, a high-school student who works at Mr. Meats during the summer, start to unpack the defrosted cuts the next day, this issue surfaces. The vacuum bags are filled with meat liquids, which splatter and make the scene messy. The cuts are pink and greyish, in contrast to reds and whites of fresh pork. I suggest that some of the cuts smell funky, and ask Ian if I am supposed to throw them away. He smells them and says “no, those are ok, on the margins, but ok.” As the crates are emptied, several liters of a greyish-pink liquid that smells pungently are left therein.

While freezing deteriorates the physical qualities of meat, it saves their aesthetics. Despite their somber looks and funky smells, these cuts are now treated as more palatable than when they were fresh. However, to become sufficiently palatable, the cuts demand some further transformations. As Kevin and I start to slice the remaining cuts, Ian puts them in vacuum bags with marinade and brands them “barbecue cutlet.” This activity is monotonous and cold, because our gloves get damp and sticky from the meat, and both Ian and Kevin complain about the job. After a while, Ian bursts out: “I do not get people who eat this junk – it is so nasty!” At the end of the same week, Kevin, Ian and I put nets on and pack hams to store in the freezer – to be “brought out for Christmas – because nobody buys ham in the barbecue season [Dan, field note].” The aesthetic of whole ham is deemed unpalatable for the coming six months. While the physical qualities are deteriorated, the resemblance to a palatable commodity aesthetic improves with the time of the year.

The meat that has not been distinguished as palatable at this point becomes waste. Such meat includes left-over cuts and trimmings, and the majority of intestines, heads, tails, bones, and blood. These are treated as non-food, which means that their association with food is void, making them absent from the supply chain. It becomes clear in the above examples that meat production in processing facilities employs aesthetic valuations to produce and negotiate the boundary between palatable and unpalatable meat. The goods produced using these valuations become “commodities”, because they are distinguished purely in terms of their aesthetics in relation to commercial exchange, irrespective of what criteria of palatability they fulfill. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, existing research suggests that over-production is managed by making a greater variety of refined and differentiated commodities. So far, this chapter suggests the contrary. The critical valuations upstream and the aesthetic valuations in the butchering process negotiate the boundaries of palatability to maximize what meat and animals can be treated as sufficient. Consequently, the retailers have to make the consumers eat, or at least buy all this meat to avoid throwing it away.

90 While these products may hold economic value in other markets, they are distinguished as too unpalatable to qualify as food.
6.7 Marketing Palatabilities

When customers browse the store, most meat is displayed in cooler shelves where the individual, prepacked cuts are grouped according to the type of animal, and within that category, the type of cut. Certified organic, and occasionally locally sourced and premium meat commodities are distinguished by placing them in a separate part of the shelf. The customers’ chose meat according to the information displayed on the packages and on the shelf, where, e.g., discount offers may be posted. This display is organized according to commodity aesthetics.

As the meat arrives at the store, the retail workers’ job is to “match” meat commodities with their customers’ expected preferences. A commodity, as implied previously, is a good that is palatable purely in terms of its aesthetics and how these are appreciated by a consumer. Retailers buy the meat they intend to sell, so no meat is supposed to go to waste, despite the fact that overstocking is a well-known issue in post-scarcity food retail (see FAO 2011). Retail workers market meat by distinguishing different commodities they expect consumers to appreciate, displaying aesthetics in order to match commodity with customer (see also Barrey 2007; Cochoy 1998).

The valuation of palatability in meat retail is implied by the display of commodities. When restocking his meat section, grocery store meat manager Filip organizes it as follows: “we have a standardized order that the whole shelf is based upon, which involves certain defined items; for example, we must always display 400 g and 800 g packages of ground beef”. These two specific commodities are assumed to be popular, and therefore it is important that they are readily available for the grocery store’s customers. Filip further explains how he uses a standardized “planogram [i.e., shelf-plan…] so that the commodities are organized similarly to other [grocery chain-name] stores.” The meat is thus displayed for the customer in a manner that makes the shelf resemble how meat is marketed in other outlets in the same grocery chain in general.

The standardized order, however, do not perfectly match what commodities the customers buy. Filip explains to me that it is an ongoing problem to anticipate which meat the customers will demand. At some points, he has managed to get the standardized order changed to deal with this issue: “last year, we suddenly sold much more organic meat, especially beef, so we always ran out of them – before we changed the standardized order.” By changing the standardized order, the shelf’s aesthetic is adjusted, trying to resemble a display that the customers appreciate. However, since customers are unpredictable in their acquisitions, the retailers attempt to influence them.
6.7.1 Aesthetic Valuations in Marketing

Meat is marketed by interacting with customers, especially in a deli counter. *Pernilla*, the meat manager of a high-end supermarket, explains how she valuates the “deli-meat” to match it with her customers’ preferences. At the time of the interview, a few hanger steaks\(^91\) are displayed on the counter, which she uses to exemplify: “I have started to recommend these [hanger steaks] to people who may be looking for a strip-steak or rib-eye – especially if we are running low on those cuts, like on Friday nights.” She then adds that “but we had to change the sign, so it says ‘butcher’s steak’\(^92\) […], because some customers thought it was offal\(^93\).”

In this example, Pernilla, actively changes the name and display, i.e., the aesthetic, of a cut to make it sufficiently palatable for a certain group of customers. Doing so, the hanger steak now resembles (other) high-status cuts. In that manner, Pernilla also expects her customers to appreciate this cut accordingly. Marketing this cut of meat thus actively involves an aesthetic valuation, which enables Pernilla to improve its resemblance to a conventionalized aesthetic of premium meat. Consequently, she also obfuscates the cut’s relation to offal; incompatible with a conventional aesthetic of a premium commodity and consequently hidden.

The obfuscation of the cut’s origin in the animal supports existing studies of meat consumers in post-scarcity societies, suggesting that meat resembling animals are considered unappetizing (Kubberød et al. 2006; Kubberød, Ueland, Tronstad, et al. 2002; see also Sahlins 1976:176; Stuart 2009:139–47). The implicit boundary of premium cuts does not only disregard the origin of the cut in a carcass, but also the fact that it is a part of a living animal, making its biological make-up absent from the food supply.

In contrast to Pernilla, some retailers counteract the valuation of commodity aesthetics by marketing “lesser” cuts as equally palatable as more refined ones. *Simon* and *Anton* tell me about opening their butcher’s shop, lacking prior experience of meat production. Interviewing them some years later, Anton says: “we were just two guys who wanted our local store, when we started – we knew nothing”. On the topic of their own cooking and eating, Simon reasons that “before [we opened the store] you had all these pretentions, that it was so important that you had exactly the right cut, but now you know that most types of meat work if you just think for a bit.” Anton continues, saying “and if we did not learn that, we would have been lost when we run out of things, because we need to present an alternative.” Simon then

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\(^{91}\) At this point in time, hanger steaks were about to become a fad.

\(^{92}\) In Swedish, a hanger steak is called “njutapp”, which directly translates into something like “kidney hanger”. Butcher’s steak is another name for the same cut, but primarily used to imply a cooked hanger steak.

\(^{93}\) Offal, i.e. intestines and non-muscular cuts, is usually disqualified by consumers.
cuts in saying: “yeah, like, if we are out of strip steak – maybe a hanger steak can work […] or if they think something is too expensive, we can tell them about cheaper cuts that taste awesome.” It is a telling illustration that Simon and Anton also use the name hanger steak on the name tag in their cooler. On the topic of cheaper cuts, they explain:

Our “regulars” like us to propose something new, and maybe how to cook it, but new customers usually have their minds set on some fancy rib-eye or strip steak. [Interview]

Simon and Anton, effectively contend with aesthetic valuations of palatability. They do so by suggesting cuts with unfamiliar looks and names to their customers, proposing that they will make equally appreciated meals if cooked in the proper manner. Simon and Anton employ critical valuations here, suggesting that there are physical qualities of meat that are more relevant than their (aesthetic) resemblance to a distinguished cut type. The criteria they use is rather the cuts’ physical make up in relation to cooking a specific dish. However, in order to use this critical valuation, Simon and Anton depend on their outlet resembling other high-end ones, to “lure the ‘right’ customers into the store”. Consequently, they use a synergy of aesthetic and critical valuations to market their meat, demanding that their supply is compatible with both. They do however display a different conventionalized aesthetic than a grocery chain store, because they have to resemble an alternative to it.

The meat has now made its way through the supply chain and ended up in the hands of a customer that forwards it to an eater. The retailers use aesthetic valuations to distinguish the palatability of the meat they are supplied with. Effectively, the meat’s aesthetic is transformed to resemble certain meals or status commodities, e.g., exclusivity. The meat’s origin in an animal and the supply chain producing it is obscured by the implicit boundaries and incommensurable values of different commodities. Commodity aesthetics are thus produced in both retail and meat processing, using certain names and displaying the good accordingly. The use of aesthetic and critical valuations distinguishes two different palatabilities as sufficient, laid out in the following section.

6.8 The Boundaries of Palatability

The valuations of palatability studied in this chapter imply aesthetic and critical valuations distinguish sufficiently good meat in different manners. In the previous sections, the aesthetic valuation of meats’ resemblance to conventionalized commodity aesthetics seems to dominate. However, the primary producers employ critical valuations to distinguish palatable animals, in terms of the production regime’s ability to maintain a common good. While there are some further critical valuations of meat quality, I find that, e.g., the EUROP standard does not actually have any practical effect on distinguishing
sufficiency from excess. I first discuss aesthetic and then critical palatability, which together answer how overproduction is dealt with in the supply chain.

6.8.1 Aesthetic Palatability

A good with a palatable aesthetic is distinguished by certain looks, names, and other predominantly sensory qualities. All meat that is dissimilar to a conventionalized aesthetic of palatability, i.e., the excess, is thus obfuscated in the supply chain – either transformed or wasted.

Some producers enhance the palatability of their meat, by aesthetically distinguishing their goods from the mainstream supply. Elin, together with her husband Robin, breed cattle and sell the meat themselves, distinguished as locally sourced and certified organic. She explains the importance of aesthetic valuations in this operation: “our cattle only get to eat grass and silage; the meat gets better – more tasty – [from that feed] not like the bland meat you get from soy”. However, to change the animal’s feed is not sufficient for distinguishing their meat, as it would not distinguish the commodity.

We could not sell our meat to one of the humongous “dragons”\textsuperscript{94}, then it would just disappear into their black hole, and it [the meat] would just end up in regular packages. Our customers appreciate that they know where their meat comes from, and that they know how it is produced. [Elin, interview]

While the choice of feed affects physical qualities, Elin reasons that their meat must be “kept separate from regular meat”. By using their own brand, including their farm’s name, a boundary is produced in the retail display. Elin’s meat is effectively incommensurable to a mainstream commodity because it uses a distinctly different aesthetic (see also Weber et al. 2008).

Butcher’s shops and deli counters distinguish themselves by producing exclusive aesthetics in retail. Kent’s butcher’s shop is placed close to a grocery store. He explains that “people usually have no real clue about meat [quality], so I explain what you get when you buy these different cuts – that they are more than just strip steaks, rib-eyes, or chuck rolls”. Kent distinguishes these visually similar cuts by providing further information about their sensory aesthetics, engaging the customer in a more sophisticated distinction, e.g., their time of dry-aging. In this manner, he also produces an implicit boundary between the refined meats his shop supplies, and the “regular” meat in the nearby grocery store. These two stores market distinctly different commodities, absent in the others’ supply. Aesthetic palatability is essentially distinguished in terms of uniqueness, which (in the most extreme case) may only be provided by one individual good (cf. Karpik 2007).

The hitherto two examples show how commodities are produced by supplying meat with refined, or exclusive, aesthetics. However, aesthetic valuations of

\textsuperscript{94} Industry jargon for KLS/Ugglarps and Scan, the two largest meat processors.
palatability are also used in producing mainstream commodities. Interviewing Gustav, the manager of a large-scale cattle processing plant, he explains how such valuations are used to deal with the seasonal overproduction of certain cuts. He exemplifies, asking me if I know the “sous-vide ranges of pre-cooked meat, like pulled pork and beef, in the store?” I tell him that I am aware of these commodities. He then continues “you see, all families with children want ground meat because it is fast and easy, and these sous-vide dinners are even faster and easier”. Naïvely, I ask if these cuts were used to make ground meat before, and Gustav replies “no, they are too fatty”. These cuts are cooked and seasoned in a meat processing facility. Effectively, the physical qualities of the meat and even the shape of the cut is obfuscated, placed in a plastic bag in a cardboard box sporting a picture of the finished meal. The customer is, as implied by numerous examples in this chapter, treated as ignorant or unbothered with any qualities but commodity aesthetics. By transforming the pork to resemble a meal, it becomes incommensurable to a fresh cut of the same type. Existing research imply a “deskilling of consumers”, in terms of cooking proficiency, this example implies such “deskilling”, by making meals and groceries incommensurable with each other (cf. Halkier 2017; Jaffe and Gertler 2006). Producing these commodities, however, both increases the variety of and possibility for consumers to eat meat that would otherwise be treated as unpalatable.

To conclude, aesthetic palatability means that the commodity in question resembles a palatable meal or meal component, possibly distinguished by exclusivity. Aesthetic palatability deals with the problem of over-production by increasing consumption, both in terms of variety and accessibility of meat for consumers. The excess is absent because it is made into waste in the supply chain, distinguished as non-food (cf. Corvellec 2013; Hawkins 2013; Krzywoszynska 2013; see also Barnard 2016; Thomas 2010). This valuation thus deals with over-production by attempting to increase consumption, making more palatable aesthetics available.

### 6.8.2 The Palatability of Criterion Fulfillment

Some producers distinguish palatability in terms of criteria fulfillment. Using critical valuations, palatability is not implied by the good itself, but by the ability of its production regime to fulfill generalized criteria of a common good.

Hog farmer Berit, who previously implied that palatability depends on animal welfare, distinguishes the ignorance of foreign production regimes’ criteria-fulfillment among consumers: “when people buy all this Danish pork and other foreign meat goods, I do not think they know the difference.” As I ask her to develop what that difference entails, she continues:

> You know, all they talk about is the antibiotics (and that is important!) but that is just the start, they cut their [the hogs’] tails, they are crammed into sterile
Arriving at this point, Berit distinguishes how a palatability depends on the production regime, effectively translating into sensory experiences:

When you know how Swedish animals live, then it [the meat] tastes better, but people do not know that difference, so they buy a Danish pork tenderloin and think that they get the same thing. [Interview]

Regarding the consumers’ awareness of production regimes, I ask about the Swedish Meat-brand. Berit states that “of course, the brand is super important, but it is not enough, if people do not know what it stands for.” She stresses the value of criteria fulfillment of the meats’ production regime, and that the consumers must be aware of them to appreciate their palatability to their full extent.

Klas, following up on Berit’s statement, further distinguishes this way of reasoning: “well… I do not know if one would find any difference if one were to do a blind tasting [of Swedish and Danish pork], but people should be aware about what they eat and how it is produced – right?” Klas and Berit are thus not convinced that the physical qualities of Swedish and foreign meat differ objectively. However, they imply that neither physical nor aesthetic qualities in themselves suffice for valuating the meat’s palatability. Instead, they argue that the production regime’s ability to fulfill the criteria of a common good would be determined by whether it can distinguish palatability, and not being aware of it would mean a faulty valuation.

Klas elaborates on the common good underlying such criteria, as he says: “we [Swedish farmers] produce according to how the people have democratically decided – the law – so then that is what they have told us they want to eat”.

This critical valuation of palatability assumes a common good, relevant for producers and consumers alike. Because the citizens have decided (in popular elections\(^\text{95}\)) what production regime “they want”, the production regime distinguished in public policy is equated with a commonly agreed upon value (cf. Boltanski and Thévenot 2000:210, 2006:7–16). Effectively, the citizens are obliged to treat meat produced in any lesser regimes as excessive, because consuming it defies the common good.

The critical valuation of palatability downplays aesthetics, and demands that consumers be less concerned with what commodities they are supplied. Sara and Jesper are cattle farmers whose customers buy a share of one of their cows or steers in advance. These customers then get their proportionate amount of meat home delivered when the animal is slaughtered.\(^\text{96}\) Because Sara and

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\(^{95}\) The popular election of Swedish governments, and these governments’ agricultural policies and negotiations with the EU.

\(^{96}\) The main difference between this kind of meat production and share-holding in general is (1) that the customer does not have to cover the costs if the product is not delivered, and (2) the
Jesper have a small-size operation, they deliver all meat directly to their customers from the abattoir, in lack of storage facilities. The customers then get a proportionate share of all cuts from the animal, and effectively have to manage the “meat jigsaw” themselves, aided by Sara and Jesper.

When we get new customers, it is important to give them realistic expectations. Most expect more [than reasonable amounts of] tenderloin and such “fancy parts” in the box; but if you buy 1/8th of a cow, that means 400 g of tenderloin. The majority of the cuts will be things like chuck roll, round and so on.

[Interview, Sara]

To avoid disappointed customers, Sara tries to help them appreciate the physical qualities of meat – by teaching them to cook fewer – or unpalatable cuts. Many potential customers, she reasons, are “so lost in their own kitchens.” To aid their cooking, Sara posts recipes on her Facebook page, and also has a number of cookbooks readily available when she markets their meat. However, this use of premium quality to invoke a common good in a critical valuation is (as in previous examples) dependent on the supply being framed by a specific aesthetic, and supplied outside of the mainstream.

To conclude, critical valuations of palatability maintains it in terms of a common good. The findings in this chapter are that using animal welfare or other political criteria of a common good actually translates into the producers’ practice as they distinguish palatable meat from excess. Over-production is dealt with by distinguishing “sub-standard” production regimes as unpalatable, or excessive, implied by criticizing the inability to fulfill criteria of, e.g., animal welfare, which is a qualitative yet commensurable value. The critical valuations of physical quality, however, do not have any practical effects. This is especially clear in the cases where producers reluctantly use aesthetic valuations. The only cases physical quality translates into the treatment of meat is within a frame of aesthetic valuations that makes the meat exclusive, or at least a niche commodity. However, it also seems like hardly any meat is unpalatable in terms of physical quality, at least given a competent cook.

6.9 Conclusion: Making the Cut

This chapter has approached the problem of over-production in terms of the valuation of palatability in the Swedish meat supply chain. The important insights from this chapter is that sufficiency is distinguished from excess either in terms of what meat resembles conventional commodity aesthetics, individual goods that resemble meals or an exclusive taste, or in terms of

share of meat is delivered at one occasion, rather than a continuous dividend. It is thus more similar to crowdfunding than co-operative ownership.
fulfilling criteria indicative of Swedish agricultural policy. Physical quality does not actually have any effect on what meat becomes sufficiently palatable.

So far in this study, it is evident that there is no measure of palatability that may be used to reduce the supply of meat in order to only produce palatable goods. This is the case because aesthetic valuations do not valuate commensurable measures, while the criteria used in critical valuations may be fulfilled by an infinite number of producers, at least in theory. The effect is that over-production can be perpetuated as long as the meat supplied is distinguished as palatable in terms of certain qualities which are not quantitatively limited. In opposition to existing studies of overproduction in post-scarcity meat supplies, this chapter argues that the further production of commodity aesthetics does not reduce, but rather aggravates, overproduction (cf. e.g. Grunert et al. 2004; Grunert 2006). This is the case, because differentiation does not produce a greater qualitative or quantitative variety of goods. On the contrary, commodity differentiation is better described as commodity resemblance. Aesthetic valuations make the producers attain a small number of conventionalized aesthetics, consequently routinizing them as being distinctive of palatable commodities.

The valuation of palatability used in the Swedish meat supply chain is incapable of distinguishing sufficiency from excess in a manner that inhibits the production of abundance. However, the fundamental idea in economic theory is that the diminishing revenue of producing abundance would force the supply to adjust to the demand. Costs are, after all, commensurable to revenue in terms of money. Therefore, I turn to the problem of diminishing revenue to analyze how Swedish meat producers valuate economic values, setting prices in order to cover their costs of production.
7 Covering Costs

Right now, we sell Swedish ground meat at 29 SEK per kg – we are practically paying the customers to buy them!

- Martin, 
  discount supermarket meat manager

Retail prices on meat commodities do not always reflect the costs of producing them. On the contrary, as Martin exclaims, the prices set may not cover the costs of retailing it, nor alone the supply chains’ production costs as a whole. Such a low price raises doubts about how to make money from meat production. In the previous chapter, I raised the conundrum of how a producer stays in business, given that over-production is perpetuated. The Swedish meat supply chain is, after all, comprised of private ventures. According to economic theory, as outlined initially in this study, an over-supply would be forced to adjust to the demand because of decreasing economic value. I call this effect of producing abundance “the problem of diminishing revenue”. This problem concerns valuations of economic value, i.e., pricing, as the producers risk going bankrupt if they do not make enough money. To understand how the problem of diminishing revenue is dealt with, this chapter focuses on pricing activities; routinely used valuations that distinguish the sufficient economic value of an animal or a unit of meat. Following on the distinctions of palatable meat in the previous chapter, this chapter explores how that meat and the animals it comes from are valuated in monetary terms.

7.1 Approaching the Problem of Diminishing Revenue

The problem of diminishing revenue concerns the ability to make money from an abundant supply. According to economic theory, the market value of something in abundance would be void. Effectively, the costs of production would be greater than the revenue from sales, and force the producer out of business due to economic loss (cf. Lancaster 1966). This issue is evident in existing studies of meat and other forms of agrifood production, showing increasing economic hardship for farmers and food processors worldwide (Brown and Argent 2016; Bruniori and Bartolini 2016; Burch and Lawrence 2009; Carolan 2012:16–39; see also Fitzgerald 2003). Economic studies of meat supply in post-scarcity societies argue that marketing is, or can be, used to counter falling prices and sales, as well as “consumer disloyalty” towards certain commodities or outlets. Such studies either suggest methods for
increasing the consumed volumes of meat or the refinement of commodity aesthetics through differentiation and branding (e.g., Grunert et al. 2011; Schulze-Ehlers and Anders 2017; Verbeke and Viaene 2000; Vermier and Verbeke 2006; Weber et al. 2008; cf. Warde and Martens 2000). In many ways, these suggested solutions are the same as for overproduction. Complementing such studies, this chapter supplies evidence for how prices are set within the supply chain of Swedish meat. Additionally, this chapter furthers the sociology of pricing, by exploring the dynamic between the performativity of economic valuations (cf. Callon 2007), and price setting as an outcome of coordinated market relations (cf. Aspers 2009; Beckert 2011). Together, these approaches to economic sociology suggest further insights into how diminishing revenue is dealt with, and how producers of an abundant good may stay in business.

By analyzing the valuations used to set prices in the production of an abundant foodstuff, I make the following argument: Whether or not a meat producer realizes sufficient economic returns from producing meat depends on how prices are set in the trade relations she is engaged in. Following the same trajectory as in the previous chapter, the pricing activities valuate increasingly incommensurable, aesthetic, qualities to distinguish an economic value. Niche producers, however, contend such incommensurability by organizing their own supply chains that take all production costs into regard for supplying meat, a practice which, however, depends on the producers framing themselves using an exclusive aesthetic. Pricing activities are thus indicative of how meat is used to earn revenue, attempting to (at least) cover the costs of production. Prices, I argue, may be produced as sufficient economic value in more than one manner, either transparently covering production costs or obscuring them by setting prices translating the aesthetics of the commodity, producing what I coin “boundaries of incommensurability” obscuring the costs of production.

In this chapter, I explore the economic value of supplying meat in abundance. I first outline “pricing activities” as practical routines of economic valuations. The use of pricing activities in long- and short-term trade of meat and animals are then outlined to distinguish how prices are set in by negotiations or in more standardized manners in relation to production costs. By following the pricing activities used in the markets between farm and retail outlets, this chapter outlines how the economic valuations change depending on how the animal or the meat is valued in the Swedish meat supply chain; the market for animals, for wholesale meat, and in grocery retail for consumers. In the final section, I discuss how the mainstream supply chain’s pricing activities disregard and obscure production costs, and how niche producers’ transparent pricing activities enable them to set the prices that mirror production costs.
7.2 Pricing Activities: Revenue and Trade Relations

The revenue a producer makes stems from the prices that are paid for her goods. If the revenue covers more than the costs of production, e.g., raw materials, salaries, and interest rates, the producer makes a profit. In the long run, she will also need to make re-investments in her means of production and pay herself a living wage. A producer thus has to set prices for her products that cover these costs to avoid incurring a loss. Prices and revenue stand in an intimate relation, because the former influences the latter.

