

## Culture



# Culture and Agriculture In the North American Context

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### Article abstract

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# Culture and Agriculture In the North American Context

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This paper reviews the anthropological literature relating to culture and modern capital intensive farming in North America. The author argues that there is a legitimate niche for anthropological enquiry in spite of the dominance of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology. Domains of enquiry that are advocated include: holistic community studies, studies of cultural and historical developments of agricultural practices, farm unit ethnographies, comparative regional analyses, examination of agrarian values and applied advocacy research.

*Le présent article constitue un compte rendu de la littérature anthropologique traitant de la culture et de l'agriculture fortement capitaliste implantée en Amérique du Nord. L'auteur démontre qu'en dépit de la prédominance des études économiques et sociologiques sur les milieux ruraux, la recherche anthropologique a un rôle légitime à jouer dans ce domaine. Ce champ de recherche anthropologique permettrait en effet de réaliser des études communautaires holistiques, une analyse de l'évolution historico-culturelle de la pratique agricole, une ethnographie de la cellule rurale, des analyses régionales comparatives ou encore un examen des valeurs agraires. Elle permettrait aussi une recherche appliquée permettant la défense des intérêts des populations étudiées.*

## *Introduction*

My purpose, in this essay, is to explore a domain of study that has not yet received much attention among ethnologists, that is, the study of modern North American agriculture. It is my contention that the very small amount of work that has been devoted to it demonstrates the theoretical and practical potential for a highly developed area of enquiry which could fit within the mainstream of the anthropological tradition, as well as contribute to other disciplines already concerned with North American agriculture.

It would be safe to say that the majority of ethnological studies have been conducted in rural settings, yet the number devoted to North American agrarian society is minimal. Other areas of agrarian development have been amply explored. For instance, horticultural systems have been frequently studied, principally from the ecological perspective, with regard to demographics, settlement patterns, carrying capacity, crop diversification, energy transfers, kinship, warfare, economic exchange and ritual cycles (see Forde, 1934; Meggers, 1971; Conklin, 1954; Rappaport, 1967). Anthropology has also been the most important discipline engaged in the study of peasantry. That massive literature deals with classification and definition of peasant types, values, political economy, religion

and religious revitalization, the allocation of time and resources in household economies and processes of modernization. Important anthropological scholars such as Redfield (1953, 1956), Wolf (1966), Dalton (1972), Geertz (1963), and many others contributed to this highly developed but sometimes involuted literature.

Given this lack of attention to North American agriculture, it may be useful to examine some of the reasons for such avoidance. Two reasons may be fairly obvious. First of all, attention has been focused on tribal horticulturalists and peasants because the presumed mandate for anthropologists has been cross-cultural, largely non-Western, and methodologies had emerged for the study of small scale societies and village communities which were often perceived as being under threats of cultural extinction. Secondly, the division of labour among the social sciences has seen the development of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology. These disciplines have flourished, developing their own niches and providing theoretical and substantive knowledge of modern agriculture. For these reasons alone, it might be asked whether there really is a legitimate anthropological niche for the study of North American agriculture.

The essence of my argument is that there is a need to maintain, or in most cases create, a more integrated perspective on agriculture for analysis which might influence agricultural policy. The distinguished agronomist Richard Loomis has stated, "The benign neglect of agriculture as one of the lesser pursuits of man is no longer possible" (Loomis, 1976: 74). While accounting for ecological variables of soil, sunlight, temperature and rain in an agricultural system, he concludes:

... that the actual choice of crops, however, is heavily dependent on the economic and cultural environment of the society that is doing the farming. So are the manner and intensity of cultivation. What one finds is that the density of population, the distance to market, the level of technology and the society's cultural heritage seems to play as large a role as the natural forces.

Social forces cannot be completely separated in an analysis of farming systems for the simple reason that agriculture and the rest of the social system evolved together. Strong feedback interactions bring about a continual tuning of each sector (*ibid.*: 70)...

The food system is dependent, however, on the smooth functioning of the larger society. The Irish famine of the 1840's, for example, was more a failure of human institutions than of biology (*ibid.*: 74).

Clearly, then, there is a sound argument for the importance of sociocultural factors in agriculture. The basic social science literature involving Rural

Sociology and Agricultural Economics, however, tends to be formalistic, statistical, segmented, truncated and oriented to a limited number of variables. Virtually none of the studies from these disciplines is natural-historical or substantive, rooted in actual communities in time and space. Williams (1963: 63), in an assessment of agricultural studies done in England, has a similar view.

Unfortunately, these studies have become more and more specialized and their increased relevance to each other has become increasingly difficult to discern. Even more serious, the social study of farming has been almost completely ignored and very little is known about the social organization and structure of the farming community or, for that matter, the country folk as a whole.

Except for the small anthropological literature to be cited shortly, and some popular literature (cf. Berry 1977), there is virtually nothing which provides the equivalent of an ethnographic perspective on the contemporary North American agricultural situation. An ethnography should be a social and cultural model of what it is like to live in a particular community; it should provide an understanding of local interrelationships of economy, environment and society; and provide some replication of the principle attitudes and values of peoples in their behavioural settings. To those unfamiliar with North American agriculture there is little to give them such a perspective; there is probably a richer ethnographic record of contemporary change in the Highlands of New Guinea and among other so-called "traditional peoples".

Furthermore, there have been suggestions among some agricultural economists of a need to re-address some of their research perspectives. In a presidential speech to the Canadian Agricultural Economics Society, Gary Storey called for a return to earlier, more inclusive principles of political economy rather than "... the proclivity to simplify theory and to avoid the unknown of human behaviour" (Storey, 1978: 751, 752). He also states, "We need to examine agricultural problems in the context of the entire production and its linkages to the rest of the economy, both urban and rural" (*ibid.*: 750). In his proposal, he suggests an attention to normative economics, pointing out, for example, how the cultural notion of "equity" held among early Western Canadian settlers had profound effects on grain marketing institutions such as the quota system and equalized delivery opportunities. Storey's advocacy of political economy is not far removed from the basic anthropological approach of substantive economics as established by George Dalton (1961) for a wide variety of contexts.

Closer to the essence of this paper, John Bennett, in his most recent book, *Of Time and the Enterprise* (1982), demonstrates the potential utility of the anthropological approach in agrarian studies through such formulations as the "agri-family system" and "management style". He, too, suggests that agricultural economists have tended to exclude human or subjective factors in their studies of microeconomics and, instead, formalize decision-making factors from the "rational" or "economic" spheres only. He suggests that as a result there is difficulty of communication between the policy-makers and farmers themselves, the ultimate actors upon which the whole system succeeds or fails.

