Research Statement

Title: The Changing Face of Mary
Creator: Lila Singh-Peterson, Sondra Smit, Geoffrey Lawrence, Bill Carter
Year: 2015

Research Background
Agricultural systems around the world are being severely impacted by a changing climate, extreme weather events, urbanisation and neoliberal (free market) policies. Yet, there are currently few studies that present the experiences of those affected by these compounding pressures, captured at the local scale. As a case study, this documentary provides a voice through which those most affected can articulate their opinions and concerns, celebrate their innovative responses and generally inform those unaware of the challenges confronting the majority of small scale food producers in Australia.

Research Contribution
Experiences of adaptive responses, along with recommendations for transformations of the agricultural systems are presented in this documentary by both small scale farmers and industry experts. By presenting this information, we believe that such responses can provide valuable insights into what can be done, and what needs to be done, to bring about a more equitable and sustainable food system in Australia. The documentary also highlights that the practical and strategic recommendations made by participants, particularly the need for supermarket and government policies to appropriately reflect the immense value of small-scale farmers in sustaining rural communities and enhancing the resilience and sustainability of Australia’s food security.

A complementary peer reviewed research article has also been published to clarify these points raised in the documentary and place them within the body of established knowledge in this field (Singh-Peterson, L., & Lawrence, G. (2017). The changing face of the Mary Valley: considering the fairness, sustainability and resilience of the agricultural system in a peri-urban setting. Local Environment, 22(5), 568-580). This journal article appeals to an academic audience, but is less effective in mobilising and supporting communities of local small scale farmers. The documentary and journal article we considered would effectively reach both audiences.

Research Significance
There is much concern regarding the impact of climate change on food production around the world. The research significance of this documentary rests on the fact that the small scale farmers featured in this case study reiterate that the impacts of climate change are manageable, if the farming business is able to generate enough profit to absorb the costs of preparation and recovery from disasters. Globalisation pressures are far more significant to farmers in this case study than the impacts of climate change – highlighting that resilience to climate change is therefore dependent on resolving globalisation issues for these small scale farmers. This is clearly a significant finding with obvious policy implications.