Instead of analyzing the exact monetary quantity of set prices, I look at the “pricing activities” the producers use in market trade. These activities are valuations where certain qualities and conditions of a good are distinguished by their economic value, which produces a price. As a price is set, the good may be used in market exchange (cf. Çalışkan and Callon 2009). It follows that both buyer and seller treat the price as sufficient in the given market, or no trade takes place. The relationship between the trading parts is an important aspect of pricing activities. Kaary Çalışkan outlines this synergy of trade relations and the valuation of economic value.

Prices are never set by a mere coming together of supply and demand. They are made, produced, and challenged by a multiplicity of actors in a market process. (Çalışkan 2007:243)

The “market process” is the continued valuation along the supply chain. As the animal is transformed into meat, it moves through markets and is transformed in between those markets. I outlined this process in the previous chapter, but here I look at markets specifically, and how the pricing activities enable both monetary measures and relationships between producers (see also Dixon 1999; cf. Aspers 2011:4).

Studying the markets along the Swedish meat supply chain, pricing activities enable producers to deal with diminishing revenue in two manners: (1) to valuate, and effectively produce, a good’s economic value and (2) to engender (and discontinue) “trade relations” where meat and animals are exchanged for money. It is therefore also relevant to distinguish buyers from customers and consumers. The former are producers who buy to sell, while the latter are end users of the traded good (cf. “production” and “consumption markets” in White 1981a). Completing the previous chapter, the main object of analysis henceforth is how meat and animals are priced, and how economic value relates to palatability – aesthetic, political, and physical quality in the Swedish meat supply chain. The important insight from studying pricing activities is how prices distinguish value, and of how prices are set in relation to the producers’ revenue.
7.3 Trading Meat and Animals

When meat producers buy and sell meat and animals they engage in trade. All trade is not made under market competition, but all market exchange is some kind of trade (cf. Aspers 2011:6–8). In the Swedish meat supply chain, goods and money change hands in “day-to-day trade”, spontaneous and unpredictable exchange, and “contracted trade”, long-term agreements used to maintain stable and continuous exchange. It does eventually become clear that pricing activities are employed differently in these forms of trade, which is important for the subsequent argument.

7.3.1 Day-to-Day Trade

In day-to-day trade, money and meat or animals change hands on an unpredictable basis. Hasse, the small-scale processor, outlines how he uses this type of trade: “we post a price list on our homepage, so people can call and order [meat], and then they pick up the goods here at the facility – or we deliver it”. This type of trade is also found among retailers. “Our sales”, supermarket fresh produce manager Diana tells me, “differs from day to day, depending on the weather, what is cooked on a popular cooking show, and sometimes you just do not know.” Since day-to-day trade is unpredictable, Diana has to market meat to maintain demand:

> The customers have expectations […] so, for example] there cannot be big “holes” [empty spaces in the shelf] if we are out of some things [, because] if it [the shelf] does not look nice and stocked, the customers may think that the meat is bad. [Interview]

Because of the unpredictability in what customers will purchase, it is hard to keep a supply that consistently fit their consumption. However, Diana’s reasoning implies that day-to-day trade is necessary to deal with consumers’ unpredictable acquisitions, but “you never get it 100% right”, she concludes (see also Gronow 2004).

In contrast to the previous examples, butcher’s shop owners Simon and Anton utilize day-to-day trading as a marketing strategy. Anton says: “we cannot be lazy, and just have the same thing all the time, we must have meat that people find exciting, so they come to the store.” Thus, by buying meat on a day-to-day basis, they enable variation in their stock. The unpredictability of day-to-day trade is harnessed to produce a varied supply which markets their store as a more “exciting” one (cf. Johnston and Baumann 2010). However, a cut of meat making a revenue today may be priced steeper – or not even supplied – in the wholesale market the next day.

7.3.2 Contracted Trade

To avoid the unpredictability of day-to-day trading, producers throughout the Swedish meat supply chain draft contracts with each other. Such contracts
state the number of goods of a defined quality the seller ought to deliver within
a set time period to be paid a defined price. This form of trade makes prices
predictable for both parts, and the revenue earned from the exchange as well.
Such contracts are imperative for farmers.

*Ragnar,* who runs a mid-sized hog farm with his wife *Kerstin,* finds that their
whole operation depends on holding a contract with a meat processor. He tells
me that “we cannot breed hogs and just hope that someone wants to buy them,
that would be a disaster!” He must be “sure that the hog is sold in the future”,
and that this future is not jeopardized “from one day to the next”. Ragnar and
Kerstin’s contract demands that they deliver: “300 hogs every second week,
and that these should be slaughtered in [i.e., awarded] a certain class to pay
the agreed upon price”. The contracted price is set as a “quota”\(^{97}\); a price tied
to a fulfilling a number of standardized criteria of the hogs’ quality (the same
goes for cattle). The contracted quota makes Kerstin and Ragnar’s revenue
predictable, because they can account for future sales and production costs,
and know if and how he can stay in business. To account for future revenue,
Ragnar and Kerstin take the contracted quota into account in their farm
operation. They “work to uphold the demands of the contract,” which means
that the quota distinguishes how they must practice meat production in order
to both honor the contract, and maximize the revenue from it.

Contracted trade is also used among producers downstream to resolve their
doubts about earning revenue. *Fredrik,* who manages sales and product
development for a large-scale processor, explains: “when we look at a new
[commodity concept] we need to know – can we sell this?” When making a
cooperative contract, “we must [first] understand whether we can get the
quantities to the store, and from the store to the customer”. In addition,
Fredrik’s employer shares knowledge of processing in exchange for the
retailer’s knowledge of retailing and marketing, so as to draft contracts they
may both uphold.

While the contracts outlined here have their distinct differences, their
important similarity is that they generate a predictable flow of money and
products between traders over time by standardizing the pricing activities (cf.
White 1981a:5). To generate such a flow is an important use of a contract for
a producer, who may then optimize her supply. The daily work for the
producer become predictable, because in order to ensure a sufficient revenue,
the qualities defined in the contract have to be supplied. The unpredictability
of “hog cycles” imply the value especially for farmers to draft contracts. The
long-term investment that animal breeding demands implies that prices may
change from the animal’s birth to the day of slaughter, and that there has to be
a buyer at the peak of the animals’ value (Elster 1989:93–95). The following

\(^{97}\) A quota is a pricing matrix based on a standardized quality and quantity of a product, as
outlined in Section 11.9.
sections cover the markets in the supply chain individually by focusing on the pricing activities in each of them and how they relate to each other.

7.4 Pricing in the Market for Animals

The market for animals is distinguished by slaughtering contracts. That makes hogs and cattle traded in one market, because there are no practical alternatives to contracted trade. The pricing activities of such slaughtering contracts are defined in terms of the **EUROP**-classification of carcasses, outlined in the previous chapter. The classes are related to carcass weight, breed, and possible certifications (e.g., organic) to account for the price paid to the farmer, which comprises a “quota grid”. The meat processors post the current version of such a grid on their homepages for the farmers to review when they seek out a contract.

7.4.1 Selling on Quota

All farmers interviewed in this study imply that the prices awarded from contracted quotas differ little between processors. This is also the case for those informants who have attempted to negotiate their quota. Cattle farmers *Freja* and *Arvid’s* experience of reviewing potential contracts is telling of this pricing activity:

I contact the other [close enough] processors occasionally to see if they can offer a better deal, [...] but in the end, the big difference [between the processors] is that the cattle would have to be transported one hour longer [to the other abattoir]. [Interview, Arvid]

Freja stresses this importance of the distance to the processor when reviewing contracts: “the important thing [when drafting a contract] is to get the best contract [with a processor] that is close enough to the farm.” “Close enough” is not an exact distance or transport time, but Freja and Arvid consider the limit “three or four hours; we do not want to send the cattle further.” This is a (somewhat fuzzy) criterion that all relevant contracts have to fulfill. Transports are however more than just distance; the contracted meat processor must also supply “good forwarding agents [i.e., truck drivers]”. The competence of these forwarding agents is important, because: “at some points,
there have been drivers who we had to ask to stay in the truck and load the animals ourselves, because they just did not know how to handle [them].”

In these quotes, Freja and Arvid show that they do not primarily valuate the monetary price paid by a contract. Instead, they valuate which contracts fulfill their criteria of a sufficient production regime. Money is not irrelevant for Arvid and Freja. However, since the pay differs little between contracts, they distinguish a sufficient pricing activity in terms of how honoring the contract enables them to attain a common good, e.g., their experience of decent animal welfare. Therefore, a bad or longer animal transport is not worth the (small) extra pay. However, all farmers do not valuate a contract in the same manner.

Gunnar, who runs a larger-sized specialized hog farm alongside his son, use the contracted quota to maximize profits. When I first meet him at an industry conference, he describes himself as “modern producer” because he regards “the processor as our customer [Field note, Industry meeting 1].” Gunnar explains, when I interview him, how he uses the quota grid as a standard for “what [animals] we are supposed to produce.” To adhere to that standard, he has invested in a computerized feeding system for adjusting to and upholding it. Gunnar “need[s] to have an exact control of these hogs’ feed, so that they always slaughter in the best [paying] class – that is our business model”. He thus uses a technology that enables him to conform to the pricing activity in order to maximize revenue and possible profits; optimizing each hog for the best paying class (cf. Aspers 2009:115).

Suppose that we would feed [the hogs] 70 grams more than they need [each day], that is 0.1 SEK of feed per hog, and in a year, that is 120,000 SEK that someone has to pay. But in addition, that would also mean that our hogs will be slaughtered in a fatter class, say 56, and then we would lose like 0.2 SEK per kg of slaughtered hog – then we are talking money, [because] we produce close to 10,000 hogs per year. [Interview, Gunnar]

In this quote, Gunnar makes the quota system into a standard for how to best cover his costs of production, implying that just a minor change in pricing or deviance from the standard would have a large impact on his revenue. By making use of technological tools, he adjusts the breeding of hogs to the pricing standard, and effectively the quota price. Gunnar does care about transport conditions, and he certainly holds an idea of what sufficient meat production is. However, these ideas do not translate into Gunnar’s valuation of slaughtering contracts, nor what (legal) measures he is willing to take to maximize profits.

The contracted trade of animals shows two ways of employing pricing activities. Arvid and Freja looks for a contract to be awarded a sufficient price

102 A farm which buys piglets and breeds them for slaughter.
103 Swedish krona, 1 SEK = approx. €0.1.
104 See Section 10.9 for example hog quota grids.
for employing a production regime that fulfills certain criteria. Their pricing activities are thus employed similarly to the critical valuation of palatability. This method of using a critical valuation shows as Freja and hog farmer Johanna, respectively, tell me about previous quarrels with their processors about the competence of the forwarding agents. Johanna even wrestled an agent once, forcing him to stop systematically using an electric cattle prod. She further threatened the meat processor, who hired the agent to “discontinue the contract despite […] risks of] economic loss”. Gunnar, in contrast, adjusts the production regime to optimize the hogs’ resemblance with the quality distinguished by the contracted pricing activity. While he uses a critical valuation, it is different from the other examples because he uses a quality standard. The criteria are commensurable measures defined in the contracted quota. Any further criteria are of little relevance, as long as he stays within the law. These two pricing activities of animals raise the question of how the meat processors valuate hogs and cattle.

7.4.2 Buying on Quota

The informants from meat processing, in contrast to the farmers, all use the contracted quotas the same way. The “[paid] price is set […] by] slaughtered class [Interview, Gustav]”, according to the contracted quota grid to optimize the quality of the cattle. One of the certified classifiers in Gustav’s employer’s large-scale abattoir explains the pricing activity for cattle.

The farmers can view the classifications “live” on the internet, and if they think we have classified their cattle wrong, they can call us, and also call the [Swedish] Board of Agriculture, who audits our classifications. But they seldom complain. If they do, we show them how the classification is done, and then they are usually content. [Field note + interview]

The classification of cattle thus involves farmers and meat processors in the same economic valuation, which is what I mean by saying that pricing activities are shared. Having contracted a contracted quota, they have agreed beforehand on the pricing activity. As long as the classification is performed in a routinized manner, and the price set according to the quota grid, all parts should be satisfied with the price of an individual animal. The use of a standard implies objectivity in the pricing activity, and transparency between the farmer and the meat processor to ensure that the farmers producing higher quality meat are paid accordingly. However, the quota grid does not consider the production regime, except for when it is awarded a branded standard, e.g., certified organic. Criteria fulfilled by the individual farmer’s work may therefore not be financially rewarded, because they are not distinguished by the contracted pricing activity. Consequently, these pricing activities do not pay for the farmer’s production regime, because the common good in the pricing activity is meat quality, and the criteria used only regard qualities that are assumed to have an effect on the physical quality of the meat.
Given the fact that a mature creature’s value is unknown when it is born, Jon Elster reasons that it is impossible to make rational choices for breeding to maximize profits at the time of slaughter (1989:93–95). Contracted trade takes away that unpredictability. However, it is evident that means and ends are inseparable in the producers’ activities, despite rational choices being theoretically possible. The pricing activities in the market for animals implies both performative and coordinative explanations of how revenue is made, depending on the common good being valued for. By distinguishing the highest awarded price as sufficient, Gunnar uses the quota in a performative manner, meaning that it influences, rather than mirrors, what animals he breeds (cf. Çalışkan 2007; Çalışkan and Callon 2009). However, the opposite seems to be the case when the farmers seek slaughtering contracts that fulfill qualitative criteria of the production regime. In those cases, the pricing activity is distinguished as an effect of producers’ mutual agreements over a production regime (cf. Aspers 2013:67–69). There are thus different purposes involved in what contracts are drafted, but they are not goals that are attained extrinsically to animal breeding. Rather they distinguish the purposes of the practical routines of meat production, means and ends alike, to make sense in the long run.

7.5 Pricing in the Wholesale Markets

The pricing activities in meat wholesale distinguish meat goods, cuts or prepared meats, in terms of economic value. The revenue made from selling these goods have to cover the costs of buying and butchering an animal to avoid economic loss. The contracted quota is used to resolve what price the processor pays the farmer for the animal in the previous market. However, the economic valuation of meat changes drastically in the butchering process. Cut types’ aesthetics, rather than the classified quality, are distinguished as economically valuable qualities. There are two wholesale markets for meat. Therefore, the pricing activities of small-scale producers are first discussed before moving on to large-scale ones.

7.5.1 Bang for the Bulk

To create a steady revenue from an irregular supply is a reoccurring issue for smaller-scale meat processors like Hasse. He finds that he “can charge 300 or 500 SEK per kilo for a [beef] tenderloin; [however,] that does not matter in the end; what matters is the bulk.” Bulk, the large quantities of less or unpalatable cuts, makes most of the money for Hasse. Sufficient pricing of this “lion’s share, like ground meat and industrial meat product,” is what determines if he earns a profit.

Hasse tells me that he used to have a “contract with the [local] municipality,” where “the politicians decided that all public food outlets ought to use locally sourced meat”. There, he “sent about 10 tons of minced meat every week, to
the hospital and the school canteens and so on.” Hasse thought that this was “a good deal, [because] we had large, continuous sales.” This contract also paid him a premium for supplying “locally sourced meat”, i.e., higher than the going price for ground meat because of a certain commodity aesthetic.

The revenue of Hasse’s former contract is made from a discrepancy between the pricing activities in the respective markets for animals and wholesale meat. The financial basis is, Hasse explains: “to get hold of old cows and other cheaper animals, that are [financially] sound for ground meat.” “Old cows [from] local dairy farms”, he continues, realizes a profit because such cattle “are classified in cheap classes, but are [still] locally sourced.” The revenue is thus dependent on the pricing activities in the respective markets valuates different qualities, producing discrepant values.

What Hasse indicates in this example is that the pricing activities in different, but adjacent, markets in the same supply chain are effectively contending each other’s valuations. The respective contracts distinguish different qualities as economically valuable, which under certain circumstances enables Hasse to buy cheap and sell dear, i.e., make profit. The farm’s revenue is contingent upon the fact that the contracted quota for animals does not pay a premium for the geographical proximity of the farm. This (aesthetic) quality is, however, valuable in the wholesale contract’s pricing activity, paying a premium for locally sourced meat. Because the pricing activities are incompatible, Hasse can make money from a quality that the farmer supplies for free.

To make a revenue in the aforementioned manner is however fickle, as the cheaper animals may fall into shortage. Especially a small-scale producer like Hasse lacks “the capacity to contract more farmers [so to uphold the contract], and I cannot […] buy only their cheap cattle, it does not work like that [laughter].” The pricing activity in the wholesale contract does not take the cattle’s classified quality into account, thus disregarding the cost of purchasing a given quality. Contracts do not only create a steady outlet or supply, they also demand consistency in order to produce the contracted goods and earn revenue. If the supply changes, the discrepancy between two pricing activities may suddenly generate a loss.

The discrepancy between pricing activities in the previous example produces what I call a “boundary of incommensurability”. By this concept, I imply a black box, for lack of better words, between two markets in a supply chain, obscuring what qualities are valued in the respective pricing activities. As the animal is slaughtered and butchered into a wholesale good, its qualities are valued in a manner that makes the values incommensurable between the markets – despite there being a seemingly commensurable monetary measure. Effectively, this boundary has the effect that it obscures the relationship between the animal’s value and the meat’s value. Hasse’s revenue depends on speculating on the effects of a boundary of incommensurability turning out in his favor. Effectively, such boundaries also inhibit farmers from comparing
wholesale prices to what she is paid for her livestock. In the following section, I turn to how small-scale producers counteract such boundaries, by building relationships across markets.

7.5.2 The Art of the Deal

Small-scale processors have to manage a relatively uneven supply of meat. Olov’s job at Mr. Meats is to make “deals” with retailers to make the most out of the present supply. He does so by “spend[ing] the whole day more or less on the phone, as do the other guys in sales.” “On the phone” means that Olov gets calls from “people in different [grocery] stores that want to order our goods”. To make that call into a deal, Olov first gets “to know what they [retailers] want, so I can put together an order”. Usually “they [buyers] know what the others [processors and suppliers] charge [and] they are not afraid of mentioning it – but I am rock solid, I just say ‘this is what we charge for the merchandise’”. The outcome of a deal depends on Olov convincing the potential buyer “that our locally sourced meat is worth the money, because ‘locally sourced’ is not a guarantee of quality or sustainability or anything like it.” Effectively, Olov markets a commodity aesthetic. Mr. Meats is also a relatively small producer. Lacking a competitive economy of scale, they have to make revenue from supplying a refined commodity aesthetic.

While Olov avoids negotiating prices, he later admits: “on fresh meat, sure, there is some leeway; I never give special treatment, but if we have a lot of something, I talk with the others [in sales] and we make a ‘drive’.” A “drive” is a general discount offer, available to those buyers who order certain volume or for a certain amount of money. Such “drives” deal with inconsistencies in Mr. Meats’s supply. For example, when “the freezer is over-stocked and we need to get rid of, say fresh ham, in the midst of the summer [Interview, Olov].” The “drives”, and temporary discount prices on fresh meat, imply that the pricing activities which Olov, in cooperation with his colleagues, use to negotiate what a sufficient price is in day-to-day trade. To discount only the fresh meat enables them to keep the prices of prepared goods consistent. The importance of that strategy is further implied by the fact that Arnold, Mr. Meats’s president and majority owner, “sets all the prices on cold cuts and other prepared meats, and we never compromise with those prices […]because] those goods cannot be used as discount offers by the store [Interview, Olov]”.

This example shows how fresh meat and prepared goods are valued using different pricing activities. Effectively, these goods are used in different

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105 It should be mentioned that while Mr. Meats is more small- than large-scale, they are significantly larger than Hasse’s facility, which is “as small as it gets if you have a stand-alone abattoir [Hasse, interview].” A large-scale facility, like Gustav’s or Ivar’s, has more than ten times the capacity of Mr. Meats, but do not seem to have a significant economy of scale in terms of processing capacity, because they also have more than ten times as many employees. The main competitive advantage rather seems to be consistency and volume.
matters to generate revenue. Fresh meat may be discounted, but the prices on cold cuts may not. This is the case, I argue, because the pricing activity does not mirror the goods’ value, but translates the commodity aesthetic into numbers. The prices are thus, to some extent, set irrespective of production costs, reproducing the aesthetic of some goods as more refined than others by being more expensive.

Maintaining the commodity aesthetics of Mr. Meats’s goods further demands that Olov sometimes visits the stores carrying their supply. He explains why these visits are important:

[You must] show an interest in their [retail employees] work […], like buying them lunch […and] showing them some appreciation. […] If they just think I am another guy from another supplier [when they call to order], then they will never care about our shelf, and see to it that our brand is [properly] displayed, and so on. [Interview]

Olov, in an informal manner, attempts to influence the retail workers’ marketing of Mr. Meats’s goods. For example, “that the store does not discount our cold cuts as marketing.” This example shows the relational coordination of a pricing activity. To set a sufficient price, Olov have to resolve any doubts about the retailer’s ability to sell the traded goods to a consumer for a price that matches the wholesale one. The store visit is thus a critical valuation of that ability, ensuring that the wholesale pricing activity is attuned to the consumer market. In contrast to previous examples, Olov counteracts possible boundaries of incommensurability that would inhibit Mr. Meats from earning revenue. The wholesale prices are used as a criterion for evaluating the retail ones, while aesthetically valuating the marketing of goods in the outlet.

The relational part of the pricing activity is also a way of dealing with an unpredictable supply. In times of short supply, Olov depends on the retailers’ loyalty: “when they call us and order, say 40 packages of pork shoulder slices, and we can only deliver 30, they accept that, because they know who I am, and that I treat all [buyers] the same.” The pricing activities employed in these examples show how an uneven supply is used to stabilize trade relations in day-to-day trade. By negotiating prices and generating transparency beyond the individual markets’ pricing activity, Olov may avoid and counteract boundaries of incommensurability. Mr. Meats’s pricing activities produce two distinct commodity aesthetics, affordable fresh meat and distinguished prepared goods. Their revenue effectively depends on the retailers maintaining that distinction in the store.

*Hasse*, the small-scale processor, exemplifies what happens if the retailer produces a boundary of incommensurability: “the supermarkets […] only want it [my meat] for marketing, and then they sell their own stuff – they just put it [Hasse’s goods] in the deli counter for show, but they do not push for [selling] it.” Effectively, the retailer does not attempt to earn revenue from
selling Hasse’s meat. The boundary of incommensurability shows in the fact that Hasse may not harmonize his pricing activity with the retailers to improve his revenue, by better matching demand. That is the case because Hasse valuates the profit from his meat, but the retailer uses it as marketing. If Hasse’s meat is not sold by the retailer, he does not make any money from it. Consequently, setting a sufficient price that enables Hasse to earn revenue is impossible, as the meat’s economic value for the retailer is incommensurable to his costs of production.

If a boundary of incommensurability is produced in between markets, it becomes hard-to-impossible to set a price that earns a predictable revenue. While money is a commensurable measure, it is evident that just the numbers on the price tag are not sufficient for making this valuation. When prices are set to translate a commodity aesthetic, they are detached from production costs. Trade relations can, however, counteract the boundaries of incommensurability, as Olov showed in this section. Boundaries of incommensurability, it follows, inhibits that supply and demand meet and create a market equilibrium because there is no commensurable way of comparing offers in the market (cf. Caravale 1997; Lancaster 1966). I now turn to large-scale meat processors’ pricing activities to investigate how revenue is made using contracted trade, economies of scale, and a significantly more predictable supply.

7.5.3 Pricing Cut Types

In a large-scale meat processing operation, the economy of scale and consistent supply of animals enables every type of cut to be valuated individually. In the previous chapter, I showed how palatability is produced as a commodity aesthetic in meat processing. The pricing activity in large-scale meat processing distinguishes a sufficient price by imitating the commodity aesthetic. Gustav explains the process, guiding me along the cutting line in a cattle processing plant. One cutting line consists of ca. 20 cutters, standing side by side in white clothing. In a sequence, each one of them employs a small number of cuts, together butchering whole beef carcasses in a shared sequence. At the end of the line there are plastic crates where the cuts are stacked according to their different aesthetics, similarly to Mr. Meats. Gustav produces a cut from a crate and tells me “this rib-eye has undergone ‘ocular assessment’ by everyone here, so we know that it is consistent with the other ones in this crate.” Consistency, however, concerns the aesthetic of the cut, i.e., its type.