Another rationale for anthropological attention to this domain is the need for some sort of advocacy research for farmers and their communities. In this past century, there has been enormous change and ultimate social dislocations in rural North America and in some cases these have been equivalent to some of the most profound impacts of the original Industrial Revolution. The most obvious example is the up-rooting of tenant farmers in the American South, which has been so intrinsically related to major racial conflicts in the U.S.A. In general, because of farm modernization processes there has been a great depopulation of rural areas with immense social consequences for such factors as the delivery of social, educational and health services. As well, there are indications that many changes in production and transportation, mechanization, land tenure, irrigation policies, etc. have been carried out more for the benefit of agribusiness and urban consumer interests than they have been for the primary producers themselves. Some might argue that the gains of rural modernization have been offset by the negative effects of transportation and production costs, market instabilities, population losses, losses of political power and declines in services of education and health care delivery for the elderly. Anthropologists have provided their expertise in other types of advocacy research, such as native land claims, why not for farm interest groups and rural communities.

### *Previous Literature*

The subject has not been completely ignored and, in some respects, the earliest literature clustered in the 1940s and 1950s is very well developed and demonstrates the promise of the domain. Some of the earliest approaches were applied, most especially those sponsored by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, a division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This unit provided

assessments of the Department's programs, most notably those of the "New Deal", as well as portraying the perceived needs of rural Americans. According to Nelson (1969: 98-100), some of the Bureau's achievements included: a demonstration that rural living by no means provided a buffer against the severe aspects of the Depression and that rural poverty was deep-rooted; the realization that it was impossible to speak of the "farming class" because of extreme diversity in rural conditions; and that there were considerable social dislocations because of frequent rural-urban and intra-rural migrations.

From the beginning the Bureau's work was controversial because of its exposure of instabilities, class and racial tensions and the disruptions caused by agribusiness interests. According to Nelson (*ibid.*: 98), its program of research was terminated because of Congressional complaints about a study which exposed racial tensions in a Mississippi county.

One set of studies conducted by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, each entitled *Culture of a Contemporary Rural Community*, appears to have been organized with a common research design and each component study was classically ethnographic and holistic in format (including variables of environment, land tenure, technology, cultural history, farming practices, social organization, values and ideology). The investigators also assessed the local success or failure of such New Deal legislation as the Work's Program Administration.

Part of the research design was toward an assessment of stability in the economic practice of farming and stability of the local community in a sociocultural sense. Some communities, such as those of New Hampshire dairy farmers (Macleish and Young, 1942) and Mexican-Americans in New Mexico (Olen and Loomis, 1941) were judged as being culturally very stable, but their agricultural economies were in jeopardy because of inadequate market opportunities and because, in the case of the Mexican-Americans, much of their traditional land base had been lost to Anglo-Americans and they were too impoverished to keep up with most agricultural innovations. The Midwestern communities of Iowa corn and cattle farmers (Moe and Taylor, 1942) and Kansas wheat farmers (Bell, 1942) had lost much of their community integration, characteristic of their pioneering periods, due to their highly modernized farming procedures which were fostering individualism and competition in marketing. The Georgia study (Wynne, 1943), involving cotton and dairy farming showed extreme instability in culture and community with

a small land owning elite, controlling poor Black and White tenant farmers; economically some segments of farming were stable, while others were in danger of decline. The Amish of Pennsylvania (Kollmorgen, 1942) were viewed as exceptionally stable with regard to community and, in spite of their renunciation of farm mechanization, they were stable and proficient in agriculture, due primarily to a remarkable cultural history which had forced them to be agricultural innovators.

These studies were far ahead of their times, especially in their capacities to deal with local communities in relationship to the institutional frameworks of the larger society; in their capacities to evaluate government programs; and in their ability to demonstrate how culture affected agricultural performance. It was unfortunate that the final synthesis was stifled since there was a potential for further direct comparative insight, something that is rarely done in ethnology, especially through a common research design.

Two other anthropological studies were completed in the 1940's, under the auspices of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics. Walter Goldschmidt's (1947) *As You Sow* is a landmark study and a controversial contribution; it has recently been expanded with a contemporary commentary (Goldschmidt, 1978). He compared two California communities, one surrounded by family farms, the other by large corporate farms. His basic conclusions include: his well documented contention that agribusiness interests were abusing federally-supported irrigation programs; that the notion of economy of scale was a myth, since small-scale farmers were actually more productive on a per unit basis; and that social class distinctions were breaking down community viability in the town dominated by corporate farms. Horace Miner (1949) working under a contract from the Bureau, completed an ethnography of an Iowa corn belt county. He demonstrated how New Deal paternalistic and welfare-oriented agricultural policies did not correspond very well with the values of local farmers. One example was the revulsion held by local farmers to the government program whereby they would be paid for not growing the crops that were perceived to be in surplus.

During this same period, Solon Kimball (1965), working out of the University of Michigan, studied a mixed farming community near Detroit. He discovered an emergence of class distinctions and a desire among prospering farmers to shed traditional patterns of co-operation. However, such perceived restrictive obligations were rapidly being replaced by those transferred to agribusiness through the increasing vertical integration of agriculture.

In the 1950's, Evan Vogt and his Harvard research team conducted the Five Cultures Study in New Mexico (Vogt and Albert, 1966; Vogt, 1955), which included research with Navaho, Zuni, Mormons, Mexican-Americans and recent Anglo-American migrants from Texas who engaged in small-scale ranching and bean farming. The major thrust of this study was to show how the pre-existing value structures of these groups influenced their very diverse economic systems and ecological adaptations to a similar environment. In one of the component studies, Vogt (1955) focused on the transplanted Texas dry bean farmers. He contended that their 'core' values of: mastery over nature, independence, and their "over-mechanization" were contributing to their obsolescence as a close knit co-operative grouping and that their values were actually leading to a form of self-destruction since their holdings were being supplanted by ranchers.

Anthropological research on Canadian farming is later and somewhat scattered. However, Horace Miner's (1939) *Saint Denis* was an early study of Quebec peasant society that paid some attention to agricultural procedure and, according to Gold and Tremblay (1982: 104, 105), stimulated controversy and research into the changing nature of Quebec rural society. Similarly, Charles Hughes and his co-workers (1960) analyzed rural society in a Nova Scotia county, analyzing in part the role of agriculture along with fishing and lumbering. A later study by Tremblay and Laplante (1971) portrays the changes in identity, kinship and values among the Acadians in the same region, changes brought about by the diminishing roles in agriculture, fishing and lumbering and the increased role of wage labour. Tremblay, the distinguished Quebecois anthropologist, should also be mentioned for his co-editorship (Tremblay and Anderson, 1966) of a much cited volume, *Rural Canada in Transition*, although the contributions were essentially those of rural sociologists and agricultural economists.