The visual valuations and the cut’s weight, i.e., “the data [Field note, Gustav]”, is put into a computerized system that all cutters can access. The “data” is used to calculate the “efficiency of each part of the [butchering and cutting] process” accounting for the costs of “every cut and how they [the costs] are affected by every step of the [butchery and cutting] process”. In reply, I ask
Gustav about the (quality) classifications awarded to the carcasses in the abattoir, and he explains:

[The classified quality] is in “the system”, we know what classes the meat that go into the crates have, but we do not sort according to them, that would be too messy and […] disregard] the quality of the individual cut – classification is not everything. [Field note + interview]

This quote implies a change in the pricing activity taking place during the meat processing operation. Gustav’s quote clearly states that they disregard the classified quality of the carcass, and instead price the cut type’s aesthetic. Gustav further confirms that EUROP-classes are limited to pricing in the market for animals, saying: “some of these cuts are equally good [as] the ones made in [another facility] for restaurant grade meat.” While the carcasses used in this other facility may be classified higher in general, the class does not dictate the price paid for the meat – as the classifiers would have one believe.¹⁰⁶

The aesthetic valuation used in this pricing activity is further affirmed by the sorting of cuts in the processing plant, distinguished by their type.

The large-scale butchering process produces a boundary of incommensurability in relation to the farmers, as the classified quality is not used to make a revenue in the wholesale market for meat. Fredrik, who works for another large-scale meat processor, explains how the pricing activity of individual cut types work:

All goods are supposed to pay for themselves – we are a business – so if, say brined pork hocks, start to become too expensive to make, then we have to look for new commodities to make [from pork hocks], cut costs in the processing [operation], or find new markets [for them]. [Interview]

By pricing cut types, in contrast to animals or bulk meat, some parts of the animal become economically worthless because they cost more to produce than they may individually be sold for. Fredrik explains this valuation further:

We have a lot of bone and trotters and all those things that we would need to “push up” the prices for to pay [higher quotas] to the farmers, and these categories [of goods] already have slim margins. [Interview]

What Fredrik implies in this quote is that the quotas paid to farmers are restricted by the prices on fresh cuts. The cut types of the least economic value restrict the quota prices, because they cannot be produced at a loss. A sufficient price thus disregards both the cost of breeding a whole animal, where all parts are equally necessary, and the profits made from higher priced commodities. While Fredrik repeatedly assures me that “we do everything we can to avoid waste,” he also states that “we cannot make goods that generate costs.” The excessiveness of waste is thus not the excess meat itself, but the

¹⁰⁶ See Section 6.5.1.
economic insufficiency of such a good. The price which would translate the commodity aesthetic is below the cost of supplying it.

When I ask Fredrik about what makes money in the company’s operation, he is slightly more secretive. However, he says: “what makes us survive [financially] is that we make processed meat – cold cuts, meatballs, and so on – that is the economic backbone of our business.” Similar to small-scale meat processors, the processed meats are used to generate revenue. In this case however, Fredrik implies that the revenue from fresh meat has an influence on what quota prices are paid. The processed meats, in turn, have a less clear relationship to the contracted quotas for animals.

As each individual cut type must pay for its cost of production, the pricing activity disregards the costs of production of animals, i.e., the production regime. That cost is further disregarded by neglecting the economic value of the meats’ physical quality. Effectively, the meat processor does not make any money on the premium quality they pay the farmers for. The meat traded in the wholesale market are those for which a sufficient price also translates the commodity aesthetic into figures. The price is thus sufficient in two manners, paying for the production costs and generating a revenue as an aesthetic. However, processed goods are priced higher than fresh meat. Consequently, by pricing fresh meat low, the quota prices are kept low, and the profit margin of processed meats may increase. Fresh meat hardly seems to be a source of profit at all, begging the question of how large-scale processors trade with retailers.

7.5.4 Contracted Cooperation

To make a predictable amount of revenue, large-scale meat processors and grocery chains draft contracts for producing specific commodities. Fredrik says that these contracts are imperial for knowing “that there is a market before we produce”. By drafting these contracts, he continues, “we agree [with the retailer] on how much should be produced, the weight of the package, whether there are to be different versions of the product – like different flavors of sausage – and so on”. Such a contract regards such volumes that also the largest meat processors have to dedicate a section of the processing plant to produce these goods, e.g., making and packing self-branded ground meat for a major grocery chain. These meat goods are already priced according to the contract, and the grocery chain “has more or less already paid for these goods [Interview, Fredrik].”

Beyond defining the good and how it will be produced, the contract includes “a target price”. Fredrik explains that such a price “may have to change later, when the good is offered in the store, depending on how the market develops and the costs of production.” The price is thus not fixed, but outlined in terms of the boundaries within which a sufficient price may be set, avoiding loss but also securing the commodity’s aesthetic.
Comparing these contracts to the ones farmers draft with meat processors distinguish an important difference. A “cooperative” contract counteracts boundaries of incommensurability, because the involved parts know the costs of production and pricing activities used up-and downstream from the wholesale market. The farmers, in contrast, have no such insight and more-or-less have to choose from pre-defined defined contracts.

The important difference between small- and large-scale producers in the wholesale market is the predictability of their pricing activities. Economies of scale enable a predictable supply, implying that small-scale producers have to use pricing activities that may account for sudden changes. Consequently, the large-scale producers supply a greater variety of commodity aesthetics, pricing every individual cut type individually. The problem of diminishing revenue is dealt with by producing prepared meats, making profits from other selling goods than fresh meat. These goods are priced dearer, displaying a more exclusive, or less price-sensitive, commodity aesthetic. Doing so also obscures the revenue made on these goods, using the fresh meat prices as when defining quotas. This discrepancy is also present within the same operation, as Fredrik explains: “to account for the costs, we sell the meat from our abattoir to our food processing [operation] and compare the price to […] competing offers in the wholesale] market.”

To conclude, a boundary of incommensurability implies a power-asymmetry because it inhibits one producer from influencing the pricing activity in a given market relationship so that it reflects the production costs. Laws and standards intended to generate transparency in pricing, even if they are applied in the most diligent manner in an individual market, may be futile or even misleading under such circumstances (cf., e.g., Fligstein 2001:228–30). The incommensurability is produced by inhibiting a common denominator of the economies in the markets along the supply chain. Such a denominator may however be generated if producers are open and loyal to each other, or by a contract that grants insight into their buyers or sellers’ pricing activities.

Turning to the retail market for meat, the hitherto findings suggest that fresh meat does not really hold an economic value, let alone make any profits.

7.6 Pricing in the Retail Markets for Meat

The goods that processors sell end up in deli counters and meat coolers in retail outlets. Here, the goods are marketed and sold to customers on a day-to-day basis. In contrast to the markets for animals and wholesale meat, retail engages with “consumer markets”, where the buyers do not resell their purchases (White 1981a). In Swedish meat retail, there are multiple markets; niche and mainstream meat commodities, sold in grocery chain stores, butchers’ shops, and direct from farm to the customer. These markets do overlap, but distinguishing them enables an explanation of how some goods are priced high, and others low, and how the pricing activities are part of
earning revenue. In the following sections, I show how mainstream retailers price fresh meat to use commodity aesthetics as a marketing tool, and niche ones counteract such pricing using production costs as a criterion for a sufficient price. I first cover how retailers supply their stores, and thereafter how the meat is marketed.

7.6.1 Stocking the Store

Simon and Anton buy premium grade meat for their butcher’s shop from a distinguished, but mainstream, supplier. Anton reasons that “if we would just supply the same things all the time – then we would just be like any supermarket – so we have to go for their ‘best stuff’.” To get those best cuts of meat:

We have to be the first ones [at the suppliers’ facility] in the morning and pay the most […] because they [the meat processors] treat you like you should feel honored for [being allowed to] buy from them. [Interview, Anton]

These grades of meat are “really expensive – but that is what we have to get to sell the best [meat] – we cannot go for second tier”. Simon later adds:

That way, we are a bit different from other shops who have been around for a long time, they have their regular suppliers – we had to build it all from scratch, so we must play according to their rules. [Interview]

The prices that Simon and Anton have to manage when buying from their suppliers seems like a textbook example of status pricing; they pay for being part of the trade. This pricing activity engenders a hierarchy between buyer and seller (cf. Aspers 2009:116–18). That status order also implies that their supplier produces a boundary of incommensurability. Simon and Anton do not know what the supplier paid for these meats, nor where they can get hold of the same qualities for a lower price. In effect, they pay more than anyone else to get the meat they want. While they set steep prices in their shop, they also admit: “our salaries are more or less like a student loan.”

Simon and Anton make up an extreme case, but it shows what it means to lack transparency into upstream markets’ pricing activities – in the same manners as the farmers. Simon and Anton have little means of negotiating or contending their prices, inhibited from affecting how the pricing activity valuates their status or the meat they buy (see also Çalışkan 2007).

This case implies the relationship between commodity aesthetic and boundaries of incommensurability. As the production process and the costs of

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107 A student loan, at the time of this interview, was (including subsidy) 9004 SEK per 4 weeks (CSN 2016:4). The national relative poverty threshold in 2014 was 11495 SEK (disposable income) per month (based on SCB 2016:21, 26–27). In 2010 economic subsidies were awarded those with a disposable income below ca. 8750 SEK in the urban areas (Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare 2013:13). While these numbers are only illustrative for the quote, they have the overall effect of indicating the small salaries that Anton and Simon make.
production are obscured, the price can only be related to the commodity aesthetic and what Simon and Anton can ask for it in retail trade. Their competence in valuating meat quality is of little help beyond refusing substandard meat. Lacking any insight into the production process, and its costs of production, they are left to aesthetic valuations of the commodity at hand. The expensive supply on one hand forces Simon and Anton to ask steep prices, on the other hand enables them to resemble a premium outlet by asking these prices. The revenue, however, is small.

To have a network of suppliers is useful for stocking a store, because it enables a producer to influence pricing activities. *Eskil*, who manages a supermarket meat section, has worked in different parts of the Swedish meat supply chain during the last four decades. In contrast to Simon and Anton, he uses day-to-day trade to pay less and make his store resemble an affordable outlet. His “contacts from ‘the butchering business’” is what he nowadays uses, as a retailer, to reduce the costs of buying meat. These contacts let Eskil “know if someone is in trouble – and then you can get some really good deals.” When I ask him to extrapolate on that procedure, he explains:

> I call some old pals [from the processing business], and ask how things are going and then they are in trouble, because they have too much meat, and then we buy it – it is business, plain and simple. [Interview]

This pricing activity uses an aesthetic valuation of the trading parts’ statuses. Eskil gets “the best prices” because he “knows the right people”, implying that the valuation distinguishes a sufficient price based on an asymmetry between buyer and seller. Eskil more or less openly admits that he exploits, or in his own words, “utilizes” suppliers who are “between a rock and a hard place”. However, he also experiences that he “saves them, because I can buy it all [their goods].” What Eskil does is that he offers a solution to these meat processors’ problem of diminishing revenue. The pricing activity makes a low price into a sufficient one, because it is closer to the production costs than no price at all. Such low prices may possibly lead to bankruptcy for the processor in the long run, but at Eskil at least saves the day.

Day-to-day trade thus opens up for boundaries of incommensurability, given that only the qualities both trading parts agree on in the active negotiation are priced. In this last example, the seller has small chances of negotiating the price as Eskil knows he is the only one offering a price at all. The weaker part has no means of testing the sufficiency of the price beyond the alternative of refusing the deal. Large-scale retailers do, however, depend on more predictable pricing activities than those in day-to-day trade, using standardized orders.

### 7.6.2 Standardized Orders

The contracts large-scale processors draw with grocery store chains – cooperative or not – make the pricing activities different from the above day-
to-day deals. Yngve, who manages fresh produce development for a major grocery chain, explains how such contracts are drafted from a retailer’s perspective: “we work, as all major chains, with ‘commodity windows’. These windows are “a time each year when suppliers can propose new commodities to us, and then we review their goods and what they charge for them.” A commodity window is thus open for all kinds of meat goods. However, Yngve reviews these proposed goods as commodities, according to their “prospects for continuous sales” over a longer period of time in “numerous outlets.” While the large-scale meat processors are influential when pricing cattle, commodity windows imply that they still have to abide by the conditions grocery chains dictate for contracting their goods. The grocery chain set a price they find sufficient for the good. While the supplier may negotiate it, they have few competitors to turn to if they do not take up the offer (see also Burch, Dixon, and Lawrence 2013; Cochoy 2010).

“Sometimes,” Yngve continues, “we make a prolonged cooperation with a larger supplier.” In such cases, the processor and retailer “build the concept together, so that it fits most of our stores. Yngve continues, saying: “the price we pay our supplier is part of the deal we make when they [i.e., their goods] get accepted into our system, and then we also have a target price for consumers.” The prolonged cooperation between large-scale processors and supermarkets that these contracts generate do not only set standards for pricing. In addition, these producers also “cooperate, so we can make a more detailed evaluation of prices” in relation to “marketing, sales, and competing commodities [Interview, Yngve].” This example to some extent mirrors Fredrik’s outline of cooperative contracts earlier in this chapter. However, it is made clear here that the grocery chains are approached with offers from the large-scale meat processors, arriving at these cooperative contracts.

The meat processors have to develop the commodity aesthetic, and how it may be produced so that a sufficient price may be set, and hope that it passes the retailers’ aesthetic valuations. The commodity window enables the grocery chain to produce a boundary of incommensurability, as they designate what information that may be supplied in order for them to valuate the commodity’s ability to make revenue. If it does not pass, the good will be absent from retail. At this point, it is evident that the grocery chains do not primarily seek out meat commodities to meet specific consumer demands. Instead, retailers approach the diminishing revenue of meat by selecting only the meat goods that processors propose which resemble marketable commodities – price included. The goods may then become part of the chain’s standardized supply system. Filip, who orders all meat for a smaller grocery chain store, explains how it is done: “it is easy, you have a standard order and then you just change that [according to] what you need […] everything is priced.” The standardized order is a list of commodities, defined by the central office. Filip thus has to
Filip does not, however, set prices himself. Lacking a more senior status, he may not adjust the prices of the grocery chain’s pre-set range of commodities to what he believes the customers are prepared to pay for them. In some cases, a formal approval from Filip’s manager may enable him to change a price, “if we have a lot of meat that will expire soon.” However, the pricing activities of grocery chains are to a large extent removed from the outlet itself, inhibiting the employees from valuating the sufficiency of the prices set.

Lars, whose pricing activities are more independent of the grocery chain’s central office, also imply this boundary of incommensurability between the retail workers and the goods’ economic value:

> We have a set profit margin that we always have to employ when we buy outside the ordering system, […] if we get an audit, the auditor can demand that we change the price so that we do not undercut the regular supply. [Interview]

Pricing activities are, according to this example, not part of retail activities. Instead, the price is supplied together with the good, ensuring it translates the commodity aesthetic into figures when displayed (cf. Barrey 2007). The employees can thus not valuate the sufficiency of a price, because they do not know anything about the production costs. Consequently, they have little insight into the possible revenue made from a specific item, and the margins for changing the price. There are, however, some grocery chain meat managers that set prices themselves, where the pricing activity used by retailers becomes more tangible.

7.6.3 **Marketing Refinement**

Meat is marketed to consumers who, as a group, trade with retailers on a day-to-day basis. In contrast to the other informants from grocery store chains, Eskil and Peter set the prices in the store, because Eskil is involved in developing the chain-wide pricing activities. While possibly an extreme case, their store encompasses both a deli-counter with premium and a large cooler-section with mainstream meat commodities. That combination, however, shows the tension between the respective pricing activities in a distinctive manner.

In the deli counter, Peter explains, they sell “the best meat we got, so they [meat commodities] are also more expensive.” The prices are therefore generally steeper in the deli than the pre-packed section. On that topic, Eskil reasons: “the customers who come to the deli counter, they want something extra, and they are usually prepared to pay for it.” He then exemplifies, using one of the cheaper cuts on the counter: “beef cheeks are quite a novel cut, and
it is dirt cheap to make; the abattoirs do not pay [the farmer] for the head, so it is practically for free.” However, Eskil continues, “we can charge 99 SEK per kg, because those who buy it know that it is trendy to serve beef cheeks and they want such things.” Beef cheeks are, at the time of this interview, not sold as a pre-packed good. This display of beef cheeks as solely a premium good is part of producing its commodity aesthetic. All pre-packed pork and beef in Peter and Eskil’s store (except for certified organic) are cut and packed in the back of the store, they could also market pre-packed beef cheeks.

By selling beef cheeks solely in the deli counter produces a refined commodity aesthetic. While 99 SEK per kg is one of the lower prices in the deli counter, it is still more expensive than significantly more popular commodities. For example, the pre-packed chuck roll in the coolers of the same store is priced at 89 SEK per kg. The pricing activity used to valuate beef cheeks distinguishes it as an exclusive commodity by inflating the price relative to mainstream cuts (cf. Aspers 2009:116–19, 2011:88–92). The synergy between boundaries of incommensurability and commodity aesthetics is telling in this example, as the price is detached from any production costs, just as the meat is detached from its origins, in order to make it resemble the conventionalized aesthetic of exclusivity. Its price translates the aesthetic refinement into figures, affirming the distinguished status of the good. I now turn to pre-packed, mainstream meat to show how prices are set when marketing everyday commodities.

7.6.4 Marketing Thriftiness

The prices on pre-packed meat are significantly lower than in the deli counter, with a different consumer in mind. “Customers”, Eskil states, “find meat expensive”. Therefore, he argues that “discounts for meat are decisive”. To distinguish the store as one with “affordable prices […], you must always have some kinds of meat discounted.” Eskil explains how pricing activities of mainstream meat translate into the aesthetic of both the commodity and the outlet: “you see the ground beef there [for 39 SEK per kg] I do not make any money on that, I practically lose money on that specific item.” Ground meat is thus a good which enables Eskil to distinguish his store as “affordable”, because the discounted meat-good must be “popular, so that it is something that people usually buy.” Consequently, only relatively palatable cut types, or ground meat, may be discounted to distinguish a store as “affordable”. Recalling the meat processors’ pricing activities, they rely on those exact same cuts to make a sufficient revenue on fresh meats. These cuts are not the

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108 As mentioned previously, the carcass is weighed without the head, so a cow or steer with unusually large cheek muscles would not be priced higher.
cheapest to buy in a wholesale market for meat, but the one’s best for making an attractive discount offer.

As Eskil has implied previously in this chapter, he occasionally gets good deals. However, his pricing activity does not only regard if the cost is unusually small, as he prices meat below the wholesale price. Making profits selling the meat is not Eskil’s ambition. He explains that he “discount[s] meat to get people into the store […] because, where you buy your meat – you buy everything else”. He further implies the importance of less palatable, cheap cuts, e.g., oxtails and offal, to imply the store’s affordability to a greater variety of consumers. Such relatively unpalatable commodities are cheap, but are never discounted or actively marketed.

The pricing activity Eskil uses makes the store resemble an “aesthetic of thrift” (Miller 1998:103–4). While Weber’s (2005) protestant ethic frames thrift as investment in the future, Eskil implies that thrift is a commodity aesthetic, cheap but popular goods that his customers purchase to display a “thrifty status”; renown from avoiding spending money without lessened material standards, a kind of “white collar sensibility” (Streib 2015:82–84). Daniel Miller writes in his theory of shopping that “the lack of any relation between the importance of thrift and the levels of income or resources” makes it a “process by which economic activity is used to create a moral framework for the construction of value” (1998:137). By contrast to a refined consumer, a thrifty one is distinguished by her supposed ability to avoid being swayed by marketing. An aesthetic of thrift is thus perceived as the image of rational consumer choice. While low prices could certainly be attractive to poor consumers, Eskil affirms Miller’s argument by repeatedly distinguishing his customers as “ordinary Swedes”. Effectively, it is hard to argue that the thrifty consumer is one of small means, using a critical valuation to survive on a budget (see also Baumann et al. 2017; Lehtonen 1999).

Discounts may be a special case, but this pricing activity is employed throughout the pre-packaged meat sections reviewed in this study and the prices and discounts posted displayed small differences in price. Eskil affirms the use of specifically meat to market thrift by saying: “you never make any money on a meat section – but you should not make a loss on it either – a good meat section breaks even, in the end.” The store’s revenue, Peter puts in, comes from “colonial groceries” and convenience foods, that is where you make the big money.” While money is not made on selling meat directly, the costs of supplying them are neither substituted for by the profits from more prosperous commodity categories (see also, e.g., Burch et al. 2013; Vickner 2015). To market thrift, the meat section as a whole becomes a boundary of incommensurability which obscures the fact that the goods sold do not cover

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109 “Colonial” is grocery store jargon for the category of groceries produced in southern countries historically under colonial rule, e.g., chocolate and coffee.
their production costs. To make profits, the store then increases the prices of commodities where customers are expected to care less about prices.

While fresh meat makes no money, some stores utilize an oversupply to make revenue on convenience foods. Meat managers Diana and Pernilla, respectively, tell me that the store-cooked convenience foods they make in their stores, using meat products that are close to their expiration date, makes a greater revenue than if the same meat would be sold as a fresh cut. Further processing increases the profit margin. Existing studies of food waste find expiry dates etc. to perpetuate the over-production of food (cf. Hawkins 2013; Milne 2013). The systematic use of soon-to-expire meat to for convenience foods reduces waste, but also perpetuates the diminishing revenue of meat production. The increased revenue of convenience foods is thus not taken into account when meat is priced in the wholesale market.

In retail, the problem of diminishing from meat is dealt with by using it as marketing, not even attempting to pay the production costs. A sufficient price is one which makes customers acquire non-meat goods, rather than the meat itself. There is no way for consumers to discern what they actually pay for – and the employees do not necessarily know themselves. The relational coordination of customers and retail workers is thus aestheticized, making prices mirror conventionalized aesthetics which become the statuses’ market actors.

To conclude, the pricing activities of the Swedish meat supply chain show how the markets therein relate to each other. These relationships are especially relevant regarding boundaries of incommensurability, produced when pricing activities disregard how valuations are employed in upstream or downstream markets. The last section of this chapter distinguishes two pricing activities in terms of how they produce a sufficient price, and the effects thereof.

7.7 Pricing Criteria and Aesthetics

In this chapter, I have so far shown how prices are set in the markets along the Swedish meat supply chain. The problem of diminishing revenue relates to the pricing activities, because boundaries of incommensurability may be employed or counteracted in attempts to set a price that generates revenue (in some manner). The pricing activity’s ability to cover the costs of production, and even make a profit, depends on the producer’s ability to influence the pricing activities beyond the one she trades in herself.

The Swedish meat producers’ pricing activities may be distinguished by how they valuate the sufficiency of a price. I borrow the concept “transparent”, and define its antipode as “opaque”, based on Fernand Braudel’s argument that markets favor trade transparency and specialization, while capitalism’s tendency to drive financial speculation favor opacity and hybridization, increasing the number of markets to trade in (1977:49–54). An “opaque
“pricing activity” implies the production of boundaries of incommensurability; withholding or disregarding what qualities that are priced in other markets in the supply chain, effectively obfuscating production costs by setting prices translating commodity aesthetics. In Braudel’s words, such a pricing activity is “speculative”, i.e., a trade strategy used to gamble on future capital gains rather than supplying an existing demand (1977:49–54). A “transparent pricing activity”, in contrast, uses the costs of production as a criterion to set that which enables revenue, attempting to harmonize a demand with their supply (see also Braudel 1983).

7.7.1 Opaque Pricing Activities

In the previous sections of this chapter, I have shown how meat processors and grocery store chains deal with the problem of diminishing revenue by producing boundaries of incommensurability. However, those boundaries do not explain how farmers make revenue by supplying animals for the mainstream supply chain. On the contrary, they raise questions about the prices they are paid. By turning back to the farmers, I distinguish how they deal with the problem of diminishing revenue in the face of opaque pricing activities.

The mainstream farmers are subjected to a boundary of incommensurability, and effectively they have little means of demanding a higher price from their contracted processors. Hog farmer Gunnar concludes his economic situation as: “it is tough, […] we farmers are essentially ‘price takers’, but if I can just improve the efficiency somewhat, I am in ‘the black’110. Being a price taker, a sufficient price is the best offer available, regardless of whether it enables the producer to earn revenue, or even avoid loss. In the beginning of this chapter, I outlined how Gunnar adjusts his hog breeding to maximize profits. At this point, however, it seems like those profits have little to do with the consumer demand for, or market value of, those qualities.

Many Swedish cattle farmers have tried to expand their farms to access further economies of scale, trying to battle the diminishing revenue. Lennart is one of these farmers. By borrowing money and buying neighboring farms when they went out of business, he has stayed in business. While Lennart has increased the turn-around, his income is more or less limited to the Area Grant from the EU, paying for the curation of grazing lands. Lennart shows me his accounting and explains: “this [about 500 000 SEK] is what I get as EU grants each year, which is about how much I can use for salary111.” While these grants offer a predictable income for Lennart personally, they have also made “the prices on land skyrocket.” The issue is that Lennart “bought the neighboring farms when

110 “The black” implies black numbers, i.e., revenue, as opposed to red numbers of loss.
111 Including income tax and employer’s fee, leaving ca. 250,000 SEK in net. salary; roughly equivalent to the salary of a Swedish Ph.D. student at the time.
they were for sale, but it [land] has become too expensive now, I cannot afford to expand any further.” While he has invested further in his farm, it has not had any effect on his ability to make money from meat (and dairy) production, but rather, increased the economic risk.

Lennart’s dependency on the Area Grant\textsuperscript{112} for staying in business distinguish how a farm is tied to its geography, which makes it especially valuable for opaque pricing activities. Lennart’s expansion has been made possible because he convinced the bank of the venture’s economic viability, in order to get a loan. He is aware that the presently low interest rates could possibly enable him to borrow more money for further expansion, but:

> The mortgages would eat through the whole operation if interest rates go up just the slightest bit. […And,] I was the one who bought the other [cattle] farms that went out of business, so there are no neighboring farms left who could buy my farm if I go bankrupt. [Interview, Lennart]

The economic value of Lennart’s business presupposes that someone is willing to pay for it, at least in the event of bankruptcy. With no neighboring farms left, the farm may be unsellable. Contrary to many other kinds of small businesses, a farm cannot be moved to access a better market. While it may seem obvious, it is worth considering that Lennart being a farmer depends on his farm’s staying in business at this exact place.

This geographical tie of the business complicates the personal ties between market actors, which economic sociology has generally used as the object of analysis (cf., e.g., Granovetter 1985; White 1981a, 1981b; Zelizer 2004). What I call the “production site” is limited to the trade relations that are locally available, and effectively constitutes the boundaries of how production practices that may be used to make revenue (see also Schatzki 2002:138–52). The ability to get a sufficient price depends on which meat processors happen to be accessible in proximity to the farm. The Area Grant provides the income keeping Lennart out of personal bankruptcy, but that only enables him to accept a quota which does not generate any profits from production – he still needs a buyer for his goods that pay the production costs.

The farmers among the informants who supply mainstream meat use a vast array of means to afford staying in business, but few can survive solely on their animal breeding. To mention some examples: cattle farmer Karl makes his “salary by working in the forest”, and hog farmer Ragnar makes “needed money from different board engagements and forestry”. Also, Klas and Berit reason that they “have quite a small advance ratio, so we can deal with lower prices for a while, but if we would have been fully mortgaged, we would not

\textsuperscript{112} The subsidy granted for maintaining farmland environment. This grant is not tied to agricultural production. Also see Section 3.2.2.
survive.” When I ask cattle farming consultant Ellinor how you make money on breeding beef cattle in general, she suggest “from small mortgage-rates, because if the quota price rises, so does the feed prices – and you cannot stop feeding the animals.” She also adds that, “many farmers depend on their buildings holding up, in 20 to 30 years they will be worn out and beyond reparation.” Effectively, these farmers comply with opaque pricing activities to the extent that they almost work for free to supply meat, because then they may be able to afford to accept the prices they are offered. The slaughtering contract is thus better explained as a predictable outlet, ensuring that the animals are sold and that the production site is kept operational rather than securing profits (cf. Elster 1989:93–95).

There are, however, producers who, despite producing boundaries of incommensurability themselves, do not earn any revenue. To keep his small-scale processing in business, borrowing money has become a reoccurring financial input for Hasse. He tells me: “I have run this operation for 11 years, but I have not made any money on it yet, I pay the bills, but you have to borrow some more every year, and I never got a salary from it.” Hasse’s lego-slaughtering contract creates a “steady flow of money”, but “in the end, I have to find a way to create a local market, because the lego-contract cannot [by itself] keep us afloat.” While Hasse is still in business, it is certainly hard to imagine that his present lack of revenue will keep him afloat in the long run. Like the farmers, he is also tied to a production site and the possible trade relations offered in a relatively remote area.

Opaque pricing activities enables the use of meat as a marketing tool, because they distinguish an economic value translating the commodity aesthetic rather than the costs of production. The possibility of setting prices in this manner is based on boundaries of incommensurability because they inhibit producers from influencing how prices are set, stressing the effects of which qualities are treated as valuable in a pricing activity. It follows that such opacity especially affects the producers with few competing offers, i.e., the ones that are tied to the most distant and sparsely populated rural areas. To put it crudely, the farmers in the mainstream have no means of making the retailers who ask for sufficiently high prices from them make revenue from breeding animals. Their pricing activities are thus opaque, because the prices are incommensurable to production costs. There is, however, an alternative pricing activity based on transparency.

113 Also keep in mind the small salaries of Simon and Anton mentioned previously in this chapter.
114 A market for locally sourced beef.
115 This impression was also enhanced when Hasse re-scheduled my visit to the processing facility twice, because he had to “go to the bank for an emergency meeting [note from phone call]”.

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7.7.2 Transparent Pricing Activities

Niche producers omit or counteract opaque pricing activities by producing a boundary which distinguishes their own supply chains from the mainstream. They do so following the same course of action as mainstream meat producers do when they build relationships to their buyers or sellers, e.g., cooperative contracts. Niche producers do, however, employ such pricing activities throughout the supply chain. I call these “transparent pricing activities” because they valuate costs of production in manners that make them transpire through the supply chain as criteria for a sufficient price.

Cattle farmers Elin and Robin almost omit the entire mainstream supply chain. Elin explains that they breed their cattle according to “the EU standard for certified organic beef.” These cattle are then slaughtered by Robin in a nearby, small-scale abattoir. They retail their meat in their own store on the farm, and forward them to a few local grocery stores and restaurants.

Producing meat this way: “we set the price we have to, [so] as to make do” Elin explains, and continues:

We [our goods] are of course more expensive than the regular [mainstream meat], not to speak of the imports, so we have to check that the [local] retailers showcase our meat in their shelves and market it accordingly. [Interview]

In the cases Elin and Robin do not sell direct to their customers, they build relations to the retailers counteracting any possibility of opaque pricing. That way, their revenue becomes more predictable despite lacking contracted sales. That is the case because they may secure that the retailer distinguishes the refined aesthetic of their niche goods from the mainstream, enabling them to ask for a steeper price.

As I discuss this business strategy with Elin and Robin, it is made clear that the economic prospects of this production strategy are far from irrelevant. Elin explains: “we are lucky, this farm fits organic production [because] we have enough grazing land and grow may enough silage – we do not have to buy any feed”. Robin further adds: “if you try to ‘go local’, you should be certified organic, because that is what people expect locally produced [meat] to be, and there are certain subsidies for organic farmers.” Again, the production site emerges as an important condition for employing a transparent pricing activity. The site’s constitution distinguishes whether a farm may adhere to a production regime that is awarded a brand or an economic premium, including access to more markets. While farming consultant Ellinor previously suggested that feed prices co-vary with quota prices, Elin and Robin are independent of the feed market and thus also less vulnerable to opaque pricing activities in that regard.

To opt out of mainstream meat processing is to actively maintain a transparent supply chain, in order to know that all segments of it may stay in business in a predictable manner. Walter runs a niche processing business with his sons.
which he tells me is “profitable – because we are the best at what we do.” He further implies this profitability, by suggesting I look at the exclusive cars in the company’s parking lot.

While Walter sometimes sells meat to grocery chain stores, he primarily supplies butchers’ shops and other exclusive outlets. He explains: “I have been in this business for more than 50 years, so I know quality, and so do my sons because I trained them. That experience is why he utilizes pricing in a transparent manner: “you seem to know ‘the industry’ so then you know that the ‘dragons’ do not bother with quality.” Quality is the key word for Walter, because “if you have good farmers – which I do – and pay them for delivering quality, then they will do that – that is how ‘business’ works”. I ask in return what he pays to get such “quality”. Walter somewhat avoids the question, but says: “I ask the farmers; if they ‘know their shit’ then they can give you an estimate.” Walter further explains that he has worked with a small number of farmers, and delivered to a limited number of premium retailers, for a long time. He stresses their interdependency, saying: “the ‘guys’ who sell [retail] my meat pays [for it] according to quality, so they must excel at marketing if I should bother supplying someone ‘green’ [a newbie].” Just as Elin and Robin, Walter maintains relations along the supply chain and enables transparency for his suppliers and buyers, both regarding costs of production and the prices they have to ask of consumers. These relations enable him to distinguish a criterion that represents a common good; the shared financial survival of these producers.

In both these examples, the consumer markets are not left to their own pricing activities. The suppliers’ markets have to be related to the consumer market to ensure that the primary producer make a profit, and that the meat is not priced solely as a means of marketing. However, it is also evident that the niche producers depend on producing a refined commodity aesthetic to set prices that cover production costs for the entire supply chain. A mainstream commodity seems impossible to sell at a price that covers production costs according to this critical valuation. Butcher’s shop keeper Kent’s depends on his supplying goods that are distinct from those in mainstream retail to set prices that are steep enough.

I have a supermarket down the street, and they advertise pork tenderloin at 59 SEK per kg right now – Swedish! [Hence,] there is no reason for me to sell a regular tenderloin, which I would have to charge three times that price for – why bother?! [Interview]

The suckling pig tenderloin from a small-scale farm he markets “is expensive for pork, but my customers do not come here to save money, they come out of curiosity or that they want something better than the supermarket can provide.” The tenderloin comes from a farmer Kent knows, and the price “is what it costs to produce that kind of meat on a farm which people would actually like to visit.”
To conclude, transparent pricing activities distinguish prices as sufficient because they pay for the costs of production. This study cannot draw any conclusions about profits made from niche production, nor compare them to the mainstream. However, contrary to existing studies of high-end symbolic markets, refined commodity aesthetics seem to have a greater possibility to use pricing activities where a sufficient price covers the costs of production. The low prices of thriftiness may save money for the consumer, but do seem more aesthetically distorted in relation to production costs than the more distinguished, niche producer alternative (cf. Beckert and Rössel 2013; Beckert, Rössel, and Schenk 2017). Niche production is dependent on the individual primary producers staying in business, using a specific production site. Large-scale mainstream producers, on the contrary, may change suppliers to lower the costs of production as much as possible (see also Burch and Lawrence 2005; Hattersley et al. 2013; cf. Bjerhammar 2011).

7.8 Conclusion: Making Money

In this chapter, I show that the problem of diminishing revenue is dealt with through the use of two different pricing activities; the opaque one, producing “boundaries of incommensurability” by employing aesthetic valuations, and the transparent one counteracting those same boundaries using critical valuations. To set prices that cover production costs in a critical manner, niche producer’s frame their critical valuations with refined commodity aesthetics. Turning to the general scope of this study, the following (preliminary) conclusions may be drawn at this point.

First, that the production of an abundant foodstuff is perpetuated by producing it as something else than a market good, traded to make a profit. Meat, I find, is generally produced as a marketing tool or as a means of keeping the production site operational. This use of meat is implied further by how low prices distinguish a commodity’s aesthetic as a symbol of thrift. Existing studies of price formation in consumer markets generally study high-brow symbolic goods used to distinguish an elite consumer and supplier (cf., e.g., Beckert and Rössel 2013; Beckert et al. 2017; Johnston and Baumann 2010:182–201; see also Peterson and Kern 1996). The findings here suggest that “low brow” commodities are equally aestheticized. The production of abundance may thus be perpetuated by treating limited spending as an aesthetic value, which also makes low prices valuable for the consumers who can afford more expensive commodities. The price must resemble what a thrifty person would pay, regardless of whether the good fulfills any relevant criteria. This insight questions existing research on meat consumption, which I previously suggested to be paradoxical, arguing that meat is regarded as a dangerous and immoral food when eaten in unprecedented quantities. The

116 Also see Section 2.1.3.
abundance of meat rather seems to enhance the positive status of meat. Being both affordable and a sign of wealth, the positive status of meat becomes that of rationality and economic sensibility – the image of raw intelligence rather than bodily strength.

The second conclusion is methodological, finding that studying an individual market may not explain the valuation of a good, because the pricing activity therein may be distorted by boundaries of commensurability. Producers in other markets, who depend on and may affect the pricing must also be taken into consideration. This becomes evident especially when standards are used to set prices objectively, but the criteria used to distinguish a sufficient price is not indicative of the qualities that are priced in a consumer market, where the money which can be used as revenue flows into the supply chain.

With these findings in mind, the perpetuation of abundance is further explained. Fresh meat is not produced as a market good to make a profit or revenue from. Effectively, the quantities of meat are not reduced from abundance to sufficient levels despite netting a loss, or at least not any profit. Opaque pricing activities set prices that “commercialize” trade, which makes exchange in itself a goal rather than a means of market distribution, in line with Braudel (1977:44–47, see also 1983). Commerce thus becomes a conventionalized aesthetic of market exchange, distinguished before profits from selling a good. Because the costs of production are not used as a criterion when setting prices in commerce, this aesthetic becomes a boundary of incommensurability. Primary producers’ costs of production are not covered by, nor influence, the pricing activities in retail. Customers, consequently, do not know what they actually pay for. Abundant production is perpetuated, because the existing pricing activities may not refuse the production of goods that do not cover their production costs. The market equilibrium does not occur, because meat is not supplied to meet a demand for this particular good (cf. Lancaster 1966). However, the economic reality may of course force primary producers into bankruptcy in the long run, so abundance may not be perpetuated indefinitely in this manner. At this point, it seems like Swedish meat is supplied in abundance despite being unappreciated by consumers to the extent that prices that cover production costs cannot be asked. These findings raise the question how Swedish meat producers find these kinds of activities worthwhile, which the following chapter explores.
8 Recognizing Responsibility

[Regular] people don’t seem to understand what cattle farming means – they don’t have a damn clue!

- Karl, cattle farmer

It becomes evident to me during fieldwork that Swedish meat producers, especially farmers, struggle with the impression that their contribution to the rest of society is neglected and misunderstood. Karl implies this experience in the above quote, exclaiming in red-faced anger that “people” are ignorant and incompetent, because they do not recognize the value of Swedish cattle farming. The values Karl refers to are “all the environmental services,\textsuperscript{117} animal welfare, and such things [that] no one seems to remember that we provide.” Cattle farming is thus valuable for Karl because it contributes to the common good of Swedish society. However, Karl does not experience that Swedish farmers are recognized for the responsibility they take supplying these services. This lack of recognition is what I call “the problem of disrespect”. Axel Honneth (1996) defines “recognition” in opposition to disrespect to explore the moral grammar of social conflicts. By utilizing these two concepts, this chapter explores the Swedish meat producers’ valuations of responsibility. By studying their emotional experiences of recognition and disrespect, this chapter explains how supplying fresh meat in abundance is valuable for Swedish meat producers, despite the issues of doing so.

8.1 Approaching the Problem of Disrespect

Meat production, at least farming and meat processing, is seldom held in high esteem, but rather perceived as a “dirty job”. In existing studies of such jobs, the negative experience of these workers stem from public images of scorned, morally tainted, and practically messy activities (e.g., Thompson 1983; Kidder 2006: 39; Pachirat 2011; Gjerris & Klingenberg 2012; Gamborg 2012). The important insight such studies provide is that the workers deal with disrespect by distinguishing their vocation as a collective, positive “we”, internally recognizing each other as sufficiently responsible persons (Ashforth & Kreiner 1999; Ashforth et al. 2007; see also Becker 1966: 95-100). Rural studies similarly suggest that remote areas are spaces of resistance,

\textsuperscript{117} A way of saying “eco-systems services” reoccurring throughout the empirical materials.
counteracting urban majority culture (Macken-Walsh 2016:619–21; Shucksmith and Brown 2016:663–66; Woods 2016). Complementing existing studies, this chapter shows how neglect – rather than scorn or aggression – makes meat producers feel disrespected, but that it does not provoke any form of practical resistance. A further contribution is showing the role of responsibility in material production.

By studying how Swedish meat producers deal with the problem of disrespect, I make the following argument: Whether or not a meat producer experiences recognition is intimately related to how she valuates producers’ responsibility. By investigating how aesthetic and critical valuations distinguish a responsible producer from an irresponsible one, this chapter shows the values of supplying an abundant foodstuff; either generating the aesthetics of commerce or to supply Swedish meat production as a common good. These values explain how Swedish meat producers make it meaningful to perpetuate the production of abundance, instead of terminating their operations.

In this chapter, I first define the concept “recognition” and how it relates emotions to valuations of responsibility. The producers’ valuations of their own and other producers’, consumers’, Swedish society’s responsibility-taking makes up the main analysis. Those episodes show how valuations are used to deal with disrespect or attaining recognition. In the final part, I turn to the aesthetic and critical values of supplying Swedish meat, and how they make it meaningful to perpetuate the supply of an abundant foodstuff.

8.2 Recognition: Responsibility and Emotions

Beyond problems of over-production and diminishing revenue, abundance means that production activities may be treated as excessive, because there are more of them than demanded. By becoming recognized, a producer may experience that she supplies meat or animals that place themselves in the sufficient part of abundance. “Recognition” means that a producer is treated as (capable of) being responsible (Honneth 1996:92–93, 109–13; cf. Lamont 2002). That experience is affirmed by positive emotions, which makes the producer feel recognized.

Honneth outlines a pragmatic theory of recognition, drawing on George Herbert Mead’s understanding of the self, which is: “realized in its relationship to others. It must be recognised to have the very values which we want to have belong to it” (Mead in Honneth 1996:86). This social realization of the self is coupled with the concept of “production” in Marx’s early writings, which leads Honneth to the conclusion:

The word “recognition” is a translation of the German word “anerkennung”. To “recognize” individuals or groups is to ascribe to them some positive status” (Anderson in Honneth 1996:viii).
 [...in producing, one not only realizes oneself (in gradually objectifying one’s individual abilities) but also, at the same time, affectively recognizes all of one’s interaction partners, since one anticipates them to be needy co-subjects. (1996:147, italics added)

Productive activities of Swedish meat producers, it follows, are tied to the condition that producers experience themselves as responsible, and therefore worthy of recognition. By valuating responsibility, a producer may distinguish that she is worthy of recognition. It follows that such a valuation may also recognize or disrespect others for their ability (or inability) to take responsibility. “Positive feelings such as joy or pride” demarcate whether the responsibility is also recognized by others (Honneth 1996:135–39, quote on p. 136).

Honneth’s theory of recognition implies that emotions are practically “fostered” or “evoked” in practice (see also Burkitt 1997:42–98; Hochschild 1979; Schatzki 2001b:60–61). Feelings are thus not purely cognitive states, but part of shared practical routines. It should however be stressed that such feelings do not have to be fostered mild-manneredly. Pride, for example, may certainly be fostered in aggressive and extroverted ways. There is further no way of distinguishing a delusoryary experience of recognition from a sober one; they will seem equally real for the person in question.

Honneth’s antipode to recognition is disrespect, which “injures [any] positive understanding of [oneself]” (1996:131). This experience is demarcated by “anger, indignation, and sorrow” which implies that someone who finds herself taking responsibility experiences lacking or absent recognition. In the following sections, I analyze the informants’ valuations of responsibility, stressing how they use emotional experiences to distinguish recognition and disrespect, and responsible from irresponsible conduct.

8.3 Recognition in Practice

Recognition is experienced in practical conduct, where responsibility-taking enables Swedish meat producers to feel good about what they do, and also mitigate or counteract disrespect. The first section below concerns how

119 Other studies have distinguished the fostering of feelings in this manner. Positive emotions such as “thrill” (Kidder 2006) and “pride” (Perry 1998) have been used to explain how some disrespected trades keep up what they do. In a more general sense, the maintenance of positive emotions to avoid “boredom” (Roy 1953, 1959; Thompson 1983) or fend of “stigma” been shown (Ashforth & Kreiner 1999). There are certainly also “feeling practices” involved in work which mean to evoke or suppress certain feelings, as a part of the job (Hochschild 1979).

120 The word “disrespect” is translated from the German word “mißachtung”, which means “not merely a failure to show proper deference” but includes anything between willful neglect or ignorance to physical assault (Anderson in Honneth 1996:viii).
recognition is experienced in valuations of responsibility. In the following section, I turn to experiences of disrespect.

8.3.1 Recognition and Responsibility

Swedish meat producers seek recognition for taking certain responsibilities. For example, cattle farmer Arvid holds the impression that he “feeds the people”, which makes him feel recognized in the following manner. This impression fosters positive feelings, which Arvid explains to me in a calm, but passionate manner: “it feels good to know that you ensure that people have food”. What Arvid implies here is that he knows that meat from his farm ends up on people’s dinner tables. From this impression, he extrapolates the responsibility that farmers take in Swedish society: “we [in Sweden] need to have farmers, if we do not have food, morality disappears [...] in bread queues [in the USSR], people could steal a loaf of bread from a child!”. When Arvid relates to peoples’ ability to take responsibility in their food procurement, he also makes his farm part of the moral base of Swedish society. Effectively, he feels recognized by the experience his cattle breeding operation has in taking responsibility for the Swedish people’s moral character, because he feeds them.

Arvid contrasts this recognition with his experience of disrespect from Swedish public authorities:

Honestely, I think that we [the Swedes] are off the rails when it comes to food – and national defense. Look at all the other EU countries – we are the only ones who do not have a plan for self-sufficiency in a time of war! [Interview]

When Arvid distinguishes these policies as “off the rails”, he poses them in contrast to the value of farming activities. The disrespect from government institutions is this proof for Arvid that these do not live up to the criteria of sufficient policy. His valuation of the Swedish government concludes that it acts irresponsibly. The relation to national defense is telling, suggesting that farmers are politically neglected for both feeding the people and contributing to national sovereignty, in other words, for attaining the common good. Arvid’s valuation thus disrespects the government, because of the irresponsibility it shows when failing recognize those who fulfill the criteria of the common good. In this manner, Arvid may reassure himself that he takes responsibility worthy of recognition despite the present neglect.

Retailers, in contrast to Arvid, get recognized in immediate, personal interaction with customers. The importance of personal interaction is implied as I talk to Lars, the meat-section manager of a larger grocery chain store, about marketing imported meat. Such commodities have been routinely criticized for putting Swedish producers out of business, and that they come from destructive production regimes. Lars spontaneously defends his choice to sell imported meat, saying: “it is important that we can cater to all income groups.” To have a broad group of customers is important to Lars, who values
running “a store for everybody [because] that is what we are.” Lars uses imported meats to display as broad a selection of meat commodities as possible, marketing meat “that our financially weakest customers can afford.” The way he talks about and addresses consumers implies that he feels responsible for supplying as heterogeneous a group as possible. By selling cheaper, imported meat, he feels that he takes on that responsibility. The feeling stems from the impression that customers are present in the store, and that they buy these goods, i.e., recognizing both Lars and the store he works in.

In both these examples, the producers distinguish responsibility by valuating how they may be recognized. Arvid’s valuation uses a common good and certain explicit criterion, while Lars attempts to resemble a store for all customers by marketing as wide a selection of meat as possible. He attempts to get as many customers into the store as possible, but distinguishes this value in aesthetic terms: “what we are”. There is further no criterion that explicitly defines a successful “store for everyone”, neither a failed one. This wording may sound like a critical justification, but “for everyone” is not a common good, it is the commercial aesthetic the store attempts to display. An absence of consumers, it follows, would not resemble the conventional aesthetic of commerce.