Returning more specifically to Quebec, during the late 1970's, a number of francophone anthropologists analyzed the penetration of agribusiness and the capitalist mode of production into the lives of farmers from a Marxian perspective (cf. Bernier, 1976). Following this approach, a recent issue of *Anthropologie et Sociétés* was devoted to Quebec agriculture. Durand (1977) provides an overview and literature review; Pilon-Lê (1977) reconstructs *habitant* economic life in the context of class struggles and Anctil (1977) describes the penetration of the capitalist mode of production into Quebec at the turn of this century, resulting in the

partial breakdown of the peasant class, many of whom moved to the cities. In the same volume, Breton (1977) characterizes contemporary farmers as being in a parallel struggle along with workers against capitalist interests. The domination of agribusiness supported by the state is documented by Piot (1977) and Bergeron *et al* (1977) discusses the changing role of capital in agriculture dealing with land revenues, profits, technological improvements, and their unequal distributions.

With regard to the rest of Canada, I doubt that anyone could argue that the research done by John Bennett in southwestern Saskatchewan is not the most significant in the whole domain under question. His first major work *Northern Plainsmen* (Bennett, 1969) is a cultural-ecological study describing the patterns of environmental and social adaptations of four sub-cultural groupings (ranchers, grain farmers, Hutterites and Plains Cree) to factors of cultural history, values, local environment and economic opportunities and constraints. A series of papers by Bennett (1963, 1964, 1967, 1968, 1973, 1980, 1981) have examined such variables as co-operative patterns, attitudes toward nature, farm management styles, socio-economic relationships with the larger society and other topics. The most recent update on his longitudinal study is *Of Time and the Enterprise* (Bennett, 1982), a rather sophisticated computer assisted analysis, introducing the concept of "agri-family system" and expanding upon his concept of "management style". Seena Kohl (1976), Bennett's collaborator on this project, has provided very important insights into the role of women and the family domestic cycle relating these important but often neglected variables to the success of farm enterprises.

Other contributions are more fragmentary. Ervin (1985) has attempted to deal with changing ecological adaptations, farm types and community organization in the Parkland region of Saskatchewan providing some interesting contrasts with Bennett's short grass prairie zone of study. Also using a Parkland context in Alberta, Max Hedley (1976, 1979, 1981) has provided a number of interesting papers in which he examines how small scale farmers continuously adapt to constraints provided by the capitalist economy; yet they are also vulnerable to ultimate extinction as they attempt to expand and modernize and how, in spite of expressions of egalitarian ideologies, there have always been capitalistic relations among farmers themselves through the exploitation of non-land owning family members and hired hands.

### *Peasant-Farmer Distinctions*

One problem has persisted for me throughout this enquiry; that is, how do we conceptually separate North American farmers from other types of agrarians? In his widely read *Peasants*, Wolf (1966: 2) attempts to distinguish them from farmers.

At the same time they are not farmers, or agricultural entrepreneurs as we know them in the United States. The American farm is a business enterprise, combining factors of production purchased in a market to obtain a profit by selling advantageously in a products market. The peasant, however, does not operate an enterprise in the economic sense; he runs a household, not a business concern.

He goes on to distinguish peasants from other cultivators by pointing out that peasants "... form part of a larger society whereas a primitive band or tribe does not" (*ibid.*: 2). In his political-economic approach he also points out that peasants are required to transfer much of their surplus to a dominant group of rulers through the fund of rent, as well, he suggests other dimensions that separate peasants from tribal horticulturalists.

His distinctions between peasants and tribal agrarians seem adequate, but his argument for a separation between peasants and farmers is not convincing. Certainly peasants, such as the Thai described by Hanks (1972), buy factors of production such as water buffalo in order to obtain greater productivity to sell in a products market and they do not avoid opportunities to make profit. From the other end of the scale and from my own research experience in studying Saskatchewan farmers, there is not an insignificant number who are oriented towards "getting by" or "making a living" and towards maintaining their households, even though they may be mechanized and exhibit other aspects of agrarian modernization such as crop specialization.

It is very difficult to sort out distinctions from the rest of the peasant literature. We get definitions like this,

A peasant society is composed of settled rural peoples, engaged for the most part in agricultural production, whose productive activities and culturally distinct characteristics are influenced, shaped, or determined to a significant extent by powerful outsiders (Powell, 1972: 97).

Powell goes on to list sub-types, the fifth of which is "... the small scale capitalist peasant whose access to land is great enough to require the regular employment of non-family labour on the farm enterprise" (*ibid.*: 98). Using both his general

and more specific categorical types, it would be difficult to exclude Canadian grain farmers since production is influenced by "powerful outsiders" such as the Canadian Wheat Board, federal and provincial departments of agriculture, as well as railroads. There are, of course, farmers who maintain "regular employment of non-family labour."

In another formulation, Theodore Shanin (1973) forcefully argues for the concreteness of the peasant category. He offers four characteristics that presumably separate them from other agrarians:

1. The peasant family-farm as the basic unit of multi-dimensional social organization. The family and nearly only the family, provides the labour on the farm. The farm and nearly only the farm provides for the consumption needs of the family, and the payment of its duties to the holder of political power... Family membership is based on total participation in the life of the family-farm. The division of labour is family-based and ascribed. The self-perpetuating family-farm operates as the major unit of peasant property, status, socialization, sociability and welfare with the individual tending to submit to formalized family-role behaviour... The peasant family unit usually consists of two or three generations living together.
2. Land husbandry as the main means of livelihood directly providing the major part of the consumption needs... Food production renders the family farm comparatively autonomous...
3. Specific traditional culture related to the way of life of small communities. Much of the cultural patterns typical of peasant communities may be deduced from the character of any small village community... Within the village community peasants reach levels of self-sufficiency unobtainable in the individual household. Activities such as the exchange of marriage partners and at least rudimentary economic cooperation at tasks too big to be handled by one are carried out at the community level.
4. The "underdog position". The domination of peasantry by outsiders. Peasants as a rule have been kept at arms length from the social sources of power. Political organization, educational superiority, mastery of the means of suppression and communication give to powerful outsiders an almost unchallenged hold over village communities (Shanin, 1973: 3, 4).

Again, there is little in this formulation which can provide a distinct taxonomic separation of peasants from farmers and some of it would be matters of degree rather than truly distinct behaviour and attitude. The farms that I have studied are frequently patriarchal and are often three generational; they most frequently provide their own labour; they often feel exploited by external agencies such as railways, implement and produce marketing companies, government, unions;

and they feel themselves at a disadvantage politically when they compare themselves to urbanites.

Some distinctions might be acceptable to a degree. Few North American farmers completely rely on their own produce to feed themselves. Also, the small integrated, regionally distinct village community has suffered from centrifugal tendencies due to mass media, educational and transportation influences, although vestiges of both self-sufficiency and regional differences remain.