8.3.2 Dealing with Disrespect

A disrespected producer is refused recognition for the responsibility she experiences herself taking, distinguished by, e.g., resignation, boredom, or outright anger. While disrespect may come in many forms, neglect is how it primarily shows in the Swedish meat supply chain.

Cattle farmer Benny tells me about how he once dealt with disrespect from his former, large-scale, processor: “the [large-scale] slaughtering industry is just a circus.” Using vivid gestures and speaking in an almost oratory manner, he continues by saying that this “circus” evoked “the feeling that the cuts go a thousand different directions – [that activity] takes away the identity of the meat!” The obfuscation of Benny’s cattle breeding in mainstream meat processing made him feel neglected. That feeling implied disrespect both for the quality of the meat that Benny supplies, and the responsibility he finds himself taking as a farmer. To counteract the disrespect, Benny once terminated a contract which involved a “long and expensive” judicial process. However, Benny now argues that it was “necessary” because he “could not stand it anymore”. In this example, Benny counteracted the disrespect he experienced from a boundary of incommensurability, implying the social and emotional effects thereof. Benny actively dealt with the problem of disrespect by abstaining from a neglectful producer, in contrast to Arvid, who dismisses the moral soundness of current policy, but has yet to resist it practically.
Disrespect is, however, also a problem for retailers. Kent runs his own butcher’s shop, where he sells premium-quality meat. In that operation, he deals with the threat of being neglected in a different manner than Benny – but for the same reason.

I do not want to make enemies with them [the suppliers] without a good “case”, because it will come back to me. At the moment, they are very helpful and pick the best cuts for me. If I start to whine, they will just think “oh no, it is Kent again, I don’t care, just send something.” […] I learned that the hard way from [previous, high end supplier] that if I whine, it [the supplier relation] will become a catastrophe. So, you have got to swallow [your pride, when you are dissatisfied] and just deal with it. [Interview, Kent]

Kent experiences that his prior supplier neglected his “needs”, and that his “whining” made them stop caring about what they delivered to him, which he now holds in mind. The present supplier’s helpfulness recognizes Kent’s responsibility to market the supplier’s meat and effectively contribute to both their businesses. However, since doing and saying the wrong things can threaten the recognition, Kent now takes the experience that suppliers do not recognize “whiners” into regard in order to avoid disrespect. If Kent’s relationship with his supplier would turn sour, they would not stop the deliveries – but they would possibly disrespect his requests for certain qualities of meat, or ask steeper prices.

In the two hitherto examples, disrespect emerges primarily as neglect, and is dealt with by terminating relations with the producers who the informants experienced neglected them. In both examples, boundaries of incommensurability battle to become recognized. Neglectful buyers or sellers mean lacking transparency beyond the individual market in both cases. For Benny, neglect mean disrespecting the criteria he fulfills as a farmer, taking responsibility for quality and the production regime. For Kent, in contrast, neglect means inhibiting his ability to resemble a high-end outlet, possibly hurting sales or the customers’ recognition of his store.

8.4 The Recognition of Animal Welfare

The care for animals, and the distinction of “Swedish meat production” from foreign regimes, is possibly the clearest example of how Swedish meat producers valuate responsibility. A producer may experience recognition for animal welfare from other people, and from the animals themselves (cf. Holmberg 2011; see also Mol, Moser, and Pols 2010; Molander 2011). I first show how recognition is experienced in the practice of caring for animals and then how “Swedish animal welfare” is distinguished as the responsible production regime, in contrast to “foreign” ones.
8.4.1 Recognition and Disrespect in Animal Husbandry

Taking care of animals is an activity in which some producers feel recognized. Cattle farmer Freja, for example, “cares for them [cattle]” by “reading how they feel [and] seeing to it that they are fed and feel well.” The caring practice means that she is present and active in the cattle’s physical environment. This use of the production site to feel recognized includes the cattle having “enough space to roam […] and consort with their buddies [Field note, Freja].” By arranging such an environment, Freja finds that the cattle are responsibly cared for, affirmed by them being “calm and pleasant”, having “lively eyes”, and “eat[ing] their feed”. This episode is a critical valuation of responsibility. While using many visual components, Freja clearly distinguishes certain criteria that a sufficiently cared-for animal fulfills, and responsibilities a farmer performs routinely maintain by fulfilling them. Her valuation of the animals’ behavior then affirms that she is worthy of recognition, attaining the common good.

To care for animals demands that the farmer in question evoke affectionate feelings that translate into practice (see also Bock et al. 2007). Freja and her husband Arvid show how such affection is fostered first hand, as I am shown around their premises. A calf delivered the previous night lays in the hay in one of the stables. He is still sticky from the birth process. The messiness of the scene is amplified by the placenta lying next to him in the litter. This scene might seem gruesome; it is a mess of blood, excrement, and fetal substances. Freja and Arvid, however, look in a dreamy way at the calf. Arvid says: “you [as an interested outsider] should know, that this is what it is all about!”, effectively underlining the feelings of recognition this experience fosters. Freja, who aided the cow during delivery, adds that “it was a long night, sure, but it is all worth it when you see this, when you get to be a part of this.”

Beef cattle (and hogs) are cared for with their planned deaths in mind, which is important for the care practice. Arvid later points this out by saying: “sure, there is nothing pleasant with an abattoir, but that makes it even more important that our cattle are cared for up until the end.” The coming slaughter is not a threat against the animals’ welfare, but a reminder of the farmer’s responsibility to care for them until the end (see also Bock et al. 2007; cf. Holmberg 2011; Redmalm 2013). The common good of caring for animals does not mean a long life for the creatures, but as good of one as possible as long as it lasts. Freja and Arvid show that they experience themselves recognized by their livestock by stressing the warm feelings fostered by taking care of them. The fact that they decide on their cattle’s death is a part of that impression, rather than a threat against it.

Recognition from animal husbandry demands that the producer takes responsibility for her animals, all the way until the end. A caring end is supposed to be “humane”, which means tending to the animals’ needs as much as minimizing their pain and suffering at the moment of slaughter (see also
Holmberg 2011:154–58). Hence, meat producers who mistreat animals in any part of the supply chain are disrespected.

Hog farmer Kerstin implies that any maltreatment of her hogs in the abattoir would disrespect her care for them: “when you have given everything […] you want them [the hogs] to have it as good as possible until the end – or what’s the point?!” Kerstin finds that her care “would have been for nothing” if that were to happen. To forward her hogs to such a processor (even unknowingly) would mean that she wronged her hogs. The meat processor’s (hypothetical) disrespect would cast a long shadow over Kerstin’s ability to take on responsibility. The recognition she experiences giving her hogs a “good life” would be threatened, or even destroyed, if they would get a painful end. Talking to one of the stable hands in the stables at Gustav’s cattle processing facility, he displays this same disrespect for maltreatment of animals: “if someone ever kicks or hits a cow he re, he is gone the next day […] if you do that, you never get to work in a decent abattoir again [field note].” The disrespect for an irresponsible producer thus translate into practical effects, removing her from the supply chain altogether.

In these examples, critical valuations of responsibility are used to distinguish those who fulfill criteria of animal welfare in the supply chain, translating into the routine work of farmers and stablehands. An irresponsible producer, it is implied, is one incapable of fulfilling these criteria – despite the reason. Consequently, the production activities of such a meat producer is distinguished as excessive. The following section further develops the criteria of animal welfare, and how it may also be aesthetically valuated.

8.4.2 Standards and Aesthetics of Responsibility

Up to this point, caring has been outlined as an activity in the production of meat, where recognition comes from (sufficiently) caring animal husbandry. Recognition is, however, experienced not only from animals themselves, but for adhering to the Swedish Statute on Animal Welfare (SAW).\(^\text{121}\) The informants of this study distinguish “Swedish” animal welfare as “strict”. This word implies “greater” demands for individual space and activity for animals, high levels of attention for each animal, and low antibiotic use. These qualities of animal breeding are further combined with sustained trust in the public institutions auditing food security and animal welfare (see also Hoffman 2000; Kjaernes et al. 2007:146, 185).

Valuating the fulfillment of criteria implied by SAW distinguishes Swedish meat producers, particularly farmers, as responsible in contrast to foreign suppliers. Cattle farmer Karl distinguishes Swedish farmers as particularly responsible in this manner, saying: “I do not think that they [foreign producers] get it [animal welfare] the way we do in Sweden, [I mean] how

\(^{121}\) See also Sections 3.1-3.2.
animals ought to live good lives.” Karl further distinguishes SAW as “just intuitive […] animals are beings and they should have good lives – that is what it [SAW] is about.” This topic spurs an emotional reaction for Karl, who then bursts out: “I get enraged when I hear about maltreatment [of animals]!” As the reaction implies, Karl feels disrespected by the fact that some meat producers mistreat animals because it is irresponsible to even unknowingly violate SAW. He further distinguishes the value of SAW as indicative of a common good by describing how he told off an acquaintance (who is uninvolved in meat production) at a BBQ party for bringing Danish pork. Karl was unusually provoked by this acquaintance, since this scenario happened “right after their [Danish hog farmers’] illegal tail clippings were all over the news.” Concluding this topic, he stresses that “those people [who mistreat animals] lack stockmanship – they should not work with animals!”

In the above episode, Karl’s valuation rests on the assumption that a farmer with stockmanship intuitively fulfills criteria that makes him or her fulfill the criteria implied by SAW, whether she operates in Sweden or not. Using SAW this way, Karl distinguishes “Swedish animal welfare” as the only way a responsible producer would breed animals, despite cultural context.

This use of SAW as a standard of responsibility is further distinguished, and explained, by farming consultant Britt and cattle farmer Lennart when they use the exact same phrase, independent of each other: “It [SAW] is based on science – that makes it the only one [animal welfare legislation] in the world.” Consequently, those who violate SAW are more or less objectively irresponsible, violating a scientifically proven common good. Consequently, the critique of other production regimes may be explicit and define exactly how they may change from irresponsible to responsible production activities (cf. Boltanski and Thévenot 1999).

So how do the producers downstream from farmers valuate animal welfare? Since retailers and meat processors (beyond abattoir stables) do not encounter live animals, they rely on indirect reassurances of responsible breeding. Filip, the smaller supermarket meat manager, valuates responsibility by distinguishing the Swedish Meat-brand: “we [major grocery chain] mostly sell Swedish meat, since then you know that the animals had a good life.” When I ask Filip what such a “good life” means, he tentatively outlines it as: “you know, they [the animals] get to be outside, and they have more space to roam and a better environment; it’s not industrial.” Filip seemingly lacks a firm understanding of how animal husbandry is practiced at a farm. However, he is convinced that the Swedish Meat-brand guarantees both sufficient and trustworthy care for the animals; the counterpart to “industrial” production.

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122 Stockmanship (Swe: djuröga) is the almost magical skill to read the behavior, including the subtest cues, of animals to understand whether they suffer from any maladies or other kinds of problems. While it can be taught to others, it demands long training in a small and informal setting and seems to involve some kind of congenital disposition (Ledin and Lema 1997).
He is thus assured about recognizing the responsible primary producers. The *Swedish Meat*-brand makes the commodities resemble the conventionalized aesthetic of animal welfare and effective responsibility.

The aforementioned recognition of the *Swedish Meat* brand shows an aesthetic valuation of responsibility in retail. To take responsibility there, attempting to be recognized, thus translates into practice in a quite different manner from the farmers above. *Lars*, in his attempt to cater to all groups of consumers, tells how he at one point dealt with disrespect from customers. Some of the customers frequenting Lars’s meat section created a Facebook campaign to criticizing the store for selling Danish pork. This campaign, he tells me, also made customers more inclined to “confront the employees” working in the meat section: “it is not fun […] when customers walk up to my colleagues and attack them for selling ‘antibiotics meat’ […] and threaten to stop shopping here.” The emotional parts of retailing activities surface when customers show their disrespect, rather than when animals are supposedly maltreated. As Lars attempts to run “a store for everyone”, he had to supply some other meat with an affordable price but which the critical customers would recognize.

The *Swedish Meat*-brand is assumed to indicate low antibiotics use, a fact important for how Lars dealt with the aforementioned issues (cf. Hoffman 2000). When these critical customers disrespected Lars because of the Danish producers’ antibiotics use, he changed to Finnish pork. “Finnish meat” he explains further “is the best after Sweden’s [in the EU] when it comes to [restrictive] antibiotics use.” To prove this fact to his customers, Lars has a diagram of antibiotics usage in the EU available in his office (which does not differentiate between antibiotics used for humans and animals, I notice). He seems proud of this solution, and the protests of the customers seems to have disappeared.

Lars’s valuation distinguishes his customers’ disrespect for antibiotics use in relation to the meat’s commodity aesthetic. Changing to meat from Finland, and explicitly marketing the low antibiotics use of Finnish producers imitates the aesthetic supplied by Swedish meat. Imitating the aesthetic of responsibility does not mean that criteria of responsibility are not fulfilled, but doing so does not relate to a common good. Instead, criteria fulfillment becomes a value in itself, treated as an intrinsic value. Lars attempt to resemble a conventionalized aesthetic of responsibility in this manner should not be seen as a cynical measure to dupe his customers. It is better seen as an attempt to adjust to their demands, given that he is restricted to aesthetically valuating what commodities he believes they will recognize. As customers return to the store, Lars also feels recognized by the experience that he managed to get the outlet to resemble a commercial space.

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123 Imitating conventionalized aesthetics of responsibility, e.g., environmental sustainability, is sometimes called “greenwashing” or “whitewashing”.
It is further important to point out that other national origins are valuated differently than Swedish and Finnish when it comes to an aesthetic of responsibility. Retail consultant Christer stresses this symbolic power of national origin, as he complains: “most Swedes […] would not even touch steak from Poland, which is the rising star in premium beef production.” By supplying commodities which resemble “Swedish” meat, the retailer may be recognized as responsible, while obscuring what responsibilities primary producers actually take.

To conclude, “Swedish” meat and animal welfare shows how critical aesthetic valuations are in distinguishing responsible production worthy of recognition. It is evident that retailers’ aesthetic valuations distinguish the immediate experience of consumers’ presence and purchases as the recognition of a responsible retailer, i.e., commerce. The critical valuations among farmers, however, also enables them to supply the common good when neglected, and distinguish oneself as being worthy of recognition. Disrespect is thus dealt with by adjusting to any aesthetics recognized in customer interaction, or by fulfilling criteria of responsibility and attempting to be recognized for doing so. It is worth pointing out that neither of these means of getting recognized necessarily involve supplying a good that meets a consumer demand. Knowing how responsibility is valuated in the case of animal welfare, it is evident that the place where producers’ practice takes place is tied to how they take responsibility, and get recognized. I therefore take a closer look at how they use production sites.

8.5 The Site of Recognition

Initially in this chapter, I point out that recognition is more than appreciation, because it depends on carrying out certain practical activities which are treated as responsible. Looking at how retailers and farmers, respectively, use their production sites further distinguishes the material aspects of activities that get recognized. The use of production sites also distinguishes how “boring” and “pointless” activities are disrespected, lacking any capacity for taking responsibility for which the producer may feel recognized.

8.5.1 Running a Responsible Operation

Farmers attempt to outsource or abstain from activities which are unrelated to fulfilling the criteria of responsible production. Benny’s initial experiences of supplying locally sourced beef led him to outsource some activities that he found meaningless: “[w]e tried to do all that [manage all activities of the supply chain] by ourselves.” This process involved “finding an abattoir, doing delivery, and marketing the meat to stores and restaurants.” However, Benny disliked “marketing things [i.e., meat] in a store or driving around to restaurants.” He indicates the meaninglessness he once experienced from those activities, by stressing laconically “that is not what I want to do”. What
he wants to do is “see to the cattle […] and to take care of the dogs; there is always something that needs to be done around the farm.” The farm, as a production site, is a necessary aspect of the activities in which Benny may take on responsibilities for which he feels recognized. Marketing means leaving the farm, and thus not practicing farming activities.

To avoid marketing, Benny now outsources that part of his locally based meat production to a smaller “processor […] who slaughter, pack, and deliver our meat.” With past negative experiences of large-scale processors, Benny’s current processor is contracted to put the meat “in packages which use our brand and our farm’s name, so that the consumers can still buy our meat.” The contract Benny holds also means that the processor “buys our meat and deliver it to stores and restaurants.” By outsourcing in this manner, Benny may stay on the production site and perform the activities which he feels recognized. The transparency of the niche supply chain is imperial for this solution, as he would not be recognized behind the mainstream’s boundaries of incommensurability.

Beyond outsourcing, some farmers valuate responsibility in manners which make them abstain from certain activities. Hog farmer Klas extrapolates on such reluctance by saying:

> If you want to sit in an office, negotiate with the union, and so on; sure – go ahead and borrow the money to invest in a thousand dairy cattle. But then you could as well take an office job with better pay and less [economic] risk, because you would not be farming, you would just be a manager. [Interview]

A manager’s job is a recurring antithesis to farming in the interviews and field notes. Managers, as the quote implies, do not take the practical responsibility carried out on the grounds of the farm. Being removed from the production site, a “manager” does not take on responsibilities worthy of recognition. The production site is where a producer may be recognized, because that is where criteria may be fulfilled through routinely taking responsibility in the most practical and concrete sense.

8.5.2 Resembling a Responsible Store

While operating the production site holds the potential for being recognized in terms of a critical valuation, retail workers use the store in a distinctly different manner. The spatial boundaries of a store distinguish menial activities, carried out in the back of the store, from where consumers may recognize the producer. Therefore, retail workers attempt to minimize the time spent outside of the immediate presence of customers. It is only in that presence that they may be recognized.

In contrast to Klas’s previous reluctance towards employing people, butcher’s shop owner Kent distinguishes possible employees as a means of recognition. At the end of the interview, its topic becomes Kent’s prospects for his shop.
Earlier, he complained about the tedious work that is cleaning the meat-grinder and the fact that he cannot not serve warm food, because his drain lacks a grease trap. Remembering this, I ask if he would consider a “food grade cleaning service” in the future, i.e., outsource the cleaning. He hesitates and frowns when I ask him this, as if this was a novel concept. He then replies: “if I could afford such a service […] I would rather employ someone part time […] and install a grease trap.” Kent reasons that “an employee can help cleaning” and a grease trap would enable Kent the permits needed to serve warm food. Lunch service, he suggests, is “the best way to get more people into the store.” A potential employee can take care of the work in the back of the store, and enable Kent to partake in more consumer interaction. While the production site is equally important for distinguishing a responsible producer, it is used in a distinctly different manner. The front is where responsibility may be recognized, displayed and immediately perceived, making market exchange into commerce.

Customer interaction also recognizes retail employees. Diana, who manages a large supermarket’s fresh goods section, points out the essential role of consumers’ presence to be recognized: “I love working with food […] it is fun to make people get things [groceries] that goes well together.” To interact with customers is however not her sole activity. Dina also “sees to that all the required chores – foremost ordering and storage work – are finished [swiftly], so I can spend time in the [front of the] store.”

Diana attempts to make the “required chores” consume a minimum of time and effort, which her employer supports. Recently, Diana got a handheld ordering device. She shows me this gadget which looks like a large, brutalist smartphone with a bar code reader and explains: “I use this device [to make orders] so if some commodity has run out of stock or if I need something extra, I can just scan the barcodes at the shelves [and order the commodity].” Diana finds that this device “is great! [because] I do not have to leave the floor as much as before, then I had to run in and out of the office all the time.” This device enables her to stay in the proximity of, and be recognized by, customers. While the activities in the back are not less responsible or necessary for running a store, they are screened off from the customers’ perception.

Both Kent and Diana attempt to be recognized by maximizing time in the front of the store, i.e., in the customers’ proximity. Existing research implies that consumer interaction is an important part of retail work (Leppänen and Sellerberg 2010a; Sellerberg and Leppänen 2014). Following on the conclusion from the previous chapter, commerce is a conventionalized aesthetic of market exchange. This aesthetic is only possible to produce with customers present, making the separation of front- and back of the store a boundary of incommensurability. Consumer interaction maintains the outlet’s image as a responsible and attractive store, translating into the recognition of
the individual employee and the grocery chain as a whole. What happens in
the back, however, is aesthetically irrelevant to the aim of resembling an
image of responsibility.

The use of production sites bears witness to how the activities which are
valuated in terms of responsibility envision the type of valuation used. Critical
valuations of responsibility distinguish the farm operation as responsible,
justified by its adherence to a common good, in line with previous chapters.
Aesthetic valuations, in contrast, make the production site divided by a
boundary of incommensurability, because recognition is only possible to
attain for a producer who is perceived by a customer. While the wall at the
back of the store is materially explicit, the boundary is still implicit, because
what happens behind it is obscured from commerce. Up to this point, I have
only considered how the producers attempt to take responsibility, and feel
recognized for doing so, by performing certain activities. In the following
sections, I turn to the use of standards and brands to become recognized in
more systematized manners, and the role of auditors’ valuations of producers.

8.6 Producers Valuated: Standards and their Audits

There are a number of standards employed in the Swedish meat supply chain.
While producers may valuate their criteria of a common good, or
conventionalized aesthetics, standards demand them to conform to
commensurable criteria. Adherence to the standard is then audited by a third
party, and is indicated by a brand on the goods which have been produced
accordingly (Ahrne and Brunsson 2008:441–43). In this section, I show what
role standards, audits, and brands play into the recognition of producers.

8.6.1 Standardized Recognition

The employment of a standard means carrying out a production activity in
accordance with a set of general, agreed upon criteria. On Johanna’s farm,
even before entering the sows’ stables, I notice the Swedish Seal-brand on the
door. The brand distinguishes that the farm’s adherence to both the IP Gris-
standard, which most hog farms use, additional, stricter production standards
demanded for Swedish Seal. Johanna is a mainstream producer, so no
customers would ever know that their meat comes from this barn. The brand,
I reason, can only be intended for auditors and producers, including Johanna
and her staff. It is an indication that the farm maintains a standardized
production process, recognized and audited by a third party.

In order to rear hogs according to the Swedish Seal standard, a farm has to
have sufficiently large pens, an environmentally sound way of dealing with
waste (primarily manure, but also dead animals), and quick transport to the
Johanna tells me that these requirements “were already being met” at the time of adopting the standard. The pens are larger than the law demands, she continues, because they “happened to be built that way.” The farm also adheres to the standard’s environmental requirements, as they have been sending their manure to a bio-gas plant for quite some time. The contracted abattoir is also less than an hour’s drive from the farm. Johanna concludes that “we fitted right into the standard, so we adopted it.” Thus, they did not adjust to the standard, but adopted it to get recognized for the criteria fulfilled by the existing production regime.

None of the informants whose farms adhere to a voluntary standard have adjusted their production activities, or the production site, to fit into it. These farmers adopt standards because they enable recognition for ongoing production activities, in line with existing studies (e.g., Hansson and Lagerqvist 2012; Saunders 2016). To adopt the Swedish Seal standard at Johanna’s farm may only seem like the rational thing to do. However, this means of using standards also has effects that are significantly harder to rationalize.

The by-now-well-acquainted hog farmers Klas and Berit, at the time of my visit, held a slaughtering contract paying a premium for hogs produced using slightly higher standards for animal welfare than the law demands. The drafting of this contract is explained in a similar manner as above; Klas and Bert’s farm happens to fit the demands of this contract. The value of the production sites’ layout is further implied by Klas, saying: “we bought this farm because it enables us to produce hogs the way we want.”

More than a year later, I find out that Klas and Berit’s contract has been terminated. I then call them to ask how they deal with this situation. Berit’s answer surprises me when she says: “we will just continue as before but sell them as conventional hogs, it is not that much worse paid, and we hope that someone in the future will appreciate and pay for our animals’ welfare.” The important insight from this quote is that using a critical valuation, responsibilities are not taken to be recognized, but rather recognition sought for taking responsibility. The criteria of a common good are not dependent on a standard to be in place. Choosing this specific farm, it fulfilled both Klas’s and Berit’s criteria for responsible production, which they hope others will eventually recognize. The material conditions of production are certainly constrained by the production site, but these very same constraints are also necessary to maintain responsible meat production.

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124 It should be mentioned that standards like IP Gris or Swedish Seal are voluntary, private standards, but do not supply meat to niche markets. IP Gris promises legal compliance by additional audits, and Swedish Seal enables the meat commodity to be branded Swedish Meat. However, if the meat processor is Swedish Seal-certified, an uncertified farmer’s animals can still be awarded the Swedish Meat brand. See also Sections 3.2.3 and 3.3.1.
As farms have been built in different times and for different purposes, their layouts and possible production regimes are surely irregular rather than standardized. These farmers adopt standards encompassing criteria of responsibility that they themselves seek to fulfill anyway. Thus, a standard is a possibility to be systematically recognized for responsibilities already taken.

8.6.2 Recognized Standards

The retailers use standards in an opposite manner to the farmers. Instead of seeking out standards that recognize what they already do, retailers actively adjust their activities to standards. That way, they may resemble the aesthetic of a responsible retailer. Retail standards such as hygiene regulations, pricing models, and shelf plans, standardize the retail outlets’ commercial spaces where customers are present.

Among the producers in retail, a standard is close to a script or sketch used to organize customers’ experiences. Pernilla, who manages the meat section in a high-end grocery store, shows me her file with all the hygiene data that she generates daily from the meat coolers. She explains to me that “these [papers] are the most important ones for me, [because] if they would be out of order they [the National Food Administration (NFA)] can close the store.” While the threat of being closed down certainly does not grant Pernilla recognition, she uses the NFA hygiene standards as a means of adjusting the store so that it resembles the hygiene levels of their competitors. Pernilla describes her use of the NFA-standards as a strict procedure: “we control the cooler temperatures, the perspiration dates, the bacterial growth in the meat grinder and so on every day”. By self-auditing for this standard, Pernilla ensures that “our store cannot be criticized for bad hygiene.” Alongside her colleagues, she may imitate other outlets as they use the same standard. While the use of the standard, and the NFA’s audits, are critical valuations, the customers only sees the retail space and the deviant aesthetic that a closed down store would display. This standard thus enables both aesthetic and critical valuations to recognize the store, as adjusting to the standard also enables the store to resemble the conventionalized aesthetic of commerce.

Beyond hygiene standards, other retail informants stated that they actively adjusted the retail outlet in order to be, e.g., organic- or Fairtrade-certified stores. The aesthetic importance of such standards is stressed by vivid displays of brands in the front of the store, and the marketing of certified commodities, e.g., a separate cooler for organic meat. By adjusting to these standards, the store space imitates the aesthetics of a responsible outlet, and avoids giving customers any impressions incompatible with such a retailer.

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The NFA demands all fresh meat retailers to have data available according to the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point system of the EU (NFA 2016; see also UN and WHO 2005). Pernilla refers to this system as “the NFA standards”.

The use of standards in the Swedish meat supply chain stresses the opposition between its ends. The farmers do not adjust their practice or production site to become recognized and treats the site as a basis for a responsible production regime, in terms of criteria-fulfillment. It follows that recognition from standards means recognizing the ongoing activities. Retailers, on the contrary, adjust to standards which enable them to imitate other outlets and maintain a responsible aesthetic of the retail space, which customers recognize by their presence and purchases in the store. However, standards must be audited to secure their integrity, which means that the producers’ accountability is valuated by a third party.

8.6.3 The Mixed Blessing of Audits

All Swedish meat producers are audited at some point, e.g., for hygiene, taxes, or animal welfare, ensuring that the producers who are subject to standards also adhere to them (see also Higgins and Hallström 2007). The auditor represents the proprietor of a brand or an agency hired to audit the producers’ compliance with a public or voluntary policy. Valuations from auditors may foster feelings of both recognition and disrespect, even when possible reprisals are negligible.

One morning during my second week at Mr. Meats, two of the workers at the adjacent vacuum packing machine suddenly appear in blue caps with hair nets. I have never seen them wear these caps before. These two packers are also the only long-haired persons working in the cutting and packing unit. Usually, they wear beanies or baseball caps. While the hair fashions of meat packers might seem irrelevant, this detail forebode what would come – a conflict over hygiene standards and the right to bodily fashions.

Word spreads that an NFA auditor has come to make an unannounced inspection of the facility just a few minutes later. Everybody in the room changes how they work, and I try to follow their lead. Protective gear is suddenly used and the cleaning procedures are performed with an unprecedented rigor (in my experience from the field site). Dan, the foreman, breaks his usual pattern of walking in-and-out of the office unit every few minutes. Instead, he attempts to anticipate how the auditor will perform the evaluation – in a slightly panicked manner. He does so by estimating whether the employees and I work according to NFA standards – to the best of his knowledge. He also corrects what he finds to be obvious breaches of those standards, such as throwing the old gloves and order lists that litter the hygiene-control station into the trash.

Dan’s attempt to adjust the operation the NFA standards goes on for a few minutes before the auditor enters the room together with and Magdalena, Mr. Meats’s part-time quality manager. They are both clad in bright white protective gear which, in their cleanliness, stand out from mine and Mr. Meats’s employees’ meat juice-stained jackets and checkered pants.
The auditor walks around to the different stations in the facility. He puts some sample pieces of meat in plastic containers, and makes notes on his clipboard. The auditing procedure goes on for maybe 10 to 15 minutes in my line of sight, before the auditor disappears into another part of the plant. The silence during the audit is as atypical as it is distressing. When the auditor leaves, nobody mentions that he was there. Thus, I did not anticipate the reactions his audit would spur a few hours later.

At lunch, Dan and Magdalena announce “the auditor’s verdict”. Dan informs the entire staff that Mr. Meats was found to have one major problem: keeping the temperatures down in the facility when it is hot outside.\(^{126}\) He then mentions in passing that the auditor commented on the workers’ “neglect of using beard guards, which are demanded by NFA standards.” As the following reactions unravel, the auditor becomes a “bad” auditor, i.e., disrespectful.

Dan’s comment provokes a sudden wave of discord raised by the packers and cutters at my table. Some of them stand up and start shouting their opinions at him. Ian, the younger cutter, explains loudly to that “you only lose bristles if you have a skin disease – it is not like hair!” Ronny, a now furiously red-faced older meat-trimmer, suggests in a cynical tone that the auditor may be “fine with my keeping my breathing to evenings and weekends”. He then asks rhetorically if he is otherwise “expected to trim off the mustache he had throughout his adult life – two years before retirement?!” Many of the employees demonstrate their support for Ronny’s opposition, repeating that “you cannot breathe in a beard guard.” As a kind of crescendo, an employee emerges from the locker room with four or five mouth guards over his head, covering it like balaclava, and a pair of protective glasses on top of it. He asks Dan and Magdalena, in a calm but sarcastic way, if this is how he is “supposed to dress for work from now on?”

The turmoil settles down after maybe 10 to 15 minutes. However, Mr. Meats’s employees repeatedly dismiss the “idiot auditor” who “never really worked in meatpacking in his life” at least for the remainder of the week. Dan, who is less concerned with the beard guards, concludes apathetically to me:

> You can never please them, they always manage to find some new fault. I don’t know how much money we have poured into coolers, but when you got blistering summer sun, nobody [no processing plant] can keep it cool enough.  
> [Field note]

The outcome of the audit did not seem to actually change anything at Mr. Meats in terms of production activities. No ambition to exchange the cooling system (again) ever surfaced, and neither I (who have a beard) nor any employee was ever presented with a beard guard, before or after the audit. Effectively, the experience of disrespect from the auditor made Mr. Meats

\(^{126}\) The fieldwork at Mr. Meats was conducted in June, when the company’s chequered sheet building suffered from a blistering sun.
employees dismiss the auditor’s valuation. The disrespect was not primarily pointing out these faults, but the neglect Mr. Meats’s employees experienced from an auditor who did not recognize them as capable of handling responsibility.

Some informants do, however, have good experiences of audits. Hog farmer Kerstin, for example, recognizes the county’s animal welfare auditor as follows: “nowadays, we got a good auditor; she grew up on a farm herself, so she understands what farming is about”. Here, Kerstin clearly relates a good auditor to a good audit, but emphasizes that it is the auditor who may recognize or disrespect the farmer’s activities depending on her insights about farming. Kerstin also implies that she had bad experiences of auditors in the past. The present auditor, Kerstin continues, “knows what actually matters,” and what matters is “that the animals live good lives.” An auditor who recognizes that Kerstin’s primary ambition is “to take care of these hogs the best that I can” is thus recognized in turn. Both Kerstin and the auditor seem to agree that the common good implied by SAW ensures a certain quality of life for the animals. Consequently, the audit recognizes Kerstin for taking responsibility, or supplying a critique which may aid her to fulfill SAW’s criteria in a sufficient manner.

The auditors in the hitherto examples differ in that the one from NFA valuates Mr. Meats’s resemblance to the looks of a responsible producer, showing no interest in the workers’ attempts to take on responsibility. While he uses a standard, its relation to a common good is not translated into the valuation. The “verdict” implies an aesthetic valuation, lacking any critique that would explain why beard guards would be needed or valuable in terms of some common good. Mr. Meat’s employees, however, contend the value of beard guards, arguing that they do not fulfill any relevant criteria of hygiene. Effectively, they contend the auditor’s valuation by distinguishing it as irresponsible. The county’s auditor, by contrast, valuates criteria-fulfillment in a manner that harmonizes with Kerstin’s own valuation of responsibility. Conflicting valuations thus disable the auditor’s ability to critique producers that employ critical valuations of responsibility, because they do not share the common good.

While the above examples show producers who employ critical valuations, this incompatibility is also the case when the producer valuates signs of responsibility. Martin, the discount supermarket meat manager, implies such a conflict: “I mean, as long as we do not breach the standards, it is just tedious to ‘guide’ the auditors around, why can they come to us in case something is out of order?” Effectively, the audit disrespects Martin, because the perception of the store as responsible is what he seeks recognition for. Fulfilling criteria which the customers do not perceive is simply irrelevant for him.

When the auditor’s and producer’s types of valuation comply, the producer may be recognized. The examples so far have, however, been limited to active
valuations of standards and audits as a result. Brands are readily used to indicating what standards have been taken in the production process, looking at them shows their ability to fulfill the promises of recognition that consumer-oriented brands give producers.

8.6.4 The Promise of Branding

A brand symbolizing a meat production standard is a promise that the producer takes on the requisite responsibility, despite the buyer’s or consumer’s lack of knowledge about the individual producer (see Higgins and Hallström 2007; cf. Karpik 2007:161). To be trusted, the brand also has to resemble a conventionalized aesthetic of responsibility. In this section, I therefore look at the use and recognition of brands in retail.

The cuts in Eskil and Peter’s deli counter all have little signs displaying standardized information: the type of cut, its origin, and the price per kg. Also, if relevant, the sign shows the breed of the animal, how long the cut has been dry-aged, or a KRAV-brand. I also notice that the cuts originating from Sweden have a small Swedish Meat-brand on their signs. This way, the customer is promised that a certain cut of meat has been produced according to the legal demands on Swedish meat production.

Instead of informing customers about the production regimes, Eskil and Peter use these brands to market the deli counter. Behind that counter, they are recognized by their customers; trusted to know more about meat than the regular consumer and therefore taking responsibility for the customers’ satisfaction. Eskil explains that “it is important for the customers to see that this meat is not ‘less Swedish’ than what you find in the pre-packed section”. Thus, by displaying the Swedish Meat brand in the deli counter, it resembles a conventionalized aesthetic of responsibility, and eventually commerce. The brand enables certain meat commodities to resemble each other, implying that they have been produced in equally responsible manners. Eskil explains this use of brands further:

If we would only display a price tag, the customers would not start asking about the cuts. […] When they start asking […], we can help them find the best meat – maybe the best they ever cooked themselves before! They [the consumers] never ask about qualities when we fill up the coolers, their questions are mostly about prices and expiry dates. [Interview + field note]

Eskil and Peter uses the deli counter to be recognized by their customers. Obscuring the primary producer, the retailer is recognized as the responsible one, despite being uninvolved in fulfilling the criteria which distinguishes Swedish meat production from its competitors. The brands become part of the retailer’s aesthetic, making the store look like it takes responsibility. It is worth recalling Lars’s issues of marketing Danish meat previously in this chapter. The customers disrespected, and then recognized, the store as the moral agent for choosing meats, rather than the farmers and meat processors producing
them. While occasionally being disrespected for supplying immoral commodities, retailers are the only producers who can be recognized by consumers. Neither appraise nor critique thus reach the primary producers. Consequently, the “aesthetization” of responsibility, together with obscure pricing activities and palatable commodity aesthetics, neglects the production process (cf. Klintman and Boström 2008). This neglect is what the primary producers experience as disrespect.

Regarding the *Swedish Meat* brand, neglect as a consequence of branding may be concluded. The brand is used to distinguishing domestically produced meat as sufficiently responsible in opposition to imported, effectively irresponsible, goods and producers. The brand thus promises responsibility, but says nothing about meat quality, revenue or costs of producing it, or what responsibilities Swedish primary producers take compared to their competitors. Consequently, the *Swedish Meat* brand bestows the mark of responsibility upon the retailer, who is then recognized by customers’ presence and purchases. The farmers’ critical valuations of responsibility, however, enable them to rest assured that they are responsible, worthy of recognition, but neglected by the rest of society. While the disrespect is disheartening, it does not seem to be a cause for changing the production practice. Brands, however, seem to be restricted in terms of mediating recognition and disrespect from consumers.

### 8.7 The Values of Meat Production

This chapter has so far shown that neither valuations of palatability nor revenue enables the production of abundance to be inhibited. However, Swedish meat producers find other values in supplying an abundant foodstuff, which do not reduce the volumes produced. When Lucien Karpik (2007) discusses what forces guide judgement in markets for “unique” goods, he distinguishes between “commercial” and “critical” ones. The distinction between them shows the same values that Swedish meat producers distinguish in producing an abundant foodstuff. The “conquest and keeping of consumers” is the aesthetic value because it makes market exchange resemble the looks of commerce (cf. Karpik 2007:51–52). Critical valuations, in turn, distinguish fulfillment of criteria that imply “protection and guarantee on behalf of the public” (cf. Karpik 2007:51–52). I describe these values below. These values are what they produce, explaining how it may be worthwhile to perpetuate meat production despite unappreciative customers and negligible (direct) profits.

#### 8.7.1 The Aesthetic Value of Commerce

Responsible meat production is, according to the aesthetic valuations in this chapter, implied by the commodities that consumers purchase. Sales are thus equated with recognition, implying that meat production is valuable in terms
of commerce. The producer feels recognized because she is capable of resembling the conventionalized aesthetic of commerce, supplying goods that are bought, regardless of whether they are appreciated or make a profit themselves. The immediate experience of commerce is thus treated as intrinsically valuable.

Using commerce as the value of meat production, Eskil explains that absence from commerce make upstream producers disrespected. This value is aesthetic because it is distinguished by the immediate perception of commerce as value, incommensurable because it does not distinguish measurable profits. “Farmers”, he tells me, are not “engaged in marketing their goods.” A farmer he once attempted to involve as a supplier of “locally sourced premium beef” serves as Eskil’s example:

This farmer, he was a bit of a character. If you went to his farm, you often found him on horseback, wearing chaps and a cowboy hat. He had free range cattle and so on. And when I started to sell his meat, we discussed that he should come to the store and market it. Nothing extravagant, just wear these clothes, and maybe bring an old tractor and a horse for the kids. But that never materialized, he did not want to [do it] in the end, and many farmers are like that. They just want to hang around the farm–they do not understand that they have to [market what they want to] sell! [Interview]

It is of importance how Eskil dictates what farmers “ought to do” in this quote. The farmer’s absence from commerce is explicitly addressed, but not as a critique so much as a dismissal of an absurd way of producing meat. Also, this example does not state in any way that this specific farmer had any problems making money. Presence in commerce as an active seller is the conventionalized aesthetic of commerce. Eskil distinguishes it as a sufficiently responsible producer before fulfilling any criteria while displaying it, such as profits or sales volumes.

Eskil further implies the both normative and factual truth of his statement by saying: “we cannot do it [meat production] as we once did; I mean, before the EU, Sweden was a sheltered workshop, but we will–hopefully–never be that again.” By putting sales in opposition to the “old way sheltered workshop”, Eskil distinguishes commerce both as the positive and true value of meat production. That commerce is an aesthetic value is indicated by the fact that it is treated as an intrinsic value, without any relation to a common good.

Eskil, perhaps realizing that he would come off as antagonizing or dismissive of farmers, underlines: “I am sympathetic towards Swedish farmers – I grew up on a farm – Swedish farmers have the skills and the land to produce the best meat in the world.” But, staying on track with his previous statements, he then retaliates by saying: “Swedish farmers must realize that meat production is business, and that the consumers decide if they can stay in business.” In this episode, the conflict between aesthetic and critical valuations is evident. Eskil
recognizes Swedish meat producers’ criteria fulfillment, but also treats that fact as irrelevant if it does not translate into commerce. If the Swedish farmers are not present, they will be disrespected, because only those who “sell” are recognized.

Defining aesthetic valuations, I argued that the value which distinguishes the conventionalized aesthetic may become clear when the use of aesthetic valuations has been explored. The Swedish meat producers’ aesthetic valuations have now been analyzed at length, which makes it possible to conclude the value produced by employing them. That value is commerce, which is evident in the fact that sales are more important than profits when it comes to producing fresh meat goods. Stocking up on grain to generate shortage is a common description of speculation, producing an aesthetic of scarcity that obscures the actual supply. In this case, that aesthetic comes in the form of oversupplying to provide an image of affordable prices and more frequent trade, while obscuring the costs of production and the producers’ work. As implied by the empirical materials, large-scale producers have other means of making profits from meat production than selling meat. The immediate impression of an “affordable store” thus enables financial speculation by setting inflated prices on goods which hold less symbolic value than fresh meat without making the store seem expensive (see also Braudel 1977:59–62, 1983:456–57). Commerce is an immediate impression of suppliers taking the responsibility of meeting a consumer demand. All producers, as is well established by now, do not valuate meat production aesthetically, leading to the critical value of producing meat in abundance.

8.7.2 The Critical Value of Swedish Meat Production

In contrast to the aesthetic value of commerce, critical valuations distinguish the maintenance of the “Swedish” meat production regime as the common good attained by producing abundance. Johanna distinguishes this value of meat production, asking me rhetorically: “would you call it [this farm] an industry?” instantly replying: “it [this farm] is not industrial! – look at the Danish, they have a real hog industry!” In this quote, Johanna distinguishes “industrial” as the explicit counterpart to responsible meat production. The “Danish” are neither the only one, nor the most aggressive, foreign competitor of Swedish meat producers. However, this neighboring country is routinely distinguished as immoral by the informants as they explicitly point out the criteria unfulfilled in that country’s production regime – which Swedish meat producers fulfill.

127 See Section 5.2.1.
128 The distinction of a conventionalized aesthetic as valuable is what Entwistle (2002) calls “valorization”.

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The Danish producers are disrespected because they maintain an excessive meat production regime, defying certain criteria fulfilled by the Swedish one. How these producers run their farms is distinguished as flawed and irresponsible; e.g., systematically using pre-emptive antibiotics and limited animal welfare. However, Denmark is not the only nation disrespected in this manner, also Germany, the Netherlands, and Brazil are explicitly distinguished as excessive in a similar manner. This critical valuation distinguishes the “Swedish” production regime as the one which is sufficient, and the criteria used to produce that boundary also critiques foreign producers in an explicit manner. A manner which implies how they could change their production regime in order to fulfill the criteria of the common good.

The criteria of Swedish meat production are treated as both as right and true. Hog farmer Ragnar, for example, implies this conception, stressing the strategic fault it would be to harmonize with foreign production regimes: “if we do not keep up our [Swedish] standards and our legislation, then we have nothing to compete with”. Ragnar instead suggests that the Swedish meat production regime’s future lay in the fact that: “we [Swedish farmers] are the best at producing hogs [and cattle] under reasonable circumstances, where farmers do not die of pneumonia”¹²⁹ […] where the hogs suffer under inhumane treatment”. As mentioned previously, the SAW is argued to be “scientific”. Samuel, who trains butchers and works part time in meat processing, distinguishes the objective character of this piece of legislation: “the framework was developed by professors at the agricultural university – not by some politician”. Klas gives an even more vivid picture, suggesting that “Sweden is the only country [in the world] where real science [i.e., biology] – neither engineering nor economics – is the basis for animal welfare.” Perceived as scientific, these criteria are as explicit as they can get and applicable to all producers. It is thus not a nationalist, but rather an exceptionalist, set of criteria that distinguishes Swedish meat production as a common good. The producers’ using critical valuations maintain that all producers could produce meat according to these criteria, given that they are capable of taking responsibility.

This critical valuation is further applied to all citizens, as cattle farmer Arvid implies when he argues that “the law […] is what the citizens have voted for – that is democracy!” This argument means that meat production according to the law is justified because it attains the common good version of food supply, which the alternative defies. That is also why Arvid argues that Swedish citizens are responsible for consuming meat in accordance with existing agrifood policy:

¹²⁹ In the interviews, reoccurrence of excessive antibiotics use in agriculture is argued to lead to farm workers becoming immune to penicillin, leading to their dying of common diseases such as pneumonia when active in foreign production regimes.
Many people do not seem to know, or at least understand, that we [the Swedish farmers] just give them what they ask for; we see to it that there is food – and since we are good at it, then I do not think that it is too much to ask that they pay for it – and stop throwing all this food away. [Interview]

It is evident in this quote that Swedish meat production is justified, and therefore worthy of recognition and revenue, and that the meat is appreciated as meals. Because the production regime is valuable, the goods it produces ought to be treated accordingly.

The supply of a Swedish meat production regime is the value farmers, and some other producers, experience producing meat despite over-production, diminishing revenue, and neglect. As I have repeatedly argued, critical valuations also enable a producer to distinguish herself as responsible when neglected. In line with the conclusion from the previous chapter; to keep the production site operational in a responsible manner, justifies the production of abundance.

8.8 Conclusion: Making it Meaningful

The argument made in this chapter is that Swedish meat producers’ valuations of responsibility, and how they seek recognition, bears witness to how it becomes meaningful to produce an abundant foodstuff. The conclusion is that meat is not valuable in terms of food, but supplied in order to produce other values. Aesthetic valuations distinguish the meat’s ability to create an image of commerce, rather than profits made from the individual good. Critical valuations distinguish the value of “Swedish” meat production as a common good, i.e., a production regime fulfilling criteria of high animal welfare and low antibiotics use. In short, to make the production of an abundant foodstuff meaningful, and effectively perpetuate it, the producer’s valuation has to distinguish sufficiency as something else than the supplied quantity of food.

The findings from this chapter imply that when disrespect comes in the form of neglect, it does not provoke resistance. Existing research shows that “dirty” and despised occupations actively produce their own identity to counter such disrespect, as stated initially in this chapter. Looking at the Swedish meat supply chain, it becomes clear that neglect – rather than outright scorn – is the prevalent form of disrespect. Neglect, however, does not seem to provoke a unifying counter-identity, because the rest of society does not seem to care about what these primary producers do. Using critical valuations, the farmers are content that they take responsibility, and are thus frustrated with the rest of society disrespecting them. While rural lives involve more than agriculture, it is evident in this chapter that the farmers valuate responsibility in terms of a common good, and requests that the rest of society take its part in attaining it (cf. Macken-Walsh 2016:619–21; Shucksmith and Brown 2016:663–66; Woods 2016). Effectively, the producers using critical valuations use the “critical capacity” to experience the abundant meat production as sufficient,
at least beyond direct interaction with animals, etc. This assurance of responsibility despite neglect may, however, not be possible using an aesthetic valuation. Distinguishing commerce as a conventionalized aesthetic of responsibility implies that a customer has to be present to recognize the producer. Otherwise, it becomes irrelevant to take any responsibility.