Reading further into Shanin's discussion, we can discern some of the possible realities of the peasant-farmer distinction. He sees peasantry as a process. Factors such as the spread of market relations, new technology, changes in the division of labour, crop specialization and acculturative pressures that contribute to the breakdown of distinctive regional traditions, "... may lead to the establishment and stabilization of middle-sized capitalist family farms within the contemporary industrial society" (*ibid.*: 6). Yet, even with this relative increase in clarity, through the notion of peasantry as a process, there is nothing to distinctly separate peasants from farmers, as there might be in separating them from tribal cultivators. According to Shanin's formulation, we might consider family farmers as highly modernized versions of peasants and, perhaps, consider them within the same processual framework of decision-making.

Another formulation includes, under the notion of vertical segmentation, the notion that the individual peasant,

... may be identified with a corporate specialized group which is more or less automatically interrelated with other specialized parts, or the individual may be prohibited from identifying himself with other corporate groups by virtue of the fact that the society allocates him to a particular corporate group... I refer to a corporate specialization of any kind, village, caste, guild, etc. It is a general characteristic of peasant societies that the general system is relatively closed (Claus, 1973: 8).

This feature may provide a minor and relative distinction that may be drawn between peasants and North American farmers. It is difficult to think of many significant closed corporate units among North American farming communities, except for such isolates as Hutterites. Using the Saskatchewan context that I am most familiar with, some immigrant groupings such as Mennonites and Doukabours may have started as ethnic-bloc settlements, maintaining in early stages aspects of village corporate life, typical of their country of origin. These units have disappeared with time, however, because of legally open land tenure

systems, assimilative factors such as education and procedures common to other farmers in their regions. Yet, at the same time, I would even have to caution that there sometimes can be vestiges of attitudes related to the “closed community” still remaining. For instance, I interviewed the local policeman in the community that I studied in the 1970’s. He was an outsider, yet he participated actively in one of the local churches, in several of the voluntary associations, felt that the community was very hospitable; but still felt that he and his family were not completely accepted because they were not of the major ethnic group and had no extended kin in the region.

Yet another formulation is E.H. Franklin’s *The European Peasantry, The Final Phase* (1969); and in this presentation there is an implication that most North American family farms could still be considered under the rubric of peasantry.

One of the enduring and essential—in fact revolutionary—characteristics of the capitalist system of production is the labour commitment of the entrepreneur. With the introduction of the capitalist system labour became a commodity to be purchased or dispensed with, hired or sacked, according to the needs of the firm and the state of the market. For the peasant “chef d’entreprise” such a freedom of action can never exist. His labour force consists mainly of his kith and kin: his wife and children and their dependents, his elderly parents. To hire and fire them according to the dictates of some external regulatory mechanism would be at once impractical and irrational. Inhuman because only in exceptional circumstances are alternative employment opportunities ever generally available. Impractical because members of the family are entitled to a share in the ownership of the means of production; because historically the enterprise is the sum of the labours of the generations. Irrational because the objectives of the enterprise are primarily genealogical and only secondarily economic: because the aim of the chef is to maximize the input of labour rather than maximize profit or some other indicator of efficiency (*ibid.*: 1).

... the one man instructs his sons in the rigours of social behaviour in the role of father and as “chef d’entreprise” he teaches them the imperative of good agronomic practice (*ibid.*: 2).

He suggests that peasant family productive systems are remarkably resilient in western Europe and that even though they may be modernized by mechanization, mass media and belong to national farming interest groups, they remain as peasants because of their labour commitments. Also, even when families are small “chefs” or heads “... attempt to find work for a smaller number of dependents but at a much higher capital-man ratio and much higher level of personal expectation—hence the frantic quest for more land, the over-

capitalization of undersized holdings, the trend towards intensive livestock farming” (*ibid.*: 4, 5). Although he is referring to farming in the European Economic Community, I cannot find anything that would necessitate the exclusion of North American family farms from such a formulation.

Another line of thinking which indirectly suggests a common peasant-farmer typology is Harriet Friedmann’s (1978: 563) discussion of the development of grain farming in North America. When world grain markets were established in the 1870’s with fluctuating and often very low grain prices, family farms (directly derived from European peasantry) tended to be much more resilient than the corporate farms with managers, workers, stockholders and absentee landowners which had been established to take advantage of the early wheat booms. Family farms, like peasant units, were more resilient because they could be self-exploitative, consuming less to preserve the enterprise when grain prices were low. Family farming was actually facilitated by the invention of mechanized methods of planting and harvesting which reduced labour requirements (such as threshing crews) and the reduction in labour requirements supported grain farming as a nuclear family enterprise (*ibid.*: 567).

John Bennett (1982) in his most recent book *Of Time and the Enterprise*, refers to the issue of peasant-farmer distinctions in several instances. But again, many of the distinctions made can be seen as matters of degree rather than allowing for concrete typological separation. He suggests that family farms place more autonomy upon the nuclear family rather than the importance placed on extended families that is done among traditional peasants. In parallel, North American family farms provide much more potential for individual goal fulfillment for their sons and daughters (*ibid.*: 115). Later, in keeping with the line of argument that I am developing, Bennett suggests that there has been a “... progressive incorporation of both peasants and farmers into national integrated systems... many peasant groups were sometimes as responsive as farmers to commercialization and that many ‘farmers’ could be just as conservative as peasants in responding to risk and uncertainty” (*ibid.*: 434).

Originally, I had expected that a more clear-cut taxonomic distinction would emerge between peasants and farmers, but instead I am forced to conclude that they both exist within a continuum, a rather crude and time-worn heuristic device. There are some features that might indicate some relative distinction between farmers and peasants within the continuum. Peasants rely on large extended



families; farmers, although sometimes involved in extended family networks, more frequently organize their enterprises on a nuclear family basis. Peasants are subsistence-oriented and diversified with regard to crops and livestock; farmers are more specialized and oriented towards cash crops. Peasants are more labour-intensive; farmers are more mechanized. Peasants may be subject to more community imposed socio-economic obligations of shared labour and the redistribution of surpluses; farmers' enterprises are more independent of community demands.

Even the listing of these relative distinctions encourages the temptation to reify the categories. Both "types" have much more in common than in contrast, and there are many reasons to suggest that they operate within a common processual framework of attitude and behaviour. Classical "traditionally oriented" peasants, when given certain opportunities, may increase their market activities, mechanize (even if only at the roto-tiller level), become politically active, encourage excess family members to migrate, specialize in certain crops, etc. More developed capitalistic farmers may resort to more extended types of family "holding operations" during periods of economic difficulty. Also, both farmers and peasants invariably see themselves as being politically and economically exploited by urban society.

Peasant/farmers can be taxonomically separated from tribal agrarians at one end of the scale; and at the other end be distinguished from large corporate, non-family, industrialized farms as, for instance, described by Goldschmidt (1947) and McWilliams (1971) in the context of California. Farmers and peasants cannot be adequately distinguished from each other, and it must be clearly recognized that there will be considerable variation among them within their same home communities. In conclusion, what we are dealing with in this paper is more advanced, more market-oriented peasant/family farm units in the context of North America.

### *Cultural Historical Aspects of Agrarian Ecotypes*

Archaeology has provided a wealth of data, systematic comparative analysis and theoretical insight with regard to the origins and spread of agriculture. One of the classical contributions of anthropology has been its use of the diachronic to account for aspects of current sociocultural patterns. More attention might be paid to the antecedents and historical continuities of current agrarian customs and complexes.

A number of examples come to mind. Clifford Geertz' (1963) widely cited study on Java demonstrated how "sawah" or wet-rice agricultural systems first developed among ancient Asian states, but were intensified through pressures from Dutch mercantile interests, forcing peasants and their communities to continuously extend the system and intensify their production. Using the concept of involution, this brilliant study demonstrates why contemporary Javanese agriculture cannot be modernized because of overpopulation and inextricable labour and land tenure commitments.

Another study, that of Strickon (1965), is even more edifying to the domain of study under discussion. He demonstrates how pastoralism evolved into ranching patterns in the central plateau regions of Spain. This system was transplanted to arid Spanish New World colonies. Then, through a process of acculturation, this cultural historical tradition, involving herding, an equestrian culture, a material culture (involving special clothing, lariats and other items) was adopted by Anglo-Americans and diffused northward into Canada.

A third example is Kollmorgen's (1942) study of Pennsylvania Old Order Amish. This study also illustrates continuity from Old to New World contexts. In spite of their avoidance of mechanization, Amish farmers have an excellent reputation for high productivity and for roles as innovators. In their context of origin in central Europe, they were only allowed access to marginal and previously uncultivated lands, principally because of their pacifist traditions. As a result, they found it necessary to intensify their farming procedures, as well as to experiment and adopt innovations. Furthermore, their custom of village exogamy facilitated the communication and diffusion of innovations in contrast to the more conservative and endogamous neighbouring peasant villages. Their co-operativism helped to maintain a natural credit union system which fostered the development of new types of enterprises. Among their innovations and early adoptions were clover feeding, which increased soil productivity, which in turn increased manure for fertilization and this was further reinforced by their introduction of stall feeding.

Not many modern agrarian systems have received cultural historical scrutiny, although there have been some overviews which suggest some potential for more intensive research. Eric Wolf in *Peasants* (1966: 21-31) discusses major forms of peasant agrarian systems that are products of environmental factors, population, technology and history. One of his types, that of Eurasian grain

farming, relates to the types of studies done by Bennett (1969) and others on the Great Plains of North America. In its North European context, it was associated with open fields, with short-term fallowing, animal traction, abundant land, short growing seasons and low populations. He suggests other European types such as the Mediterranean and Transalpine ecotypes. With the second agricultural revolution in the 1700's, "neotechnic" types developed including: 1) specialized horticulture, involving garden, tree or vineyard crops derived from the Mediterranean type; 2) dairy farming, a specialized off-shoot and short cycle system of continental Europe; 3) mixed farming in which both livestock and crops were raised for commercial purposes; and, 4) a set of ecosystems producing tropical crops, such as sugar or coffee, raised on plantations which have antecedents in the Roman "latifundium".

These and other types of Old World systems that have offshoots in North America could be more intensely examined. Land tenure systems, social and community relations, technology and orientations towards innovation, agricultural practices and choices of crops or livestock do not emerge from a vacuum, but have important cultural historical antecedents. Such forms, as well as the historical processes leading to their modifications as the result of adjustments to new environments, technological innovations and market transformations, should be accounted for.

### *Farm Unit Ethnographies*

Anthropologists could provide special contributions to modern agrarian studies through detailed ethnographic descriptions of farm unit types. We have already had considerable experience at this sort of activity with other levels of sociocultural integration.

Nowhere in the literature have I been able to find detailed descriptions of the annual seasonal cycles of different types of farm units such as dairy farms, grain farms, poultry operations, ranching enterprises, hog operations, feed-lot operations, or mixtures of the preceding, let alone the vast array of other types of operations found in the North American context. Following the pioneering work of Julian Steward (1955) through the cultural ecological approach, we are well aware of the primary influence of cultural core relationships, in which basic subsistence and other economic activities and their patternings have strong influences on the shapes and patterning of other institutions. Yet we do not have similar detailed descriptions, to abstract recurrent patterning and

seasonal cycles for modern farms, which would then provide a foundation for a more comprehensive cultural-ecology of this domain.

For instance, in dairy farming the dairy farmer's schedule consists of very careful, largely repetitive, daily, time-consuming activities, with very few slack periods. This type of enterprise lends itself more frequently to an extended family form of organization. On the other hand, the typical straight grain operation on the Canadian prairies is more usually associated with a nuclear family type of organization, with a single operator or father-son type of arrangement providing all the labour. The seasonal cycle usually begins with an intensive seed-cleaning, machinery repair, cultivating and seeding activity of about one and one-half months in the spring, followed by a more levelled mid-summer period of fallowing, spraying and miscellaneous activities; then followed by an intense late summer-early fall set of harvesting activities. Mid and late fall and winter are characterized by relative inactivity of farm operations except for some hauling of grain to elevators and some fall field work. Pedigreed seed-growing is a subvarietal type with regard to grain farming. Production and management activities are much more intensive throughout the whole farming season because of the high standards required and periodic quality control crop inspections conducted by federal agricultural officials. During the normally "slack" winter months, this type of farmer invests a lot of time in cleaning and seed treating activities, as well as acting as an entrepreneur with regard to local client farmers through the sale of new seed varieties and farm chemicals. These types of farmers tend to be incorporated, have full-time hired help, large land holdings, high scales of farm mechanization, stronger orientations towards innovations, efficiency and profit-making and extra-community relations than do their smaller scale grain farming neighbours (for more details, see Ervin, 1985).

Another thing that should not be lost sight of is the fact that the majority of North American farms are still family operations. Factors of consumption, production and the allocation of land, labour and assets are deeply intertwined with kinship considerations. Also with regard to such analyses, matters relating to the basic approaches of the principal operator are of importance. Some of these will have already been influenced by the type of operation, but others are potentially more random, aspects of personality, opportunity or other experience. Are farmers, in their production strategies, conservative, laggard, refugist or progressive, innovative and developmental in their approach? Such factors can be related to basic

enterprise types, but also to the position of farmers in the family domestic cycle (e.g., beginning bachelor, middle-aged formative, pre-retirement), and to overall age-cohort variables. It should be noted that John Bennett has made considerable advances in this type of analysis through his concepts of agri-family system and management style in his most recent publications (Bennett, 1980, 1981, 1982).

Another related area of research potential which might prove to be useful is the analysis of energy flow, input-output studies or particular operational types. Anthropologists have done similar types of studies with other ecological types (Dyson-Hudson and Dyson-Hudson, 1972; Kemp, 1972; Rappaport, 1972). Precise details quantifying time and energy expenditures (for example, tractor hours and gasoline consumption related to other social and ecological variables) would be useful to assess the energy efficiency of current cultural practices of farming. Such studies could also be comparative, using examples such as Japanese, Amish and Hutterites who are much less mechanized in their operations, but are reputed to be very efficient in production.

Because of anthropologists' experience in collecting detailed information on the daily activities of small groups, they have the potential of developing models which might assist agricultural planners who are often confounded by human variables. Such a process would undoubtedly be very indirect and go through many stages of interpretation before being utilized or communicated in exchanges between agricultural agents and local farmers. Agricultural representatives do make use of sociological models of diffusion (ultimately anthropologically derived) using notions of innovators, early adopters, laggards, etc. (Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971) and there is the potential for anthropological input. However, even as a straightforward academic exercise, ethnographies of farm units would have merit because there is a definite vacuum.

### *Comparative Regional Analyses of North American Agriculture*

Normal ethnological enquiry involves three basic ingredients: local ethnographic description, cross-cultural comparison and theoretical model building. They may all, of course, be inextricably linked, or the stage may be first set by ethnographic description or conversely by theory building. While I have maintained in this essay that we could do with a lot more basic community studies, dealing with the relationships between agriculture and

culture, I am concerned here with the middle range of enquiry, that of cross-cultural comparison.

Cross-regional comparisons of culture and agriculture could be sorted out with regard to North America. We would be dealing with factors of ecological constraint and opportunity, basic regional crop or livestock specialization, settlement patterns and demographics, cultural historical antecedents and marketing arrangements. Some of the broad regional variants that come to mind include: fruit and vineyard farming of California; cotton and fruit farming of the American southwest; plantation and share-cropping systems of cotton, rice and tobacco in the American south; orchard farming in the northwest; grain farming in the Great Plains of the United States and Canada; mixed farming in the midwest of Canada and the United States and other major regional types, plus all sorts of regional subvariants.

I am interested in differences and similarities between American and Canadian wheat growing regions—the Dakotas, Montana, Eastern Washington, Kansas, Nebraska versus the Prairie provinces. The Americans rely on open futures markets with highly fluctuating grain prices, transportation and marketing is managed by powerful private corporations such as Cargill and grain terminals are very dispersed with farmers depending upon custom trucking over distances of up to 100 miles. The Canadian system is based on an orderly market system dominated by the Canadian Wheat Board, farmers co-operatives such as the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool and with branch rail-lines and country grain elevators in local communities. American farms are much larger, with communities being much more centralized and the countryside more depopulated.

Surely these broad differences would have considerable effect on social organization and culture. I was struck, when reading the Bureau of Agricultural Economics reports on the Iowa (Moe and Taylor, 1942) and Kansas (Bell, 1942) communities by the presence of trends established in the 1930's or earlier that have only recently become prevalent in Saskatchewan in the post-World War II period. Some of these trends include: consolidation of schools; centralization of marketing and retail centres and the beginning of the erosion of local communities. These may represent inevitable processes of change that are found in regions with parallel crop specializations and methods of production; they can obviously be more easily discerned through ethnography and regional comparison.

Given the complexities of the social and environmental variables, as well as technological

marketing and transportation considerations there is a need for theoretical guidance for such an enterprise. Political economic models such as those of the Marxian variety may have powerful potential for analyzing regional systems. In fact, some anthropologists have already utilized Marxian concepts of modes of production for the analysis of the penetration of capitalism among family producers in North American agriculture, examples being the previously cited Quebecois authors (Bernier, 1976; Anctil, 1977; Bergeron *et al.*, 1977; Breton, 1977; Pilon-Lê, 1977 and Piot, 1977) and Max Hedley (1976, 1979 and 1981) in his Alberta studies. Furthermore, James Wessman (1981: 253-260) has provided an excellent example of the use of mode of production concept in the analysis of sugar cane production in southwestern Puerto Rico. Within anthropology there is an emerging Marxian core literature which discusses the utility of the concept of mode of production (cf. Friedman, 1974; Godelier, 1977; O'Laughlin, 1975; Wessman, 1981 and Wolf, 1982). This literature attempts to sort out, among other things, the pitfalls of "vulgar materialism", the classification of modes of production and the question of how to analyze situations where there appears to be several modes of production extant in a given situation. However, these controversies are beyond my expertise and the current considerations.

Another approach might be to revive and refine Julian Steward's (1955) notion of levels of socio-cultural integration, to systematically handle such proposed regional comparisons, while avoiding the previous excessive reliance on technological and ecological interpretations. Steward had demonstrated their utility in analyzing the parallels of contrasts of change in the study of hunting and gathering societies, pastoralists, horticulturalists and ancient state societies. Although not as well-developed, he did attempt to deal with horizontal levels of sociocultural integration (families, communities), in relation to vertical integration (unions, bureaucracies, corporations) in the context of modernization in Puerto Rico (Steward, 1956).

Loosely following the Stewardian model, one of the initial tasks would be to sort out the various levels of sociocultural integration in each region's agriculture. It is noteworthy that in contemporary economics practically the only surviving example of family production is the farm. There are regions, where perhaps some other type of farming production predominates in terms of total production, such as in California, but family farms usually predominate in terms of absolute numbers.

With the discussion of horizontal levels of integration, other factors such as farm seasonal

cycles and other aspects of local ecology, such as hydrology, should enter into the discussion, as well as the distribution of labour and nuclear and extended kinship. Beyond these other horizontal considerations might include co-operative patterns and institutions, voluntary associations and the community. Then there are the vertical levels to consider; these include: federal, state and provincial departments of agriculture, machinery, chemical, seed and feed companies, marketing, transportation, processing and retailing institutions, banks, university research units and farm lobbies. Some other variables might have to be taken into account such as hydraulic and energy transfer variables, and special legislative economic and social policy related to the region.

I have not yet seen any attempt to classify and analyze a regional agricultural system from the bottom to the top, especially with an attempt to compare its structural regularities and processes to other regional types. In the Canadian Plains context, for instance, it would be possible to combine in a single synthesis, the ecological, sub-cultural, community and micro-economic considerations of farm enterprises as outlined by John Bennett (1969, 1982) with an analysis of the external macro-economic operations of government agencies, transportation, food processing, machinery manufacturing and marketing as analyzed by non-anthropologists (cf. Mitchell, 1975; Morgan, 1979 and Wornock, 1978). I would contend that such an enterprise is within anthropological competence and it would enhance our attempts to generate models of complex societies.

### *Agrarian Values*

Research on the values of modern farmers would seem like a natural and compatible exercise for anthropologists. As indicated earlier, there are already several such precedents with, for example, Vogt's (Vogt and Albert, 1966; Vogt, 1955) Five Cultures study, where he attempts to show that types of farm operations are as much conditioned by values derived from cultural historical experiences as they are from local environmental constraint and opportunity. This conclusion is perhaps a bit dated, since although existing values might be conceded as generating influences for behaviour, selecting influences, most principally those of the market, are more important for the ultimate shape of contemporary farming systems.

Another study, that of Horace Miner (1949) demonstrated a recurrent phenomenon, that of national agricultural policies not being compatible with local community agrarian values. Several of

the previously cited Bureau of Agricultural Economics studies (Bell, 1942; Moe and Taylor, 1942) demonstrated attitudinal differences among farmers in their willingness to accrue debt for increasing their land bases and to support mechanization of their operations. Variables accounting for debt included age cohort differences, ethnicity and differential experiences of "boom or bust" during farmers' lifetimes.

John Bennett (1967) has written on the theme of values as influencing agrarian behaviour. He demonstrated, among other things, how farmers juggle contrasting or ambivalent adherence to value clusters of individualism-independence-competition versus egalitarianism-cooperation. The farmer will tend to stress one emphasis over the other according to his economic fortune at any given time. Individualistic, independent and competitive values allow more fortunate farmers to rationalize their accumulation of seemingly limited resources; but this is offset by another value theme, that of particularism which promotes the establishment of private and personal relationships among farmers. More affluent farmers can compensate for the situation of their less fortunate neighbours by providing opportunities of land leasing, custom work and by providing temporary jobs. On the other hand, agricultural agencies acting as bureaucracies, operate according to universalistic regulations (i.e., all rules apply equally to all, but only the qualified benefit). These agencies frequently come into conflict with the individualistic-particularistic values of farmers. Bennett goes on to show how farmers are not simply pawns of external agencies, but they have developed strategies to manipulate opportunities and constraints established by the external agencies.

One issue concerning values that is worth some special anthropological attention is the question of "agrarianism" or "agricultural fundamentalism". Agrarianism has had a foundation in intellectual culture with Eighteenth Century physiocratic notions that a nation's wealth ultimately rests upon its capacities to produce food surpluses (see Galbraith, 1977), and American notions of "Jeffersonian Democracy" which suggest that a free and democratic society is best based on a large substructure of independent family farms. But of course, the construct has its most distinctive foundations among rural peoples themselves, and probably has a great antiquity as suggested by Redfield's (1953) discussions of peasantry, where peasants are portrayed as existing with an ideology dominated by the "moral order" based on the value of propagation, the family, piety towards the supernatural, with a correspondingly disdainful

view of the "technical order" of the cosmopolitan urbanite.

Contemporary agrarianism is apt to include such notions as: agricultural life is natural for man, while city life is artificial and evil; rural life permits more independence and freedom; rural people have a greater opportunity for property ownership; better home and family life prevails in the country; rural people are more religious; rural living offers more community relations and neighbourliness; rugged individualism, the farmer should work hard to demonstrate his virtue; replacement of family farms by large scale farms using hired labour would have undesirable economic and social consequences for the society (Flinn and Johnson, 1974).

This ideology has had historical importance in North America, helping to promote the settlement of the West and to shape many of its political institutions. In modified form, it is even seen today among non-agrarians as a factor partly accounting for the development of suburbs. It has even been a source for discontent and populist movements, although it has also been perceived as having anti-union and anti-immigration overtones. Studies have suggested that people having these values tend to be older, poorer, not well educated, small scale farmers who avoid debt. Younger, better educated, "progressive", venturesome farmers, along with town neighbours tend to abandon the value system as they become more integrated into national economies. As presented in the sociological literature, there is a strong implication that the most consistent bearers of agrarianism are isolated "laggard" and "refugist" farmers who use the value system as a means of rationalizing their unrealistic adaptations to contemporary and future trends as towards horizontal and vertical integration of agriculture (Buttel and Flinn, 1975; Flinn and Johnson, 1974).

In one of the few studies (Tremblay and Anderson, 1966) done on the social and cultural aspects of Canadian agriculture, most of the participants in the symposium favour the view that agricultural fundamentalism is an obsolete value system that is contrary to the realities of already existing and massive external controls on farmers, and they feel that many refugist farmers should be encouraged and assisted into relocating into non-agricultural sectors and that the remainder should be encouraged to maximize their modernization. Whyte makes the strongest statement in this regard:

On the one hand technology and its material returns are embraced, albeit somewhat hesitantly, by all but a minority of the rural Canadian population. On the other hand is the wish to preserve the institutions of pre-

technological times. "Nowhere", states Harvey Cox "does the fervour for this arcadian age reach such a crescendo as it does with the odes that are dedicated to the whooping crane of the American economic scene, the "family farm". The votives of the old "rural way of life" and the incantations to the "family farm" are fitting tributes to the past, but they can neither preserve nor reinstate those elements of the Canadian heritage. "When men are committed to technology, they are also committed to continual change in institutions and customs." The ideology of an outmoded way of life, must therefore either be discarded or, if preserved, be relegated to a fictional status (Whyte, 1966: 99).

As an anthropologist, I find myself more than merely uncomfortable with this sort of statement. To me it represents a form of academic *hubris*, the obsession with the "well-turned phrase", especially containing a sense of irony or sarcasm. Too frequently, social scientists are seduced by their own census analyses and formalistic models of economic performance into maintaining an overly detached quasi-pragmatic attitude, without maintaining a sympathy or even an attempt to understand the values of those they are studying.

This is not to say that anthropologists should blind themselves to the realities of rural depopulation, the high capital requirements of modern farming and to the increasing horizontal and vertical integration of the food industry. But on the other hand, anthropologists have often demonstrated that the value systems of other peoples undergoing the harsh realities of modernization are often useful preadaptations against further grief and social disintegration. I believe that anthropologists could play a valuable role if they entered into the discussion of modern agrarian value systems, just as they have played a similar role in the discussion of peasants.

In the Saskatchewan context, I have found that even the most commercially venturesome and progressive farmers exhibit aspects of agrarianism or agricultural fundamentalism by opposing such proposals as the abandonment of the country grain elevators, branch rail lines and "Crow's Nest" rate subsidies on grain shipments. These issues are all related to cost-squeeze pressures, the survival of small farms and the viability of rural communities. One rather sophisticated pedigreed seed owner with large land holdings complained to me of a non-farmer, living 30 miles away, who had bought an expensive quarter section of land in the vicinity. This "suitcase farmer" decided to grow rape seed or canola because of high cash returns, instead of growing rye which this precarious piece of land was more suited for an initial crop. My informant used this particular example to suggest that farmers

should be well-rooted in local communities and know their land intimately so that they could be proper stewards of its productivity.

On the whole, I would suggest that aspects of agricultural fundamentalism can be realistic and serve as warning devices to even the most progressive farmers about the implications of abandoning certain traditional social and economic practices. There has to be much more investigation of this issue and the approach to it should be much more complex than the sometimes rather superficial treatment given to it by attitudinal surveys.

On the other end of the scale, I would suggest that there should be some examination of the values, assumptions and attitudes of agricultural extension agents, researchers of rural society and economy, agronomists in general and those associated with agribusiness. I have the intuition that sometimes some of their attitudes may be implicitly detrimental to farmers and their aspirations. Because of their training and job-orientations, efficiency, rationality and productivity seem to predominate their thinking. While not fully tested, I often feel from my interviews and studies of the literature that non-farming establishment is more interested or institutionally-directed to serving agribusiness interests and towards the introduction of innovations among farmers than to the preservation or development of what farmers themselves perceive to be desirable.

### *Conclusions*

A number of indicators have lead me to the conclusion that much of the contemporary research on North American agriculture, largely ignores or disputes many of the basic problems and the aspirations that rural people have for themselves. One of these indications is the already cited literature on agricultural fundamentalism where holders of "traditional" agrarian values are perceived as refugist laggards who are detrimental to the modernization of agriculture and should be encouraged to leave the farm.

In my own context of research, I was struck by a set of comments made by a livestock research scientist during an interview at a federal research station near the community I was studying in the 1970's. He said, "My work and that of other agricultural extension people is not to further the lot of the farmer but to make it easier for the consumer." He also said that the farmers in this district were "a closed conservative patriarchal group"; that they were "only fooling themselves when they say that they are trying to preserve farming as a way of life"; and that he himself "does

not care whether or not the number of farmers is greatly reducing.”

Another indicator relates to the issue of rail-line abandonment and the closure of country grain elevators, which Saskatchewan farmers feel would threaten the survival of both their farming operations and their local communities. Such proposals have come from railways, marketing companies and to a certain extent, from the Federal government itself. The rationales presented are entirely economic; to reduce the costs of grain transportation and to upgrade the remaining lines. The economic benefits for the farmer, however, are non-existent, in fact, the costs that will eventually accrue because of the longer distances that they will have to haul grain will probably drive many of them out of farming.

At any rate, the Federal government formed two royal commissions, the Grain Handling and Transportation Commission (Hall *et al.*, 1977) and the Prairie Rail Action Committee (Anderson *et al.*, 1979) to evaluate the consequences of such proposals. Of the total 2,000 pages of research findings in these two reports, only 21 are devoted to “The Producer and His Community”, and “The Social and Community Implications of Railway Abandonment” (Hall *et al.*, 1977: 66-87). But even there, the commissioners largely discount the appeals of the rural residents.

At every rural and regional hearing, an emotional plea was made for the retention of the rail line on the basis that they serve as the focal point and vestige of community viability, it was stated repeatedly that the removal of the rail line and therefore the grain elevators would cause the hamlet, the village or the town to die.

The sincerity of the people making these presentations is unchallenged. However, the validity of the suggestions insofar as the extent of the effect is concerned, is less certain (*ibid.*: 76).

There are, clearly, many problems facing rural North America and most of them have their origins with exterior forces. Again, let me use the Canadian Plains which typifies the situation in broad outline for rural North America. Farmers have been pressured to produce more because commodity prices remain low or are exceptionally variable, and they must capitalize their operations through increased mechanization and the purchase or rental of more land, as well as maintain a heavy reliance on expensive chemical herbicides and pesticides to produce an adequate crop which will pay production costs and maintain a family income. For instance, with regard to the Canadian Prairies, wheat prices have not significantly increased since World War I, while land prices have increased over

a hundred-fold, not to speak of machinery and other production costs. Since farmers are unorganized, independent commodity producers, they have no control over prices, so that the more successful they are, collectively, in producing crops, the more they suffer from the negative market effects of supply and demand. Also, there have been trends towards the rationalization and centralization of marketing and transportation systems which force farmers to haul their products greater distances at much greater cost.

All of these and other trends have contributed to a depopulation of the rural countryside. Fewer farmers can remain and class and interest group divisions are becoming more visible among them, whereas a more egalitarian and co-operative ethos previously prevailed. Groups such as the National Farmers' Union, largely following the value system of agricultural fundamentalism, argue for the limitation on farm sizes, the stabilization and support of commodity prices, as well as the retention of rail lines, country elevators and Federal subsidies for grain transportation. Another group, the Pallisar Wheat Growers' Association follows a technocratic, “laissez-faire” model, and many farmers are caught between the two extremes. Another social problem emerging from these trends in farming is the difficulty of managing father-son operational transfers. The father has built up a very large capital investment in order to maintain production and a modest yearly net income. In order to retire, he must tap into that investment; but this creates difficulties for the son who must find the lines of credit to finance the transfer. Over the last two decades, a large proportion of a future generation of farmers have opted out, allowing more affluent farmers to further increase their land holdings through purchase and rentals.

Rural communities are affected by such processes. Rural social districts of kin and neighbours, engaged in co-operative endeavours have virtually disappeared because of low population densities and with many farmers now living in settlements rather than on the farm. Yet even many of these settlements are becoming obsolete because of failing businesses and the lack of services. The smaller ones are becoming latent “ghost towns”, populated principally by the aged, as pockets of rural poverty. With regard to the elderly, they are becoming an increasingly dominant proportion of the rural population, 16% of Saskatchewan as a whole, and around 30% in the larger rural settlements. It is easy to imagine the difficulties in providing health and social services for such people, when their links to close and extended kin

are becoming increasingly truncated through out-migration.

The younger residents are becoming fewer in number, with usually practically the entire high school class migrating from the community. Very little wage labour awaits them in the community; traditional transition occupations, as farm labourers for young males are decreasing because of the mechanized trends of capital intensive farming. Schools have been consolidated since the early 1960's and most receive education in communities other than their own. With regard to consumption, entertainment and farm product marketing, rural people no longer concentrate these activities in their home communities but extend them over hundreds of square miles in a multitude of rural settlements and cities. The framework to preserve the rural community as a meaningful sociocultural structure has been greatly eroded. Although rural residents still frequently espouse agrarian values, eventually there will be little in the way of a meaningful socioeconomic infrastructure to support them. I still maintain, however, that their expression is a proper posture in order to attempt to salvage what they hold valuable.

Many other problems face rural North Americans, including the loss of significant political power; the difficulties in dealing with agribusiness, government and credit institutions; let alone the cultural-ecological consequences of capital intensive, land extensive farming with a heavy reliance on exterior energy sources.

I think that it can be legitimately asserted that to a very large extent, many North American farmers and other members of their communities have been "Victims of Progress" to borrow from Bodley's (1975) title. Also, as Eric Wolf's (1982) recent book has indicated, all of the world's peoples have been inextricably linked within the same economic web of change since the 1400's, and there is no sufficient reason to separate so-called "traditional", "tribal" or "Third World" peoples from modern agrarians or even urbanites in the anthropological enquiry.

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