At this point, it can be concluded that Swedish meat producers deal with producing an abundant foodstuff by not using the consumer demand of the foodstuff itself to distinguish a sufficient volume to supply. Taking the conclusions from previous chapters into consideration, this chapter further implies that Swedish meat producers do not valuate the quantity of meat supplied, but the critical and aesthetic qualities of that supply. This insight follows on how neither quality standards, nor profit margins, are used to distinguish what meat supply is sufficient. Aesthetic valuations do not take commensurable measures into regard, so they cannot distinguish a sufficient quantity of meat to produce. Critical valuations, which could use a “sufficiency-metric”, are limited to binary, or qualitative, criteria that all producers in the world may fulfill, at least in theory. Concluding this study, Part IV returns to the research questions, how they may be answered, and this study’s contribution to existing literature.
9 The Production of Abundance

People always told me: “slow down, remember – less is more.” I always said “how can that be? how can less be more?” It is impossible – more is more!

- Yngwie J. Malmsteen

In this study, I have shown how Swedish meat producers deal with producing an abundant foodstuff, and effectively perpetuate the production of abundance. I quote larger-than-life metal guitarist Yngwie J. Malmsteen’s infamous statement because it denotes my answer regarding how abundance is perpetuated in the Swedish meat supply chain: more meat may not supply more value in terms of food, but more commerce or production adhering to a “Swedish” meat production regime. While less may be more in some contexts, more is consequently more for Swedish meat producers. As this study has ventured into the Swedish meat supply chain, it is evident that abundance is perpetuated because the valuations used do not distinguish a sufficient volume of meat. Instead, the valuations are limited to sufficient qualities, devoid of any quantitative limit. Effectively, the consumer demand for meat is irrelevant to how much meat is supplied, as long as the producers stay out of bankruptcy or depression.

In this concluding chapter, I first summarize the findings of this study. I then turn to the two research questions, in turn, concluding their respective answers and how they relate to existing research. Finalizing the chapter, I discuss this study’s contributions to food studies, economic sociology, and the study of abundance.

9.1 Summary: Production in a State of Abundance

In the initial chapter of this monograph, I posed the empirical question: “How do Swedish meat producers deal with producing an abundant foodstuff?” This question has thereafter been addressed in relation to the problems of meat production in a post-scarcity society. Doing that has enabled me to supply and answer the theoretical question: “How is abundance perpetuated?” I have approached these questions in the following manner.

In Part I, I set out to distinguish what problems meat producers have to deal with in a post-scarcity society, and why Swedish meat production is an
especially fitting case for exploring them. The literature review outlined three problems of producing meat abundance: overproduction, diminishing revenue, and disrespect. Thereafter, I outlined the history and conditions of contemporary Swedish meat production. Farmers and processors have gone out of business, and the ones in business grow in size. Retailers have, on the contrary, grown more powerful. Meat production in a post-scarcity society thus displays problems that make primary producers loose out to retail, and because the Swedish meat supply chain has been left to solve such issues itself, while lacking competitive advantages, I found it an especially fitting case for studying how abundance is perpetuated.

In Part II, I argued that ethnographic fieldwork, i.e., in-depth interviews and participatory observations, is the best method for exploring the Swedish meat supply chain in order to answer the research questions. Following the whole supply chain while studying the producers’ activities therein enabled me to generate materials on the production of an abundant foodstuff. To explain how meat may be supplied in abundance, I outline a pragmatist understanding of valuations and how they distinguish abundance into sufficiency and excess. To explain how excess is supplied together with abundance, without reducing the supply to sufficient volumes, I distinguish two types of valuation: aesthetic and critical. Looking at the difference between these valuations in terms of commensurable and incommensurable values, and implicit and explicit boundaries, is how I then engage with the empirical materials.

In the three chapters of Part III, it becomes successively evident that meat is valuable either for resembling the aesthetics of commerce, i.e., marketing, or is supplied in order to keep production sites operational in accordance with Swedish legal demands. These values emerge first in the distinction of palatability into either a commodity aesthetic detached from its supply chain, or as an implication of the production regime’s criteria-fulfillment of a common good. Further, pricing activities distinguish a sufficient price either by its ability to translate commodity aesthetics into monetary figures, or maintain an output, perpetuating a certain production regime, rather than generating any profits. And finally, how producers seek recognition for taking responsibility bears witness to how they make it meaningful to supply an abundant foodstuff, despite overproduction and diminishing revenue. The answer is that meat is not supplied to meet a consumer demand, but to produce a conventionalized aesthetic of commerce or a production regime fulfilling the criteria of “Swedish” meat production. Neither of these values involve a quantitative measure of a sufficient supply, because they rely on qualitative values. Consequently, abundance is perpetuated because the valuations that are employed in practice are limited to sufficiency as a quality.
9.2 The Qualities of an Abundant Quantity

By asking how Swedish meat producers deal with producing an abundant foodstuff, I have inquired into the values that material production supply in a post-scarcity society. My conclusion is that meat is not supplied to meet the consumers’ demand for food. Instead, it is supplied to meet the producers’ demand for commerce or sustained production in line with Swedish agrifood policy. These values are both qualitative versions of sufficiency, enabled by the supply of an abundant quantity. Laying out this conclusion, I first discuss the producers’ disregard for consumer demand and then the problem of using qualitative values.

9.2.1 The Disregard of Consumer Demand

The first part of this conclusion is that producers do not regard consumer demand, but the values of producing a supply. In this case, the Swedish meat producers’ deal with producing an abundant foodstuff by downplaying its value as food. This finding is especially clear in relation to Keynes, writing that “consumption [...] is the sole end and object of all economic activity” (2012:104), quoted initially in this study. The findings from the Swedish meat supply chain is empirical evidence of the opposite. While there are meat consumers who eat meat, the Swedish meat producers do rather treat production as the “end and object” of consumption. I point out some of the structural features of the supply chain to elaborate further on this conclusion.

The dominance of a few large retailers and meat processors in the supply chain certainly leaves many smaller producers no choice but to accept their valuations if they want to stay on as producers, i.e., prices that do not cover their costs of production, absent appreciation for the meat’s palatability, and neglect of the primary producers. Some of the smaller-scale producers will eventually go out of business from producing at a loss, unpaid debts, lacking motivation, or when they or their production site get too old to manage continued production. As I point out in Chapter 3, the domestic supply chain studied here is in many ways similar to the global ones in terms this of power-asymmetry. These conditions are certainly part of the explanation of why Swedish farmers and smaller meat processors struggle in face of abundance and global competition. However, it does not answer how these conditions continue to exist, as they depend on producers to perpetuate their production practices, rather than terminate their operations or actively protest.

The problems of producing an abundant foodstuff I drew from existing studies certainly show in the empirical materials; lacking appreciation from consumers, small profits, and the feeling that the rest of society would not care if Swedish meat production ceases to exist. Such experiences are, after all, why producers may be expected to terminate their operations when supply is greater than demand, supposedly resulting in a market equilibrium (cf. Caravale 1997; Lancaster 1966). When Swedish meat producers deal with the
problems stemming from producing an abundant foodstuff, it becomes evident
that they do not treat consumption as the goal of production. On the contrary,
taking the valuations of palatability and economic value together, the
producers distinguish meat and animals as sufficient because they enable the
producers the output needed to maintain production, either critically or
aesthetically. Setting prices below production costs, especially on palatable
and popular commodities, is probably as far from economic rationality as one
can be. To underprice in that manner is only reasonable if the value of meat is
gained from something other than supplying the consumer demand.

To use meat as marketing is a practical way of dealing with an abundant
supply, which also maintains an aesthetic of commerce. In the literature
review, I discuss that meat until recently has been an unchallenged symbol of
wealth and power (see, e.g., Fiddes 1991; cf. Gjerris et al. 2012). While studies
of contemporary meat eating suggest this positive symbolism to be fading, my
findings point to the contrary: meat is used by Swedish grocery retailers as a
conventionalized aesthetic of wealth and power, and pricing it cheaply makes
these values accessible (see however Carolan 2011:223–68; cf. Ruby and
Heine 2011; Sobal 2005). Producing an “aesthetic of thrift” means that
abundance may be perpetuated, because the symbolic status of meat is actively
maintained while it is used in a different manner in the practice of production.
The use of meat as marketing is explained by the fact that producers
distinguish commerce as an immediate experience of market exchange, i.e.,
an aesthetic value.

The producers using critical valuations may, in the same manner, be explained
as stemming from a practice. The reluctance to changing Swedish meat
production is evident in the uses of critical valuations, a reluctance supported
by existing studies (Hansson and Lagerqvist 2012, 2014, 2015). Especially the
farmers in this study distinguish the Swedish meat production regime as the
only one fulfilling the criteria of the common good, i.e., restrictive use of
antibiotics and high animal welfare. It follows on such a valuation that
Swedish producers’ operations are the sufficient ones, compared to (foreign)
competitors. When the Swedish producers experience a failing consumer
demand, the production of abundant volumes of meat are justified by the fact
that they come from the only production regime that adheres to the common
good. The only regime that, consequently, may supply sufficiently good meat.
The practice of production according to a certain regime engenders both the
structures and the subjective purposes of some producers. After all, they do
accept small-to-no profits and questionable consumer demand, and stay on
producing despite both structural incentives to stop doing so from public
institutions and a societal neglect of their contributions. The use of critical
valuations further explains why producers demand that consumers inform
themselves enough to appreciate the common good as a sensory taste.
Essentially, the producers ask the consumers to act like citizens, and use a
consumer practice that harmonizes with Swedish meat production. The use of
meat as a means of output for a certain production regime is explained by the fact that producers distinguish “Swedish” meat production as a common good, i.e., a critical value.

Both as an aesthetic of commerce and as a means of attaining a common good is production used as the goal of consumption in the Swedish meat supply chain, counter to Keynes’s argument above. However, the valuations used to produce an abundant foodstuff do stand in a conflict with each other. This conflict rests on the fact that aesthetic valuations obscure primary producers’ costs and neglects their efforts, while critical valuations may place demands on retailers and meat processors that have no aesthetic value. While sparsely acted out among the producers, the conflict surfaces when retailers get recognized for the criteria fulfillment of Swedish meat production, while the farmers who fulfill these criteria are neglected. The inability of branded commodities to recognize primary producers further explains the paradox in existing literature, where farmers and butchers become increasingly disrespected while they are the ones who supply increasing levels of animal welfare, demanded and appreciated by the general population (Bock and Van Huik 2007; Winter et al. 1998; cf. Ashforth and Kreiner 1999; Brandth and Haugen 2016; Pachirat 2011; Stenbacka 2011; Thompson 1983). Commerce obscures the practice of animal welfare by making it an aesthetic in the form of a brand. A “status market” of ethical consumers and retailers is coordinated, because there is no commensurable measure or transparency of animal welfare practices available (cf. Aspers 2009). Any consumer demand for animal welfare is thus not supplied by retail (see also Thorslund and Lassen 2016; cf. Lusk 2011).

The disregard of consumer demand is further implied by the absent valuation of the meat’s advertising value. While it is beyond this study to answer whether consumers demand marketing, it is evident that retailers buy meat to use as a means of advertising. It follows that they obscure their own demand for marketing as the (less economically valuable) consumer demand for food. To distort the value of the traded good in this manner is a form of speculation, implying the difference between markets and capitalism that Braudel (1977) envisions. Meat is neither bought nor sold to produce food, but used as a means of re-producing capital; it is effectively an “anti-market” which inhibits efficient distribution and production. Braudel explains how such “financialization” makes food a means of speculation by controlling the supply, making it deviate from demand and gamble on higher profits in other or future markets, similarly to studies of contemporary food systems (see also 1983:229–39; cf. Burch and Lawrence 2009, 2013; Russi 2013). This is also the case in the Swedish meat supply chain, albeit in a different manner than in the early modern Europe Braudel studied.

By producing meat in abundance compared to the consumer demand, its aesthetic value as a status symbol may be used to speculate on the sales of
higher profit goods. It is in the disregard of consumers’ demand for a good in deciding on the quantities and (physical) qualities to produce that capitalism becomes the antipode of a market. No market equilibrium occurs in the market for meat-as-food because the speculative value of meat-as-marketing, is greater than the potential profits of meat sold as a regular market good (assuming that the large-scale producers’ practices to realize profits actually work). It is true that some retailer-informants have occasionally been criticized by customers for their defiance of the common good in retail. However, the farmers have yet to take to the streets in protest of retailers using Swedish meat as a means of speculation.

9.2.2 The Problem of Qualitative Values

The previous section explained how Swedish meat producers deal with supplying an abundant foodstuff by disregarding consumer demand. Following on that conclusion, I turn to my second research question of how abundance is perpetuated. This second question is explained by the finding that all (practically influential) valuations in the Swedish meat supply chain distinguish qualitative values. Swedish meat producers’ valuations perpetuate abundance because there is no measure of a sufficient output volume that translates into practical effects.

Given that the producers do not supply food to meet a demand, it follows that the output thereof is not measured to distinguish a sufficient volume. The aesthetic of commerce is a qualitative value. It is the immediate experience of the retail space as a site of commerce that is valuable, not the measures of profit or quality applicable to the goods exchanged (cf. Entwistle 2002). Existing studies support this conclusion, showing that retailers overstock their stores and set high aesthetic standards for their supply, which demands making a lot of food into waste (see Barnard 2016; Edwards and Mercer 2012; Evans 2011; Hawkins 2013; Thomas 2010; see also FAO 2011).

The criteria distinguishing the Swedish meat production regime from its competitors are also qualitative, because they make binary distinctions between sufficiency and excess. This lack of a commensurable measure is also implied by existing research on the cultural ambiguity of animal welfare policies (Winter et al. 1998; Miele 2013; cf. European Commission 2007). For producers using critical valuations, there is no way of knowing what a sufficient volume of meat to supply is. All meat produced that fulfills the criteria of the common good is, effectively, sufficient.

The use of qualitative values, and ignorance of a quantifiable consumer demand, problematizes Hayek’s (1945) argument that abundance occurs because of distorted market signals, i.e., prices. For Hayek, such distortion is a consequence of central planning. However, this study shows that the disregard of quality standards and profit margins does not necessarily come from government market intervention. In this case, the signals from consumers
are ignored and obscured by the market actors themselves. Without using quantitative measures of profit or desire, it is impossible to know how much meat consumers demand for food in the first place. While the Area Grant is certainly keeping some farmers out of bankruptcy, they are not dependent on producing meat to be awarded that grant. But counter to Hayek’s argument, commercial businesses themselves produce the boundaries of incommensurability that distort prices. While such boundaries generate a scarcity of knowledge, it is hard to regard them as the underlying cause of abundance. They are better explained as a means of dealing with producing an abundant foodstuff, eventually perpetuating it.

In the case of Swedish meat production, central planning is actually the reason that there is a commensurable quality measure for cattle and hogs available, albeit uninfluential. The EU installed the EUROP in an attempt to produce a “standard market” with price competition over defined qualities (see European Commission 2012; cf. Aspers 2009:115–16). However, my informants from retail and meat processing imply that their revenue is unrelated to the classified qualities of meat. The producers’ distortion of signals is thus essential for them to make profits from more profitable and less symbolically powerful goods than fresh meat. It is thus questionable if existing economic research of “consumer preferences” for meat may be used to solve problems of abundance. Instead, they may risk aggravating the problems of abundance by driving further conformity of commodity aesthetics and neglect or ignorance of primary production (cf., e.g., Grunert et al. 2011, 2004). The large-scale retailers’ and meat processors’ profits are dependent on the fact that fresh meat is not treated as a market good in the first place. The limitations of qualitative valuations and the disregard of consumer demand thus have to be perpetuated, because otherwise meat may not be used as marketing. For meat to be traded in a market-like manner, production costs and volumes have to be taken into regard in some manner, despite being a highly symbolic good (see also Velthuis 2005; Zelizer 1994a). How can one otherwise know what to produce and who to sell it to in a sustainable manner?

Following on the effects of disregarding consumer demand, I maintain that Braudel’s (1977) theory of capitalism as “anti-market”, distorting or obscuring value to enable financial speculation, better captures the economic reality of how Swedish meat is supplied in abundance than Hayek (or Keynes). Despite being honestly applied, the EUROP standard’s prices are sparsely related to the consumer market. Effectively, it does not distinguish values objectively in the manner standards are expected to do in markets (see also Ponte and Gibbon 2005; cf. Aspers 2009; Sandholtz 2012). Because the large-scale processors’ and retailers’ pricing activities distort the signals from cattle trade, they may use the value discrepancy between commodity and raw material for financial speculation (see also Burch and Lawrence 2013; Harrington 2016). Just as there is no commensurable measure of animals’ welfare, there is not one of production cost used when setting the price of
meat. That said, Hayek’s argument can easily be improved, taking Braudel’s theory into account. The routinization of valuations is certainly influenced by dominant market actors use and non-use of values produced therein. Consequently, these “dragons”, to use the industry term, may generate same practical effects as governments because they hold near monopolies. “Merchants”, just as governments, may “eliminate competition by holding an actual or virtual monopoly” (Braudel 1983:416). The Swedish meat supply chain is, after all, dominated by a few, large-scale companies. Qualitative valuations make such large-scale producers’ dominance incommensurable and implicit concerning how they affect smaller-scale producers, consumers, and citizens alike. Also, since the large-scale producers create this scarcity of knowledge themselves, it becomes hard to argue that it would exist \(\text{à priori}\) to abundance. Rather, it seems to be a part of the production practice.

To conclude, the aim of this study has ultimately sought to answer is how abundance is perpetuated. In the introduction, I argue that existing sociological approaches to abundance assume this state as the \(\text{à priori}\) condition of social reality. A given condition, which people deal with by distinguishing it into sufficient and an excess part. I further pointed out that existing theories of abundance define the excess part thereof as the problem, which is therefore either wasted or invested (to be used as sufficiency in the future). The evidence supplied by this study furthers these findings by distinguishing the human, or social, origin of abundance. The Swedish meat supply chain bears witness to that for abundance to be perpetuated; a qualitative distinction between sufficiency and excess has to be produced. Qualitative values are, by definition, quantitatively limitless. Abundance is thus perpetuated by treating such a quantity as qualitatively sufficient.

9.2.3 The Values of a Qualitative Study of Quantity

Taken as a whole, the abundance of meat is perpetuated by the supply chain itself. In opposition to economic theory, I argue, this is not the consequence of scarcity, but an effect of meat producers who do not valuate their goods in terms of a demand for food. The effect is that an excess supply is not reduced to sufficient volumes. This finding, I argue, shows that abundance is actively produced. It is certainly possible to argue that meat is supplied in sufficient quantities, because the supply matches the demand for “meat as marketing”. However, since that demand depends on underpricing meat, it would be strange to argue that it is an actual demand. Pragmatically speaking, the value of meat as marketing has no means of sustaining a market equilibrium, because it presupposes that the costs of production do not have to be covered, and that the conditions of production are obfuscated. These findings beg the question how marketing and agriculture are valuated, and what values they supply in a state of abundance (see also Carolan 2011; Wu 2016).
Beyond the precarious future for Swedish farmers and small-scale meat processors, this conclusion further shows the value of sociological pragmatism for this study. By taking into account how distinctions of value actually translate into practical conduct, this study has been able to show how valuation works in practice, showing how knowledge about, and standardized evaluations of, commensurable meat quality is disregarded and kept uninfluential in the Swedish meat supply chain. Without stressing the tension between the informants’ conceptions and practical conduct, the futile use of quantitative measures in the production of abundance would not have been possible to discern. The valuation of sufficiency as a quality – rather than quantity – is the practical reality of meat production in a post-scarcity society.

While the findings of this study may to some extent seem like homo economicus (large-scale retailers) and meat processors and homo sociologicus (small-scale producers), I do not argue that to be the case. What I discuss is how two types of valuations are used in practice. The effects of using them may come off as goal-oriented or reproducing a structural position. However, these impressions are the effects of shared and routinized practices, which is an important distinction from the aforementioned theoretical approaches. The fact that both of these aspects of human conduct can be discussed within the same theoretical framework implies the reliance on practices in sociological pragmatism, which may be used both in reproductive manners and to purposefully attain some goal.

As I use the concepts aesthetic and critical valuations for analyzing producers’ practices, it should be stressed that they do not perfectly match reality. Some valuations are clearer cut than others in terms of these concepts. It is therefore important to stress that they are theoretical, used to reduce complexity in order to explain reality. It should further be pointed out that there may be valuations which are not captured by these types, and that further ones may have to be developed to explain other empirical cases. That said, these types of valuations do distinguish different parts of an empirical reality of valuation. It is certainly of essence if valuations use commensurable values or not, and if these are treated intrinsically or as a means to attain some greater or common good (cf. Aspers 2009; Lamont 2012).

Using what might be called a “supply chain ethnography” have enabled this study to employ an analysis of value which takes the tension between ideas and practical conduct into regard. Participatory observations and on-site interviews show how the employment of valuations changes between markets and producers. The empirical materials covering the whole of a supply chain have certainly been decisive in answering the research questions. These questions could not have been answered using a quantitative method, limited to measures of value assumed to be commensurable with other ones. Such a method would not have been able to discern how numbers are produced, used, and disregarded in relation to non-quantified values of an abundant supply.
While my method has proven itself useful, its limitations are also evident at this point. This study cannot draw any conclusions about the distribution of aesthetic and critical abundance among meat producers, nor where the supply chain’s breaking point in terms of measurable qualities, revenue, or producers’ experienced meaning would be. While comparisons to other kinds of producers are possible, it is certainly a delicate process to distinguish how it can be devised. This study alone cannot distinguish to what extent its analytical generalizability holds for other cases. That said, some novel evidence of a previously sparsely studied part of reality has been generated, as both agrifood production and supply chains are sparsely studied using qualitative methods. With the answers to my questions laid out in relation to the research process, I turn to this study’s scientific contributions.

9.3 Discussion: Contributions and Implications

While the main finding of this study is that qualitative valuations perpetuate the production of abundance in the Swedish meat supply chain, it also complements and challenges existing research in a number of more specific manners. With the entirety of the study laid out, and the research questions answered, I turn to the contributions of this study for food studies, economic sociology, and the study of abundance.

9.3.1 Food in Society

Turning to a food supply chain in a post-scarcity society has granted some further evidence of the conditions of food consumption. Food studies, as I mention initially in this study, have generally been concerned with consumers and their practices in post-scarcity societies, especially the possibilities and limits of consumer choice. Existing studies argue that consumers are held responsible, or even blamed, for lacking food quality, hygiene, etc. (e.g. Evans 2011; Holm 2003; Meah 2014; Soneryd and Uggla 2015; see also Boström and Klintman 2017:8–9). Also, that the “attitude-behavioral gap” of consumers’ ethics may be explained by absence of “civic values” in retail environments, inhibiting consumers from making justifications rather than being hypocrites (Thorslund and Lassen 2016; see also Warde 2017:186–88; cf. Vermier and Verbeke 2006). By turning to food production, this study supports and complements the aforementioned ones. I show how consumers’ valuations of food are inhibited by and reduced to aesthetic values in retail spaces. The production of commercial aesthetics further obfuscates or neglects any criteria or measure of a common good. Even the most diligent consumer may not discern what she actually pays for, or what the goods’ different production regimes imply in relation to each other. Effectively, if there is a consumer demand for such things, it is disregarded. However, this conclusion should not be taken as a sinister intention from grocery store chains. The
aesthetic of commerce may be an effect of flawed valuations, rather than values.

With the retailers’ obfuscation of production regimes in mind, it is worth the finding in exiting research suggesting that retailers have come to adopt responsibilities for food safety from public authorities (Belo Moreira 2015; Halkier and Holm 2006; Holm and Halkier 2009). Paradoxically enough, retailers are also the least transparent part of the supply chain, implied by the sparse access to public reports and statistics. It is thus hard to judge how they fare as warrants of food safety, not saying that they do a poor job. However, this study suggests that retailers are much keener to adapt their operations to standards than primary producers. Hence, it may be well worth studying if policies can be more efficiently implemented in the retail part of an agrifood supply chain than among reluctant and financially challenged primary producers.

The finding that aesthetics obscure production practice should, however, not be mistaken for suggesting that further diligently devised ones, e.g., brands, would solve this issue. Reviewing existing literature on meat consumption, I pointed out that refined tastes of meat made the eating of large quantities of common and cheap meat vulgar. I later suggested this conception to be paradoxical, as unprecedented quantities of meat are consumed. The findings of this study suggest that a preoccupation with refined qualities of meat in the study of taste have disregarded the “status of thrift” that is supplied by affordable prices and relatively common commodity aesthetics.

This study cannot say how consumers use thrifty commodity aesthetics. However, it is evident that retailers supply them, and experience consumers demanding a status of thriftiness. Weber’s (2005) seminal study of how the protestant ethic transformed into the spirit of capitalism have been readily used in sociology to explain contemporary economic and social life. It is thus far from unreasonable that an aesthetic of thrift would be how such an ethic is attained in post-scarcity capitalist societies (see also Lehtonen and Pantzar 2002; Podkalicka and Potts 2014; Streib 2015). In the light of this study, contemporary studies of food consumption seem to have approached all but the most impoverished meat consumers as wasteful status-seekers, in the vein of Veblen’s (2008) leisure class (cf., e.g., Beagan et al. 2014; Johnston and Baumann 2010; Mennell 1996; Paddock 2015c). This study implies that the routine consumption of meat has been somewhat ignored in the field of food studies. I thus argue that the study of practices of food consumption, purchase, cooking, and eating, have to approach the supply of food more explicitly to fully explain the limits of consumer choice in food-related practices (see also Boström and Klintman 2017). Consumers’ thrift may then also be explored not as “a means to an end, […but] an end in itself” (Miller 1998:135–36).

The political economy of “food systems”, or “value chains”, would, in the same manner, benefit from considering consumer practices. This study
supplies evidence supporting existing studies that food systems are dominated by large-scale grocery chains, which are less concerned with food supply than sales (see, e.g., Burch and Lawrence 2005, 2009). However, the evidence supplied here further suggests that the use of standards in a supply chain are easily transformed into an aesthetic of responsibility or quality, including prices, which reflects more on the retailer than the primary producer. Food systems and value chain research would thus benefit from regarding the practical activities of employment standards, and how the values produced in that process are treated in markets and production processes along the supply chain (cf. Ponte and Gibbon 2005). Albeit this study does not primarily address rural sociology, it is also worth pointing out the finding that neglect and invisibility of farmers seems to inhibit rural resistance (cf. Macken-Walsh 2016:619–21; Shucksmith and Brown 2016:663–66; Woods 2016). While this study supplies evidence of frustration and critique of “regular” urban people, those feelings do not translate into protests. On the contrary, they fuel attempts and demands for social inclusion of farmers into majority society by sharing a common good.

Conclusively, I find that the study of food in society may benefit from a further engagement with the tension between consumption and production. There is presently no clear definition explaining whether these activities are inherently different, employed by different groups of people, or if they are parts of a whole encompassing human provisioning. The last decades turn for “practice theory” in food studies have supplied a number of important insights for understanding maybe the most fundamental activity of human societies; how we feed ourselves (e.g., Shove and Spurling 2013; Warde 2016, 2017). By turning to the entire complex of social food provisioning, including how processes of provisioning have transformed from the pre-Neolithic era until today, food studies may supply more general evidence and theories for how society works, and how economic, political, technological, and cultural development become part of the practical processes of human civilization. The practice and organization of agriculture is thus an especially relevant matter for social sciences, as it has been part of all but the earliest sedentary human cultures (see Scott 2017).

9.3.2 Economic Practice

This study has taken some interest in valuation practices used in agrifood production, a field sparsely addressed by economic sociologists. By drawing on sociological pragmatism, this study contributes to the argument that both coordination and performativity of valuations hold explanatory power, and may be combined. While there is little outright debate, I find that valuations as aspects of shared and routinized practice may take both the performativity of markets and the relational coordination of market actors into regard (cf. Aspers 2007; Callon 2007). As production activities are routinely used, they both engender and sustain relations between producers in a market-like
manner and produce economic value as reality. In line with, e.g., Charles Smith (2007), I thus argue that economic practice includes both coordination and performative aspects, and may only be fully explained by understanding the dynamic between them.

By studying a full supply chain, this study supplies evidence for the importance of production sites in everyday economic life. The farmers and meat processors clearly show the importance of production sites for their economic activities. It is more or less impossible to move a farm, and the abattoir is dependent on how close it is to farms that supply animals. The layout of the built environment also affects the production practices employed there. Such sites are thus conditions for what values that can be produced, and what criteria can be fulfilled. The production site is, however, as important for employees in retail. The store’s built environment enables it to resemble commerce, and the back of the store may encompass and obfuscate any activity that would overshadow these aesthetic values. While different in many regards, the production sites become imperial for how producers deal with supplying an abundant foodstuff. The site of production is where valuations are employed, both enabling and constraining how values are produced.

The role of production sites certainly differs between industries, countries, and types of producers. However, such cultural irregularities should then be taken into regard, in order to make sense of what market relations actually mean for a producer. Weak ties may be important in a labor markets where the worker is less anchored to a specific site, e.g., in the USA (cf. Granovetter 1973). Markets for highly complex and aesthetic goods such as fashion, obscuring their origins and dependency on primary production, are certainly less dependent on a specific production site (see Aspers 2010:125–36). This study supplies evidence of how producers use and engage with their production sites in different manners, how valuations are embedded and configure the use of these sites in producers’ practice. Such an engagement may be jeopardized when social reality changes, and with it the meaning of production sites in economic lives (see also Çalışkan 2010:200–203; Dobeson 2016a:203–6).

Braudel’s (1977, 1983) distinction between markets and capitalism, and especially the concepts transparency and opacity, have been shown to contribute a useful distinction for economic sociology. While his theory deserves further investigation, this study certainly implies the usefulness of Braudel’s conception of economic life in relation to studying economic practices: the availability of both knowledge and material resources in the practices of producers and consumers alike. Economic practices may either obscure or transpire values in markets, which makes them important for explaining how economy in society works. The concepts transparency and obscurity enable a discussion of how practical elements are accessible for users of social practices. I show these concepts’ usefulness especially in how
asymmetric influence and knowledge is intertwined in pricing activities; lacking access to knowledge of economic valuations, as well as a means for producing commodity aesthetics also inhibits the producers’ ability to influence pricing activities (see also Warde 2017:173–74). Since practice theory has been criticized for lacking a theory of power (Bénatouïl 1999; Wattson 2017), it may benefit from discussing the role of access in practical reality. A practice can after all only be used if the person using it has access to all its relevant parts. Further explorations of economic practices, including but not limited to consumption, may be a promising field of research for developing a pragmatic theory of power.

9.3.3 Towards a Sociology of Sufficiency

Finally, the study of abundance in sociology has, until this study, primarily concerned the management of à priori states of abundance. The main theoretical contribution of this study is the insight that abundance is perpetuated by valuating sufficiency and excess qualitatively. Valuating social reality in terms of qualities means that it is experienced, perceived and engaged with, as abundant; inherently divided by sufficiency and excess. It would be impossible to use qualitative valuations without assuming that there is something that lacks the relevant quality, what might be called a “naturalized dichotomy”. Qualitative valuations would otherwise be redundant and have no practical effects if everything is assumed to be sufficient, and treated accordingly.

It is with the conception of qualitative values as dichotomous that I turn back to the sociological theories of abundance. These theories generally assume that excess is a necessary “accursed share” of social reality, to use Bataille’s words (1988). The findings from this study raise the question of whether that assumption is correct, or if it bears witness to a world view that naturalizes some normative dichotomy, e.g., value and waste or good and bad (cf. Abbott 2016; Callon 1998, 2007a; Czarniawska and Löfgren 2012; Thompson 2004; Veblen 2008). When Daoud (2011a) studies scarcity, he finds that it is not a universal state of undersupply, but depends on the context in which scarcity is defined – in other words, a normative concept. This study opens up a similar line of thought when it comes to abundance, since the empirical case studied here shows how oversupply is enabled by distinguishing certain qualities of it as sufficient. It is certainly not possible to render an exhaustive answer to how abundance can exist from one singular study. However, it certainly opens up the hypothesis that scarcity and abundance are phenomena that may be addressed by the same questions: what is sufficiency, and how can it be defined and achieved?

This study suggests that quantitative, commensurable measures are necessary for distinguishing sufficiency. However, I would not go so far as to argue that such measures may cover all aspects thereof. As the sociology of
quantification shows, measurements are not given by nature, but defined in social processes (Espeland and Stevens 2008, 1998; see also Espeland and Sauder 2007; Fourcade 2011a, 2011b). Consequently, a measure translates its designers’ conception of reality into practice. There is certainly some irony to a qualitative study drawing the conclusion that the problem it has studied is an effect of lacking quantification. However, I maintain that qualitative studies are decisive to warrant against naïve, opportunist, ambiguous, or misguided attempts to quantify human experience, and experience reality in terms of quantities. That said, it is certainly possible to further explore the sociology of sufficiency by studying practices used to attain it, both in material and symbolic manners.

Attempts to achieve sufficiency have recently gained attention in studies of sustainable consumption and circular economies, albeit studies of production may complement their findings further (cf. Mylan, Holmes, and Paddock 2016; Shove and Spurling 2013; Stål and Corvellec 2018). For example, people who attempt to “downsize” and live “simpler lives” by becoming self-sufficient farmers may hold further insights into this phenomenon. A drastically different case would be tax migration. That phenomena may be perceived as leaving welfare states to legally attain sufficient fiscal pressure, possibly sacrificing social security, the positive effects of high-trust communities, and personal relations in the process. Albeit sufficiency of two drastically different kinds, these two examples both hold possibilities for understanding sufficiency.

One last insight closing my argument, is that economic theory is not all wrong about abundance. Oversupply has actually rid society of the problem of scarcity, i.e., to distinguish proper allocation. That finding is, however, a pyrrhic victory for economics. While the problem “allocation of scarce resources” is not pressing, scarcity in itself prevails. The Swedish meat supply chain certainly shows that not even in a state of abundance is there such a thing as a free lunch. But since food is as symbol ridden as ever in a post-scarcity society, it is even harder to discern who pays for it.
References


Appendices

10.1 Appendix A: Meat Taboos in Existing Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Toxic/safe</td>
<td>(Fessler and Navarrete 2003; Kjaernes et al. 2007; Vincent 2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unhealthy/healthy</td>
<td>(Bildtgård 2002; Levenstein 1994:196–212)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>slaughter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production animals /consumption</td>
<td>(Beadsworth and Kiel 1997:203–9; Mennell 1996:304–10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>animals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste/food</td>
<td>(Ferrell 2006; Barnard 2016; Clark 2004; cf. Corvellec 2013)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{130}\) This distinction is thus made between different animal parts, tabooing, e.g., offal because it is reminiscent of the meat’s animal origin.
10.2 Appendix B: Interviewed Informants

The cell colors indicate whether the interview was made individually or in pairs. Each group of informants is ordered chronologically according to the time of the interview.

Table 10:1 Interviewed Informants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Farmer</th>
<th>Informant</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Karl</td>
<td>Part-time cattle farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lennart</td>
<td>Cattle farmer, meat and dairy, larger scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Berit</td>
<td>Hog farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Klas</td>
<td>Hog farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freja</td>
<td>Cattle farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arvid</td>
<td>Cattle farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Benny</td>
<td>Cattle farmer, niche producer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elin</td>
<td>Cattle farmer, organic production and DTC retailer and sales agent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Robin</td>
<td>Cattle farmer, organic production and employed butcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kerstin</td>
<td>Hog farmer, animal welfare focus (non-standardized)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ragnar</td>
<td>Hog farmer, animal welfare focus (non-standardized)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>Cattle farmer, DTC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jesper</td>
<td>Cattle farmer, DTC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Johanna</td>
<td>Hog farmer, large scale integrated production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gunnar</td>
<td>Hog farmer, large scale specialized production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processor</td>
<td>Hasse</td>
<td>Small-scale abattoir and cutting facility, lego-slaughter, owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Walter</td>
<td>Premium cutting, co-owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Olov</td>
<td>Mid-sized sales, employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Samuel</td>
<td>Mid-sized processing and butchery, employee and teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gustav</td>
<td>Large-scale cattle slaughter and processing, manager/employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ivar</td>
<td>Large-scale hog slaughter and processing, manager/employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fredrik</td>
<td>Large-scale slaughter and processing (both hog and cattle) manager/employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>György</td>
<td>Mid-scale cattle cutter, employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retailer</td>
<td>Eskil</td>
<td>Large supermarket meat manager (w. deli counter), employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>Large supermarket meat manager (w. deli counter), employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lars</td>
<td>Large supermarket meat manager (no deli counter), employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Filip</td>
<td>Small supermarket meat manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Occupation and Identification</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anton</td>
<td>Butcher shop and restaurant, co-owner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>Butcher shop and restaurant, co-owner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>Mid-sized supermarket meat/fresh produce manager, employee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pernilla</td>
<td>Premium supermarket meat manager, employee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kent</td>
<td>Butcher's shop, owner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin</td>
<td>Discount supermarket, employee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yngve</td>
<td>Supermarket central management, employee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viktor</td>
<td>Meat distributor and wholesale agent, employee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Cattle farming Lobbyist, employee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agneta</td>
<td>Hog farming Lobbyist, employee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellinor</td>
<td>Cattle farming consultant, employee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosanna</td>
<td>Production standards consultant, employee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britt</td>
<td>Hog and cattle farming consultant, employee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christer</td>
<td>Retail consultant, self-employed, former butcher and meat-processing entrepreneur</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10.3 Appendix C: Named Informants at Mr. Meats

Table 10:2 Named Informants at Mr. Meats

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harald</td>
<td>An old meat cutter and foreman at Mr. Meats.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ronny</td>
<td>A cutter in his 60s with a background in grocery stores.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olle</td>
<td>A cutter in his early 30s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>The foreman for the plant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arnold</td>
<td>The president and majority owner of Mr. Meats.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian</td>
<td>Young employee with university background.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>High school student doing on-the-job training from the food and hospitality program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magdalena</td>
<td>Quality control manager.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10.4 Appendix D: Industry Meetings

The meetings outlined below are anonymized, as the organizers agreed to my participation but not all producers present were aware of my study, albeit I always disclosed it when talking to people at these meetings and wore a name tag stating my affiliation with Uppsala University. The pseudonyms are however made to describe the meetings, rather than directly translate their names, which usually involve acronyms of organizations or companies. Closed meetings or sessions mean that all participants had to register beforehand, and that the meeting or session was not open to the public, albeit journalists did also attend. I was never barred from attending such sessions or meeting as audience.

Table 10:3 Industry Meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Future Green Industries: Swedish Food and Competence</td>
<td>One-day closed meeting. Panel discussions, presentations, and booths representing different companies and organizations involved in Swedish food production of all kinds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. National Fair on Animal Farming 2014</td>
<td>Three-day open meeting, closed industry sessions. Fair both for industry relations and for maintaining the public image of Swedish farming. The general focus is breeding and farm technology, e.g., automated feeding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. National Fair on Animal Farming 2015</td>
<td>Three-day open meeting, closed industry sessions. Same as above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The Meat and Charcuteries Fair</td>
<td>Two-day meeting, one closed and one open day. Meeting among small- and large-scale meat processing industries, charcuteries producers, retailers, and hospitality industry. Second day open to the public as a marketing event.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Veterinary Medicine and Swedish Farming</td>
<td>Two-day closed meeting. Supply chain-wide meeting, focusing on the value of Swedish farm animal welfare and the future development of farm animal welfare.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10.5 Appendix E: Interview Guide

The following interview guide is a translated and somewhat aggregated version of the four different ones I used. In the interviews, I used a paper version so to take notes. The general questions are part of all versions of the interview guide, while the use of the specific ones depended on the what type of producer the informant was interviewed as. The use of dichotomies in the interview guide is a means of organization and not part of the interview method nor an analytical framework. INF is short for Informant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. The daily work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| What do INF do on a regular day as a [meat producer]?
| Regular activities            | Lay out the course of a day |
| B. The operation               |
| What kind of meat production operation does INF run? |
| Organization                   | Employment/Business ownership |
| Development/History            | Education / Prev. Experience |
| C. Economy                     |
| How does INF make money?       |
| Suppliers                      | Customers                       |
| Prices for buying              | Prices for selling              |
| Cooperation w. other producers | Knowledge about competitors     |
| Subsidies                      | Taxes and tariffs               |
| Other sources of income        | Marketing                       |
| Imports                        | Exports                         |
| D. Policy and standards        |
| How do INF deal w. standards and laws? |
| Swedish politics on meat/prod. | EU                              |
| Swedish Board of Agriculture   | Animal Welfare                  |
| National Food Administration   | Hygiene                         |
| Swedish Tax Agency             | Tax reports                      |
| IP Standards / Sigill          | EU-organic                      |
| Krav                           |
| Audits                         |
| Other standardized regimes?    |
| E. Meat consumption            |
| How does INF perceive meat consumption? |
| Consumption levels             | Consumer preferences            |
Imports
Environment
Food industry / large-scale
Grocery stores
Pork

F. Personal

How did you become a meat producer?
Family
Geographical background
Economic standing

G. Other

How do INF perceive the future?
Experience of other parts of Swedish meat production?
Industry organizations (LRF, KCF, Swedish Grocery Trade)

Farmers

A. Animals

What kind of animals are bred by INF?
Quantity
Breeds (Choice)
Feed
Meat quality
Deaths
Transports

B. The Farm

What is the farm’s layout?
Buildings / Machinery
Land
Other kinds of agriculture

Processors/Butchers

A. Butchery process

How are animals slaughtered?
Animal deliveries
Euthanizing methods
Carcass dressing
Cooling
Hanging
Butchery/Cutting
B. Meat cuts

*How are carcasses made into cuts?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of meat cuts</th>
<th>Meat quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commodities</td>
<td>Packaging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further processing</td>
<td>Waste</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Retailers**

A. Supply

*How are meat-foods chosen and supplied for retail?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Butcher’s shop</th>
<th>Grocery chain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delivery</td>
<td>Orders / Ordering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returns</td>
<td>Storage hygiene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudden deals</td>
<td>Out-of-stock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-store cutting</td>
<td>Packaging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-store cooking</td>
<td>Waste</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B. Marketing

*How is meat sold and marketed?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pork</th>
<th>Beef</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coolers/shelves</td>
<td>Deli counter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price tags</td>
<td>Consumer interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-store advertising</td>
<td>Staff training/competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discounts</td>
<td>Inventory / -management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other groceries

**Lobbyists & Consultants**

A. Swedish meat production

*How is Swedish meat production organized?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Hogs/Pork</th>
<th>Cattle/Beef</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relations between producers</td>
<td>Historical development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>New methods/technologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards</td>
<td>Niche producers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Food production in general | Who stays in business?

B. Working with/for Swedish meat producers

*How does your work engage with meat production?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Hogs/Pork</th>
<th>Cattle/Beef</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Giving advice</td>
<td>Opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own experience of production</td>
<td>International relations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10.6 Appendix F: Example Letter

Dear Kerstin and Ragnar,

Here comes a presentation of me and my study, as promised.

My name is Jonas Bååth and I am a PhD student in sociology at Uppsala University. I study the Swedish meat industry in order to understand how economy and meat quality are managed therein. At this point, I am looking for interviewees that work either with meat or breed animals for meat production.

The background for this project is that I am writing my dissertation as part of a larger project on assessment and evaluations in markets. The purpose of my individual project is to study how economy and meat quality is managed in all parts of Swedish meat production. The study thus concerns the breeding and husbandry of animals, meat processing, and retail to consumers. The project is funded by the European Research Council, and thus independent of any political or commercial liabilities.

The interview requires ca. 60-90 minutes. You are always free to abstain from answering a question, or to end the interview. You and your farm will be anonymous. With your approval, the interview is recorded with a dictation device. Neither the audio file nor your participation will be confided to a third party. I can however provide you with a copy of the audio file on a USB drive. Beyond the interview, I would also like to see your premises and operation, in the event that it is practically manageable.

You do not have to prepare in any way for the interview. The questions concern your experiences and everyday work as hog farmers. For example, how you deliver to a meat processor and how you came to work with that processor.

I will be in [town] on [dates]. Please do not hesitate to ask any further questions.

My best regards,

Jonas

[Author’s translation]
10.7 Appendix G: Outline of Example Interview

The initial contact for an interview was made through email or phone, setting up a time and place for the interview. I explained the time frame of the interview and the purpose of my research to the interviewee. The latter topic was usually framed as “I study the Swedish meat industry and your idea of what good meat is.” When I was asked about my interest in this topic, I pointed to media coverage of the meat industry, and the lack of perspective from the people “who do the actual work”. Many also asked me if I had a background in the meat industry or in farming, which I do not.

The interviews were made in proximity to the production site, either on the premises or at, e.g., a café next door. If the site was a publicly accessible space, e.g., a grocery store, I arrived 20-30 minutes before the interview to look at the store, its surroundings, and especially the meat section, to involve these elements in the interview. While every interview has its irregularities, the following example outlines how a regular interview, here at a farm, was carried out.

Before leaving for the interview, I usually call the interviewee(s) to check that everything was ok, and that they had time for me.

Following the GPS pre-recorded voice, I finally drive up to the driveway ending up among the buildings. While I exit the car, one or two persons come out of the dwelling house and wave at me.

After a proper introduction, I am asked to come into the kitchen “where it will be best to talk”. The farmer(s) offer(s) me coffee and cake and I talk to them for 10-15 minutes before I bring out the recording device. Before starting it, I ask if they feel comfortable being recorded, and inform them that the audio recording will be used by me personally, and that the transcripts were to be anonymous. Finally, I also add that they are not forced to answer any questions and that they can end the interview whenever they want. Recording was accepted by all interviewees under these conditions.

I used an interview guide, more as a framework than as a list of questions. This guide was, however, less and less used over the course of the interview. In the end, it was mainly used to see if I had left something out worth talking about. Rather I proposed certain themes, but the interviewees were usually talkative and touched upon most of the themes I had prepared. I also took notes during the interview, to be able to get back to details and when the conversation was occasionally side-tracked. These notes also included visual information, such as body language, documents (e.g., book-keeping and newspaper articles), and pictures that the farmers showed me. At the end of the interview I also asked if the informants have any questions for me or if there is anything in addition that they think I should be aware of.

After ca. 105 minutes of recorded interview, I was offered to see the animals and the operation. I then put on boots and protective clothing and was guided by one of the farmers around the premises. Usually I asked them to show me how the animals moved from birth or delivery to when they leave the farm.
This “tour” took about 30 minutes. I continued to record during the tour, but also took notes and made occasional sketches. Afterwards, I was also allowed to walk around by myself and look at the premises.

Driving off after ca three hours on the farm, I used my smartphone to record my spontaneous reflections from the interview, which usually amounted to about five to ten minutes of recorded monologue.

This way of interviewing, the physical environment became important for what happens during the interview. Also, the topics of these interviews primarily concern how to, e.g., feed hogs, classify carcasses, or clean a store shelf. The question I found most fruitful to begin an interview with was: “can you tell me what you do here on a regular day?” From that question, the details of production could be investigated. Thus, the discourse generated is the discourse about the practical activities of producing meat, rather than what the producers think about meat production. This latter category, however, was often unavoidable as the producers often wanted to discuss these things – especially towards the end of the interviews.
10.8 Appendix H: Cutting Schemas

Beef cutting Schema

1. Collar (hals) 1. Strips teak (ryggbiff)
2. Chuck roll (högrev) 2. Sirloin steak (ryggbiff)
3. Rib-eye (entrecôte) 3. Rump (rostbiff)
4. Rib-eye (entrecôte) 4. Tenderloin (filé)
5. Strip-steak (ryggbiff) 5. Flank (tjock källap), and hanger steak
6. Marrow (märppipa) 6. Flank-steak (källap)
7. Brisket (bringspets) 7. Plate (bringa)
8. Plate (bringa) 8. Ball tip/round (picaña, rostlock)
10. Top side with eye of round
Pork Cutting Schema

1. Head (huvud)
2. Collar (nacke)
3. Hock (framlägg)
4. Trotter (fot)
5. Shoulder (karré) and loin (kotlettrad), also tenderloin (filé).
6. Ham (skinka)
7. Shank (baklägg)
8. Trotter (fot)

-. Un-numbered area in the midst of the carcass: belly (sida) and ribs (revben).
10.9 Appendix I: Quota Grids from Meat Processors

Hog quota sheet, major processor:

Cattle quota sheet (veal excluded), major processor: