

Wilfrid Laurier University

Scholars Commons @ Laurier

---

Theses and Dissertations (Comprehensive)

---

2000

## Changing landscapes: Stories of five women farming ecologically

Sherri Joy van de Hoef  
*Wilfrid Laurier University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.wlu.ca/etd>



Part of the [Social Psychology Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

van de Hoef, Sherri Joy, "Changing landscapes: Stories of five women farming ecologically" (2000).  
*Theses and Dissertations (Comprehensive)*. 695.  
<https://scholars.wlu.ca/etd/695>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations (Comprehensive) by an authorized administrator of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact [scholarscommons@wlu.ca](mailto:scholarscommons@wlu.ca).

## **INFORMATION TO USERS**

**This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.**

**The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.**

**In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.**

**Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.**

**Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.**

**Bell & Howell Information and Learning  
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA  
800-521-0600**

**UMI<sup>®</sup>**





**National Library  
of Canada**

**Acquisitions and  
Bibliographic Services**

**395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada**

**Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada**

**Acquisitions et  
services bibliographiques**

**395, rue Wellington  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada**

*Your file Votre référence*

*Our file Notre référence*

**The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.**

**The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.**

**L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.**

**L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.**

**0-612-52228-8**

**Canada**

**CHANGING LANDSCAPES:  
STORIES OF FIVE WOMEN FARMING ECOLOGICALLY**

**By**

**Sherri van de Hoef  
BA (Honours) Music & Psychology,  
Wilfrid Laurier University, 1998**

**THESIS**

**Submitted to the Department of Psychology  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the Master of Arts degree  
Wilfrid Laurier University  
1999**

**© Sherri van de Hoef**

*Dedicated to my Oma, Willy (Hooijer) van de Hoef,  
who has taught me much about the role of women on the farm  
and who continues to inspire me;  
and to the memory of my Opa, Sander van de Hoef,  
a dedicated farmer and devoted grandfather;  
with love.*

## Abstract

Community and the natural environment have always played an important role in my life. I have had the opportunity in the past few years to explore these areas in more depth. My introduction to Community Psychology during my undergraduate degree exposed me to agricultural initiatives that emphasized community and respect for the environment. I explored these initiatives further by conducting a study (van de Hoef, 1998) of Ontario couples who live self-reliantly (that is, they grow their own food, build their own homes, live off the electricity grid, and find supports in their local communities). Subsequent to that study I have become particularly interested in the experiences of women in alternative settings.

This project was motivated by several questions centred specifically around the experiences of women farming ecologically. Ecological farming is defined by Keeney (1989) as "agricultural systems that are environmentally sound, profitable, and productive and that maintain the social fabric of the rural community". I am interested in farming ecologically myself some day. Yet there is a lack of information available about women, especially Canadian women who farm ecologically.

This topic is particularly important in the field of community psychology. Although this is the field that introduced me to community agricultural issues, the role of the natural ecology remains unconsidered in most community psychology research. In light of our current ecological crisis and the increasing awareness of the importance of nature in human experience and particularly human health, it is imperative that academic and particularly psychological studies explore human interactions with the natural world.

The present study utilized the ecological approach prevalent in community psychology research to explore the contributions of conventional and ecological farming practices to human and natural ecosystem health. I looked specifically at the experiences of women in alternative agricultural settings and the role of nature in their lifestyles. I interviewed five women who farm ecologically in Southern Ontario using a narrative approach. Additionally I interned on an ecological farm and I offer a case study and ethnographic perspective on my experiences. The findings are presented as six individual life story summaries.

The stories were collectively summarized and explored using the eight elements of

ecological agriculture highlighted by Beus & Dunlap (1990) and Chiappe & Flora (1998). These are independence, community, decentralization, harmony with nature, diversity, restraint, quality of family life, and spirituality.

Although the previous studies present these elements as distinct categories, the stories of the present study do not warrant dividing them up in a similar fashion. They are grouped according to the integrations highlighted in the stories. Chiappe & Flora (1998) reported that ecological farming provides more leisure time for families. The stories from the present study do not suggest this. Family and community supports are highlighted in the stories as necessary components of alternative farms. However the stories also indicate that current changes in rural Canadian landscapes and the prevalence of conventional farming philosophies and practices in agricultural areas minimize the accessibility of these supports. Meares (1997) suggests that women's burdens on ecological farms increase relative to their experiences on conventional farms. The women in the present study do indicate high levels of busy-ness and physical exhaustion. However in most cases this again was attributed to a lack of available supports and resources. Finally, current research highlights an important connection between the natural environment and human health. The women's stories affirm this connection as an important ingredient not only in their individual health but in the health of their families and local communities.

In summary, the women's stories highlight their difficulties of maintaining alternative farm lifestyles in Canada's present rural climate. Yet they also present ecological agriculture as an important model for promoting the health of individuals, families, communities, and the natural environment. This project contributes their voices to Community Psychology literature as well as Canadian literature on ecological agriculture. It offers additional evidence to the Community Psychology field demonstrating the importance of nature and holistic food production in human health. It also documents the process of a non-traditional, yet effective and empowering research approach. Finally, this project provides additional evidence for ecological agriculture as an effective model of health.



## Acknowledgements

There is an afghan at the foot of my bed that was crocheted by my Oma<sup>1</sup>. My Oma is notorious for collecting bits of different materials from her apartment and combining them to create something unique and beautiful. This afghan is no exception. Its pattern consists of several wide strips of alternating beige and burgundy. No two strips are alike. Each section is comprised of a variety of shades and types of yarn.

This thesis process and the resulting document are like that afghan. It reflects the input and influence of a variety of experiences and people. The combination of all of them have made this process meaningful and worthwhile.

I would like to acknowledge some of these by name. To begin I present the five women whose stories grace these pages: Marilew Albrecht, Martha Laing, Cathy MacGregor-Smith, Ellinor Nurnberg, and Marg Steele. They are in many aspects co-authors of this document. They willingly and eloquently shared parts of their lives with me. I am honoured to know them and inspired by their lives. I also want to thank Bob and Bev Budd for sharing their home with me this summer. Their oasis provided additional inspiration to encourage me through this final year. To Birgit Hillier I offer my thanks for the brief but informative time we spent together this summer.

My family has been particularly supportive, in many ways, throughout the past year and a half. I thank them for their interest, thoughtfulness, and input. I specifically want to thank my partner Chris and my sister Diana. In addition to their informal support they contributed their skills as photographers and proof-readers. Their contributions have brightened my days and this thesis.

My thesis committee has helped make this a rewarding experience. Ed Bennett, my advisor, introduced me to ecological agriculture in an undergraduate class. Since then he has shared with me his knowledge and passion for rural development issues. I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to work with someone who is facilitating positive change in rural communities. Susan Wismer is partly responsible for my choice of topic: it was through a reading

---

<sup>1</sup> Oma is a Dutch term for Grandmother.

class with her that I solidified the topic for this thesis. She in many ways (perhaps even without knowing it) acted as a sounding board for my ideas and gave me valuable guidance. Finally, although I did not know Juanne Clarke prior to asking her to sit on my committee, I am honoured to have had the chance to get to know her over the past year. Her courage, strength, and her interest in my topic continue to encourage me.

I finish this thesis with mixed feelings. Before me is a document that records a highlight of my academic career. Yet this also marks the end of the journey with my colleagues in the Community Psychology program. Their humour, our shared late nights, frustrations, and triumphs gave me stamina, endurance, and a healthy perspective on my place in academia. My thanks and best wishes go to all of them.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	i
Acknowledgements .....	iii
List of Appendices .....	ix
List of Tables, Figures, and Photos .....	x
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Background .....	1
A Reflection on Paradigms .....	2
The Conventional Paradigm .....	2
The Alternative Paradigm .....	4
Back to the Point .....	5
<b>CHAPTER 2: AGRICULTURE AND PSYCHOLOGY PARADIGMS .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Agriculture .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>The Conventional Agricultural Paradigm .....</b>	<b>7</b>
Economic .....	7
Social .....	9
Ecology .....	10
Time .....	10
Summary .....	11
<b>The Ecological Agriculture Paradigm .....</b>	<b>12</b>
Economic .....	13
Social .....	13
Ecology .....	16
Time .....	17
Summary .....	17
<b>Psychology .....</b>	<b>18</b>
Mainstream Conventional Psychology .....	18
Alternative (Community) Psychology .....	21
<b>Agriculture through the Lens of Community Psychology .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Gaps in the Research .....</b>	<b>29</b>
Women and Agriculture .....	29
Psychology and the Natural Ecology .....	33
Summary .....	34
<b>CHAPTER 3: METHODS .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>What Does She Know? .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>The Narrative Approach .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Definition .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Narratives are Stories that Include Context .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Narratives are Interdisciplinary:</b>	
<b>They Consist of Art AND Science .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Narratives are Action-Oriented and Empowering .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>How Narratives Fit This Project .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Alternative Agriculture and Stories .....</b>	<b>38</b>

Women and Stories .....	38
Psychology and Stories .....	39
Life Stories as a Form of Narrative .....	39
Ethical Issues of the Narrative Approach .....	40
Generalizability .....	40
Creating Heroes .....	41
Power Issues .....	41
Creating New Hierarchies .....	42
Writing for Different Audiences .....	43
My Internship Experience .....	43
Case Study .....	44
Ethnography .....	44
<b>CHAPTER 4: THE RESEARCH PROCESS .....</b>	<b>45</b>
Interviews .....	45
Demographics .....	45
Some Definitions .....	45
Permaculture .....	45
Biodynamic .....	45
Community Shared Agriculture .....	46
Organic .....	46
Willing Workers on Organic Farms (WWOOF) .....	46
Participant Selection .....	47
Contacting Participants .....	47
Case Study/Ethnography .....	49
Analysis .....	49
The Interviews .....	49
Feedback .....	50
Collective Summary .....	50
Case Study and Ethnography .....	50
<b>CHAPTER 5: MARTHA LAING – ORCHARD-HILL FARM COMMUNITY GARDEN .....</b>	<b>51</b>
Introduction .....	51
Farming Background .....	52
Why She Does it .....	54
Highlights .....	55
Challenges .....	56
Advice for Others .....	58
After the Interview .....	59
<b>CHAPTER 6: MARILEW ALBRECHT – MARBRECHT HOLSTEINS .....</b>	<b>60</b>
Introduction .....	60
Background .....	62
The Challenges of Raising a Family Farm-Style .....	63
Finding Her Place on the Farm .....	65
Strategies .....	68

Advice for Others . . . . .	70
Highlights . . . . .	71
<b>CHAPTER 7: ELLINOR NURNBERG -- SUNNIVUE FARM . . . . .</b>	<b>74</b>
Introduction . . . . .	74
Background . . . . .	75
Challenges . . . . .	76
Highlights . . . . .	78
The Female Element . . . . .	79
Promoting Change . . . . .	81
After the Interview . . . . .	82
<b>CHAPTER 8: CATHY MACGREGOR-SMITH-MCSMITH'S FARM PRODUCE . . . . .</b>	<b>84</b>
Introduction . . . . .	84
Background . . . . .	84
Highlights . . . . .	88
Lowlights . . . . .	89
Life as a Farming Woman . . . . .	90
Strategies and Advice . . . . .	91
After the Interview . . . . .	92
<b>CHAPTER 9: MARG STEELE – STEELE WOOL FARM . . . . .</b>	<b>93</b>
Introduction . . . . .	93
Background . . . . .	96
Lowlights . . . . .	98
Motivations and Highlights . . . . .	99
Strategies . . . . .	102
Advice for Others . . . . .	102
After the Interview . . . . .	103
<b>CHAPTER 10: CASE STUDY/ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR . . . . .</b>	<b>105</b>
My Background . . . . .	105
Herstory . . . . .	105
Gardening . . . . .	106
Nature . . . . .	107
Feminism . . . . .	108
Agriculture . . . . .	109
My Summer Internship . . . . .	110
Introduction . . . . .	110
Life at the Farm . . . . .	111
Highlights . . . . .	112
Lessons . . . . .	116
Challenges . . . . .	118
On Being a Woman . . . . .	120
After the Summer . . . . .	122
<b>CHAPTER 11: SUMMARIZING THE FINDINGS . . . . .</b>	<b>124</b>
Collective Summary . . . . .	124

Demographics . . . . .	124
Common Themes . . . . .	124
Independence . . . . .	125
Decentralization and Community . . . . .	125
Harmony with Nature, Spirituality, and Quality of Family Life . . . . .	126
Diversity . . . . .	127
Restraint . . . . .	127
The Women's Perspectives . . . . .	128
Advice for Others . . . . .	128
Challenges and Concerns . . . . .	129
Conclusion . . . . .	130
My Experience Farming Ecologically . . . . .	131
CHAPTER 12: DISCUSSION . . . . .	133
Overview of Findings . . . . .	133
The Women's Perceptions of Ecological Agriculture . . . . .	133
The Women as Farm Partners . . . . .	135
The Women's Advice to Others . . . . .	136
The Importance of Nature . . . . .	137
Personal Reflections on the Research Process . . . . .	138
Contributions to the Literature . . . . .	139
Research Limitations and Suggestions for the Future . . . . .	140
Future Research . . . . .	140
Future Action . . . . .	142
Personal Thoughts . . . . .	143
APPENDICES . . . . .	145
REFERENCES . . . . .	151

**List of Appendices**

**Appendix A: Topic Guide . . . . . 145**  
**Appendix B: Resource List . . . . . 146**  
**Appendix C: Information Letter . . . . . 147**  
**Appendix D: Consent Form . . . . . 149**  
**Appendix E: Feedback Letter . . . . . 150**

## List of Tables, Figures, and Photos

<b>Table 1: Key Elements of the Competing Agricultural Paradigms</b> .....	14
<b>Table 2: Two Paradigms of Inquiry</b> .....	22
<b>Figure 1: Characteristics of Conventional Agriculture</b> .....	11
<b>Figure 2: Characteristics of Ecological Agriculture</b> .....	18
<b>Figure 3: Characteristics of Mainstream Psychology</b> .....	21
<b>Figure 4: Characteristics of Community Psychology</b> .....	25
<b>Figure 5: Conventional Agriculture Through the Lens of Community Psychology: A Model of DIS-EASE</b> .....	26
<b>Figure 6: Ecological Agriculture Through the Lens of Community Psychology: A Model of WELL-NESS</b> .....	28
<b>Photo 1: Martha Laing, her Pick-Your-Own flower garden, and the Laing farmhouse</b> .	51
<b>Photo 2: Marilew Albrecht in the Marbrecht hen barn</b> .....	60
<b>Photo 3: The Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario Emblem</b> .....	73
<b>Photo 4: Ellinor Nurnberg with one of her cows, Penelope</b> .....	74
<b>Photo 5: Photo Collage of two apprentices (Mika &amp; Dagmar), Waldorf school children, and Sunnivue Farm's new store</b> .....	77
<b>Photo 6: One of Ellinor's cows' 'name tags'</b> .....	83
<b>Photo 7: Cathy with her 3000 cabbage plants</b> .....	85
<b>Photo 8: The Steele farmhouse</b> .....	93
<b>Photo 9: Marg Steele and members of the sheep flock</b> .....	94
<b>Photo 10: Marg packing wool from her flock</b> .....	95
<b>Photo 11: Marg with a collection of her sweaters</b> .....	96
<b>Photo 12: Marg's two oldest children, Sarah and Mathew, with a lamb</b> .....	100
<b>Photo 13: In my grandparents' barn on one of our vacations</b> .....	108
<b>Photo 14: My father and grandfather on the family farm</b> .....	109
<b>Photo 15: My view off the porch of the cottage</b> .....	111
<b>Photo 16: A display of the produce from the garden for a local fair</b> .....	114
<b>Photo 17: Tomato and pepper plants in the greenhouse</b> .....	115
<b>Photo 18: Setting the turkeys free</b> .....	116



**“It’s all a question of story. We are in trouble just now because we do not have a good story. We are in between stories. The old story, the account of how we fit into it, is no longer effective. Yet we have not learned the new story” (Berry, 1988)<sup>2</sup>.**

---

<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to Jan O’Reilly’s Master’s thesis (O’Reilly, 1999) for the discovery of this excellent quote.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Background

I come from a long line of farmers. My agrarian roots go back at least four generations (which is as far as anyone living can remember). Although my parents lived in a city for two decades, five years ago they moved onto my grandparents' farm in Southern Ontario. A weathered plank on the century-old red barn proudly bears witness to my heritage: "Sander van de Hoef & Family"; my heritage exists on the land.

Yet here I am, in a Psychology Master's program. I often ask myself how I got here, especially now, as I near the end of all this education. As I think about what my future holds, I feel pulled 'back' to the land and to farming.<sup>3</sup>

This raises other questions for me: Why do I want to farm when I could make more money in my field? Why have I spent all this time and money if what I really want to do is farm?

The questions themselves hold part of their answers. They assume that money is the major factor in deciding what to do with one's life (i.e. "I could make more money in my field"). They imply that education is not necessary to farm (i.e. "why waste all that time and money if I'm just going to farm?"). Until recently, I had accepted these assumptions as truth. This has a lot to do with where I am today. In the past few years I have begun to examine these assumptions and question their appropriateness for my life. In doing so I have embarked on a journey that requires making sense of the way I and the people around me view the world.

This thesis project is part of that journey. Subsequently, this project explores the available research on conventional and alternative agricultural approaches and how they reflect contrasting paradigms. I used the ecological perspective proposed by Community Psychology to examine the contributions of these farming approaches to human and ecological health. I employed a narrative approach to collect and present life stories of five women farming ecologically in Southern Ontario. Additionally, I interned on an ecological farm and developed a case study and ethnographic perspective of that experience. The resulting stories are used to illuminate the

---

<sup>3</sup> I use the term 'back' figuratively. I did not grow up on a farm and I have had little exposure to the farming experience until my parents began farming five years ago. Yet I do not feel like I am heading into new territory. I literally feel like I am 'going back'.

validity of the examinations of conventional and alternative agriculture and to gain an understanding of women's experiences farming alternatively. I end with a discussion of how the elements reflected in their stories confirm or challenge past research in this area and I offer suggestions for future research and action.

### A Reflection on Paradigms

The term paradigm is often used to describe a "prominent world view, model or frame of reference through which individuals, or collectively, a society interpret the meaning of the external world" (Pirages and Ehrlich, 1984, as quoted in Beus and Dunlap, 1990, p. 592). A society's most pervasive world view can be called a "dominant social paradigm" or "DSP" (Ibid.).

Our paradigms are comprised of assumptions we hold as truth about the world. These in turn guide our decision-making and the way in which we choose to live our lives. It is important to recognize the paradigms within which we live, individually and collectively, so that we may critically examine our assumptions and determine their relevance to our lives. For example, growing up in a Protestant Dutch community in an urban area, I was immersed in a paradigm that emphasized a strong work ethic, fundamental religious values, and comfortable urban living. Although there were variations among us, these values made up our DSP.

### The Conventional Paradigm

Similarly, one can view North American society as reflecting a dominant social paradigm, even though variations within it may exist. Beus and Dunlap (1990) define what many agree is the present North American world view: "Americans' belief in progress, growth, and prosperity; faith in science and technology; commitment to a laissez-faire economy and private property rights; and view of nature as something that must be subdued and made useful are among the core elements of our society's DSP" (p. 592).

Many names have been attached to this paradigm, often reflecting the standpoint from which the speaker is labeling them. These include "Conventional", "Mechanical", "Positivist", and "Scientific". For my purposes I will refer to it as the "Conventional" Paradigm.

In simplified terms, the Conventional Paradigm subscribes to a belief in the existence of one universal and absolute Truth. It holds that this Truth is knowable through empirical science, that is, through methodical, objective manipulation, and observation of variables in any given

environment. This in turn is based on the assumption that things in this world are measurable, that they can be quantified (or counted), controlled, and predicted. This is the world of Descartes and Newton: it is mechanical in that, like a machine, it can be broken down into its separate parts (Prilleltensky, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1989).

Components of machinery are directly related to each other. One component prompts another component to function, which in turn prompts another and so on. Likewise, the Conventional Paradigm sees aspects of the natural life as directly related to each other in a linear and causal way. That is, one event directly causes or hinders another. For example, a doctor tells a patient that a flu shot will directly lessen her or his chances of getting a cold. According to this paradigm then, theories and laws can be generalized as true to any given setting and/or person. This paradigm sees the world in terms of its reduced parts and orders those parts according to the absolute Truth subscribed to. For example, America's belief in "progress, growth, prosperity and individual property rights" (Beus & Dunlap, 1990, p. 592) positions humans separate from their contexts. We are encouraged to transcend contexts in order to rationally and truly gain an understanding of them and ourselves (Stivers, 1993; Beus & Dunlap, 1990; Hollway, 1989).

A major criticism of this world view is that it ignores the complexity of the world. It upholds the existence of one universal Truth. Yet who then decides what that Truth is? What may be 'true' for some settings may not be for another. Let me illustrate.

In the Dutch community there is a saying: "If you ain't Dutch, you ain't much." Now it would be silly to hold that as truth when we all know that non-Dutch people are just as wonderful, or not, as Dutch people. Similarly our present DSP has encouraged biased Truths throughout history. For example, white, middle to upper-class males have throughout European history held to a self-imposed supremacy over others. This was and is reflected in laws and behaviours that exclude women (as well as minority groups, the poor, disabled, etc.) from equal participation in society because they were deemed less capable than this group of men. The Canadian Election Act until 1918 read: "No woman, idiot, lunatic, or criminal shall vote" (McCaw, 1996, p. 95). Such perceptions have promoted a hierarchy (that is a belief in one group's reality as more "Truthful" than another).

Similarly, as highlighted in Beus and Dunlap's (1990) definition of North American DSP,

this DSP has historically seen human existence as more important than non-human existence. Specifically, it holds “a view of nature as something that must be subdued and made useful” (Ibid., p. 592). This hierarchy places white, resource rich males at the top and less privileged groups (including women) and the natural world at the bottom (Winter, 1996; Beus & Dunlap, 1990).

I, a woman, who is bound to the land in more ways than I know, am bothered by this hierarchy. Do we not rely on 'nature' for food, water, energy, and community—all essential for human survival? Does that not make it of the utmost importance? Because I was born to Dutch parents, does this mean that I'm superior to any other ethnic group? And for that matter, just because I was born female, does this make me inferior to males? Questions like these prompted me to look for alternatives to the Conventional Paradigm.

### The Alternative Paradigm

Many other women have had trouble with the Conventional Paradigm as well. The feminist movement has played an important role in promoting a paradigm to challenge the Conventional one. This emergent world view rejects the notion of hierarchy and validates the contributions of all people equally. This emerging world view has also been given many names, again reflecting the standpoint from which a person is labelling it: "Holistic", "Alternative", "Constructivist" and "Post-Positivist". For my purposes I will use the term "Alternative".

The Alternative Paradigm holds the assumption that there is no absolute Truth with a capital 'T'. It subscribes instead to the belief that there are many realities, constructed within different contexts. These 'constructed' truths then cannot by definition be considered universals. In this world view, "knowledge acquisition [is] not unproblematically transparent but instead [is] a function of sets of rules or agreements among members of particular knowledge communities" (Stivers, 1993, p. 409).

These contexts are comprised of many levels (e.g. political, social, personal, natural) and are dynamic or continuously changing. If truths are constructed within changing settings then they are dynamic or continuously changing as well. Since individual and collective truths are so closely connected to the contexts within which we exist, it is impossible to be completely separate from our lived experiences. That is, the process of acquiring and developing truth is just as integral as the truth itself. This is in contrast to the Conventional Paradigm which views

knowledge about human existence as something that can and should be separate from lived experience. The Alternative Paradigm holds that there is no such thing as completely 'unbiased' or uninfluenced (objective) knowledge. Rather, knowledge is grounded in a certain set of assumptions and interests; its limitations are defined by the related assumptions and interests and therefore more obviously applicable to some settings and not to others (Stivers, 1993; Kirby & McKenna, 1989; Lincoln and Guba, 1989).

This paradigm sees the world in holistic terms, as complex and comprised of intertwined elements in dynamic contexts. An example of this emerging paradigm is beginning to appear in the medical approach to illness treatment. It recognizes a cold as being 'out of health' versus being sick. It seeks to encourage well-ness in holistic ways: by promoting healthy living through exercise, diet, stress reduction, and overall life quality.

#### Back to the Point

As mentioned earlier, paradigms are the foundations upon which we make decisions about how we live our lives. The two paradigms I highlighted above are reflected in dramatically different approaches to the world. A story may help illustrate this:

A busy executive from the city spent two precious weeks each year fishing in one particular northern lake. Each year he fished with the same local guide, and after twenty years or so of this he was emboldened enough to ask the guide how much he earned. Shocked at the pitiful amount, the businessman offered to find the guide a job in the city paying twice as much. The guide refused. The executive was confounded. "Why don't you want to better yourself?" he asked. The guide asked the executive how much he earned. "And what's the most expensive, most satisfying thing you can buy with all that?" the guide asked. "My annual fishing trip," was the answer. "Well, you see, I don't need that much money," the guide replied, happily casting his line across the water. (Coleman, 1989, p. 50)

The city executive subscribes to the Conventional Paradigm that places priority on making lots of money (over his love of the outdoors). In comparison, the local guide subscribes to the Alternative Paradigm that values healthy living (demonstrated by his love of the outdoors) over making lots of money. Both of their lifestyles reflect the paradigms they subscribe to. Examples of these paradigms can be found in other arenas as well. In the next section I will discuss how they are reflected in agriculture and psychology.

## CHAPTER 2: AGRICULTURE AND PSYCHOLOGY PARADIGMS

The emerging alternative paradigm is not limited to the feminist movement nor to fishing guides. Similar values are found in agriculture and the social sciences.

### Agriculture

"When tillage begins, other arts follow. The farmers therefore are the founders of civilization." (Daniel Webster, New Hampshire statesman, as quoted in Groh & McFadden, 1997, p. xiii). Humans are dependent on food for survival. Agriculture is therefore an integral part of the foundation of civilization. Today that foundation is threatened:

[There is] an unresolved contest between two philosophies of farm life:

1. The farm is a food-factory, and the criterion of its success is salable products.
2. The farm is a place to live. The criterion of success is a harmonious balance between plants, animals, and people; between the domestic and the wild; between utility and beauty...

It was inevitable and no doubt desirable that the tremendous momentum of industrialization should have spread to farm life. It is clear to me, however, that it has overshot the mark, in the sense that it is generating new insecurities, economic and ecological, in place of those it was meant to abolish. In its extreme form it is humanly desolate and economically unstable. These extremes will someday die of their own too-much, not because they are bad for wildlife, but because they are bad for farmers. (Aldo Leopold, 1945, as quoted in Callicott, 1990, p.47)

Although various agricultural groups are making attempts to develop more sustainable agricultural practices, part of the problem today is the lack of consensus about the term 'sustainable'. As Reguly (1999), Gale and Cordray (1994), and Keeney (1989) highlight, this term can mean different things for different people depending on their context and the paradigms they subscribe to. This quote from an American conventional farmer illustrates the point: "What is sustainable agriculture after all? The only sustainable agriculture is profitable agriculture" (Beus & Dunlap, 1990, p. 610). This farmer sees sustainability in terms of economics. An environmentalist on the other hand would likely see it in terms of ecological health, whereas a Community Psychologist for example, would likely see it in terms of social health.

Gale and Cordray's (1994) study of people employed in the natural resources field developed nine different working definitions of sustainability. These definitions reflected different combinations of three main elements: economics, ecology, and social issues. They also address a

fourth element: time. Chiappe (1999) and Keeney (1989) highlight this fourth temporal element as being an equally important part of true sustainability. Specifically they stress that it is important to see sustainability in terms of long-term effects in the other three elements of economics, ecology, and social issues. I will use these four elements (economics, ecology, social, and time) to help illustrate the contrasting paradigms in agriculture.

Very rarely will a farmer fall neatly into one agricultural paradigm; the lines between them are more often blurred. I present the following approaches to agriculture as dichotomous categories for the sake of comparison.

### The Conventional Agricultural Paradigm

Farmers are individuals, especially when it comes to their chosen approaches to farming. However, as members of society they too hold certain assumptions based on the world views to which they subscribe. Studies suggest that different agricultural practices reflect different world views (Baltaz, 1998; Allen & Bernhardt, 1995; Beus & Dunlap, 1990).

Conventional or mainstream agriculture is described by Knorr and Watkins (1984, as cited in Beus & Dunlap, 1990, p. 594), as "capital-intensive, large-scale, highly mechanized agriculture with monocultures of crops and extensive use of artificial fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides, with intensive animal husbandry." Conventional farming characteristics parallel those found in the Conventional Social Paradigm discussed earlier. Conventional agriculture sees farming as primarily an individualistic pursuit for economic (and less commonly) social benefits (Beus & Dunlap, 1990).

An analysis of conventional agriculture, using the four elements of sustainability mentioned above, clarifies its underlying motivations and implications:

#### Economic

"What is sustainable agriculture after all? The only sustainable agriculture is profitable agriculture" (Beus & Dunlap, 1990, p. 610). As highlighted by this quote, agriculture today is ultimately seen as a business. That is, the goal of farms is to make money-both to support farmers and their families, and to promote financial success. With the introduction of technology on farms, farming has become more efficient and money-making opportunities have increased. To promote this new found efficiency, farms have become specialized. They primarily focus on either



cash cropping or livestock and on only one or a few varieties of either (Van Bers, 1991; Beus and Dunlap, 1990). This is called monoculture. To maintain efficiency on monoculture farms, farm sizes have increased dramatically (Hay, 1992). Expensive machinery used to harvest crops or house dairy cows for instance, can be paid off faster and used more effectively if farms have larger acreage or more cows. There is a saying in conventional agriculture today that “bigger is better”: bigger implies better chances for making money.

The history of rural Canada illustrates the subsequent change. In the 1850s about 80% of the Canadian population lived in rural areas. By 1986 almost 80% lived in urban areas, leaving 20% in rural areas (Hay, 1992). By 1991 only 3.2% of the Canadian population were farmers (Wiebe, 1995). From 1941 to 1986 the average farm size by acreage increased by 141% (Hay, 1992). These trends continue.

Many farmers do not necessarily choose to build large-scale farms. The reality however, is that they are at the mercy of a larger economic market that demands it. Specifically, this global market demands things such as: lots of available and accessible food, variety, and aesthetics. Subsequently farmers must produce lots of food, utilizing cheap production methods and top quality food strains (strains that emphasize appearance and durability), and sell it to companies that can ship it to where there is in demand. To accomplish this, farmers who want to remain competitive are literally forced to invest large amounts of money into their farms (Van Bers, 1991).

This puts farmers in economically unstable positions. It makes it harder and less attractive for new farmers or the children of current farmers to take up farming (Mann, 1999; Hodne, 1987). As farms get bigger, farmers become fewer in number, and fewer of them can afford to own their farm (Lind, 1995). The food industry is left in the hands of few, who then have greater power over it. Giant corporations and their wealthy owners have begun to monopolize the food industry; farmers are at the mercy of the broader economic market and these corporations (Van Bers, 1991; Beus & Dunlap, 1990; Kneen, 1989). Sharon Butala (1994), a rancher's wife from Saskatchewan illustrates some of the implications of these changes:

**When I heard the experts prophesy about even bigger and better technologies which would save us, I shuddered, since it seemed to me that it was technology run rampant that had brought on the disaster in the first place. When I heard about corporate farms I saw**

only a modern-day feudal system where people would work the land for the profit of landowners whose faces they would never even see. When I heard about any ideas for saving the pace which involved moving people off their farms, I saw only unlivable, dangerous megalopolis full of the poor and homeless—and an empty landscape. (p. 202)

### Social

Although economics is the top priority of most farms in Canada today, farming typically has important social elements as well. Farms, like my parents' present farm, are often passed down family lines. Many, if not most, Canadian farmers are carrying on a family tradition. Consequently, these farmers feel a unique connection to their work and their land. Additionally, many farmers value their lifestyle because they see it as an important environment for their families to grow up in. It provides opportunities for children to participate in the business and develop their own connections to the land (Hodne, 1987).

However, the decrease of farms in rural Canada and the increased financial inputs required to farm, have significantly diminished farming opportunities for families (Hodne, 1987) and farming novices. This in turn adds to the economic instability of farming. Many family members are forced to find work off the farm and relocate elsewhere, typically to urban centres (Mann, 1999; Neth, 1995; Barlett, 1993; Hay, 1992). This exodus of farmers from rural communities threatens the economic and social survival of rural communities and family farms (Barlett, 1993; Van Bers, 1991), increases the congestion in urban areas (Chiappe, 1999; Hay, 1992), and decreases the availability of farmland (Van Bers & Robinson, 1993).

Increased urban populations and decreased rural farmers result in fewer people involved in the food production process (Kneen, 1989). This in turn disconnects people from the land and from the natural cycles of growth and survival. This detachment has been highlighted by many philosophers, environmentalists, and eco-psychologists as being an important but unfortunately overlooked component of human dysfunction (Suzuki & McConnell, 1998; Winter, 1996; Glendinning, 1994; Roszak, 1992).

Increased mechanization on the farm also tends to separate farmers from their land and instead directs their focus to business issues. As Wendell Berry (1977, as cited in Feldman & Welsh, 1995) said:

once [the farmer's] investment in land and machines is large enough, he [sic] must forsake the values of husbandry and assume those of finance and technology. Thenceforth his

thinking is not determined by agricultural responsibility, but by financial accountability and the capacity of his machines...The economy of money has infiltrated and subverted the economics of nature and energy and the human spirit. (p. 25)

### Ecology

As highlighted, conventional agriculture is becoming more specialized in order to meet the demands of a capitalist market. Subsequently, it often fails to recognize the complexity of the context upon which agriculture is dependent for survival. Specifically, highly mechanized agricultural practices tend to push the limits of natural ecosystems, yet is dependent on this ecosystem for them to survive long-term.

As Frisvold and Kuhn (1999) highlight, the agriculture sector is by far the most sensitive to environmental change. At the same time agriculture, coupled with forestry, are the major users of land and water resources. The Worldwatch Institute estimated that over \$89 billion in global economic losses resulted from natural disasters between January and November 1998. The majority of these disasters were attributed to human behaviour, particularly to deforestation and loss of wetlands (Abramovitz & Dunn, 1998). Deforestation and the filling of wetlands are typically done to create more land for agricultural purposes (Van Bers, 1991).

Highly mechanized agricultural practices utilize large machinery and subsequently require large parcels of land. Additionally, these practices require intensive planting and harvesting cycles which result in the depletion of soil quality. These factors force farmers to look elsewhere for more land and/or make extensive use of chemical fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides or intensive livestock practices to increase production on their current farm parcels. Yet, chemical inputs and intensive animal care taking, in turn, threaten soil and water quality (Van Bers, 1991). These practices create a vicious cycle from which it is hard to escape.

As mentioned, the food system has become more and more monopolized by fewer corporations or wealthy individuals. These groups recognize that increased food production creates an opportunity to make more money. This in turn promotes food production practices that abuse the soil to prompt the extraction of as much food as possible and then artificially replenish it through chemical fertilizers. The lack of naturally occurring nutrients in the soil and the use of synthetic nutrients deplete food quality. This in turn affects the health of the consumers

of these products (Groh & McFadden, 1997).

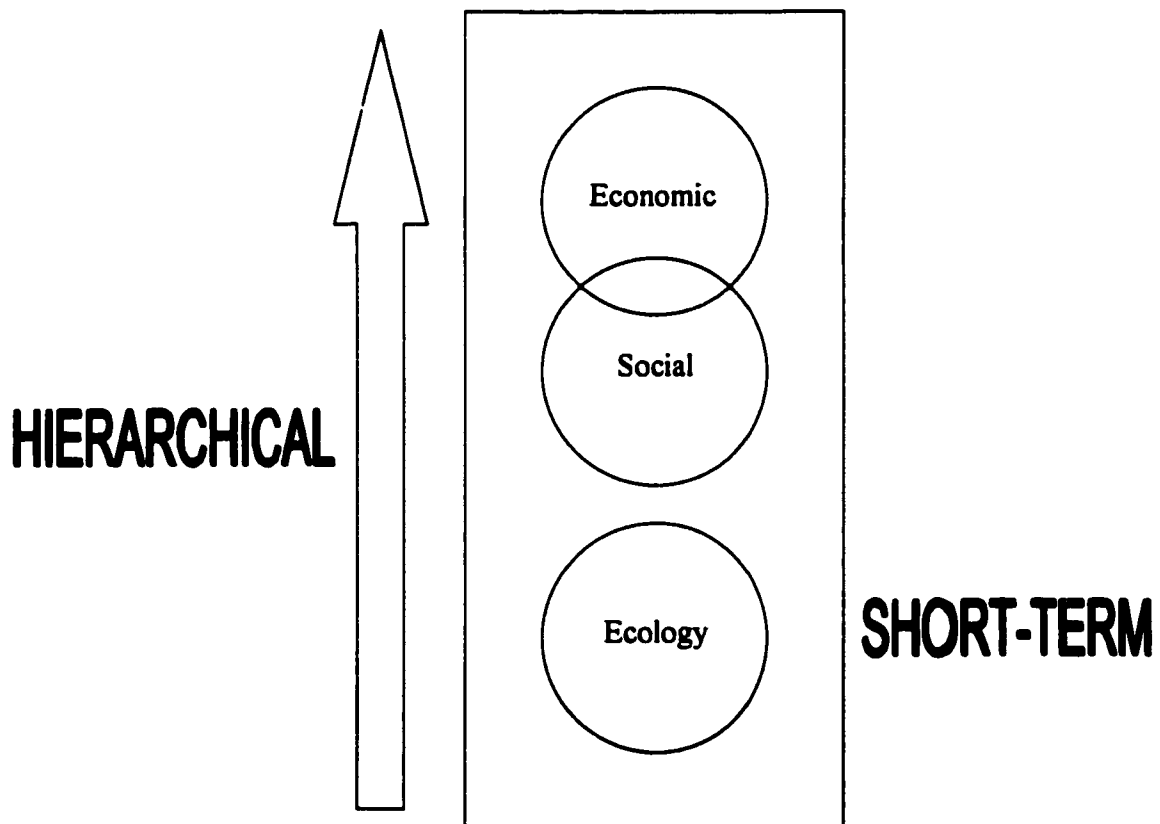
### Time

A capitalist market demands that products be available and money be made NOW. Farmers caught in such an environment are typically forced to ignore long-term effects of their practices in order to meet the present market demands and to financially support their families. This promotes a short-term focus in farming (Chiappe, 1999; Keeney, 1989).

### Summary

To summarize, conventional agriculture is based on a paradigm similar to the Conventional DSP in that it defines sustainability in short-sighted, hierarchical terms. That is, in making agricultural decisions, economics are seen as the priority followed by social concerns. The natural ecology is relegated to a peripheral position: its importance is seen in terms of providing natural resources for the broader economy. Figure 1 (below) illustrates these characteristics.

**Figure 1: Characteristics of Conventional Agriculture**



Economic, social and ecological elements are represented as distinct spheres organized hierarchically in terms of importance (illustrated by arrow). The overlap in the economic and social spheres signifies the areas typically taken into consideration when making agricultural decisions. The separation of ecology from these two spheres signifies the typical oversight of ecological issues when making these decisions. Finally, the short-term focus of conventional agriculture is highlighted. From a health stand-point, these characteristics would appear to threaten overall individual and community health. This relationship will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

### The Ecological Agriculture Paradigm

In contrast to the conventional agriculture approach, Troughton (1995) highlights that there has been a resurgence of 'subsistence farming' in the past few decades. This type of farming emphasizes growing food in conditions that are as natural as possible. It typically incorporates the local community, environmentally friendly methods and economic sustainability. Subsequently it often gets the term 'sustainable' or 'alternative agriculture'.

Beus and Dunlap (1990) present that whereas conventional agriculture considers economic and social sustainability alone, "alternative agriculture adds a critical element...--an urgent concern over the ecological aspects of agriculture" (p. 595). They also highlight that alternative agriculture practices may include various different approaches such as "organic agriculture, sustainable agriculture, bio-dynamics, agroecology, natural farming, low-input agriculture, and others" (p. 594).

For the purposes of this project, I will use Keeney's (1989) definition of sustainable agriculture to refer to this emerging agricultural paradigm. That is, "agricultural systems that are environmentally sound, profitable, and productive and that maintain the social fabric of the rural community" (p. 102). In light of the emphasis on ecological sustainability in alternative agriculture, as well as the holistic perspective evident in this quote, I will use the term 'ecological agriculture' when discussing this method of food production.

Callicott (1990) refers to this approach to agriculture as "a paradigm shift in the metaphysics of agriculture--from the Newtonian to the Eltonian, from the mechanical to the ecological" (p. 47). This paradigm parallels the Alternative DSP highlighted earlier in that it sees

farming as a "whole systems" approach. In order to gain a more in-depth understanding of ecological farming I again will utilize the four elements of sustainability, that is, the economic, social, ecology, and temporal elements.

To put this paradigm shift in more concrete terms, Beus and Dunlap (1990) reviewed the writings of six conventional and six alternative male agriculturalists and farmers. Chiappe and Flora (1998) interviewed women farming ecologically. Table 1 (see page 14) outlines the findings of these two studies. I will use these results and additional literature findings to explore the above four elements in relation to ecological agriculture.

### Economic

Ecological farmers are just as concerned as conventional farmers about financial stability both at a personal and family level. Ecological farming systems however tend to keep money flow within a community. Community Shared Agriculture (CSA) initiatives are an example of this. Community members pay a fee to a local farmer or group of farmers in exchange for organic produce throughout the growing season (Baltaz, 1998; Bennett & Heise, 1997). In this way resources are cycled within the community<sup>4</sup>.

Additionally, ecological farms tend to be small-scale which promotes more farmers in a given rural area. This in turn provides a larger customer base for other economic initiatives in nearby towns. As highlighted by Beus and Dunlap (1990), resources are spread out among a variety of people rather than concentrated in the hands of few. Finally, ecological farms tend to be diversified. This, coupled with direct community support, ensures their self-sufficiency and subsequently their survival, regardless of what conditions may arise in the broader economic market (Ibid; Chiappe and Flora, 1998).

### Social

Ecological farms tend to be small-scale. Being small limits the number of customers farmers can provide with food which in turn encourages the presence of other farmers. Ecological farms also tend to be directly connected to local communities. This connection supports rural communities and encourages interaction between community members (O'Reilly,

---

<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed description of CSAs, see page 46.

**Table 1: Key Elements of the Competing Agricultural Paradigms**

<i>Conventional Agriculture</i>	<i>Alternative agriculture</i>
<p><b>Centralization</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-national/international production, processing, marketing</li> <li>-concentrated populations; fewer farmers</li> <li>-concentrated control of land, resources and capital</li> </ul>	<p><b>Decentralization</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-more local/regional production, processing, marketing</li> <li>-dispersed populations; more farmers</li> <li>-dispersed control of land, resources, and capital</li> </ul>
<p><b>Dependence</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-large, capital-intensive production units and technology</li> <li>-heavy reliance on external sources of energy, inputs, and credit</li> <li>-consumerism &amp; dependence on the market</li> <li>-primary emphasis on science, specialists and experts</li> </ul>	<p><b>Independence</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-smaller, low-capital production units and technology</li> <li>-reduced reliance on external sources of energy, inputs, credit</li> <li>-more personal &amp; community self-sufficiency</li> <li>-primary emphasis on personal knowledge, skills, and local wisdom</li> </ul>
<p><b>Competition</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-lack of cooperation; self-interest</li> <li>-farm traditions and rural culture outdated</li> <li>-small rural communities not necessary to agriculture</li> <li>-farm work a drudgery; labour and input to be minimized</li> <li>-farming is a business only</li> <li>-primary emphasis on speed, quantity, and profit</li> </ul>	<p><b>Community</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-increased cooperation</li> <li>-preservation of farm traditions and rural culture</li> <li>-small rural communities essential to agriculture</li> <li>-farm work rewarding; labour an essential to be made meaningful</li> <li>-farming is a way of life &amp; business</li> <li>-primary emphasis on permanence, quality, and beauty</li> </ul>
<p><b>Domination of nature</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-humans are separate from and superior to nature</li> <li>-nature consists primarily of resources to be used</li> <li>-life-cycle incomplete; decay (recycling wastes) neglected</li> <li>-human-made systems imposed on nature</li> <li>-production maintained by agricultural chemicals</li> <li>-highly processed, nutrient-fortified food</li> </ul>	<p><b>Harmony with nature</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-humans are part of and subject to nature</li> <li>-nature is valued primarily for its own sake</li> <li>-life-cycle complete; growth and decay balanced</li> <li>-natural ecosystems are imitated</li> <li>-production maintained by development of healthy soil</li> <li>-minimally processed, naturally nutritious food</li> </ul>

**Table 1: Key Elements of the Competing Agricultural Paradigms (cont.)**

<i>Conventional Agriculture</i>	<i>Alternative agriculture</i>
<p><b>Specialization</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-narrow genetic base</li> <li>-most plants grown in monocultures</li> <li>-single-cropping in succession</li> <li>-separation of crops and livestock</li> <li>-standardized production systems</li> <li>-highly specialized, reductionistic science and technology</li> </ul> <p><b>Exploitation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-external costs often ignored</li> <li>-short-term benefits outweigh consequences</li> <li>-based on heavy use of non-renewable resources</li> <li>-great confidence in science and technology</li> <li>-high consumption to maintain economic growth</li> <li>-financial success; busy lifestyles; materialism</li> </ul>	<p><b>Diversity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-broad genetic base</li> <li>-more plants grown in policulture</li> <li>-multiple crops in complementary rotations</li> <li>-integration of crops and livestock</li> <li>-locally adapted production systems</li> <li>-interdisciplinary, systems-oriented science and technology</li> </ul> <p><b>Restraint</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-all external costs must be considered</li> <li>-short-term and long-term outcomes long-term equally important</li> <li>-based on renewable resources; non-renewable resources conserved</li> <li>-limited confidence in science and technology</li> <li>-consumption restrained to benefit future generations</li> <li>-self-discovery; simpler lifestyles; non-materialism</li> </ul> <p><b>Quality of Family Life</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-decreased labour time creates more leisure time with/for family</li> <li>-health of family important motivator (i.e. minimal to no chemicals used)</li> <li>-more balanced family life (i.e. small-scale, diversity allows for family involvement)</li> </ul> <p><b>Spirituality/Religiosity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-spirituality mediated &amp; required honouring nature</li> <li>-harmony with nature important for spiritual wholeness</li> <li>-especially important for women who have less access to material resources</li> </ul>

Source: Beus and Dunlap, 1990: 598-599.

Source: Developed from Chiappe & Flora (1998) (\*since this study only looked at ecological farmers they do not provide comparisons of these two elements for conventional farmers)



1999; Baltaz, 1998; van de Hoef, 1998; Ashiabi, 1995). It also encourages a connection between community members and the land and food production processes (Chiappe & Flora, 1998; Groh & McFadden, 1997).

Similar to conventional farmers, many ecological farms are passed down through family lines and this therefore maintains a rich rural tradition. Beus and Dunlap (1990) also highlight that ecological farmers tend to see farming as a family lifestyle, or life calling, as well as a family business. Chiappe and Flora (1998) have found that ecological agriculture helps decrease labour time and family stress. They suggest that this is a result of a healthier perception of farming (i.e. the farm is not an entity in itself but part of the family life which also includes leisure time together) and healthier farm practices such as rotational grazing (which decreases the amount of time required to manually feed livestock). Additionally, the women they talked to highlighted that their farming style promotes their connection to the land and reflects their family's religious values. These factors helped promote a sense of wholeness among the women in Chiappe and Flora's study.

### Ecology

Beus and Dunlap (1990) highlight that a unique contribution of ecological agriculture is its emphasis on preserving the natural ecology. Whereas conventional agriculture tends to view the natural ecology in terms of the resources it provides, ecological farmers typically view the natural ecology as a greater context in which humans are merely one part. Ecological farmers strive to imitate and live in balance with nature.

They promote natural diversity on their land by planting and raising a variety of crops and livestock. They imitate natural cycles of growth and decay through practices such as the incorporation of animal and green manures on their land. The majority of ecological farmers do not use synthetic fertilizers, herbicides, or pesticides but focus instead on developing natural methods to deal with soil fertility, weed and insect control. Because most ecological farms are small in size, there is less need for the extensive use of machinery on the land. The absence of chemicals and large machinery minimizes harm to the soil structure and watersheds. This in turn promotes the health of the local natural ecosystem, the broader biosphere (or natural environment), and the food farmers produce (Chiappe and Flora, 1998; Van Bers, 1991; Beus and

Dunlap, 1990).

These practices also promote the physical health of the farmer, her or his family, and customers (typically community members but also the broader society). The farmer maintains a connection to the land and encourages that connection among family and community members as well. As highlighted by research, that connection is an important part of the spiritual and physical health of individuals, families and communities (Chiappe and Flora, 1998; Suzuki & McConnell; 1997; Glendinning, 1994; Roszak, 1992).

### Time

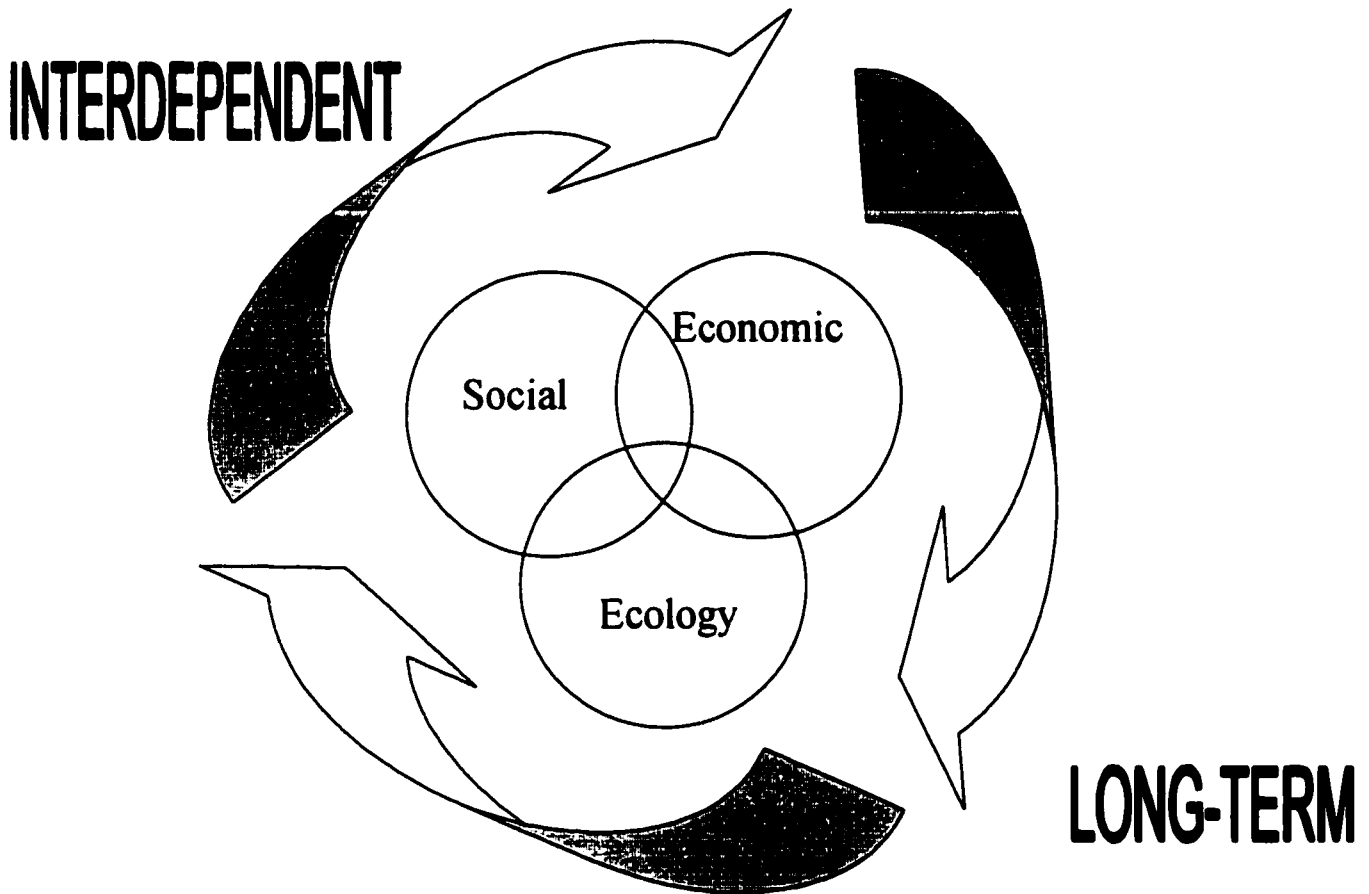
Finally, ecological farmers take seriously their impacts on the future. They recognize the importance of making choices that do not harm future generations (Chiappe and Flora, 1998; Beus and Dunlap, 1990; Keeney, 1989). For example, conventional farmers tend to use non-renewable resources, like fossil fuels (e.g. gas, diesel), without limitation. Ecological farmers tend to be more conscious of long-term implications of fuel use and therefore practice restraint. Some alternative farmers prefer not to have any machines on their farms for this reason.

### Summary

In summary, ecological agriculture is based on a holistic paradigm similar to the alternative DSP in that it defines sustainability in long-sighted, interdependent terms. That is, it recognizes and validates the equal importance of relationships both in the present and long-term, between economics, social issues, and the natural ecology. Figure 2 (see page 18) illustrates the relationship between the above four elements in ecological agriculture. The three elements of sustainability (economic, social, ecology) are represented as equally important, independent spheres all overlapping. The arrows encircling the elements signify the qualities highlighted by the terms surrounding the figure, namely 'interdependence' and 'long-term' vision. They illustrate the continuous, balanced nature of the model by representing a closed system in perpetual motion.

From a health standpoint, the characteristics of ecological agriculture would appear to encourage healthy individuals and communities. Once again, this will be delved into in more detail later in this chapter.

**Figure 2: Characteristics of Ecological Agriculture**



### Psychology

"Psychology is the scientific study of behaviour and mental processes in contexts. Psychology emphasizes observing, describing, explaining, and predicting behaviour" (Halonen & Santrok, 1997, p. 5). In light of what we now know about the conventional and alternative paradigms, this definition of psychology, found in an introductory psychology textbook, seems to combine elements of both (i.e. it recognizes 'context' and emphasizes 'predicting' behaviour). However a critical examination of what is actually happening in psychology today sheds new light on this definition.

### Mainstream Conventional Psychology

Although mainstream psychology considers the 'context' within which human behaviour

occurs, it is still based on a belief in a mechanical world that can be studied empirically by isolating its various parts. It is based on the following assumptions:

that the subject matter of interest to social science...is as hard or concrete as the physical objects studied by botanists or geologists and is "out there" waiting to be revealed; that social science acquires systematic knowledge by adhering to rules of hypothesis testing, controlled (unbiased) observation, and the replication of previous research results; and that by using the prescribed methodology, social science arrives at Truth, which consists of lawlike generalizations that take the form, "Given conditions A, B, and C, when X occurs, Y will follow," laws that make possible the prediction--hence, the control--of events. (Stivers, 1993, p. 408)

Looking back on the textbook definition then we can see that, although behaviour is recognized as fitting in a context, the methods used to study it are based on a conventional mechanistic paradigm. Like the Conventional Paradigm, the underlying philosophy of mainstream psychology values and promotes the separation of humans from their contexts (e.g. lab experiments to study child development) as well as aspects of the human psyche (e.g. cognitive psychology). Also like the Conventional Paradigm, conventional psychology's view of human quality living is "based on individualism and acceptance of the capitalist ideal of the consuming citizen" (Prilleltensky, 1999, p. 9). That is, individuals are capable of 'transcending' all contextual factors and meaningfully contributing to an economic based society (Prilleltensky, 1999; Levine & Perkins, 1997).

This reductionist perspective, like the Conventional DSP, relegates certain proponents to superior or inferior positions. Not surprisingly, the discussion of the natural ecology is typically non-existent in mainstream psychological literature.

Critics of psychology's reluctance to incorporate the natural world into its studies, often look to Freud as the foundation on which psychology has based this reluctance. In Freud's words:

We recognize, then, that countries have attained a high level of civilization if we find that in them everything which can assist in the *exploitation of the earth by man [sic] and in his protection against the forces of nature*--everything, in short which is of *use to him*--is attended to and effectively carried out. In such countries, rivers which threaten to flood the land are regulated in their flow, and their water is directed through canals to places where there is a shortage of it. The soil is carefully cultivated and planted with the vegetation which it is suited to support; and the mineral wealth below ground is assiduously brought to the surface and fashioned into the required implements and

utensils...Wild and dangerous animals have been exterminated, and the breeding of domesticated animals flourishes....[italics added] (Freud, 1930/1961, p. 39)...[T]he principal task of civilization, its actual *raison d'etre*, is to defend us against nature. We all know that in many ways civilization does this fairly well already, and clearly as time goes on it will do it much better. but no one is under the illusion that nature has already been vanquished; and few dare hope that *she* [sic] will ever be entirely subjected to *man* [sic] [italics added]. (Freud, 1961, p. 15)

In the above passage we see Freud's view of humans as separate from and at the mercy of a wild and dangerous (and gendered) nature. Subsequently humans (or in Freud's words: 'man') must learn to subdue and control it. As is evident, Freud's world view consists of a reductionistic, hierarchical value base that is evident in Western and psychological thought even today (Winter, 1996).

Psychology seems particularly unable to shake its preoccupation with a hierarchical world view that sees the natural world as secondary or peripheral<sup>5</sup>. This hierarchical, empirical philosophy subsequently places limits on research. Effective research is that which quantifies behaviour into terms that will facilitate the removal of it from its context (and make it 'generalizeable') as well as control and eventually predict it, by an objective researcher. Levine and Perkins (1997) also highlight that effective research in mainstream psychology deals specifically with the present, that is it focuses on information and implications that are short-term.

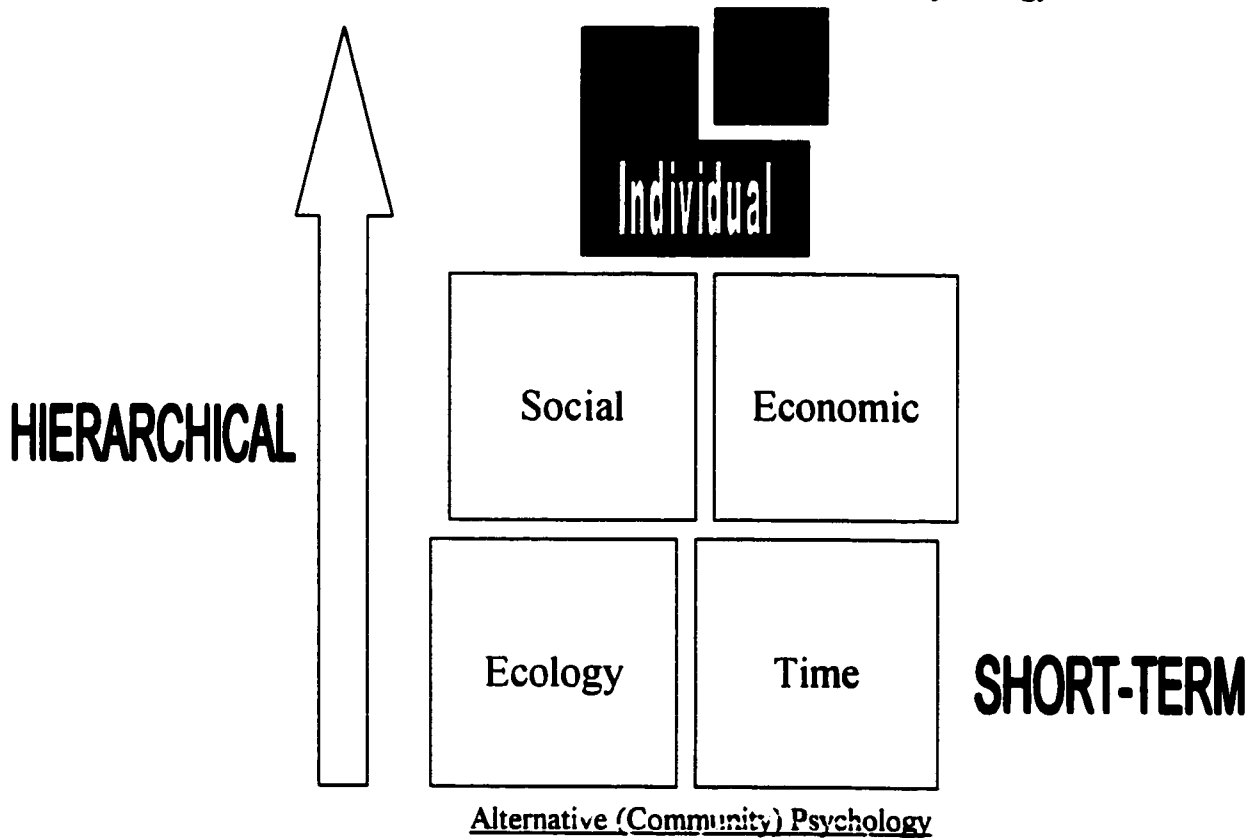
In summary, mainstream psychology views individuals as independent entities which, although part of a context, can transcend contextual factors (including then social, economic, ecology, and temporal factors). They in turn can be understood by reducing human characteristics into separate components. Mainstream psychology emphasizes the importance of human experience over and above contextual issues, including the natural ecology. It is focused on short-term 'here and now' implications of such research. Figure 3 (see page 21) visually outlines these characteristics by representing the above elements in boxes, independent and separate from each other. Human experience (represented by the 'individual' box) and humans themselves can be broken down into components (e.g. cognition, physiology, behaviour,

---

<sup>5</sup> I would also argue that psychology is still very patriarchal as evident in Freud's quote. See Van Herik (1982) Freud on femininity and faith and/or Hollway, (1989) Subjectivity and method in psychology: Gender, meaning and science for more information.

conditioning, etc.). This is represented by the division of this box into four removable components. The surrounding terms 'hierarchical' and 'short-term' reflect the short-term focus of mainstream psychology and the placement of specific elements in particular priorities (as evident in the figure).

**Figure 3: Characteristics of Mainstream Psychology**



The social sciences are faced with a transformation of thought about the way in which we see and subsequently study the world. In Stivers' (1993) words: "a shift of tectonic proportions took place when the argument was advanced that "paradigms" existed at all--that knowledge acquisition was not unproblematically transparent but instead was a function of sets of rules or agreements among members of particular knowledge communities" (p.409). Many term the new 'paradigm' we see emerging and expanding as the 'post-positivist' or 'holistic' paradigm. For consistency sake, I will refer to it as the "alternative psychology" paradigm.

Table 2 (see page 22) highlights the core elements of these contrasting research paradigms. Paralleling the Alternative DSP highlighted earlier, alternative psychology views the

world in a holistic way, comprised of complex, dynamic parts. All individuals or groups of individuals have their own constructed realities, there are no universal, absolute laws of reality. Since truths are constructed and dynamic, they, and subsequently human behaviours and experiences are contextually bound and perpetually emerging. The researcher as well can not separate her or himself from the context in which she or he is conducting research. The researcher takes a role of instrument and interpreter rather than objective expert (Kirby & McKenna, 1989).

**Table 2: Two Paradigms of Inquiry**

<i><b>The Conventional Paradigm</b></i>	<i><b>The Holistic Paradigm</b></i>
<p><b>Ontology</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-belief in a single reality independent of any observer's interest</li> <li>-mechanistic explanation of causality</li> <li>-presumes that time/space context-free universal truths can be found</li> </ul>	<p><b>Ontology</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-belief in multiple, socially constructed realities dependent on persons who hold them</li> <li>-dynamic, everchanging, complex interrelations</li> <li>-truth is best informed and most sophisticated understanding held by high level of consensus</li> </ul>
<p><b>Epistemology</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-subject/object dualism</li> <li>-researcher as detached observer</li> <li>-accepts possibility &amp; desirability of excluding researcher's value-biases</li> </ul>	<p><b>Epistemology</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-inquirer is interlocked with the item under inquiry, rendering the findings a creation of the process itself</li> </ul>
<p><b>Methodology</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-researcher as interventionist (experimental/manipulative)</li> <li>-hypotheses stated in propositional form and subject to empirical (falsification) tests</li> <li>-strives to control for multiple variables, rendering the variable of interest context (confound) free</li> </ul>	<p><b>Methodology</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-hermeneutic (interpretative), and dialectic process (dialogue, constant comparison of differing interpretations)</li> <li>-iteration, analysis, critique, reiteration, reanalysis, and synthesis leading to the emergence of some shared understanding of a "case" or set of relations</li> <li>-flexible methods/process seeking to gain understanding of issue within its context</li> </ul>

Source: Lincoln and Guba, 1989; modified from table developed by the Centre for Research and Education in Human Services, Kitchener, ON, 1999

The research process itself is seen as an emergent, collaborative one between researcher and participants. It leaves room for mixed media and interdisciplinary expressions. The emphasis is on social change and empowerment versus developing universal laws (Lincoln & Guba, 1989).

Recent trends in social, gestalt, transpersonal, environmental, critical, and community psychology have begun to include contextual factors in their study and analysis of human behaviour (Winter, 1996; Kidner, 1994). Specific to this project is the current focus in community psychology. Following the initiative of developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner (1977), community psychology proposes an ecological model to understanding human experience. This model highlights four different contextual levels that impact an individual or community's experience. These are the individual (e.g. personal characteristics), micro/family (e.g. parenting styles), exo/community (e.g. accessible community resources), and macro/society (e.g. broader cultural attitudes and/or economic trends).

Community psychology emphasizes the need for and promotes healthy individuals and healthy communities. It recognizes the importance of incorporating economic, social, temporal, and natural ecology factors within each of those four levels to encourage human health. For example, Bennett (1987) highlights the importance of economic issues in promoting or preventing healthy communities in his work on community based economic development (CBED) initiatives. Prilleltensky (1999) and Ashiabi (1995) address the importance of social concerns in community and individual health. Levine and Perkins (1997) show how community psychology emphasizes more long-term applications and implications of research. O'Reilly (1999) and Bennett and Campbell (1996) stress the need for incorporating the natural ecology in discussions of community health.

Additionally, community psychology applies ecological principles as suggested by Kelly (1969, as cited in Levine and Perkins, 1997) in evaluating and analyzing community interventions. Specifically, these principles are: cycling of resources, natural succession, adaptability, and interdependence. As described by Levine and Perkins (1997) cycling of resources addresses the transfer or movement of resources within a given system. Natural succession refers to the manner in which change benefits one or more particular groups currently and over time. Adaptability refers to "the process by which organisms vary their habits or characteristics to cope with



available or changing resources” (p. 125). Interdependence states that changes in one component of a system will influence change in another and that components in a given system are mutually influential.

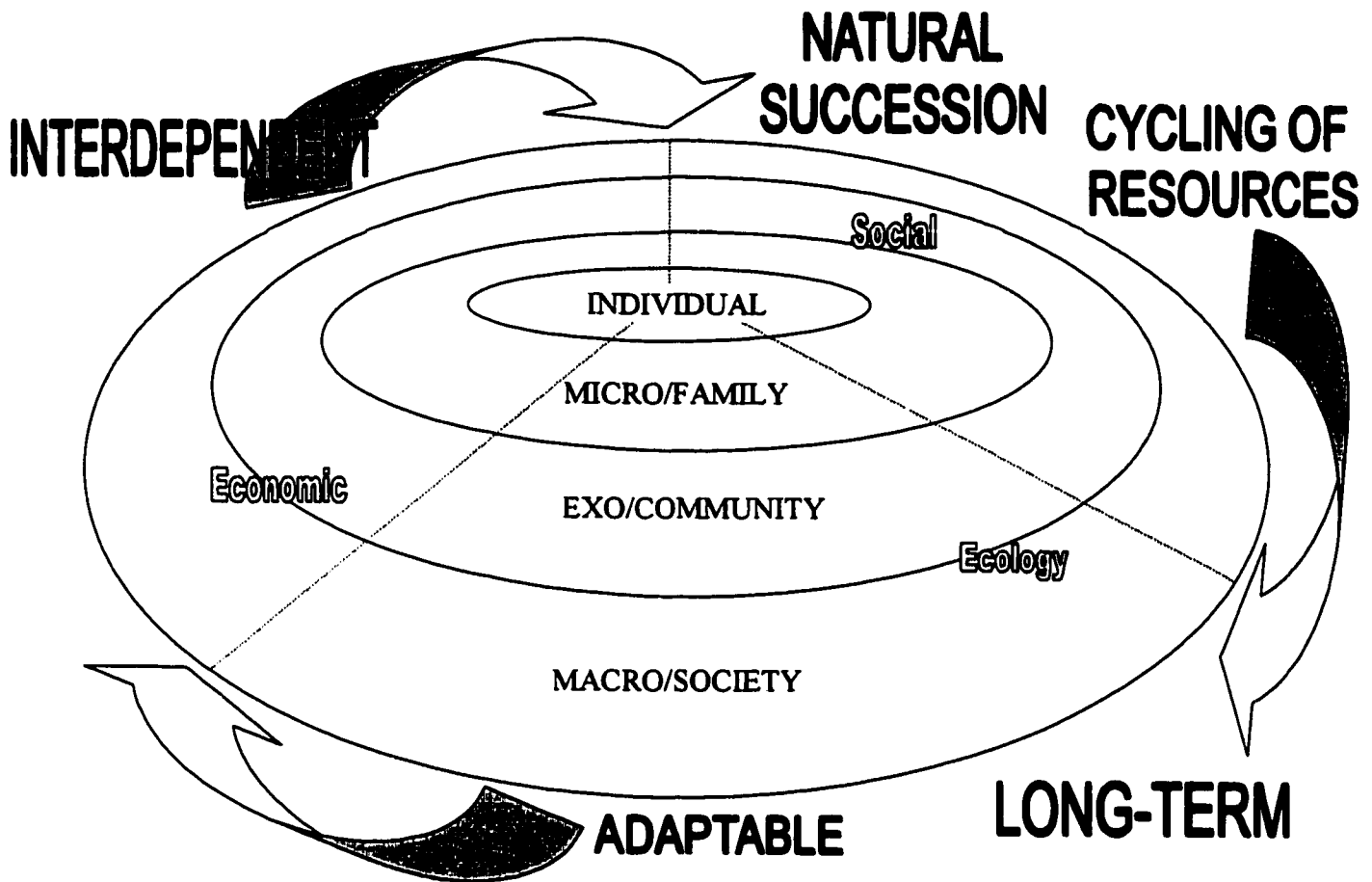
Community psychology proposes that healthy communities have equal access to resources and are allowed to develop in ways that do not consistently ignore certain group members. It appreciates the importance of adaptability in communities to ensure their strength and flexibility and of interdependence between all members (Levine and Perkins, 1997). Finally, community psychology recognizes the importance of these principles and their interaction with economic, social and natural ecology issues. It proposes that these principles must be encouraged in all of these areas, at all four levels highlighted by the ecological approach (i.e. individual, micro/family, exo/community, and macro/society) with long-term implications and applications considered (Prilleltensky, 1999; Levine & Perkins, 1997; Bennett & Campbell, 1996; Bennett, 1987).

In summary, community psychology explores individual and community health issues by taking into consideration various contextual levels and elements (i.e. individual, micro, exo, macro, social, economic, ecology, temporal) and approaches this exploration with a recognition of various principles that may be involved (i.e. cycling of resources, natural succession, adaptability, interdependence) as well as long-term implications and applications. Figure 4 (see page 25) illustrates the combination of these qualities. Each contextual level is represented by spheres embedded within each other. Spanning each of these levels are the economic, social, and ecology elements. Surrounding these the ecological principles are listed and visually demonstrated through the use of arrows encircling the model.

#### **Agriculture through the Lens of Community Psychology**

The fields of agriculture and psychology have much to offer each other. Agriculture is primarily responsible for producing healthy food and subsequently promoting healthy societies. Yet research has shown that conventional agriculture practices are in fact threatening the health of societies (Van Bers, 1991; EAP, 1997). Psychology, as the study of human behaviour, offers a unique glimpse into human health issues. Specifically, community psychology offers a critical analysis of current farming practices and their relationship to community health. It also offers suggestions for promoting healthy individuals and societies. By recognizing and analysing the

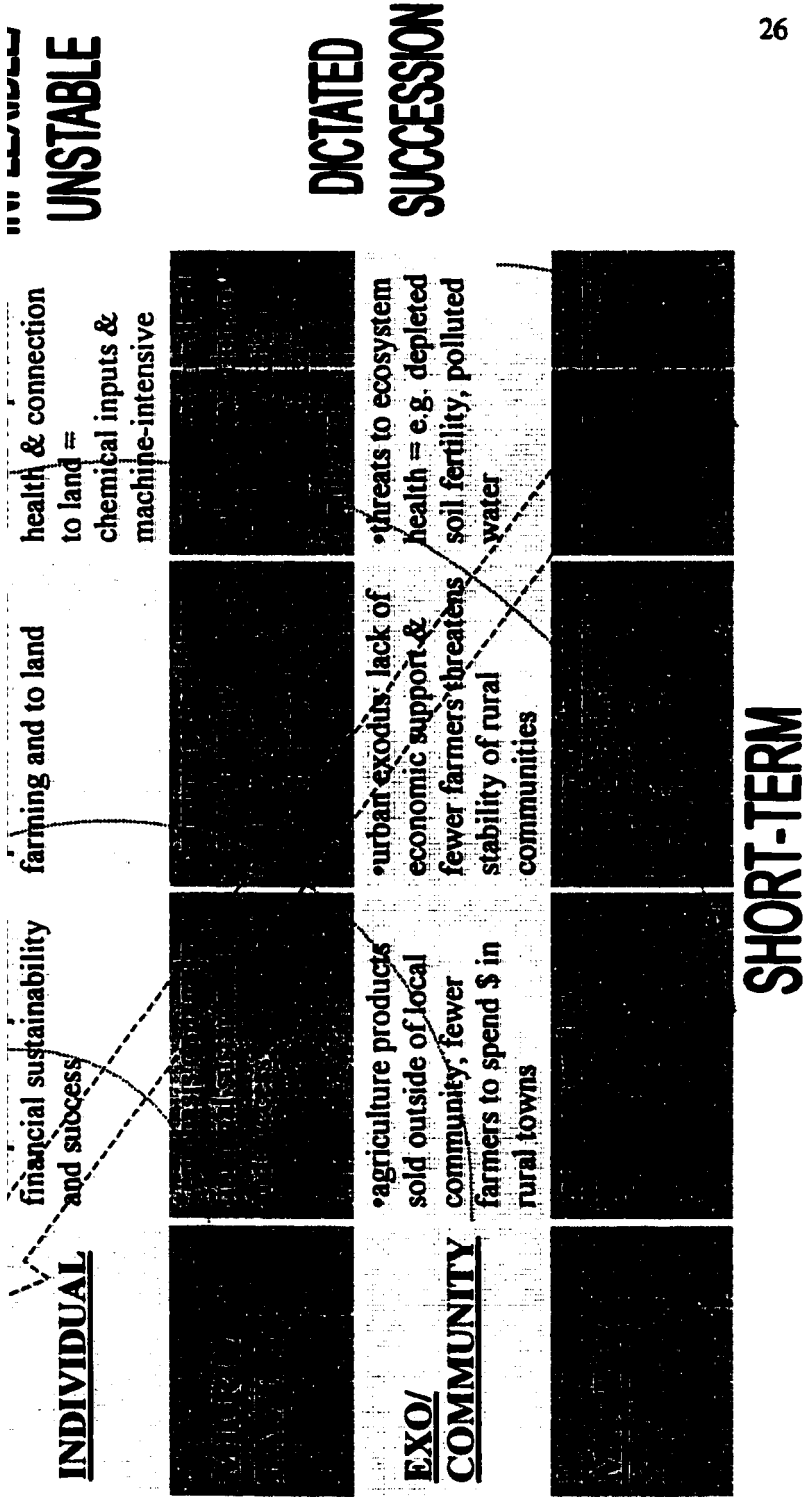
**Figure 4: Characteristics of Community Psychology**



contrasting agricultural paradigms from an community psychology ecological perspective we can determine the health-promoting and damaging aspects of food production practices.

Figure 5 (see page 26) illustrates the food production system of conventional agriculture through the lens of community psychology. The sustainability elements (economic, social, and ecology) are set up in table form with the ecological spheres of community psychology (individual, micro/family, exo/community, macro/society). These elements are placed in priority based on the hierarchical nature of conventional agriculture as highlighted in figure 1. The quadrants within the table highlight the characteristics of each of these combined spheres within conventional agriculture. The stars in the quadrants emphasize those areas of particular interest to conventional farmers (i.e. economics--especially at the individual and family level, followed by

# HIERARCHICAL COMPETITIVE



social--personal and family issues) and illustrate the hierarchical nature of this paradigm. Other quadrants symbolically move further away from these 'important' quadrants. Subsequently, we see that quadrants falling under ecology, and community and society, are deemed less important (signified by bullets instead of stars). As mentioned earlier, these are typically seen in terms of the resources they can provide to farmers and corporations (Van Bers, 1991; Beus & Dunlap, 1990).

Finally, the figure illustrates the relevance of the ecological principles highlighted in community psychology within this paradigm (i.e. cycling of resources, adaptability, natural succession, and interdependence). Specifically, it traces the movement of resources throughout the food production system into the hands of the 'powerful few', described here as corporations and the rich. This 'power group' in turn applies pressure on the system to ensure that resources are continually funnelled back to them (illustrated by the arrow through the quadrants).

The funnelling of resources to specific, select groups promotes a competitive environment as 'non-select' groups struggle to acquire the resources necessary to survive and succeed. Those who do manage to obtain significant amounts of resources in effect dictate the movement and development (succession) of products within the system (Kneen, 1989). An emphasis on economic gain tends to be short-sighted in terms of any consideration of the environment and communities (Gale & Cordray, 1994). The combination of these qualities and the pressure from corporations promotes a highly inflexible and unstable system.

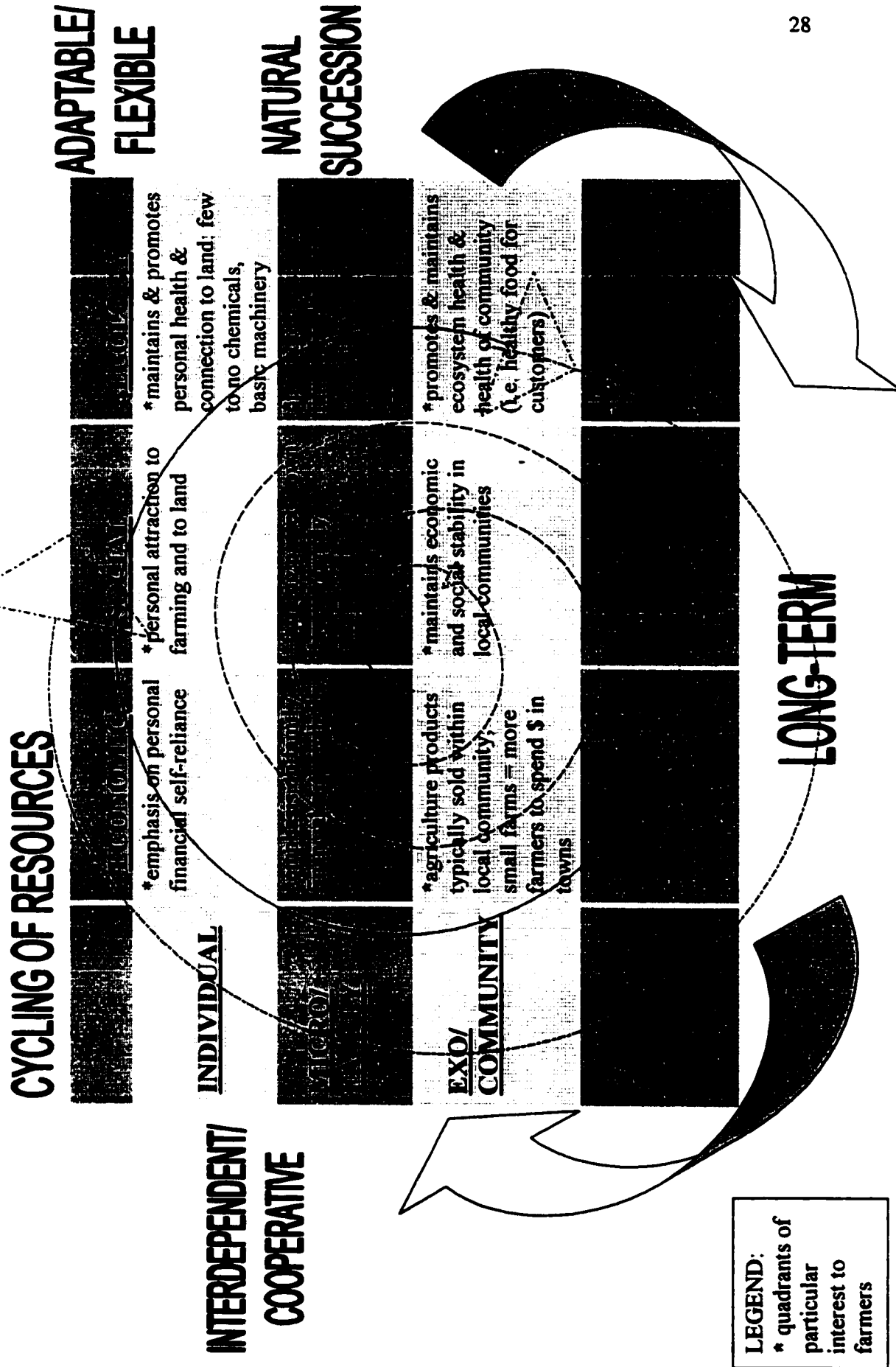
Viewed through the lens of community psychology, incorporating what we know about what elements should be present in healthy communities, it is evident that conventional agriculture in its present state is a model of DIS-EASE.

Figure 6<sup>6</sup> (see page 28) illustrates the characteristics of ecological agriculture through the lens of community psychology. The sustainability elements (economic, social, and ecology) are again set up in table form with the ecological spheres of community psychology (individual, micro/family, exo/community, macro/society). The quadrants within the table highlight the

---

<sup>6</sup> Figures 5 and 6 illustrate an analysis of both the conventional and alternative agricultural paradigms, respectively, from a community psychology perspective. The characteristics listed in the table quadrants have been highlighted in detail earlier in the related sections on the contrasting agricultural approaches.

Figure 6: Ecological Agriculture Through the Lens of Community Psychology: A Model of WELL-NESS



characteristics of each of these combined spheres within ecological agriculture. The presence of stars in each of the quadrants present each quadrant as equally important and incorporated accordingly. It also illustrates the interdependent nature of this food system.

Finally, the figure illustrates the relevance of the ecological principles highlighted in community psychology within this paradigm (i.e. cycling of resources, adaptability, natural succession, and interdependence). The spiral circling throughout the quadrants illustrates the contributions of ecological agriculture in all aspects of individual and community contexts. For example, community members in this system provide financial resources to local ecological farmers who in turn provide food products to the community members. They do this using methods that promote the sustainability of environmental resources (e.g. healthy air, soil and water) for their families, communities, and the broader society (Groh & McFadden, 1997; Bennett & Campbell, 1996; Van Bers, 1991).

These qualities recognize and validate the interdependency of all the components of a healthy community and in turn promote cooperation and support among farmers and community members. Agricultural products and processes are allowed to develop and adapt naturally, thus promoting natural succession. Ecological agriculture emphasizes the importance of a long-term vision when making agricultural decisions. This in turn ensures the availability of resources both currently and for future generations. Finally, these qualities promote an adaptable system that is not at the mercy of broader societal conditions, such as economic market trends.

Viewed through the lens of community psychology, and taking what we know about what should be present in healthy communities, it is evident that ecological agriculture is a model of WELL-NESS.

### **Gaps in the Research**

I have chosen to use the areas of agriculture and psychology to illustrate the contrasting paradigms because of my personal interest in them. This interest stems from a passion and concern for both. My concern lies in what I consider to be major gaps in the exploration and understanding of agriculture and psychology.

### **Women and Agriculture**

My concern for agriculture is its lack of focus on women's experiences. Some researchers

suggest that many women historically have had a deep connection to and with the earth (Glendinning, 1994; Sjöo & Mor, 1987; McStay & Dunlap, 1983). This has been seen as an extension of their capability for giving birth and their subsequent roles of mothering and nurturing children with food, water, and warmth (fuel) (Jacobson, 1992, as found in Mitchell, 1997). In traditional cultures, women provided 75-80% of foods for subsistence living (Sjöo & Mor, 1987). Research has also suggested that women are the primary sources of information on plant biodiversity (Zweifel, 1996).

Today women make up approximately 60% of the agricultural labour force (PAN-AP, 1999). Agriculture has typically been a joint venture between husband and wife, yet in terms of economic and political power and visibility, women have been overlooked (Sachs, 1996). The recent shift in rural living as a result of industrialization on the farm has affected women and ultimately agriculture in many ways. It has changed the distribution of work in agriculture. According to Statistics Canada (1996), only 23% of Canadian farm operators are women. It has increased their labour time, in some cases causing women to work double or triple days (Waring, 1997).

In discussing women in rural settings, Cebratev (1994, 1988) highlights the importance of family in women's farming experiences. She, as well as Chiappe and Flora (1998), highlight that part of women's sense of wholeness on the farm stems from their ability to provide healthy, meaningful lives for their families. Women tend to spend more time in reproductive and house-based productive roles, than men. A mechanized farm typically requires less involvement from women (Meares, 1997). Harcourt (1994) points out the implications of minimizing women's involvement:

Sustaining local environments is not book work, it is learnt through time, passed on from generation to generation, and cannot easily be brought into the rationale of economic episteme. It is, therefore, easier to ignore it altogether, at considerable cost to those who, in traditional societies, were valued holders of knowledge but in the process of modernization have become devalued, 'illiterate', 'non-skilled', 'unpaid', 'non-productive' members of society. (p. 19)

In a society that validates the transaction of money as the ultimate expression of human contribution to society (which in turn is codified and validated in laws and cultural mind-sets),

women's place on the farm is often overlooked<sup>7</sup> (Chiappe & Flora, 1998; Waring, 1997). Women in the home are not seen as meaningful contributors to an economic business, including farming. Their unpaid work, as highlighted in the above quote, is considered 'non-valuable'—financially speaking. Reimar (1986, as quoted in Feldman & Welsh, 1995) challenges this assumption:

The survival of the independent commodity producer relies on the active participation of women...When the farm wife or children wash the kitchen floor, their labour corresponds to that of the corporation's maintenance crew when they clean the plant or office, except that the farm family does not always get paid...It is nevertheless labour, and it contributes just as much to the operation of the farm as the income generated by the sale of the farm products. (p. 30)

Our exploration of the Dominant Social Paradigm (recall the busy city executive) illustrated this emphasis on money. It places the most value and worth on activities that involve the exchange of money. This in turn, particularly in agriculture, promotes a hierarchy manifested in patriarchy (Waring, 1997; Shiva, 1989). Even women who are actively involved in the fieldwork on the farm, tend to be overlooked: "Some years ago, I was interviewing a farm man about his work. When I asked him about his spouse's farm work he said, 'No, she doesn't do farm work. She just digs fence posts, picks rocks and drives the other tractor'" (Keating, 1994, pp. 88-89).

Conventional agriculture places value primarily on work that involves the exchange of money. This discredits many women. Research shows that women's unpaid household duties contribute significantly to a farm business (Waring, 1997; Feldman & Welsh, 1995; Harcourt, 1994). Conventional agriculture practices are partly responsible for the disappearance of rural communities and family farms (Kneen, 1989). The lack of potential human interaction has specific implications for many women. Research has shown that many women's ways of knowing and experiencing the world emphasize the importance of creating and building relationships both within families and communities (Cummins, 1996; Ceboratev, 1994; Shaef, 1985). Ecological agriculture practices offer ways to validate women's uniqueness by encouraging a more

---

<sup>7</sup> For an excellent, powerful, and poetic chronology of perceptions of women throughout history, see Susan Griffin, 1978, Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her.



egalitarian experience on the farm and more opportunity to interact with others.

An abundance of research is emerging on the alternative agriculture paradigm. Some of the findings have been indicated earlier. However the majority of it looks primarily at men's experiences and excludes women's experiences (Chiappe & Flora, 1998; Meares, 1997), thus further promoting women's invisibility.

Exceptions to this are Chiappe and Flora's (1998) and Meare's (1997) work. Chiappe and Flora built on the Beus and Dunlap (1990) study by interviewing American women about their experiences farming sustainably. They found that women's experiences reflected the same elements that Beus and Dunlap highlighted with the addition of two others: 'quality of family life' and 'spirituality' (see Table 1, page 14). They suggested that these two elements were particularly important to women because of their investment in reproduction and because of their lack of access to material resources (and therefore increased appreciation of non-material benefits). Specifically they found that the women reported having more free time to spend with their family in leisure activities (compared to conventional farming) and that this contributed to their sense of spiritual wholeness. Meares (1997) interviewed American women who had made the transition from conventional farming practices to ecological practices. She found that the women in her study became even more busy than their husbands after their transition.

These studies highlight the need for future research regarding experiences of women farming ecologically. Given that alternative agriculture is based on a holistic paradigm (as illustrated in Figure 6, page 28), do women have an equal say and recognition on the farm and do they feel they are equals? Or are they overwhelmed as suggested by Meares' (1997) study? Given that family is such an important part of women's experiences, is ecological agriculture a viable option for family health and survival and if so, does it promote women's wholeness (as suggested by Chiappe & Flora, 1998)? Most of the research on ecological agriculture has been typically conducted by and about men (Chiappe & Flora, 1998; Meares, 1997). Do women's experiences reflect the same elements of ecological agriculture as highlighted by the model developed in Figure 6?

Finally, most of these studies have taken place in the United States or overseas. Information about women farming alternatively in Canada is scarce. How do women get

information about this, especially if they're interested in farming ecologically themselves? Based on their own experiences, what advice would women give to others who are interested in farming ecologically?

### Psychology and the Natural Ecology

"Because [the ecological crisis] is the result of human behaviour, one might expect that psychology, which has been defined as the science of human behaviour, would have an essential part to play in the analysis and prevention of environmental destruction" (Kidner, 1994, p. 359). Yet, as highlighted earlier, psychology has typically ignored the natural ecology and its interaction with individual and community health. Recent trends in some areas of psychology have begun to validate the importance of context in the study of human behaviour, yet they fail to extend their view beyond the humanly constructed levels of personal, social, political, and economic (Winter, 1996; McKenzie-Mohr & Oskamp, 1995; Oskamp, 1995; Kidner, 1994).

A notable exception to this is a branch of psychology called eco-psychology (initiated by folks outside the psychology field interestingly enough). Eco-psychologists such as Michael J. Cohen (1999), Deborah Du Nann Winter (1996), Chellis Glendinning (1994), and Theodore Roszak (1992) have demonstrated the importance of the natural ecology in promoting human health. They suggest that a reductionist focus of the world that relegates nature to a peripheral location, is a primary cause for dysfunctional and destructive tendencies in society. That is, they suggest that human connection to the natural world is an important and necessary component of human wholeness, balance, and ultimately health.

Although in principle community psychology validates the importance of natural ecology in human and community health, in practice that validation is not very visible. Bennett and Campbell (1996) stress "the importance of appreciating the natural ecology and advancing an ecocentric psychology in the practice of community psychology" (p. 8). Because of its holistic, ecological approach to health issues, community psychology is well situated and arguably responsible to incorporate the natural ecology. This includes developing an understanding of the relationship between the natural ecology and human experience and the role of agriculture in promoting or damaging that relationship. I propose this project as an opportunity to look at this relationship by studying the experiences of women in alternative agriculture.

### Summary

In summary, this project looked at Southern Ontario women's perceptions of ecological agriculture. Additionally it looked at if and how their experiences reflect egalitarian roles. Finally it explored the role of natural ecology in their lives. In keeping with a holistic perspective of human health and experience, this project has employed research methods that recognize and validate unique individual experiences. Specifically, it used a narrative approach to collect and present the life stories of five women farming ecologically in Southern Ontario.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODS

### What Does She Know?

In keeping with the tenets of the holistic paradigm, the process through which this project is carried out is as important as the topic area studied and the information obtained:

Asserting the need to include and then providing data on the work of agricultural "wives" and women into ongoing rural research, however, usually does not include an understanding of why women were excluded from most studies in the first place. Nor have many of these studies taken as their point of entrée a challenge to dominant positivist research frameworks. (Feldman & Welsh, 1995, p.31)

In recognition of the tendency throughout history to overlook and discount women's experiences, I have chosen a research method that challenges the mainstream research framework by encouraging women to talk about their experiences in ways that they feel most comfortable and that reflect their individuality.

#### The Narrative Approach

Historically popular in anthropology and feminist research, the narrative approach has begun to make an appearance in psychology (Rappaport, 1995). It fits well with the holistic paradigm because it recognizes and validates the diversity of individuals' experiences and it encourages individual expression through flexible, comfortable formats.

#### Definition

Narratives are stories that include context, incorporate many forms of expression, are action-oriented and promote empowerment.

#### Narratives are Stories that Include Context

"Simply stated, a narrative is a story...Stories are descriptions of events over time. They usually have a beginning, a middle, and an end. They usually have main and secondary characters. They usually have a point" (Rappaport, 1995, p. 803). "Because stories are the traditional vehicle of choice for conveying how human beings make sense of intentional action organized in time, they are ideally suited for making sense of one's own life in time" (McAdams et al, 1997, p. 678).

The narrative approach recognizes the validity of context in terms of history, culture, time, and place (Personal Narratives Group, 1989). "The narrative is a way of organizing episodes, actions, and accounts of actions; it is an achievement that brings together mundane facts and

fantastic creations; time and place are incorporated. The narrative allows for the inclusion of actors' reasons for their acts, as well as the causes of happening" (Sarbin, 1986, p.9).

Some authors argue that context is so integral to the narrative approach that without it, narratives can not be understood: "Only by attending to the conditions which create these narratives, the forms that guide them, and the relationships that produce them are we able to understand what is communicated in a personal narrative" (Stivers, 1993, p. 424).

#### Narratives are Interdisciplinary: They Consist of Art AND Science

Narratives are flexible and comfortable, but as such they are considered less legitimate in academia (Church, 1995). As Sarbin (1986) explains:

Because storytelling is commonly associated with fiction, fantasy, and pretending, some critics are skeptical about the use of the narrative as a model for thought and action. For the serious scientist, storytelling is related to immaturity and playfulness. To regard storytelling as the exclusive property of childhood is consistent with a world view that places a high value on positivism, technology, and realism and a low value on imagining and ludic behaviour...fictions are a part of the reality in which we live our lives. (p. 11,12)

The narrative or story form is perhaps the most comfortable human form of expression; even the most mundane things are often described in stories to give them meaning and relevancy (Sarbin, 1986). So, the fact that narratives come in what many would call, artistic form, does not jeopardize their importance in understanding human experience and behaviour:

The sense of self is an essentially narrative phenomenon; people conceive of themselves in terms of stories about their actions in the world, using them to make sense of the temporal flow of their lives. We find identity and meaning as a result of the stories we tell about ourselves or that others tell about us. Therefore, a narratives approach to self-understanding is not a distortion of reality but a confirmation of it. (Stivers, 1993, p. 412)

Narratives incorporate both science and art and recognize different contexts. Narratives also allow for the inclusion of multi-media (e.g. poetry, photos, artwork) as additional forms of expression (Minister, 1991).

#### Narratives are Action-Oriented and Empowering

Since narratives are "the traditional vehicle of choice" (McAdams et al, 1997) for how humans share their life experiences, they are an important tool for passing on life lessons, advice, morals, and visions. Narratives therefore can be a powerful force for personal and social change

(Rappaport, 1995). Researchers subscribing to the alternative paradigm recognize that "human beings and social structures mutually shape one another" (Stivers, 1993, p.418). Therefore "if structures and actors are in relationship, individual interpretations themselves constitute a societal change process" (Ibid., p. 424). Retrospection on and presentation of one's life through a storied format promotes action in that it demands responses both from the individual telling the story and from the listener(s). This active dialogue then, although it may be restricted initially to the parties involved in the telling and listening action, will likely affect outside spheres as well and in essence prompt a ripple effect throughout their lives. Additionally, the act of putting these stories into writing demands responses from readers, thus creating another starting point for the ripple effect.

The narrative approach promotes social change partly by providing opportunities to empower individuals and groups. The narrative approach requires more individual and group involvement than most other research methods. This involvement in turn promotes a sense of ownership of the research by participants and in turn promotes empowerment of those participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1989).

Additionally narratives are consistent with empowerment because even listening & respecting stories promotes co-participant relationships. Creating and sharing stories is a power issue, some don't have this opportunity, their stories are of less value because they are considered 'outsiders' (Rappaport, 1995). By recognizing that each individual's story--their interpretation and presentation of their life events--is valid, this approach places participants and researchers in more egalitarian positions than conventional research (Stivers, 1993).

The narrative approach recognizes differences among individuals and is open-ended (i.e. unstructured) to encourage the expression of information in different, personally chosen ways. That is, the narrative approach is flexible enough to use whatever means are deemed most comfortable for the specific group of people involved in the research. For example, research has found that women tend to prefer sharing information in conversation like settings versus the typical question and answer setting of an interview (Minister, 1991). In light of this, feminist researchers suggest the use of 'topic guides' in aiding women to share their stories (see Appendix A for example). This allows the women to choose whatever direction they wish to take, and sets up a more conversational like environment within which they can share their information

(Barnsley & Ellis, 1992). This was the chosen method in this project.

### How Narratives Fit This Project

The narrative approach makes sense for this project because it is particularly well suited to the topic areas of alternative agriculture, women's issues, and community psychology.

#### Alternative Agriculture and Stories

"Sustainable agriculture defies simple definition. The best way to communicate the meaning of sustainable agriculture is through real-life stories of people who are developing these systems in their own fields" ("Project seeks 1,000 sustainable farmers, ranchers", 1999). The narrative approach "identif[ies] the farm as the site of production and the place from which ideas are produced" (Feldman & Welsh, 1995, p. 28) and therefore recognizes its context: "It is the locality of such knowledge production which most completely intimates the many dimensions of its character. Such knowledge is local in the sense that it is derived from the direct experience of a labour process which is itself shaped and delimited by the distinctive characteristics of a particular place with a unique social and physical environment" (Kloppenborg, 1991, as quoted by Feldman & Welsh, 1995, p. 28).

Additionally, Joan Gussow (1999) describes the role and importance of stories in highlighting "the dull mendaciousness of the stories that now obscure our vision of food. Where is the soybean farmer happy to be growing Olestra? Show me the perfectly groomed couple who found love over a frozen dinner. Does Donna Shalala really greet visitors with a milk mustache?" (p. 12). She suggests that "for the health of the food system and ourselves, we need to begin sharing real stories about real food" (Ibid.)

#### Women and Stories

Narratives also provide an opportunity for the voices of the "differentially empowered members" of a community to be heard (Feldman & Welsh, 1995). It is particularly important for women:

Feminism is, among other things, a response to the fact that women either have been left out of, or included in demeaning and disfiguring ways in what has been an almost exclusively male account of the world....For it matters to us what is said about us, who say it, and to whom it is said: having the opportunity to talk about one's life, to give an account of it to interpret it, is integral to leading that life rather than being led through it; hence our distrust of the male monopoly over accounts of women's live. To put the same

point slightly differently, part of human life, human living, is talking about it, and we can be sure that being silenced in one's own account of one's life is a kind of amputation that signals oppression. (Lugones & Spelman, 1983, p. 573)...having rejected women's historical status as the object of the male subject's defining gaze, feminism demands that those who have been objectified now be able to define themselves, to tell their own stories. (Stivers, 1993, p. 411)

Women are different than men. Cebotarev (1994) highlights that women and men have very distinct realities of which only a small portion is shared. Women have different ways of knowing and different methods of communicating information (Goldberger et al, 1996; Simpson, 1994). To obtain knowledge about men's realities or even elicit information about women's realities using male constructed research methods, excludes a large part of women's reality and effectively silences their unique experiences (Minister, 1991). The narrative approach allows for flexibility to express information in a way that appreciates and validates women's uniqueness. Narratives promote women's empowerment then by "allowing/encouraging/enabling women to speak for themselves" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 131).

#### Psychology and Stories

The narrative approach is suitable for the field of psychology because, as Sarbin (1986) argues, human lives are constructed and made meaningful through stories: "The claim that the narratory principle facilitates survival must be taken seriously. Survival in a world of meanings is problematic without the talent to make up and to interpret stories about interweaving lives" (p. 11). He suggests that in fact narratives are the metaphor of psychology. Stories are so fundamental to human existence that any attempt to understand humans without including their stories will never be sufficient (McAdams, 1996; Sarbin, 1996).

#### Life Stories as a Form of Narrative

There are a variety of specific techniques that fall under the definition of the narrative approach--from detailed discourse analysis to global descriptions of conceptual themes such as culture, myth and identity formation (Rappaport, 1993). Specific to this project I have chosen to focus on 'life stories'.

The life story is a narrative precisely because it represents a discourse of a particular kind, organized with a potential listener or reader in mind and with an intent, often implicit, to convince self and others of a particular plot or present ordering of experience rendered



sensible within the understanding of coherence shared by speaker and listener or reader as participants within a particular culture. (Cohler & Cole, 1994 as quoted in McAdams et al, 1997, p. 679)

Life stories are similar to a case study in that they highlight the experiences and events of an individual in light of the research subject. But they take a narrative twist so to speak, in that they present information in storied format with as much contextual information as possible.

### Ethical Issues of the Narrative Approach

We feminists cannot have it both ways: we cannot unmask the oppression inherent in the aim to control nature, we cannot celebrate difference, and at the same time claim that (at least eventually) we will arrive at a standpoint that trumps others because it produces 'real' knowledge while the viewpoints of others do not. We must ground feminist standpoints (I think they must remain plural) in our commitment to liberation and allow them to unfold in many directions. We must aim for believability, not certitude, for enlargement of understanding rather than control. Otherwise we will eventually stand convicted of Gerald Vizenor's charge against the social science--that they 'separate people from the human spirit...through word icons, methods that become icons because they're powerful, because they're rewarded by institutions'. (Coltelli, as quoted in Stivers, 1993, p. 424)

### Generalizability

The premise of the narrative approach and the alternative paradigm that it subscribes to, renders generalizing the data across settings, impossible and undesirable: "all narrative...provides neither an 'accurate' nor 'inaccurate' description of preexisting 'real' experience but instead helps to give experience form" (Stivers, 1993, p. 420). Stivers indicates that sets of realities or truths may be shared within a specific knowledge group but that because of contextual differences, they are limited in their applications to other groups. The purpose of this project is not to generalize to the broader society but to offer a glimpse into the lives of five women who share similar lifestyles.

The lack of generalizability does not make this research less credible. I maintain the credibility of this research by using a combination of methods, keeping detailed notes of the process and my involvement in it, and by promoting feedback from participants throughout the process (Kirby & McKenna, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1989). Specifically, I combine not only interviews of other women, but a case study/ethnographical account of myself (to be described in detail shortly) and a personal profile to help situate myself in the research.

Life stories also can not be used to generalize about a specific person. They are merely a glimpse into someone's life, not a conclusive summary about who they are. Therefore, as Stivers (1993) suggests, we should "see human beings as generators of new descriptions rather than as beings one hopes to be able to describe accurately" (p. 425).

### Creating Heroes

Presenting the remarkable life stories of individuals, risks placing them outside their reality:

In a world pervaded with positivist restrictions on knowledge, the individual life is generally permitted to do no more than serve as an exemplar of laudable human qualities, inspiring us to lead better lives. This notion of exemplar is itself vulnerable to feminist criticism as a form of elitism, on the grounds that it perpetuates 'the logic of domination, by encouraging us to look up to 'special women' rather than to look around us for the women with whom we might act'. (Stivers, 1993, p. 413)

The women chosen to participate in this project were not singled out because of any extraordinary achievements but because they present a very realistic, common example of women in an uncommon field. They are meant to be inspirations in that they are 'like you and me'.

### Power Issues

Systematic, sustained reflection on being a woman--the kind of contemplation that 'doing theory' requires--is most likely to be done by women who vis-a-vis other women enjoy a certain amount of political, social and economic privilege because of their skin color, class membership, ethnic identity. There is a relationship between the content of our contemplation and the fact that we have the time to engage in it at some length. (Lugones & Spelman, 1983)

I am a privileged, white, middle class, Master's student. This presents some distinct power differences in this research. The university is typically seen in society as a place of unique power. Therefore I, the 'investigator/Master's student' hold more power in terms of my academic position than farming women would typically feel in our society. This may have made the women feel uncomfortable, obligated to participate and/or pressured to share difficult information.

Additionally, the project was instigated by me, not these women. I carried out the bulk of the work in terms of collecting stories, transcribing them, interpreting them, and writing about them which limits the extent to which the experience is participatory. I have the final say and this

puts me in a unique power position as well (Schneider, 1991). Finally, I was attempting to conduct this research during the summer season which is a busy time for farmers. I potentially took up valuable time from these women.

I attempted to deal with the above issues in several ways. I was clear that I would not interview the women for more than an hour and a half unless agreed upon. I respected any woman's decision to limit our time together as was the case with one woman in this study. In that instance we continued our dialogue through the mail which she found more suitable for her schedule. I was clear with the women that I was there in the interview to listen and gain knowledge about an area which the participants have more knowledge about than I. I was explicit as possible about my role, how I carried that out, my assumptions and my methods both with the participating women and in this final document (Kirby & McKenna, 1989). In so doing I promote "a relationship between equals, not one between more and less enlightened people" (Stivers, 1993, p. 421).

The process of sharing life stories could have been traumatic for any of the women. Without placing judgement on my part (as I am not trained in addressing these issues) I provided each woman with a list of local resources they could contact if they felt any discomfort (see Appendix B).

Finally, I presented the information shared with me, back to the participants before it was included in this document with the intent of promoting a "negotiation process among equal interpreters rather than a show of force, a matter of persuasion and willing assent to membership in a new knowledge community rather than unilateral invalidation of one community by another [i.e. academia]" (Stivers, 1993, p. 421).

### Creating New Hierarchies

Simone de Beauvoir (as quoted in Stivers, 1993 p. 421) cautions that "woman does not entertain the positive belief that the truth is something other than men claim; she recognizes, rather, that there is not any fixed truth." It is important that this project does not present these women's voices as a new and more important reality. Instead, in keeping with the holistic paradigm, I offer them as glimpses into a different but equally valid reality in addition to the realities of men and other women.

Additionally, in doing research about women, researchers run the risk of lumping all people who share a similar biology into a single group. The act of collecting women's voices must recognize that the myriad of voices that make up women's realities surpasses gender and includes different racial and ethnic backgrounds. It is important then that we remain aware of the variation that exists between women, as well as between women and men (hooks, 1994; Lugones & Spelman, 1983).

#### Writing for Different Audiences

This project is part of a Master's program in Community Psychology. Therefore it must meet certain requirements imposed on it by the program. Yet, it is also for, about and with farming women. It must meet their expectations and suggestions as well. As the author I write within and for two distinct communities, each having its own set of rules and even language (Stivers, 1993; Schneider, 1991).

I am faced with the challenge of satisfying the needs and requirements of both communities. This is the challenge of academic work. I attempt to address this by using language that is not too inaccessible for non-academics and yet demonstrates to the academic world of psychology that "I know something about them" as well (Schneider, 1991, p. 298).

In summary I have chosen the empowering approach of life stories within the narrative approach to conduct this research. I attempt to use accessible, non-demeaning language, and I attempt to be consciously aware of my place and my assumptions throughout the research process.

#### My Internship Experience

I chose to physically situate myself this past summer in the context of the alternative agricultural paradigm by interning on an ecological farm. I did this for several reasons. I want to farm one day and I saw this project as a unique opportunity to develop a skills and knowledge base specific to this. I also wanted to gain a personal understanding of what it is like to farm ecologically and what it's like to farm as a woman. I wanted to be able to document my first-hand experiences in this area and in doing so record my assumptions and potential biases. This would add a different perspective, present my biases and assumptions, and therefore add credibility to the research. Finally, I wanted to be able to relate to other farming women through experience in

addition to what I had read in the literature. I saw my experience as a combination of a case study and ethnographic approach.

### Case Study

The case study is an exploration and presentation of a phenomenon or experience as highlighted by one particular group, agency or individual. Reinharz (1992) highlights:

The case study is a tool of feminist research that is used to document history and generate theory. It defies the social science convention of seeking generalizations by looking instead for specificity, exceptions, and completeness. Some feminist researchers have found that social science's emphasis on generalizations has obscured phenomena important to particular groups, including women. Thus case studies are essential for putting women on the map of social life. (p. 174)

I am presenting a case study of myself in the sense that I provide an account of my experiences as a woman, farming ecologically for the summer. It is unusual in this context in that it takes place over a limited time period and is completely introspective. However it does effectively serve the purpose of demonstrating the experiences of a neophyte in the field and my potential biases that may have arose from that experience.

### Ethnography

Ethnography has often been used in the anthropology field, particularly when studying cultures that are foreign to the researchers. It consists of 'living among or with' a particular group of people to learn more about their cultural ways. Like the narrative approach it is "neither subjective nor objective but interpretive, mediating two worlds with a third" (Agar, 1986).

Ethnographies emerge from the relationship between ethnographer, group, and intended audience. I was doing ethnography in the sense that I was living with ecological farmers, farming ecologically, and making field notes about that experience. I was removed from the academic institution, and I was therefore immersed in a primarily non-academic culture. This gave me a more realistic perspective of this particular 'culture' (i.e. ecological farmers) (Fetterman, 1989).

This experience was a limited ethnography in that I interned with a man, though I was interested in the experience of women. Additionally my experience only lasted four months, not a long time by ethnographic standards. Yet it did highlight for me unique characteristics of ecological farming that I found were shared among ecological farmers, regardless of gender.

## CHAPTER 4: THE RESEARCH PROCESS

### Interviews

#### Demographics

There are few studies that document alternative agriculture's status in Canada. Estimates by the Canadian Organic Growers indicate that in 1996 there were 1724 certified growers of which 275 farmed in Ontario (Baltaz, 1998). However, the Ecological Agriculture Project suggests that for every certified grower there may be as many as 10 who are near organic or non-certified organic producers (EAP, 1997). It is estimated that certified growers comprise about 1% of the total farmers in Canada (Ibid.; Baltaz, 1998).

#### Some Definitions

As highlighted by Beus and Dunlap (1990), there are many different approaches to ecological farming. Specific to this project, I will briefly clarify what is meant by permaculture, biodynamic, Community Shared Agriculture (CSA), organic and WWOOF.

#### Permaculture

Permaculture is a designing approach to farming that was developed by the Australian ecologist Bill Mollison. It uses the natural ecology as its basis for designing farms that reflect and promote synergistic relationships (Domanigie, 1989). Put another way, permaculture is "the conscious design of cultivated ecosystems that have the diversity, stability and resilience of natural environments" (Baltaz, 1998, p.8). The farm I interned on uses permaculture practices.

#### Biodynamic

Biodynamic is a holistic philosophy of living developed by the German philosopher Rudolph Steiner around 1924. It emphasizes the harmony between various aspects of the natural world (i.e. humans, animals, plants, soil, water, and the cosmos). Various farming practices are timed based on a detailed calendar that reflects the intricate rhythms and cycles of the cosmos. Specific preparations of special herbs and substances are used to enhance the vitality of the soil. The farm is seen as a whole system maintaining its own cycle of inputs and outputs (Baltaz, 1998; Sattler & Wistinghausen, 1989). In Ontario there is only one certification body for biodynamic farmers called the Society for Biodynamic Farming and Gardening in Ontario under the label Demeter (Baltaz, 1998). Two of the women (Ellinor and Cathy) I interviewed subscribe to the

biodynamic philosophy although neither of them are certified by the Society.

### Community Shared Agriculture

Also referred to as Community Supported Agriculture, or 'farm links', CSA is "a community-based organization of growers and consumers" (Groh & McFadden, 1997, p. xiv). Community members typically pay a fee to purchase shares at the start of the season in exchange for food from the farm throughout the growing season. Often the members are involved in aspects of the growing process as well. The produce is most often organic and bioregional (that is, only what can be grown naturally in that region at any given point throughout the year is available to members). Although the title may imply that the community is supporting the farm(s) it is typically set up so that the community, including the farmer(s) may support themselves (Baltaz, 1998; Groh & McFadden, 1997). CSAs are typically community initiated and community maintained. The farmers I interned with, as well as one of the women (Martha) I interviewed, garden for a CSA initiative in their local communities.

### Organic

The term organic has become so widely used and in so many different contexts that it is tough to define. It is most often referred to as the absence of synthetic inputs throughout any of the growing process. Yet to most organic farmers it is more than just the techniques used, it describes their desire to promote ecological balance (Baltaz, 1998; Coleman, 1989). There are two certification bodies for organic farmers in Ontario: the Organic Crop Improvement Association (Ont.) Inc. (OCIA) and the Organic Crop Producers and Processors Ontario Inc. (OCPP). There are also other organizations that offer research and material resources including: Resource Efficient Agricultural Production (REAP-Canada) and the Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario (EFAO). These organizations publish regular magazines, promote organic research initiatives, and/or offer support to farmers who wish to farm ecologically (Eco-Farm and Garden, 1999). The majority of ecological farmers farm organically though their approaches may vary (for example, they may subscribe to permaculture, biodynamic, or combination philosophies). Four of the women I interviewed are certified organic (Martha, Ellinor, Cathy, and Marilew).

### Willing Workers on Organic Farms (WWOOF)

The ecological farming community extends across and outside of Canada. To encourage

diverse experiences in the field of ecological farming, as well as provide assistance to ecological farmers, an organization called Willing Workers on Organic Farms (WWOOF) was started in British Columbia. This organization connects people from across the world to ecological farms that volunteer their farm information in a circulated catalogue. Interested individuals sign up and make arrangements to spend a few days to a couple of weeks on a farm free of charge in exchange for help with daily chores. These farm 'helpers' are typically referred to as "WWOOFers" and can be of great assistance on small-scale, labour intensive farms (Baltaz, 1998).

The farm I interned on, the woman who runs the CSA (Martha) and one of the women who farms biodynamically (Ellinor) all encourage WWOOFers on their farms. While I was interning a WWOOFer joined us for two weeks from Japan. She was learning more about permaculture farming and improving her English at the same time. Although there were sometimes communication barriers it was great to have an extra pair of hands at the farm and fun to learn more about her culture.

#### Participant Selection

Participant selection was based on criterion sampling (Patton, 1990) whereby women were selected in terms of their meeting criteria specified at the beginning of the research process. Specifically the women had to live in Southern Ontario and for logistical reasons be within reachable distance from where I was working. Additionally, they had to be practicing ecological farming as described by Keeney (1989): "agricultural systems that are environmentally sound, profitable, and productive and that maintain the social fabric of the rural community" (p. 102). Finally, on-farm work had to be their primary job.

#### Contacting Participants

I found potential participants through discussions with the Bob and Bev Budd, garden members, and an organic farmers brochure. I gathered together over 20 names of women farming sustainably in Southern Ontario. I followed up on the names I received early in the summer and that reflected a diversity of farm types. Eight women were contacted. Appointments were scheduled with six women; five agreed to participate.

I contacted the women on the phone and explained to them my interest in ecological



farming as well as my wish to develop a thesis project about women's experiences in this area. Two women requested and were mailed letters explaining the study in more detail (see Appendix C). One of these two women decided not to participate and she did not feel qualified based on my criteria. Of the five who eventually agreed to participate, only one woman does not have nor is actively pursuing organic certification. Yet her and her partner's methods still fit within the definition of ecological farming indicated above.

The five participants are diverse in terms of the focus of their farms. One woman runs her own CSA, another runs a sheep farm, a third has a dairy and laying hen operation, another runs a farm market, and a fifth has a mixed farm of primarily dairy and vegetables. All five women lived within two hours' drive from the farm I interned on. The interviews took place each weekend from the middle of June to the end of July<sup>8</sup>. They were held at each woman's home and consisted of a tour of the farm and a 1-1.5 hour interview. These interviews were taped in all cases but one (Martha). In that instance, visitors were at the farm when I arrived and although we did talk and take a tour of the farm, I did not feel comfortable taping the discussion since there were several of us chatting together. Following that first visit, Martha chose to continue her involvement in the project through the mail. Her contributions were therefore written as opposed to tape-recorded.

Each woman was given a copy of a letter providing more detailed explanation about the study (see Appendix C) and a consent form to sign (Appendix D). The women all agreed to use their real names in this study. I explained the format of the interview, and asked whether they would be comfortable with it. One woman requested that I ask specific questions rather than use the topic guide (see Appendix A) so we proceeded accordingly. Martha (who participated through the mail) requested specific questions to respond to. The other three women initiated the conversation by using the topic guide for prompts and answering the occasional questions I interjected for clarification. I encouraged the women to use mixed media (photos, art, etc.) to illustrate their life stories. Several of them contributed copies of their farm brochures, four of them allowed me to take photos of them, one woman gave me a newspaper clipping about her business, another woman contributed her own photos, and two of the women contributed poetry.

---

<sup>8</sup> I thank my parents for the use of their car for 6 weeks. The interviews took place during that time.

### Case Study/Ethnography

I was part of a local Community Shared Agriculture initiative in Waterloo for about two years. Through my connection with that CSA and through Ed Bennett I met Bob and Bev Budd. The Budds run a CSA near Goderich, Ontario called the Huron Community Garden. It is one of the oldest CSAs in Canada. This summer they celebrated their tenth year of providing fresh organic produce to their local community. In 1995, another Community Psychology graduate student from Wilfrid Laurier University, Godwin Ashiabi, interned at the Budds' garden for ten weeks. During this time he collected information from garden members about their experiences in relation to the CSA (Ashiabi, 1995). I thought that perhaps the Budds would be open to having a second student stay with them to experience their community and the garden so I offered my assistance. They agreed to take me on for the four months this past summer as an intern.

My role as intern consisted of helping out on the farm in any way deemed helpful. I outline my involvement in more detail later on in the document. As a researcher I kept detailed notes about my experience, the weather, any other relevant information and I took photos.

### Analysis

A "study needs to focus its attention on existence as it is lived, experienced, and interpreted by the human person" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 125).

### The Interviews

The interviews were transcribed verbatim by myself typically during the week following the actual interview. To get a feel for the unique qualities and the main ideas of each interview I first read them over in full and made brief notes about them (Reissman, 1993; Anderson & Jack, 1991). I then coded the interviews manually using the topics highlighted in the topic guide and maintaining the structure of the original interview as much as possible, where appropriate. I summarized each interview with these topics in mind, incorporating my own experience related to the interviews (which I had recorded as field notes immediately following the interviews).

In summarizing the life stories, it was important to maintain the integrity of the women's voices and presentations. Although I did include sections that I narrated myself based on what each woman had said, I also attempted to include direct quotations where possible to maintain the integrity of their story in their own words. This also ensured that their voice would have

prevalence throughout the description of their story (Schneider, 1991). In Martha's case however this possibility was limited, since she had decided to participate through the mail.

### Feedback

After I had summarized the individual life stories, I sent each summary to each respective woman with an accompanying letter of explanation (see Appendix E). I called and arranged times to meet with them individually to discuss the summaries and hear their feedback. I was able to get together with each woman except one with whom I spoke over the phone instead. Comments from these discussions were used to modify and update the initial summary to more accurately represent these women's experiences. This revised version was then mailed out to them to ensure that I had not missed anything.

### Collective Summary

After changes had been made in the individual summaries I went through them again with the themes presented by Chiappe and Flora (1998) and Beus and Dunlap (1990) in mind. I collected these themes together into a summary which I've entitled their 'collective summary'. Rappaport (1995) uses the term "community narrative" to refer to a general life story of those who share similar individual stories and themes. The stories of the women who participated in this study did have some significant parallels which I felt were important to present. However I present those parallels as shared elements or themes versus a shared narrative.

### Case Study and Ethnography

In putting together the summary of my experience, I thought back to the experiences that had brought me to this point and created a historical profile of that journey. I then read through my summer journal notes and weather log several times. I compared the latter two to determine if there were any relationships between the weather and my feelings or experiences. I then looked for themes in my journal notes. I decided to structure the summary of my experiences in a similar way to those of the other women.

The next six chapters present the experiences of the women who participated in this study as well as my own personal experiences. I have placed the life stories in the order in which the interviews took place, with my own life story placed last. However, they do not need to be read in any particular order since they are independent stories.

## CHAPTER 5: MARTHA LAING – ORCHARD-HILL FARM COMMUNITY GARDEN

Photo by Sherri van de Hoef



**Photo 1: Martha Laing, her Pick-Your-Own flower garden, and the Laing farmhouse**

### Introduction

My meeting with Martha was more than I expected. Several cars were in the driveway as I pulled up and a group of folks were chatting around one of them. It was a Sunday and I found out soon enough that everyone had returned from a Quaker meeting and was preparing for lunch. Although one couple left soon after I arrived, I did have the pleasure of not only meeting Martha Laing and her husband Ken but Tony and Fran McQuail as well. Tony and Fran have a CSA, apple orchard and horses near Lucknow, Ontario. Myself and my partner, Chris, were invited for lunch, a farm tour and a chance to chat with all four of them. We accepted.

After introductions and explanations we headed inside to prepare for lunch. The old stone "mudroom" led us into a spacious, open concept beam and post style home which Ken and Martha had built themselves. In a far corner there sat a spinning wheel and a loom which I assumed correctly was Martha's. Drawings by Martha and Ken's son and poetry by their

daughter, graced the walls.

Lunch was eaten around a large, solid wood table. The conversation focused on their children's summer activities, school, food and lots of laughter.

After lunch, Martha walked Fran and I around the vicinity of the house to show us her herb and flower garden, grape vines, asparagus and garlic patches, and sweet cherry trees. Martha explained that she was hoping to use some of the herbs for dying wool. The rest of the plants and trees provided food for the members of her Community Shared Agriculture (CSA) garden and her family. Afterwards we located Ken and Chris while Martha went to get their horse and buggy ready for our tour of the farm.

The rest of this summary is based on my memory and notes of that tour and the subsequent information Martha sent me through the mail. Our recorded discussion then was not in a conversational form. This has limited the extent to which this summary is presented in Martha's words. To put her experiences in context we begin with an overview of her farming background.

### Farming Background

Martha explained to me that the farm her family lives on now was cleared and settled by her great-great-great uncle. Her family had lived and farmed on or near the farm for the past five generations. She explains: "My father's family was from this farm. My parents taught at a [Quaker] boarding school [that operated] a farm (300 acres) in Ohio. We came back to this farm for vacation."

At one point she decided to become a Canadian citizen and attend university. She met her husband, Ken, at a Quaker meeting in Sparta, Ontario. They attended the University of Guelph where Martha studied Fine Arts and Ken studied horticulture. "Ken and I were married in 1975. We were in school until 1979 when we started farming." In 1979 Martha's mother gave them acreage on the farm as a gift which they gratefully accepted. Orchard-Hill Farm was established. Today they farm 100 acres. They own 34 acres and rent the remainder from Martha's mother.

Martha and Ken did not start off farming organically. Ken worked a lot in orchards and subsequently sprayed a lot of chemicals. On their own farm they gardened successfully without any chemicals and used composts, green manures, and timed cultivating and weeding to reduce

weed problems. They questioned whether chemicals were in fact necessary. They were also concerned about the health issues associated with spraying and eating sprayed foods. Yet they wondered if they could economically afford to farm organically.

In late eighties, a chemical scare in apples prompted a shift in public awareness and an increased willingness to spend a bit extra on labour intensive organic products. Ken and Martha decided it was time to make the shift. The transition was tough but they were committed to it. Martha explained that they “began the transition to organic in 1989.” Today their whole farm is certified by the Organic Crop Producers and Processors (OCPP).

The bulk of their farm is devoted to organic cash crop production (for example, spelt and soybean). Some is planted in Christmas trees. Another portion is set aside for horse pasture (mostly draft horses that are used on the farm) and fruit and vegetables. Originally they grew “strawberries/raspberries/peaches/elderberries/[apples and pears—for a short time]” which they sold “PYO [pick your own] and at farmers markets during harvest”. At that point Martha “worked with Ken on the farm”.

In 1996 Martha made the transition from intense fruit production to her own enterprise--market gardening. Part of the impetus for setting up her own business was to provide an opportunity for her teenage daughter to make some money for university. Following the example of Eliot Coleman (American Master Gardener and author), Martha's good friend Fran McQuail, and other local market gardeners, she started a CSA.

Several qualities of the CSA appealed to Martha: “It was an on-farm job that spread out the labour and harvest. Marketing was taken care of once the shares were sold and we could concentrate on growing. I had experience gardening and growing strawberries. (Looking after 2.5 acres of organic strawberries gives one a lot of experience keeping ahead of weeds). We also had irrigation already and experience in preparing the soil.”

The brochure for Martha's enterprise highlights further benefits of CSAs in general:

the CSA movement is a popular movement across North America, where people are claiming back a connection to the production of their food. It allows farmers to be supported locally and for people to eat food grown in their own area, not shipped in from across the continent. Consumers get back in touch with where their food comes from and eat **FRESH ORGANICALLY GROWN PRODUCE** at affordable prices. The farmers are free to concentrate on doing the best possible job of growing the produce and in the

process enjoy sharing the farm with CSA members. CSA's are locally sustainable. They are also shared risk agriculture [between farmer and garden members]...money stays within the community...[and it promotes] healthy food, soil & people.

Martha began her CSA with 15 full shares. This year that number is up to 21.5 shares (approximately 40 families). She is gardening on approximately 2.5 acres which are divided up into two vegetable and fruit plots towards one end of the farm and a third plot of mostly herbs and flowers near the house. Martha explained that this summer was the first time since she began the CSA that she will be gardening without the assistance of her daughter. Understandably she seemed a bit apprehensive and sad about that.

Altogether Martha has been farming for 20 years with her husband Ken. They have been organic for 10 years. Martha has been market gardening for 3 years. They have two children; one in university, the other finishing high school. Both children help out on the farm when they can.

#### Why She Does it

I asked Martha why she farms. She described how she had grown up in nature although not really farming. She explained how her parents had farmed before she was born but ran into some hard luck and never returned to it. She also explained how five generations of her ancestors had lived and farmed on or near the land she and her family now live and farm on. Martha had not originally seen farming in her future but she described how she felt an unexplainable pull and connection to this land. She attempted to explain that connection but had difficulty doing so. She used words like security, roots, family ties, and feeling grounded. She told me a story about her Father that illustrated that connection. When she was younger she once asked her Father if he'd ever go back and farm again: "It was the only time I had ever seen him cry". As she thought about it, she too began to cry.

There is a poem written by Martha's daughter that I had seen hanging on one of their walls. Martha and her daughter Ellen agreed to let me include here. It helps illustrate that connection to the land in yet another way:

i come from the Land. A Land of worms that stay in the earth for years on end. A Land of slow smiles & slower acceptance. A Land of handshakes & covered hearts. A Land of rejoicing & A Land of dancing. A Land covered in the tears of a thousand laughers. A Land of Bloodshed.

i come from the People. Furred, Feathered, Finned & False-Faced People - People that talk with their Eyes & their Ears. People with spirits that are strong & wide. People with voices the size of the wind & strength that knows no limits.

And i have a place. between the leaves of the trees, Hidden in the Hair on a horse's back, in the tiers of the sunlight, i will stay. i spread Myself thin but hold the signs of many spirits. And i will play my Lives before their eyes & they will do the same. in this way we shall live small & think big.

I'm going to go on Like i have, making a place for myself between Lives.

Ellen Laing

Martha also explained her spiritual connection to her work: "my spirituality is nature based to a large extent. Gardening organically is something that I am in tune with spiritually."

Another big part of why Martha farms organically, she explained, has to do with her role as a mother: "it complements my mothering instincts. Also I provide good food for my own family during the growing season and with the food I preserve and store for Winter. Feeding my family well has always been a major consideration for me."

### Highlights

I asked Martha what she enjoys about market gardening. She replied:

The variety of crops; small size compared to field crops; interaction with CSA members and direct feedback; sharing the bounty of a good harvest; working with the soil and continuing to learn and improve....It complements my mothering instincts....Also I provide good food for my own family during the growing season and with the food I preserve and store for Winter. Feeding my family well has always been a major consideration for me.

She explained to me that she likes the nurturing aspect of growing food--from seed to



seedling to mature fruit. She likes the opportunity to do more detailed work of small-scale gardening, which she feels as a woman she is more suited to. Small-scale farming also requires smaller equipment which she is more comfortable with. These qualities make it truly her own enterprise; she is responsible for it and she is able to run it primarily on her own.

Martha likes being able to switch tasks once in a while--something that is a unique benefit of small-scale, mixed farming. She also finds positives in the challenges of gardening. That is, she likes continually learning and applying knowledge to improve her garden enterprise. In fact as we toured around the garden plots, Fran and Martha were constantly asking each other questions and brainstorming ways to apply each other's practices to the improvement of their own gardens. I certainly was not the only one benefitting from our conversation!!!

When I talked to Martha in December again, we talked about the importance of community to farmers. She told how local conventional farmers helped build their house and how her connection to other Quakers, organic farmers, family, a Spinners and Weavers group, and other groups, keep her from feeling isolated. However, she also highlighted how when their children were younger they had to make more of an effort to seek others to build a sense of community.

### Challenges

Like most farmers I've spoken to, Martha had things to say about the challenges of farming, and gardening in particular. I met up with her in the latter part of the Spring, after most of the planting had been done. Martha appeared exhausted. Although it was still early in the season, she had had little help preparing the gardens since her daughter was working elsewhere this summer and the rest of the family had work to do in the fields.

Typically Martha and Ken have WWOOFers come out to help them, but "this Spring has been a heavy work load without Ellen [their daughter] here or any other outside helpers--WWOOFers, etc."

Unlike some farm work, garden work requires that you be outside in the sun and weather for long parts of the day, every day, often on your hands and knees if planting and/or weeding by hand. The heat and physical exhaustion from the Spring planting seemed to have left a mark on Martha when I saw her. She explains a bit about her routine: "I do try and pace myself

somewhat, with usually a rest at noon. I limit my outside farm activities during our busy time of year. I find I don't have enough energy to do other things. I rest on Sunday afternoon usually."

Admittedly I was visiting on a Sunday which meant that for that week Martha would not be getting much of a rest. Entertaining can be pretty draining as well and so perhaps that was also part of the tiredness Martha seemed to have that day. It was not surprising to me however when she declined another interview later that summer but chose to continue our correspondence through the mail. When you have so little time to yourself it is not surprising to be possessive of what time you do have.

Having help on any farm is an added bonus to farmers. However with most organic farmers it's an extra challenge, as organic farming is typically not known for being financially lucrative (though there are exceptions). Martha stressed that CSAs are not big money makers and therefore it was not possible to hire much help throughout the season. She relied primarily on those who exchanged their help for gaining knowledge such as WWOOFers, as well as her husband and son on occasion. However, she did stress that farming on a larger scale "is a [financially] viable way of farming or could be", but that you had to be prepared to do it. She chooses not to.

Her varied roles on the farm added to her workload. I asked Martha what her responsibilities on the farm were. In addition to the garden and the house work (including cooking and preserving) she added:

Haying; Christmas tree pruning, and planting, and weeding young trees; work with the Draft horses; chores in Winter; and some training/some cultivation for field crops and weeding. Previously I have led crews to hand weed soybeans, but I have decided I will not do that this year.

Her days are full. When I asked her to break down her activities into hours spent on garden activities Martha replied: "It depends on the time of year; more in the Spring and early Summer—6 days/week, 7:30-8:00 am until dark some days with a break for 1.5-2 hours at noon and 1 hour at supper....In the Winter I have time off from the garden." In terms of household activities she indicated: "It depends on how much live-in help we have and whether it is raining; just as needed. It varies: approximately 1.5 hours eating, 0.5-1 hour resting, 2-3 hours house

work, 9-10 hours working on the farm.” She qualified this information though by saying:

I have felt uncomfortable about setting out hours for working/house work. It really varies so much that it is difficult to put hours on it. This Spring has been a heavy work load without Ellen here or any other outside helpers--WWOOFers, etc. There is always work to do. I am in charge of the garden, but also am very much involved in the rest of the farm work. Today--although my garden is calling me--I am sort of 'caught up' so I'll be helping move young horses around and gathering up hay in the morning. This afternoon I'll pick raspberries for tomorrow's pick-up. Sometime I'll make some pickled beets. They are cooked and waiting in the fridge. (I cleaned out the root cellar and found them in good shape). My life is usually full, but not always quite so full and I can do other things if I need to. I am not held to certain work hours. Later this week and apprentice is arriving. Grayden [their son] will be home to work full time in a week (he is away on holiday this week). We are also expecting two other youth to arrive and stay for one week, so I will be doing more cooking and less farming at that time.

I did meet with Martha a second time, in October. We talked about the changing landscape of farming. A nearby drag strip blasts their rural quiet at least once a week during the summer and reminds them that people are not too far away and perhaps they are not as 'in nature' as they wish. The encroachment of urban areas threatens the family farm experience and changes the farm environment.

#### Advice for Others

I expressed my interest in farming ecologically sometime in the near future and asked both Martha and Fran what kind of advice they would give me or any other woman wishing to do the same. Their comments were similar and they were quick to agree with each other. Therefore I will present the ideas indiscriminate of who said them.

Most importantly I was told to "BE PREPARED". This included figuring out the parameters ahead of time. For instance, logistics: Martha suggested figuring out what kinds of vegetables to plant, how much to plant, how the mature vegetables will be cleaned, and how large a garden to set up. It's also important to know your clientele. Martha for instance is located fairly close to London. Her customer base has almost doubled in two years and she is having to make important decisions about whether to continue growing or limit her clientele somehow. Since her approach is to provide healthy food to people, it's tough for her to envision saying 'no' to customers that perhaps could really benefit from her produce. But there's also the mental stuff.

You have to be willing to make a 100% commitment. Having a garden and especially having livestock, ties you to the farm.

Ken and Martha are people who live with integrity. To do so means sticking to their principles. For example, because of the Gulf War crisis, they have chosen to give up their car and use a horse and buggy as their primary mode of transportation instead. Because of Martha's principles she does not aspire to "get rich quick" from the CSA. Her motivation instead is "to share the bounty of a good harvest." She cautions that CSAs by nature are not typically money making ventures and that you have to be prepared for that too if that's a route you take. She suggests that they make more sense as a means for creating complementary income to the rest of the farm.

Finally Martha stressed the importance of talking to others to get a sense of what to do and what not to do. She also suggested reading the books of Eliot Coleman and connecting with like-minded farmers. She recommended the Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario of which she and Ken are members.

Although we had spent at least two hours at the Laing's farm on my first visit and I had again taken up Martha's time asking her to answer my questions through the mail, on both occasions she ended off with an invitation: "Please feel free to call me if you have further questions." In everything she does, this is a woman who wishes to share what she has in order to help others.

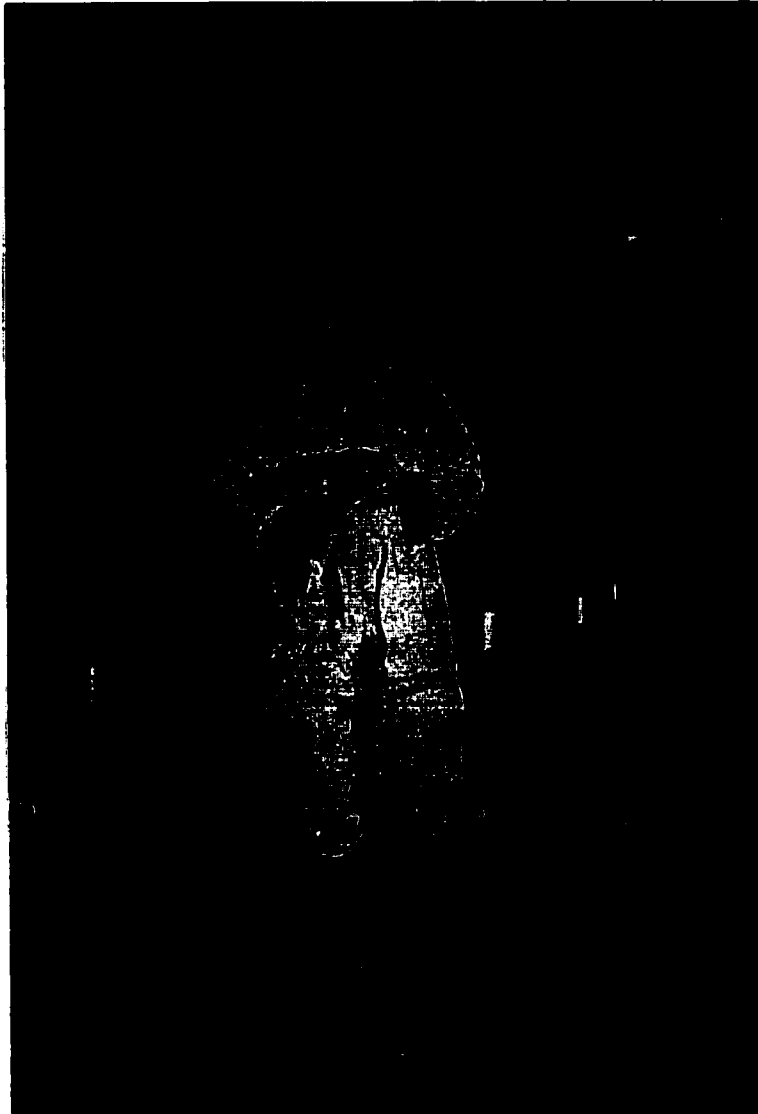
#### After the Interview

I met with Martha again the beginning of October. Things had settled down, now the focus was primarily on harvesting--until construction begins on their new horse barn. But Martha excitedly informed me that next year Ellen has decided to help her with the garden again. So they're going to try to go a bit bigger and have 30 shares and maybe charge a bit more to keep the business affordable.

I thought again about the importance of family to farm and headed to my Opa's grave nearby. I hope his death and others his generation do not signify the end of a farming era. There is a power and meaningfulness in working a land and passed down family lines. Martha made that clear to me.

**CHAPTER 6: MARILEW ALBRECHT – MARBRECHT HOLSTEINS**

*Photo by Sherri van de Hooft*



**Photo 2: Marilew Albrecht in the Marbrecht hen barn**

### Introduction

It was a hot day when I visited Marilew. I pulled into the Albrecht-Martin farm and parked near a pickup truck which had been strategically aimed at a pool and equipped with a Fisher-Price slide in its box. Several young children were taking turns sliding and splashing their way into the pool. I could not help but smile and wish I was young enough to join them without breaking something (plastic or bone).

Marilew and her dog greeted me at the front door and after settling in and explaining my purpose we went for a tour of the farm she and her husband Steve own. In typical barn style, the front boards displayed the name of the farm in bold bright letters: Marbrecht Holsteins, a name they created by combining portions of each of their last names.

I followed Marilew into the dimly lit barn and encountered that familiar musky cow smell. The barn was empty on this visit except for a few Muscovy ducks which served as fly control. Within a few hours though the cows would all be there munching contentedly while Marilew and Steve collected their milk quota for the day. We exited out the back. Marilew tramped through dry cow patties in her sandaled feet while telling me about their 45 cow dairy operation. We gazed out over the pasture where their cows grazed that day, part of their 35 acres of intensively grazed pasture (rotated grazing). Their farm consists of 200 acres, 125 of which are workable. They rent another 150 acres so altogether they have 275 acres of arable (workable) land.

We checked out their new hen barn. Inside squawked 500 laying birds and 8 roosters (to provide a more 'natural' environment). Although there were several exits to the outdoors for the hens, most of them seemed content to hang out with the roosters inside the barn. The laying hens were a recent addition to the Marbrecht farm, part of an experimental lease arrangement with the egg marketing board. It's also a bit of an investment on Marilew and Steve's part, an assessment after their three year trial period will determine the feasibility of the venture.

Marilew and I headed inside. After our tour in the hot sun we both grabbed a glass of water and sat down in a quiet part of the house. In true farmer style Marilew's glass was empty within seconds (or perhaps she was nervous?!).

I explained the interview structure or more specifically, the lack thereof. Marilew placed the topic guide beside her and plunged right in. After a brief description of her farming background she began to explain the challenges of families or what I call "low lights" of farm life for her. It became quite clear throughout the interview that Marilew was an introspective, articulate, and perceptive woman. To give her comments context I will deviate from the order of her interview briefly to layout her background, that is, how she got to farming in the first place, as highlighted throughout the interview. Following that I will pick up on the order in which she presented topics.

## Background

“My farming background...I’m from Kitchener and, well, my Dad grew up pretty much on a farm, not his own but he worked on a farm. And we had land, and a lot of my cousins that I went to for vacation farmed, so I was used to the farm and I liked the farm.” Her husband Steve had grown up on his father's dairy farm.

Her journey to farming was an indirect one:

I never knew what I wanted to be and I thought ‘well if I do college...then I’ll figure out what I wanted to be’ [then] I went to Europe for a year—I thought when I got back I’d know what I wanted to be—I got home and my Mom said ‘here, this computer programming school is just downtown Kitchener, why don’t you do that? You can make money when you get out’ and I thought ‘yah, I can make money, that’d be a good idea. When I make money then I can finally do what I want to do’. So I went to the computer programming school for one year, still didn’t know what I wanted to be and I didn’t get a job, not in computer programming, but it helped me get my job as a secretary because they were getting computers....Well, I knew Steve then and I wasn’t thinking any more about what I wanted to do after awhile [laughs], just take it as it comes. He’s a farmer, so I’ll farm....I didn't have any choice that Steve would be a farmer and I didn't have any choice that we would not be living on a farm but I knew that....And I always thought ‘yah, that would be fun, I'd like to milk cows and I'd like to live on a farm, and I'd like to do that side by side stuff’ but it didn't work out that way, especially since I’m not from a farm so I don’t know as much..., and plus it’s, I suppose, the big machines. A lot of women can handle big machines and they go out and combine and they do all that stuff, and again I’m not from a farm so I don’t have much experience and they [the big machines] intimidate me so I’m not on the machines much although I do some stuff...it’s not balanced, at all.

Marilew and Steve were married in 1986. Marilew explained their first few years: “We rented a farm for the first two and a half years, we lived in a trailer home and the people [who owned the farm] lived in the house. We rented the land and we rented the use of the quota. We had our own cows [from Steve’s father].” At this point they did not subscribe to organic practices:

the man that lived there sprayed the fields and stuff. Then we moved up here [in 1988] and Steve had to decide how he was going to spray the fields—he would either do it or hire someone...and then somehow, I can’t remember, he went to hear Ted Zettel [past public relations officer for the Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario] talk at a meeting or something, and it just hit him: ‘this is what I want to do, I just can’t stand pesticides, why would you have to wrap yourself up and cover yourself totally to spray your field and that stuff’s okay?!’ And so when he told me I thought ‘yah, I don’t like this stuff!’, so that’s

when it started...we pretty much went cold turkey [laughs].

It was a tough transition, their crop yields declined significantly, they had to bring in purchased non-organic feed to keep their herd fed, and they lost money. But after a number of years things began to turn around. They are convinced that it was and still is the right thing to do:

I think we'll have to go in that direction, you can't count on technology or chemicals to save us, in fact I think it's destroying us...we believe that we'll be taken care of...we might have more weeds some years than other people and therefore our crops will be less but we will be able to pay our bills and we'll be able to feed our cattle.

When I met with Marilew the first time, she and her husband were undergoing the process that would grant them Certified Organic status through OCPP. At my second meeting with Marilew in October she said a representative had been there and had done the necessary inspection and that the rest was merely legalities. When I chatted with her the third time, she informed me that as of February 2000 they will be shipping certified organic milk.

All told Marilew has been farming for 13 years, with her husband Steve. They have been organic for 7 years. They have three children ages 7 to 11, two boys and one girl.

This brief context of Marilew's farming background ignores some vital information about her background as a woman and how it has shaped her approach to and experience in farming. For example, Marilew described the difficulties of their transition to organic farming:

I think we didn't know what we were getting into, so we had to keep buying grain, cause we didn't produce much grain. So we went through some hard times but in a way I was kind of, I didn't really know the difference, cause I didn't know much about the choices we made before and the choices we were making afterwards. So I was clued out for a long time and partly it had to do with kids, and my energy going into that.

I have chosen to incorporate her experience as a mother and a woman in the following sections as it is hard to separate her past experience with her present.

### **The Challenges of Raising a Family Farm-Style**

Many of us associate family farms with an image like the one I opened with: children playing carefree in the spacious outdoors. Yet Marilew openly admits that having children has been the cause of much of her frustrations in farm life:



I think the worst part about it [farming] for me was having kids and the isolation. I think every woman is isolated when they have kids even if you live in a city and in an apartment building with hundreds of people. You're still isolated because...society's not set up like the Native American society was set up when you'd go out of your tent and there's everybody—there's aunts and single women and other people to raise your kids and take them off your hands. I think life was more normal for a woman who had kids because she just kept on doing what she was doing because she wasn't the only person around for that child. So she would have had adults she could talk to, she would have had adults to help look after her kids, she would have had adults to help discipline her kids, whereas especially on the farm, I was here and Steve was working and always extra busy cause I wasn't as available when they were really young and I had morning sickness or whatever. So it was more work for him and it was really boring for me. Some women might have enjoyed it more, for sure a lot of women can handle it, but for myself, it would have been nice to stroll down the sidewalk (but there is no sidewalk), or stroll to the store or the mall...just for something to do, or I suppose you could ask the neighbours. I got together once in awhile with friends that would have a baby too but have you ever tried to talk to a friend when you have babies? It's almost impossible!! [laughs] .

She did not find that kind of support in her local community:

I can remember with Tyler: so I had Dustin, who was like one and a half and Tyler a newborn, and a woman came from church and said something like 'oh, I'd really like to help you out' and then she left again and I thought 'uh, help me out please' [spreads arms in exasperation] 'hey, let me sit...or something!!'....The church is Mennonite and there's not really any one close here—one's 20 minutes that way [points right] and one's about 25 minutes that way [points left]. When I had little kids I didn't feel that [i.e. the church as a supportive community]. But we had just moved into the area, so I don't know...

Marilew explains how most of the tasks regarding their children is typically her responsibility:

you're carrying the child for nine months, your husband has no idea what that's like, and you're big, and you're really hot in the summer time, and your feet are swelling, and you're still in the barn and you're bending and then you bear the child...that's fun...then you're nursing...and so [my kids are] connected to me, and so I gotta be there.

Marilew highlights that as long as your children are young and unable to help on the farm, a tension exists between getting the farmwork done, wanting to be outside with the animals and caring for your children:

you're not only physically but psychologically [connected to your kids]....If I left my child in [the house] and I'm in the barn, then I wonder how they are....Or else Steve wants me

to do something and I think, 'well how am I going to do that with my kids, do I leave them alone? do I bring them with me?' And so I'm more psychologically and emotionally attached to them too; I'm **always** thinking about them....[these tensions] always tear at you...I like to be out there doing things but if I'm always out there my house will be even messier than it is now, [and] my kids don't get attention....

**STORY:** I heard a story from somewhere, I don't know where, but this child was in a high chair looking out the window at her mother or his mother, doing the farm work in the fields for hours, sitting in the high chair. I didn't want that for my kids ...[so] I can remember picking stones: we had a carriage on the bucket loader tractor with a baby in it and the tractor's roaring and this baby is in the bucket

Community is also important for children as they grow, explore, and learn about life. The lack of it in Marilew's area concerns her for her kids' sake:

I grew up where just down the street there was a rink, there was a playground and our backyard was big enough to have a rink sometimes. We lived on a green belt so there was a bike path behind us and a bush behind us. So I really liked where we lived. Plus we had neighbours, so I'd just go across the street and say "do you want to do this with me?"....So I feel for my daughter who kind of wanders around some days and she doesn't have kids over. And I think we're social beings, we need that interaction. So then you have to go and pick up somebody....

Yet perhaps this is merely a rural phenomenon. Perhaps the community exists but is not as accessible. When I visited Marilew a second time I asked her who she considered her community to be. She replied that it was her family (particularly her siblings), followed by other ecological farmers, members of their holistic management group, and a small discussion group that they get together with. It was certainly not her geographical neighbours.

#### **Finding Her Place on the Farm**

Marilew values her family and her children and her farming lifestyle. But she admits it has been an adjustment for her. She theorizes that perhaps not personally choosing farming to begin with may influence how she now feels on the farm especially since she lacked the farming background that Steve had. Additionally she highlights that "Farming is a man's world, the way we created it". She explains:

since I'm not from a farm so I don't know as much..., and plus....a lot of women can

handle big machines and they go out and combine and they do all that stuff, and again I'm not from a farm so I don't have much experience and they [the big machines] intimidate me so I'm not on the machines much although I do some stuff...it's not balanced, at all...[when making the transition to organic] I didn't know much about the choices we made before and the choices we were making afterwards, so I was clued out for a long time and partly it had to do with kids, and my energy going into that.

Subsequently Marilew does not feel like the farm is not her business but her husband's.

Yet perceptively she cautions:

When I get frustrated because I'm not doing what I want to do and that this is all Steve's decision,...like Steve loves it: he works 24 hours a day, ([well] not really that long, but long hours), and what he reads is always farming, and what he's thinking is always farming; he lives and breathes farming and he loves it. So his whole life is one big...party [laughs] (not quite but)...So then I get jealous and I think 'how come I'm cleaning the house, how come I'm in the house with these kids?' Well it was my choice and if I want to change the way it's happening then it's up to me. And so that means taking more responsibility for the farm stuff and...just take little steps at a time...I think as time goes on it'll become more balanced. I might never become a person who's on the machines a lot but that's what men like to do, they like big machines and they like to break up the soil...[laughs]

She stresses though that it is important for her to feel a part of the farm:

Part of thinking I want to do what I want, is seeing that the farm is his....But the farm can be mine too, [by] realizing: 'yah I like it here, I don't want to be anywhere else, it might not be perfect, but what is it that I need for the farm life to be mine so that I call it mine?'. And I think it's for one taking more responsibility:...that means I know what's going on, so then I help make the decisions...

To accomplish this she feels "it's really important that our farm is a partnership...it's a statement that says 'no matter what my wife does, even if she's in the house a hundred percent of the time, she's still contributing to the farm'".

Marilew relates that part of her difficulty with being "housebound" is a rebellion against her upbringing. Marilew grew up being told that women were to be ladies and maids. She wanted no part of it: "My Mom wanted me to be a lady...I hate that word....and I rebelled against that." Early on in her relationship with Steve, Marilew made her position clear:

Right from when we were dating I said [to Steve] 'I hate housecleaning, and I don't want to cook all your meals'...That was hard, the beginning: we were married and it was

breakfast time and he's going 'okay where are my eggs? I eat eggs for breakfast' [laughs]...I said, 'I don't make eggs at breakfast time' [laughs] so he started making eggs for breakfast....Like what's the big deal? Some women would do those things...why? He's capable-if he doesn't learn how to make eggs and I'm away for a week...then how's he gonna function? It's just, I'm not a servant, I'm not a maid, 'I'm not going to put your clothes away for you.' I don't even wash his barn clothes [laughs] he washes them for himself...once a month [both laugh]. He has a big stack of clothes to go through, he's got like a hundred pair of socks. They're so gross and the socks are hard, and they're all wrapped up into a ball: I'm not going to put my hands in there!

Marilew also recognizes that part of her dislike for women's traditional domestic role, comes from the fact that society does not consider these roles valuable:

We had a girl from France...and she had a boyfriend who was here for a week and my brother was here too. There's five of us so that was eight and I thought 'I'm cooking for eight people!' And I did it!!! It wasn't so hard!!! So it's attitude too: 'why do I hate housework, why do I hate cooking?' Because society doesn't say there's any worth in it you know....society's outlook on women and their worth...is only based on income, on money passing hands...and that's stupid cause do you want someone else to raise your children? Do you want to say 'goodbye kids, I'm not going to raise you, someone else is and they're going to get paid for it...?' [because society doesn't say there's any worth in women's work in the house] I don't see any worth in it, so I don't like it. But...I know that I can do it, and it's necessary....

**JOURNAL ENTRY:** My worth on the farm depends on my relationships, I am poor at relationships therefore I am doing poorly here. I have made no friends, I don't like or respect [the neighbour], I don't like to deal much with [our hired hand] and now I can't stand having [this other person] in the house, does this not indicate my worthlessness? At least when I was a secretary I knew I was worth five dollars and twenty-five cents an hour...even if I made some mistakes I'd still get paid.

Marilew does see her role on the farm (in or outside of the house) as indispensable:

There's no way Steve could farm if I wasn't here...he would live in a one room building. He would sleep and eat in the same spot so he wouldn't have to worry about all the in between space. And the house would be a total mess. He probably wouldn't eat very often and he wouldn't even get everything done...so like the books would be years behind! [laughs]

Though she may not spend as much time in the barn as other farm women, her responsibilities in the overall business are numerous. As mentioned she is taking over the books

and learning the financial end of the business. She also explained that “I’m the kids, I’m the house, I’m the cook and all that stuff....I’m home-schooling the boys.” She does the milking twice a day and helps out in the fields when necessary. Steve is responsible for daily fieldwork, repairs, animal care, and other daily farm operations. Marilew is responsible for the chickens and the kids help out with the calves. Running the farm keeps all of them very busy.

Having young kids also means that their work is not very balanced. Marilew spends most of her time with the kids and Steve spends most of his time in the field. Marilew and Steve have taken some concrete steps towards making their schedules and lifestyle more balanced:

we took a holistic management course...a few years ago. [The guy who led it] lives out west...he just started this program where he’s coaching by phone....so we phone him once a month and he helps us...we tell him what we want: one is more organization, to be more organized and more productive; [another] is I want to depend less on Steve....and Steve wants to be more a part of [homeschooling] too...I think it’ll come together when we can expect more from the boys and we’re all doing more work and then that will mean Steve does less work and that means he’ll be more involved in our lives

In the meantime she is consciously raising her daughter to give her experiences of every aspect of farm: “I don’t know if she’ll ever be a tractor driver...maybe, but if she wants to she should be able to. And even if she’s not interested, maybe still put her on that tractor so that she know what it’s like, so she can make a better choice.”

### Strategies

Marilew suggested many strategies throughout our talk about how she and Steve have been proactively changing things for themselves. A few years ago, they took a holistic management course which helped them vision the changes needed to make their lives more well-rounded, and the necessary steps to get there. Through this course they acquired a coach whom they speak to on a regular basis. He acts as a resource, an objective perspective, and an encourager to take those steps that sometimes they need a little nudge for.

To lighten their burden in the house and alleviate Marilew's concern for her children when she's in the barn, Steve and Marilew have hired help on occasion:

What we did a couple of times was have a [high school] student. They were in the house in the morning which meant I could go to the barn and I knew the kids were okay—if they woke up I knew someone was in the house. If they live with you you don’t pay them as

much cause they get room and board.

Marilew also suggested:

management courses [about] bringing the family together as a unit...how to have meetings with them, how to get them to work for you and with you...we have family meetings—we just had one this morning [laughs] and the kids were going 'can we go now!' [laughs].

Finally, Marilew illustrates the importance of looking at things from a lighter perspective:

THE STRESSFUL JOB OF LETTING COWS OUT

by Marilew Albrecht Fall 1995

When I let the cows out each day  
This is what I have to say:  
"Get going, move it, go Miss Bossy,  
Don't poo here, it makes me crossy".

When she stands she moves her bowels.  
That's her habit, don't get fowl.  
Take it in stride, use your brain,  
Get her up first, then wait to move the train.

When a cow lifts its tail  
I pull it down - don't let it sail.  
Don't poo on your nice straw bed  
Go outside, do it there instead.

Or the gutter is fine, too.  
It does a good job of holding poo.  
If a cow starts to meditate,  
"Hold that thought", or you'll dread your fate

I have to watch a certain few  
Their habit is to turn and poo,  
Upon their bed they put their mess  
Which makes the straw less and less.

If I watch most carefully,  
And chase them individually,  
I feel happy when I can say,  
"Not a cow did poo upon her hay".

### Advice for Others

I asked Marilew what kind of advice she could offer to me or other women who wish to farm ecologically. Most of her advice centered around women's issues; that is, knowing yourself as a woman, and preparing for motherhood.

For example, she encouraged me to stay small scale (i.e. less mechanized), especially if I plan on having children:

Smaller scale farming might [make it] easier to have kids with you...I think it's easier to involve children in that scale of farming cause they can help with the chores—our kids can't drive the tractors yet, they're all too big, and they [the kids] can hardly lift the pails to take the milk over to the calves, and they don't milk yet that's for sure.

She stressed that large machines and mechanized systems pose threats to little kids and lots of worries for mothers. She also highlighted that they are not environmentally friendly.

Marilew also emphasized the importance of attitude. When we had discussed her reluctance to participate in domestic activities, I shared with her my similar reluctance. She encouraged me to evaluate why I held disdain for the domestic attributes of women: "'why do I hate housework, why do I hate cooking?' because society doesn't say there's any worth in it....but what is my choice?...is it just rebellion [against that]....is there something wrong with being a 'lady'?...it's about coming into your own...[and answering those questions for yourself]."

Along those lines she talked about being independent, developing your own role on the farm so you're less dependent on your husband and more a part of the farm itself. This requires courage; that is, not letting yourself be intimidated by the unknown or by other people's expectations. "The first step is knowing what you want [not just want your husband wants]" and then going for it. "It doesn't matter what your Mom says, it doesn't matter what your brother says, it doesn't matter what your husband says, it's what **you** want to do."

Finally she mentioned the importance of developing a balance with your partner between farmwork and family. Most husbands want to spend time with their family too but find it hard when their wives are unavailable to help them out for whatever reason. Sometimes this means getting outside help like they did.

Her last few comments of advice for future farmers focused more on the business side of

farming. She encouraged being organized to help promote efficiency and productiveness on the farm. And even though ecological farming typically requires a tough transition period for land that has been previously farmed she cautioned:

don't get discouraged cause you know it's the right thing to do....Even if one year's looking bad, it's not the end, it's just the beginning...of good times....Don't worry about what the neighbours think. You can't worry about what people think when you farm ecologically because you're not going to be doing what they're doing. But they're going to be watching you and you're gonna show to them eventually that it's the way to go, because it's going to work out....Don't worry about the money,...because you're not going to make as much at first. But it doesn't mean you're always not going to make as much, it's only the transition period where you have to give a little in order to get a lot of return....Don't get discouraged cause you know it's the right thing to do, and even if one year's looking bad, it's not the end, it's just the beginning...of good times.

To help new farmers get through the tough times she recommended finding out about and making use of available resources. The Ecological Farmer's Association of Ontario for example was very helpful for them in that they could talk to like-minded people and access their resource library. The association also offers the help of experts who will come out to the farm and help you develop it ecologically.

### Highlights

Interesting, one of the last topics to come up was a discussion of the things Marilew likes about farming. Yet these positives, although few and expressed briefly, are very meaningful and keep Marilew farming.

For Marilew ecological farming in particular was for her a lifestyle choice based not only on mistrust of technology but also her desire to live a life that reflects her principles: "I'm the kind of person that my job has to be...an expression of myself...and this is." She explains that farmwork fits with her so well because she is a self-described introvert:

I'm not a people person, I'm an introvert and I get my energy just being alone. I love to watch the rain and I love to watch the birds and I love to sit outside and see a blue sky....In the city I'd be looking at cars and I'd be looking at traffic and I'd be looking at a brick wall beside me...and so I love it here.

Marilew also appreciates the balance of physical and mental challenges in her farm work: I like the physical work,...I like milking the cows,...gardening, feeding the cows....and then



there's also the organization—there's watching your land: how can you improve the hay field, taking pictures, taking samples; there's the financial aspect: setting goals for yourself financially and trying to spend less by watching how you're spending; there's the landscape planning: like what do I want my land to look like, how are we going to organize that. So it's a balance between really physical and really challenging mentally. I really like those things about it.

Addressing the role of the farm in her family's life Marilew highlights several positive aspects of their lifestyle: “[the kids] have more space, they can bike up and down, they can roller blade in the basement, they play basketball, they feed the calves, they have rabbits...they can run and play, they can climb trees, they play on the hay mow...”. These opportunities and the lack of neighbours minimizes the number of activities the kids need to be involved in outside of home:

In the city your next door neighbour does something, and your other next door neighbour does something, and the person across the street does something. And all these kids are involved in these things and your kid's going 'can I play too?' so you put them in something. [Here] you don't have to put your kids in everything.

By the end of our conversation, Marilew and I were sitting on the floor within a few feet of each other. She was surrounded by the journals and books she had brought out to illustrate her life on the farm. Included in her collection was a copy of the picture she won an EFAO contest with and which is now used as the EFAO's emblem (see Photo 3, page 73). She also had a copy of a book written by Diane Baltaz (1998) entitled Why We Do It: Organic Farmers on Farming. Marilew had been commissioned to do the artwork for the cover and title page of the book. What was not expressed in words during the interview was made clear by the images of animals, plants and farmers dancing along a musical staff.



**Photo 3: The Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario Emblem (drawn by Marilew)**

## CHAPTER 7: ELLINOR NURNBERG -- SUNNIVUE FARM

Photo by Sherri van de Haef



**Photo 4: Ellinor Nurnberg with one of her cows, Penelope**

#### Introduction

I arrived at the Nurnberg farm just in time for dessert. I joined Ellinor, her husband Alex, four apprentices, and two visitors for canned fruit and frozen chocolate yogurt. Though most of their conversation was in German I could gather that several of the folks at the table were curious about my presence there. Ellinor told them I was there to interview her about being a strong woman farmer. To make her point she raised her arm up in the universal strong arm gesture and

they all laughed. I knew I was in for an enjoyable and enlightening discussion with this woman.

After lunch duties were taken care of Ellinor directed me into the next room. The two sofas in the room were covered with various herbs laid out to dry so we sat on the floor. I explained my purpose and the format for the interview. She expressed that she would be more comfortable with me posing questions to her than following the topic guide I had provided. So I asked questions. The order of what we discussed was therefore mostly a reflection of the order I chose.

### Background

I began by asking her to tell me about her farming background. In her telltale German accent, Ellinor explained she was born in the city of Hamburg in Germany "but as a child I always wanted to become a farmer...". After a few detours she finally did. Ellinor was attracted to farming because "I especially like animals and also nutrition...when I was sixteen I cooked for myself because I didn't like the food my parents made, I prepared grains and organic [food]...and the organics brought me back from detours to farming."

She began farming in Germany in 1973 on a biodynamic farm. There she met her husband Alex, in 1975. Shortly after they moved to Argentina for two years and then back to Germany where they ran their own certified biodynamic farm. In 1991 she and her husband moved to Ontario. In 1993 they settled on their present land near Ailsa Craig, Ontario and established Sunnivue Farm.

Ellinor describes the farm:

we have 180 acres, and it's hundred thirty workable. We do mixed farming with a small dairy herd...and we have the farm store and we're planning to grow for that and process for that....[We] have 16 cows...the milk goes to the marketing board (it gets picked up by the truck)...we grow produce [approximately 3 acres of vegetables, ten acres of potatoes]...we sell eggs, (we have 30 layers), and we sell meat—all the beef that's produced out of the dairy herd, like bull calves we raise, and then we have some pigs and meatbirds.

Their store was opened last year. It is located on the farm and is unique: "we're building this store with no compromise—clay, straw, and grass roof and a slate floor...it's not finished yet, it's going to get a cow dung, lime, clay plastering...then imagine in the Spring you have a red roof from all these tulips in bloom [laughs]." We went for a tour of it after our interview. I could feel

the earthiness of the building materials. It was very grounding and seemed to me to symbolize the interaction of life forces which they strive to promote in their farming practices as well.

Their whole farm has been certified organic by OCIA since 1994. Yet their practices reflect a philosophy of life that goes much deeper than merely growing food without chemicals. Ellinor and her husband subscribe to a philosophy of farming called 'biodynamic':

It's not really a method, it's a philosophy behind it: that man and earth belong together, that we are not just physical beings [but] that we have different forces to us and the earth also. To work with these kind of forces, the life forces...you have certain preparations you can use to enhance them....Biodynamic includes all kingdoms...the plant...animal...wood...man...the harmony of all kingdoms...it's basically homeopathy for the world.

A certification group does exist in Canada specifically for biodynamically grown food but Ellinor mentioned that she does not feel the farm is ready for that nor are enough Canadians aware of it to make certification in it a viable marketing tool.

In keeping with their desire to promote harmony between kingdoms, their farm is set up as a Land Trust: "to give people the idea...it's not somebody owning this land...we can't own it, ...we are stewards of the land." They also "hope to set up the whole farm as an association where people can join the operation even if they don't live on the farm, and...are eligible to take out responsibility, so it's more a community approach." At present their farm is held in trust by a land care association called R.O.S.E. (Redeeming Our Soil Economically). This is a non-profit organization/corporation comprised of 8 people, including the Nurnbergs. "The corporation name is associated with the land, so it's not one or two specific people, it's the entire company [that is responsible for it]."

Altogether Ellinor has been farming for 27 years. She and her husband have two boys, Brian and Robert, who are both grown and living off the farm. They occasionally help out on the farm if needed. Other farm help include WWOOFers, students from the Waldorf school in London, and apprentices (see Photo 5, page 77).

### Challenges

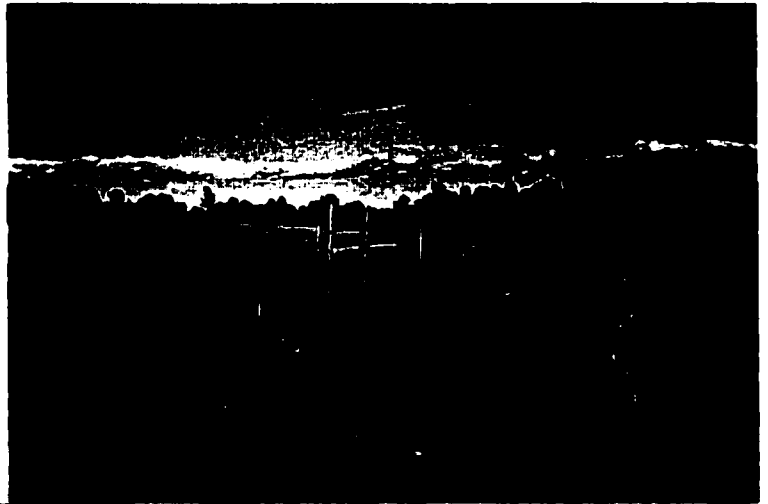
Not too far into the interview Ellinor raised the challenge of farming biodynamically in Canada:

it's not very known [here in Canada] and for marketing it's not really a brand name that



PLANTING BEANS

DAGMAR'S  
WONDER  
GARDEN



Photos from Sunnive Farm's 1978 newsletter



MIKA



DAGMAR & THE WINTER

Photo 5: Photo collage of two apprentices (Mika & Dagmar), Waldorf school children, and Sunnive Farm's new store (bottom left hand corner)

makes sense. In Germany, Europeans have a certain brand for it, it's different than organic and people know by it...[The accreditation] is here but it doesn't really make sense, people don't know and you need a lot of money to bring the information out and to really educate people about the difference to organic.

Ellinor also expressed frustration with the lack of awareness people have about where their food comes from and how their consumer choices affect the global market:

people are very disconnected....from what's happening with farming today....And without the awareness of city people, even farms like this will disappear. What's happening [is] there's a world market and...[eventually] there will be a few big corporations [using] cheap labour and produc[ing cheap products]....People are not aware of it, they just keep buying these things....These farms won't be able to survive in this world unless city people wake up and say 'that's wrong!'

She spoke about how tiring it is to educate people about their choices in general and about biodynamics specifically, especially when "our newspapers are very one-sided, depend[ing on] who pays them...it's a lot of effort to educate people...the problem is that we're too tired with all the other work we have so we don't work enough on it [and on building the association].

Once again the issue of money was a source of frustration. Although Ellinor did not speak about it much in our interview it was a major theme in the newsletter they sent out to their network of customers and friends. Ellinor summarizes: "yah we had two tough years and we're gonna make this swim..."

### Highlights

Ellinor was attracted to farming partly because: "I especially like animals and also nutrition." These continue to be highlights for her on the farm. She explains her responsibilities on the farm: "I do the dairy and the house and the canning [and parts of the gardening]." When I asked her to specify what else she liked about farming she laughed and said: "I think it's very important and I enjoy it very much...I like every part of it...everything, every part of it".

Throughout the rest of the interview she indirectly mentioned other things that were positive aspects of their lifestyle. These included being able to share their farm with others: "it's very important to share it: to share the life and experiences; to offer this place to people who are interested in this."

They can do this partly because they are small scale and diverse. They do not have

worries about telling people: “you’re not allowed to enter [the barn] because of the possible diseases” for example<sup>9</sup>.

WWOOFers and apprentices help out on the farm: “they do a lot of things for enhancing the quality of say the quality of life for the chickens...by building the chicken barn...they do something extra that makes things better...[they also promote] cultural enhancement.” Sunnivue Farm’s newsletter listed Korea, Quebec, England, Japan, and Germany as the countries of origin of their on-farm help last year.

Two big accomplishments and therefore highlights that Ellinor mentioned were the Land Trust and the new store:

we've achieved a lot, if we look back:...The land trust is really something that works, you know, we're really and truly satisfied, there's nothing we have to change about it....Or building this store with no compromise you know --- clay, straw, a grass roof and a slate floor....It's not finished yet, it's going to get a cow dung, lime, clay plastering...then imagine in the Spring you have a red roof from all these tulips in bloom!...We lived in a house from the 1600s and the feeling's just so different...you live in the earth in a way...all these natural materials and the acoustic is totally different....So [this] gives people a chance to experience it...to experience something they never experienced before.

Something that is difficult to portray in written text is the feeling behind the spoken word. As Ellinor described the store I could almost feel myself surrounded by clay/straw walls, breathing the rich smell of earth. Her gift of painting pictures with her words was especially moving as she described her experiences and wishes for farming women.

#### The Female Element

Because she lives in the world of machines and large fields, necessity encouraged Ellinor to learn to drive tractor on the farm. Like most women I’ve talked to she does not enjoy it much: “I do [it] now but I don't like it very much, for this moment you feel great and strong and powerful and have all this energy [but it doesn't last]”.

I asked Ellinor what farming as a woman meant to her. This was her response:

---

<sup>9</sup> Many conventional farmers raise one type of animal and shelter a large number of them in one building. This increases the animals’ susceptibility to illness or disease. Typically only the farmer and a limited number of employees are allowed in the barns and in many cases they have to ‘sterilize’ themselves first. In contrast Sunnivue farm has one barn which houses 16 cows. The pigs and chickens have their own shelters outside. There are no worries at the farm about inviting visitors into the barn to see the cows.



say just what is in me as a woman and say evolution would depend totally on me from the beginning, then...when I look into myself...I would say in me is to have a well and go and carry water, to have a village and raise children together, to dry herbs and cut [them] with a golden scythe, this...is in me. And then I look in this world where we are, [we] have big machinery, produce masses for people who have no idea what they eat and where it comes from and I find that it ah, it's a very male way of living...I don't know, maybe there are women who would look at a well and say 'no, I want a water pipe and I want to live independent of the village somewhere alone and raise my children all alone'....But I don't think so, [not the] women I talk to....It would be like a third world country you know? [laughs]...[I comment: "yah, people don't see that as progress"]...yah, but it is--to have poetry and songs and lots of feasts!...[But] evolution went this way, that's how I find myself as a woman in this time and in this type of farming. I'm able to do it, and I'm pretty good at it, but it wouldn't be like that...[if] evolution from now on depends on my feelings.

When I got together with Ellinor a couple of months later, she clarified this point for me. She said how she does not believe in going backwards but instead focuses on the future. She sees these qualities--this "warmth"--as something innate in people though expressed more in other, 'primitive' cultures and in the past. She said we need to bring it back into our lives, and in doing so, we will create something new and better. This concept was obviously difficult to express in words--she used the example of money to illustrate her point. She said that money today is cold...it is disrespectful of life, it is used to merely survive and make profits, it is an end in itself. She compared this to money that is "warm": that is, when money is used to convey love, to help another reach their goals, as a tool to promote real, quality living.

Ellinor felt intuitively that the warmth she referred to was something female, although not absent in males. "Maybe it's the balance of male and female that's lacking" she offered. "Perhaps we both have both parts." Yet in her experience today, it seems that men typically like and encourage the 'bigger is better', and the profit incentive approach, more than women.

Ellinor is not resigned to the fact that life can only stay as it is, neither does she view women as victims of evolution. She explains:

You know women backed out of [society] because it's stronger to do Big....A lot of women just go into the male path and that's real...sad:...especially in dairy, women do this--they're very rough and uh...'cooler' than anybody else....I think we have to go back in [to society] and change things...I once heard somebody say 'The only way to save North America is through the women'...I think as a woman, we are asked today to bring this

[female] element into the times....In the work I do I try to bring this element...I treat my animals different...I think [working with cows] is very female, like they're mothers, and I am their mother....[So] they're not crowded in the barn...they get their space [and]...I don't cut their horns....It's more stronger to do big, but I want my little piece and carry it to the moon.

### Promoting Change

Ellinor expressed several times throughout the interview that she saw this change happening through community:

I think we have to go back in [to society] and change things....Say, okay, this is in me, this...is what the world would be like now:...There is a community because everyone is relying on everyone, not just pulling out;...there you would serve all the other people with your work;...all the people in the village would [be] drying the herbs--you know...it's different than just drying herbs for yourself.

Together Ellinor and her husband Alex are working towards building community in various ways:

we set up the land as a Land Trust to give people the idea that it's not somebody owning this land—we live on this land, on this earth, and we can't own it, we are stewards of the land. It's a modern times approach. And we hope to set up the whole farm as an association where people can join to the operation even if they don't live on the farm somehow, and are eligible to take out responsibility—so it's more a community approach; the farm's not just a two man venture.

By sharing their home with apprentices, WWOOFers, and children from the Waldorf school more people can be exposed to their lifestyle and their philosophy of living:

it's very necessary I feel...that people really are connected...with the farming again. We're getting a lot of school children here so they have the possibility to work on the farm so that they can experience it. I think in the future it's very important that people are connected to these types of farms...really connected because otherwise they [these farms] won't be around. If nobody connects to it, they just die away.

By promoting the involvement of a variety of people on the farm, they have developed an extended community that takes an interest in what's going on there and offers support. The Sunnivue 1998 newsletter demonstrates this. After a tough 1997, they were contemplating “closing the book and looking for a less taxing way of making a living.” but:

We decided not to give up. One of the reasons for this was Gail, who suddenly made an appearance and took everything very seriously....

What we could not know in January was that in April Dagmar would join us and, a gardener through and through, would conjure the stock (i.e. vegetables, etc.) for the shop out of the ground....

Norm Smith declared himself willing to sow our soya beans without asking anything in return....

Gernot sent us a card to say we should consider as paid the instalment due on the liquidation of our debt....

Wolfgang Pfenning put seed oats at our disposal for which we didn't need to pay....

I asked Ellinor at our second visit who she considered her community to be. She quickly pointed out that it was not based on geography but that in fact their community extended all over the world. It was comprised of people who shared similar interests and experiences. And although they are separated by physical distance, it is obvious that the threads of their community web are strong enough to support them even when times are rough.

At the end of our interview I asked Ellinor what advice she would give women interested in farming ecologically. She responded: "stick to your dreams--all your life, it's possible" and "be a strong arm person, make it work". Once again she raised her arm in the universal gesture and we both laughed, yet I think we both knew how right she was.

#### After the Interview

Following our conversation Ellinor took me around the farm. I met her cows and was pleasantly surprised to see a cheery, clean, spacious barn. Each cow had a custom made wooden feeder (to prevent 'wing shoulder' acquired by excessive pressure on the cows' shoulders from bending over things), and a slate board hanging above her with her name and a picture drawn on it in coloured chalk with the artistic scrawl of a child (see Photo 6, page 83). Our next memorable stop was of course at the store. Again everything was spacious and fresh looking. The slate floor and earthen walls made me feel like I had entered the magical kingdom of a garden, that in fact the vegetables were still growing in the ground.

As we walked to the second level of the store Ellinor explained their plans for it: I could envision the grass, the slate walkway and benches lining the second floor balcony; I could hear the children playing beside the pond in the back, trying to catch those elusive frogs.

Perhaps the world is not evolving the way Ellinor dreams it inside herself but she is making sure that her piece of it is, and it is beautiful.

Photo by Sherri van de Hief

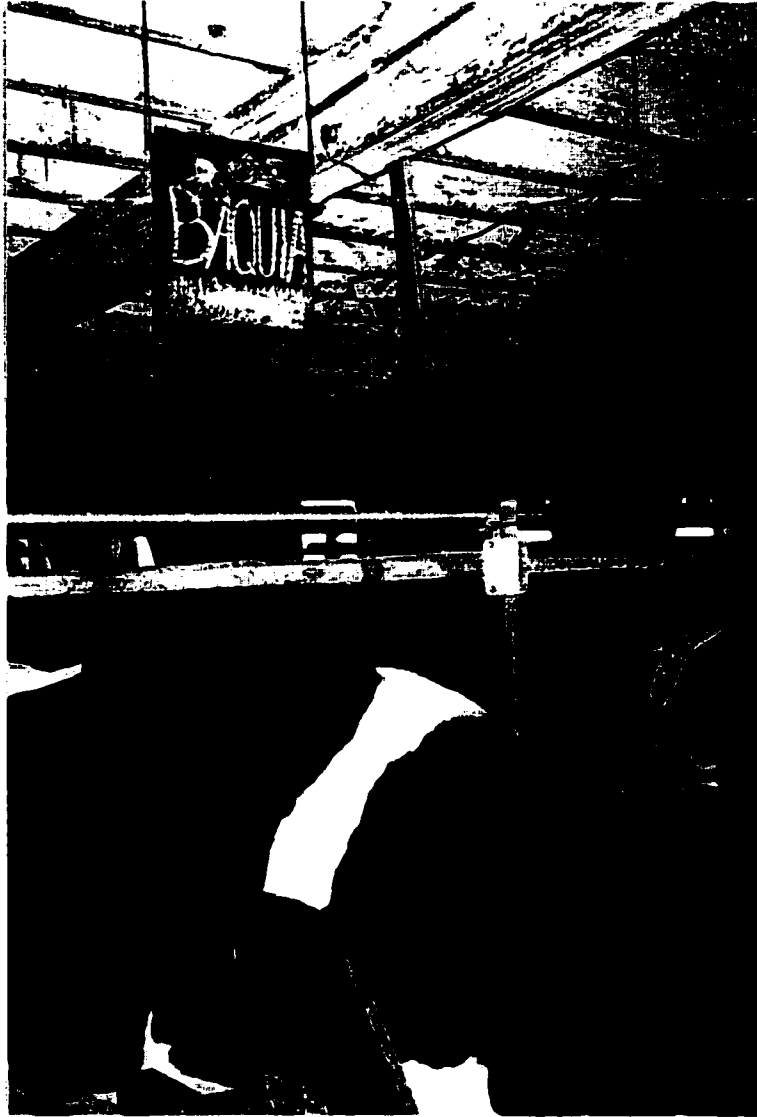


Photo 6: One of the cows' 'name tags'

## CHAPTER 8: CATHY MACGREGOR-SMITH--MCSMITH'S FARM PRODUCE

### Introduction

I arrived at the McSmith farm on a busy Saturday afternoon. Although it was not too far from closing time, cars seemed to be arriving in droves to shop at the McSmith's Farm Market. Cathy's husband Gary greeted me and went to get Cathy. She arrived and greeted me warmly. Her smile danced across her face and her eyes sparkled.

We began with a tour around the farm. I was impressed by what seemed to me were huge gardens of beans and tomatoes (see Photo 7, page 85). They have 215 acres altogether. Most of it is planted in crops slated for wholesale such as the 17 acres of green beans for an Earth's Best baby food contract and the 41 acres of Kintoki beans for an Asian buyer. Approximately 7 acres (it sure looked like more!!) is planted in a variety of vegetables for the farm market. That does not include the 3 acres of potatoes, 2 acres of sweet corn and giant patches of asparagus and squash!!! Cathy also proudly showed me their new 105x45 foot winterized greenhouse that will grow a variety of greens (lettuce, spinach, salad mix) and some tomatoes, radishes, and onions throughout the winter, as well as start their early spring transplants. This is a serious business!!

Cathy explained that in order to provide balance on the farm and a variety of products in the store there were also beef cattle, pigs and turkeys and laying hens on the farm. Milk products, dried goods and citrus were imported to round out their selection.

After our walk around the farm we sat on chairs under a shady tree. The family dog sauntered up to join us and after making sure I was friendly he plopped down behind us. I gave Cathy a copy of the topic guide and told her to start whenever and wherever she liked. She began with her family and agriculture background.

### Background

Farming background...well...I think I might start with when I worked in Agriculture Canada. I worked there for 13 years; I worked in entomology, which is the study of insects (which is really handy if you're an organic farmers cause I can tell you probably more beneficial insects than harmful insects and by encouraging the beneficial and allowing them to be on your farm, we don't really have an insect problem at our place, we have a weed problem maybe, but not an insect problem). At Agriculture Canada the thrust of the research at that point in time (in the 70s and early 80s), was integrated pest management which is when you'd use sprays only when they were needed, according to timings and things like that.....my main thing was pheromones research, so we would rear colonies of

Article from the St. Thomas Times-Journal, Tuesday, September 14, 1999

# Going all-natural at organic farm

BY BRIAN CLEEVE  
FOR THE TIMES-JOURNAL

Cathy McGregor-Smith says that organic farming yields good-quality, fresh produce without interfering with nature.

"We use no chemical fertilizer, no herbicide, no fungicide, just natural fertilizer such as composted manure," said McGregor-Smith, who has been farming about 200 acres organically for more than a dozen years.

Growing produce organically requires a deeper root system and does not grow as quickly as more conventional farms.

The farm offers fresh market produce including lettuce, mesclun (a mixture of greens), potatoes, broccoli, fresh eggs, cabbage and some meats.

"We do enough business to totally support ourselves from the farm," she said.

McGregor-Smith, who worked as an etymologist for Agriculture Canada for 10 years, said the biggest challenge is weeds. But it has also led to the use of a flame weeder, invented by husband Gary Smith, and the use of a 1947 Allis-Chalmers tractor to culti-

vate the rows.

Weeds, such as the pig weed, show the land is highly fertile, so crops such as squash, broccoli or sweet corn can be planted, she said.

Cathy and Gary, who also worked in the etymology department of Agriculture Canada, are using a method of farming that was common-place until about 40 years ago.

"Organic farming is more labor-intensive than conventional farming but it's better for the land," she said.

There are also some people who are extremely sensitive to chemical residue, added McGregor-Smith.

"Organic farming gives us better control of our markets. And we see our customers coming back."

But new technology is also helping at McSmith Farm Produce. Cathy's 17-year-old daughter, Janis, uses the Internet and e-mail to take orders.

Thirteen-year-old daughter Lisa and Gary's sister, Colleen, also work regularly at the farm.

Many of the customers come

from London, although McSmith Farm does export organic soybeans and peas to Japan.

McSmith Farm has built a new greenhouse which will allow growing lettuce and spinach through the winter season.

Every Wednesday, organically grown citrus fruits — oranges, grapefruit, bananas and kiwis — are brought in and, on Thursdays, organic milk cheese and butter come to McSmith's.

McSmith organically grown produce is located east of Wellington Road just a few miles north of St. Thomas.



Cathy McGregor-Smith, 17, is seen with her 3000 cabbage plants at McSmith Farm Produce, east of Wellington Road, just a few miles north of St. Thomas. Photo by [unreadable]

tobacco horn worms or tomato horn worms and even corn borers, we reared these colonies and then we would clip the abdomens of the females and the scientists were able to synthesize that pheromone smell, put it in a small vial, put it on some sticky tape, go out in the field and attract all the males.

By doing so they could present natural methods of controlling insect problems in agriculture. Yet more and more, big companies began to move in to the agricultural research field and fund research that met their own needs. As Cathy explained, research at Agriculture Canada began to change: "I remember some of them would just stand up there and say 'No, that is not good for the earthworms, you can't really spray that on the soil and not expect it to go down and hurt the soil life'." "It's all biological or biotechnology [now] and the big companies are paying for their contracts, so you don't really have a free voice on your results either."

Cathy grew up on a hobby farm in West Lorne, Ontario. She obtained a diploma from Ridgetown College of Agricultural Technology. She met her husband Gary at Agriculture Canada and they were married in 1980. Gary grew up on a dairy farm. I asked her what prompted the move from Agriculture Canada to setting up their own farm:

we had our two daughters and...at Agriculture Canada it was at a time when there was no more funding and there was no more raises, and everything was locked and government employees were considered deadbeats and so it got to be that I didn't really have a lot to do when I went there...every time we'd start a whole project, work all the way through it, take it up, present it and they'd say 'well that's really good but we have no money to fund that project' so then we'd just go back down and think of something else. I just couldn't stand that and leave our daughters at daycare, so [we] took the risk and started farming.

It was not a simple transition however: "when we bought our farm, Farm Credit at the time wouldn't loan any money unless you were a full-time farmer...so Gary had to quit his job at Agriculture Canada and do this full-time. So at that point in time he worked with his father as a dairy farmer and bought this place, in 1981."

Cathy continued to work until 1985 after the birth of her second daughter. At that point: we built a mushroom house—we had an organic mushroom business at my Mother's place, and that worked for awhile but then my Mother had a chance to sell the land as a subdivision so...[in 1986] Gary [went to] work at some little factory...I [was] at home but I had to think of ways to make it pay. We always had chickens, so I always had eggs, then I always had extra vegetables, so I started delivering to people's homes.

Their experience at Agriculture Canada and their knowledge of natural pest management

convinced them that chemical inputs were unnecessary and more likely harmful on the farm. So from the beginning they decided to take the natural route. Their brochure today reads: "...we can sense that the earth is not the same as it was. We depend on a healthy earth for healthy food to eat. The living forces must be in the food. An organically grown plant can choose for itself rather than have the nutrients thrust on to it as in conventional agriculture." Cathy affirms their initial decision: "I like being able to do it without any sprays and I don't see the need for it really anyway, especially on our size of farm, and even as we're getting into some of these bigger crops we're seeing that if you time the cultivation, proper nutrients in the soil, you can have crops as good as the conventional ones..."

They began the certification process in the late 1980s. By 1990 they had partial certification and a couple years later their whole farm was OCIA certified.

Cathy explained: "in 1992 we built our first phase of our market. It was smaller then, and we had to take a risk again and tell our customers that 'we're gonna stop the delivery now, will you come to our place?' And so that's how it kept developing from there." They decided on the name McSmith's Farm Produce: "my name is MacGregor and Gary's is Smith...so we just made McSmith's...we always say that our name is kind of catchy...usually people remember [our] name." Cathy and Gary spent a lot of time during the initial start-up of their business giving talks and demonstrations to educate the public about the importance and benefits of organic produce and to promote their business.

They continually added more animals and worked the land. Cathy describes their progress:

I find that our farm is working better every year...we did add more animals...—you're taking so much out [of the ground] when you're taking vegetables out. By putting something back into the ground it makes it sustainable. About four or five years ago I started using some of the biodynamic preparations and...found that kind of worked to increase the soil life as well. We always use the biodynamic calendar for planting...we're pretty well a whole farm.

Now they have a farm market that is open three days a week and sells bedding plants, potted herbs, and heirloom transplants in early Spring, fresh organic produce, and organic meat from the farm throughout their seasons, as well as local organic cheese and milk products, and



imported organic fruits, citrus and dry goods. Cathy still delivers once a week in London for a small fee and they still follow biodynamic principles and practices on their farm.

### Highlights

As highlighted in their brochure and throughout my conversation with Cathy, the McSmith's see farming and their farm market as a 'calling' not a job. Their vision for the farm is summed up in the six words found on the front page of their brochure: "Think Organic" "Connect with McSmith's Farm". This connection includes both an increased awareness of the natural world and interaction with others.

Many of the highlights Cathy shared with me, had to do with her interaction with customers. "It is fulfilling to satisfy our customer's needs and to feel the partnership between grower and consumer. Often times, customers comment on having a 'totally McSmith meal'". She enjoys getting positive feedback from their customers and even sharing recipes.

She also sees their farm as being a place for customers to connect with animals, the land and healthy food: "it gives me great pleasure to run out and be able to pick something for our customers and just bring it in...like this morning I picked some snow peas [and brought] them in to give [to some] children to try."

Just now some Oriental people came: they like to come here cause...they like the mixed farm...they can come here and they can see the pigs or they can go to the chickens, they gather the eggs—they like them so fresh....And they bow to the chickens and go 'thank you, thank you!'

Having a supportive customer base is also important and a highlight for the McSmiths. Throughout the years they have developed a core of supportive, loyal customers, several of whom provided financial backing so that Cathy and Gary could set up their new greenhouse.

But the benefits are not limited to the customer experiences only. Cathy explained how their type of farming is important to their daughters as well:

I have a friend [who is] on the pork board, one of the directors, and she loves to come here to see how our girls enjoy the farm whereas her daughters, the same age exactly, won't go near the barn....My friend says: 'I kind ah don't want them to, cause if we have any problems with the pigs, you know,...if we have any diseases...it'll wipe [them] out....[and] I can't let the girls do some of the chores because they're too precise'....There's no way that [her daughters] would **want** to get into farming whereas our girls **like** it.

The farm has become successful enough that Cathy and Gary are able to hire both their daughters and two other full-time employees throughout the summer months: “our daughters have plans for universities and things and we pay them well, we pay them every week, [and] we have two full-time students that we pay....forty hours a week for each of them.”

There are also other personal highlights for Cathy. She told me how she likes the mixed farm—having animals and a variety of crops. She likes being able to experiment: “I like the science of using inventions...like floating roll cover [a light material used to protect young plants], plastic to ease some of the work [helps minimize weed growth]...but I like to be able to do it without the sprays.” The scientist in her enjoys watching and observing changes in the plants and fruit to learn their characteristics. At one point in the interview Cathy smiled real big and said: “I like...that we are able to eat all this food [from the store] ourselves.”

Cathy is the exception among the women I talked to in that she genuinely enjoys driving tractor. She explains her attraction: “I like the tractor and I like the planter...I like making the fields look like patchwork, I like having rows going different ways so that everything from the sky I think would look like a patchwork quilt, I like that artist part of it.”

I asked Cathy to explain to me why she keeps farming and she summed it up by saying:

well my favourite time is first thing in the morning, like at five thirty...the animals are all coming alive and...it's really funny cause they just go ‘yay, it's another day!!!’....Some people you know, get up...going ‘ah, no not another day’ but when the farm comes alive in the morning it's really, really nice....

I like all the different varieties, and all the different tastes, and sharing recipes with our customers. [I like it that] people come back next week and go...‘your eggs are the best’...and ‘boy look how much we can buy here to feed our family!’...I like being...part of [that]

### Lowlights

Although Cathy likes collecting recipes and even canning and preserving, she finds that she's usually so busy she never has a time to. The success of the business and the constant flow of customers is keeping them very busy and tired. Cathy explains the irony of the situation: “...we're almost too tired by Saturday to make a nice supper: we've been...selling this to all these people so they can go home and have a nice supper [but] we're too tired.”

As mentioned earlier, Cathy and Gary have spent a lot of time educating people about the

benefits and importance of organic produce. Cathy highlights that now the public is finally catching on but research still is not: “there hasn’t been a lot of information about organic farming and you have to do a lot of it yourself, which I don’t mind cause we’re sorta from that science-type background.” Because of their scientific backgrounds, this is not a barrier for Cathy and Gary but it is a concern.

The increased interest among the public has manifested itself at the McSmith farm, as was evident even as Cathy and I sat there that Saturday afternoon. But people are so familiar with supermarkets they often have unrealistic expectations for the farm market. Cathy commented most frequently on the frustration of dealing with demanding and ignorant customers: “I used to love canning and jams, I did so much of it and when we were first starting out I used to sell it in our store, but people would...almost be demanding it: ‘you said you were gonna have strawberry jam next week and you didn’t make it!’...I just found that it was getting too demanding that way.” As closing time approached the afternoon I was there, people were still driving in, and still expecting shelves full of produce but as Cathy explains “we don’t want it to be filled with all this leftover stuff [when we close]!!”.

Others are oblivious to the seasonal changes in product availability and expect the same produce to be there every week:

sometimes they look in our freezer and go ‘well I got a couple of rump roasts a few weeks ago, don’t you have anymore rump roasts?’. We go ‘well our animals only have **one** rump and there’s only so many rump roasts!’....This is our ‘farm market’ it’s not a ‘farmers market’...this is **one** farm that’s feeding all these people!

**STORY:** When the first of the English Cucumbers came, I was so happy I brought in a dozen cucumbers to the market here. There must of been I don’t know, four [customers] there. This one lady grabbed up like four of them and was gonna take them all. I kinda went, ‘well these are the first ones, next week you can have probably as many as you want’. [She said], ‘well I want them now!’....We’re going to put up a sign:....’This is a Super Farm Market, not a Supermarket!’.

### Life as a Farming Woman

Cathy and Gary run a partnership business. Their land is jointly owned and each of them

have roles on the farm based on what they love and are best suited to do. Cathy's roles on the farm consist of planting, planning, picking, public relations, and the money stuff (cheques, bills, etc.). Gary does land preparation, lifting (especially as they get older), building and inventing. Their daughters and hired help run the cash register and help in the garden, especially with harvesting.

I asked Cathy to tell me a bit about what farming meant to her as a woman. She did not really see there being much of a difference between her and her husband's approach to farming but she did see a difference between her and her women neighbours: "In this neighbourhood I'm by far the only woman that takes any **part** in the farm and...I can't imagine that...I love being on the tractor and I love doing all those kind of things."

#### Strategies and Advice

Cathy and Gary are considering strategies to help them lighten their workload. This could possibly mean creating a whole new approach to selling their produce, whether that be CSA, selling at the Covent Garden Market in London, Ontario, or doing more wholesale field crops. For now their family is focused on working together to get the work done so that they can relax together.

Their experiences have given Cathy a lot of thoughts on what advice to give to others who would like to also farm ecologically.

Not surprisingly she cautions that you have to see it as a lifestyle so that you will be serious about it. She explains the concept of a "floatie" to illustrate what she means: "Floaties are people that...like the idea of organic but they don't understand the work of it...[you] can't just talk about it all the time [you] have to actually **do** it."

Along those lines she also stresses that you should "get in early" and have what she calls "stick-to-it-tive-ness": "You have to be in it for the long haul, you have to be able to work hard and long hours....and have simple pleasures like just eating beans in the field or whatever."

Finally and perhaps most importantly, she advised: "you have to have a partner that agrees with the same kind of ideas." She stressed that support is very important: "we have this thing that we all work and we all can relax, so it's a whole family living it, this is our whole family lifestyle."

### After the Interview

I spoke with Cathy again in mid October. Things had not changed much, she was still so busy she was incredibly hard to reach. We could not logistically meet in person so eventually we chatted on the phone. Even then she was rushed--the family was preparing for the grand opening of the organic produce section of the Covent Garden Market in London the following day.

She told me that she had read the summary out loud to her family and that they had enjoyed hearing what she had said during our conversation. We talked about community and I asked her who she considered her community to be. She said her community revolved around her family, her church, other organic growers, and members of an Advanced Agriculture Leadership Program she had been a part of. Several of these folks are scattered across Ontario. So for Cathy, her community was primarily one of interest more so than geographical location.

I wished her luck at the grand opening in London. I suggested I call back in November to see if we could get together once more. She said that would be good, that by then things should be a little calmer around the farm. I wonder.

## CHAPTER 9: MARG STEELE – STEELE WOOL FARM

### Introduction

I drove into the Steele farm and parked under their Russet apple tree. Their yellow brick farmhouse sat on top of a pretty steep hill. At the base of the hill stood a huge, old black walnut tree shading a sandbox and jungle gym. A rock and wild flower garden, which ran down the main portions of the hill, added variety to the scenery and reduced the need for acrobatics on a riding lawn mower.

Photo from the Steeles' personal collection



APRIL 1995

**Photo 8: The Steele farmhouse**

Marg and one of her children greeted me at the door and invited me in. The kitchen was busy: Marg's husband Rick and their other two children sat huddled around a computer. The oldest was clicking on pictures on the monitor to make different sound effects. The sounds that came over the speaker were met with enthralled giggles from his siblings.

I was introduced and cordially greeted. Before we even began the interview Marg and I had a discussion about the purpose of my study, and why I was interested in women only. She explained that she and Rick had chatted earlier about this and Rick had expressed concern about

the one-sided nature of my project. His concern is well-founded. It is important to highlight that farming is typically a full partnership. Both partners therefore have equal and valid contributions to make to research. I explained to Marg that my being there and talking to her alone had nothing to do with a lack of interest in the experience of farming men but rather it made more sense for me personally, since I am a woman who would like to farm. I also explained that there is a lack of information available to people about farming women and that it is important to provide some balance.

After our introductions Marg gave me a tour of the farm. She and Rick presently have 100 acres of farm land. Some of it is bush, some is rented to their neighbour, the rest is in hay and pasture.

We began our tour at the barn. Marg led down some stairs to the lower floor of the barn where the ewes winter and lamb. She explained that they presently have about 70 ewes, 50 lambs, and two rams (Fred and Bruce). I said 'hi' to Fred and Bruce and we moved on. On my second visit three months later, they had acquired four more rams and five more ewes. Their flock continues to grow.

Photo by Sherril van de Kooij



**Photo 9: Marg Steele and members of the sheep flock**

We walked out back and Marg showed me their meatbirds. Although their main emphasis is on raising sheep, Marg believes that "diversity is the key to family farming". They have about 80 white and 20 red meat birds. Further down the farm we met up with the grazing ewes and lambs. Marg explained that they sell the lambs for freezer lamb or sell them at the sales barn. The ewes are sheared (see Photo 10, below) and their wool is shipped out East to be carded and spun. Then it's sent to Marg's mother who dyes it and sends it back to Marg. Marg has a side business designing sweaters. She knits some herself with the finished wool. The rest of the wool is put into a sweater kit with her design and a photo of the finished product (see Photo 11, page 96).

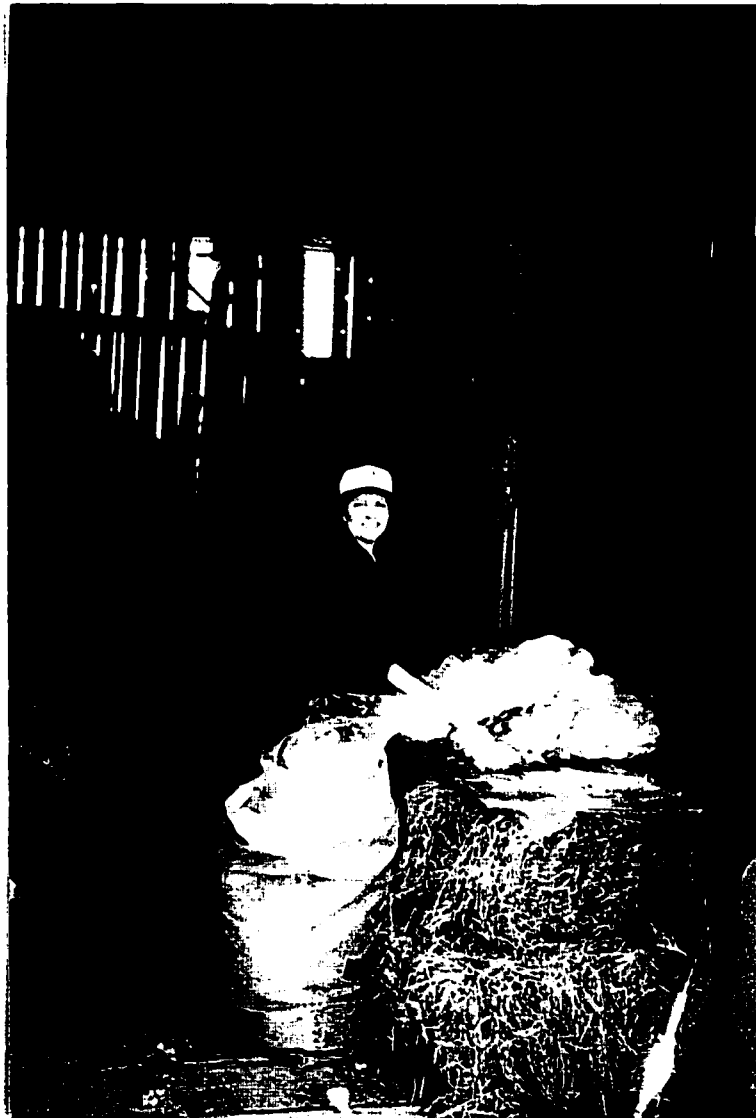


Photo from the Steeles' personal collection

**Photo 10: Marg packing wool from her flock**





**Photo 11: Marg with a collection of her sweaters**

After the tour we headed inside and sat opposite each other at the kitchen table. Marg poured us some lemonade and we dove right in.

#### **Background**

Marg has recently discovered that: “on my Mother’s side I am six generations farming...my Mom and Dad have a 400 acre sheep farm as well in Eastern Ontario. I knew from about 12 or so that farming was what I wanted to do.”

She went to agriculture college in Guelph (Ontario Agriculture College) and got a degree in Resources Management. She explained that” it really gave you a good problem-solving background...it gave you a really good, broad spectrum background.” She met her husband Rick in the program. Rick had grown up in London but had a strong interest in Natural Resources.

After graduation they got married and worked contracts around Southern Ontario. Marg:

ended up working for different conservation authorities after graduating, mostly on water quality....[Rick] got hired with the conservation authority in Wroxeter, right out of school, so we moved all over the province [laughs] just depending on where I worked, and we'd commute. It was tough.....We decided we were going to start a family and we decided I was going to stay home with the kids. We decided we'd buy our farm. My grandfather helped us with financing. We drew a half hour driving radius around Wroxeter and started looking for farms.

They decided to start a sheep farm:

cause that was the only animal I knew about and I like working with: they're the right size for me. I'm not a very big person [but] I can handle a ewe, I can take twins out of her if I have to....I don't know if I could do that to a cow,...and I didn't really like pigs all that much when we had them. But I like sheep and they're pretty friendly and easy to get along with.

Although Marg and Rick do not farm organically, they do farm ecologically. I asked Marg what that meant for them:

Farming ecologically means that you figure out what your farm needs, where it needs it and apply it appropriately...you do it responsibly....I think farming ecologically is really a responsibility in how you farm, what tools you use to farm...whether you use herbicides or insecticides....Any of that stuff...I prefer not to [use], especially with the antibiotic scare that's been happening lately with small kids. In humans, if you overuse something it becomes less effective. To me that's a warning sign to everyone that you've gotta really be careful about how you use things....You can't be too responsible in how you use something....We don't grow any crops other than hay and pasture....We don't really have any great need for herbicides cause we're not...growing crops...and every year...we put more and more in grass....The most noxious stuff that we use I guess would be Round-Up [a chemical herbicide] and we try to limit that to every couple of years under the [electrical] fences....If the grass grows up too high and it's leaning on the fence then it reduces the effectiveness of [it].... We try to use Round-Up sparingly because I read how this one woman thinks Round-Up accumulates in the soil over time; it's not as biodegradable as people think it is. So...we try only using it sparingly...and I think that's been good in terms of health for the kids.

Marg went on to explain that they do buy non-organic feed for their sheep but that they try to "finish" (raise) the lambs on unsprayed pasture. They have been working on adjusting the periods in the Spring when the ewes lamb to see what months work best in terms of having the lambs finish in the field. She expects that in five years or so they will have a flock that has adapted to their farm environment.

### Lowlights

Marg has found it tough to move into a rural area, far from her family, and try to create a new community:

it's hard because our families are far away and I find that family is very important, especially on the farm, [to] help with haying...before we bought our bale basket...we used to have to bale on the wagon, which required a few people and so finding someone to babysit [was hard] cause haying can often be last minute....I really miss the family connection, especially when a lot of the people out here have been living here for generations and [so have] all their families.

Accessibility is another challenge faced by those who live in rural areas, especially if they have had a taste of the convenience of city life. Marg lived in Guelph during her university degree and although she explains later that there are many things about the city that she did not like, she also explains: "some of those things I do miss...like being able to go shopping whenever you need something, now when you live on a farm it takes more planning."

As with most farmers, money was an issue of frustration for Marg and Rick. Presently Rick is still working off the farm at the Conservation Authority. Marg indicated:

my greatest wish now is that we were financially secure enough that Rick could quit his other job and he could be home...we like being together, and we like working together...so that's our next big goal, that and paying off our barn [laughs]....sometimes [money] worries me...we have had to put a lot of money in the farm cause it wasn't set up for sheep, it was set up for cows...and the gangway on the old barn caved in a couple of years ago...there's always expenses like that, [and] equipment...I'm sure you've seen the prices for equipment [laughs]...it's not cheap, even buying second hand...and the Conservation Authority doesn't pay as well as some other jobs might, but it's pretty secure now that we've gone through all the cutbacks and stuff. Well, that's another concern...with the whole restructuring of conservation authorities and the [changes in] funding...half the staff from Rick's office got cut/laid off, whatever...we were worried for a while that we'd be starting over again....so yah, money can keep you up at night.

Finally, Marg also expressed concern about the increase of big business farming and the effects it was having on family farms and communities:

how many articles have you read recently about the family farm disappearing? There's gonna be a point where there's only going to be ten thousand farms...in the whole country or the North American continent, who are going to be feeding everyone. Everyone's getting bigger, now there's farms with 6000 acres! I read an interesting book that a man wrote who lived in a county where all the Amish are in the States. He said that that

county which has hundreds of Amish farmers all on hundred acre farms brings in more money than the next county that has all large farms, because not only does each family produce what they need for themselves, plus they sell the extra, they provide jobs for their children and their neighbours, because often they...need people who can build carriages and people who can fix equipment, like our dealerships...but because there's so many [people] they can have more. If each of these little hundred acres had a farm on it, we could have five or six dealerships instead of one or two because there would be that many more people. But as we all started moving to the city, because we wanted 'the good life', that's changed....That's my pet thing--big isn't always better.

### Motivations and Highlights

Marg addressed her experience as a farming woman, what motivated her to farm ecologically, and the highlights of it for her, separately. I found in re-reading the interview transcript that there was a lot of overlap between these two categories. That is, those things that she considered highlights often had a lot to do with her role as a mother or her uniqueness as a woman and were part of her motivation for choosing a farming lifestyle. Therefore, I have combined them into one category.

Marg stated how she likes being her own boss. But she also stressed that the Steele Wool farm is a partnership. The property is owned by both Rick and Marg and they focus on making the business a shared experience. An important aspect of this is something they call "cross-training": "Whatever needs doing, whoever is the best qualified or most able at that particular moment then we try to do it...we teach each other". For example:

Rick's better with equipment than I am, he's better at figuring out how to put something together. I need a refresher course...driving the tractor...cause I don't get to do that often....[So] when we were haying last year we took turns. Rick would bale the first sixty bales or so and I would stack them on the wagon. Then it got to the point where, since I'm only just over five feet, I couldn't lift them up any more and get back for the next bale in time, so we'd switch and I would bale while he stacked....[Or] when he's putting in the water line I went out with him so I could see how he used the torch and how he connected the parts of the water line together....

I teach him stuff in the house....I taught him a lot about working with the sheep,...I showed him how to take twins in trouble--how to get them out I've taught him about working with the sheep and what they like to do and don't like to do. So yah I think it's been a real partnership.

Marg and Rick have three young kids, two boys and a girl, ages two to six. This means they are both busy parents. It also means that at this point in her mothering, Marg's roles on the

farm tend to be what most would consider "traditional":

I guess right now basically it's really traditional...I stay home and look after the kids, and the house, do the cooking, you know that kind of stuff, though Rick can cook as well...Rick goes out to work and comes home and he does most of the daily chores...for right now, with the small kids...I'm the primary care-giver...but Rick does bedtimes, I help work in the barn if he needs it and if he's sick....Rick's better with equipment than I am, he's better at figuring out how to put something together, I'm a better knitter....I do all the reading and show him articles that I think he should [see]...it's been a real partnership.

Marg has made a conscious decision to be at home for her children. This was a motivating factor in her decision to farm in the first place. She likes having her family close to her on a daily basis and she feels it's important for her children to have their parents around on a regular basis. She also explained that having her kids grow up on a farm is important for them:

I like knowing my kids are growing up on the farm....Kids that grow up on farms...[get] a sense of responsibility and more of a connection to how things work because they see first hand where their food comes from....They see the role nature plays in weather and in growing food and how the weather affects growing food. (see Photo 12, below)

Photos from the Steeles' personal collection



MAY 1998

**Photo 12: Marg's two oldest children, Sarah and Mathew, with a lamb**

Being in nature and respecting it was something Marg highlighted as being important for herself as well:

it really connects me to something, it's almost spiritual...it's peaceful....Sure there's busy times on the farm but it's easier [than in the city] to just sit and find yourself....Even just sitting down under the tree--even if [the kids] are bugging yah every five minutes--...you have that stillness....

You see things and you think 'that's so amazing' like: just watching the birds. seeing the instincts that the sheep have,...that grass is growing but there's millions of little bugs in the ground that each have a job that are helping that plant grow....It's awe-inspiring, and it really makes me mad to know that people can look at it and just think 'well I can just flatten this and...rearrange this' and not appreciate like [that] that tree has been there for how many years.

In fact, for her, being in nature is more than a preference, it is a need. Her time at university helped her realize this:

I lived off campus third year with three other friends from first...year...and I had claustrophobia....We were in a subdivision, the houses were only three feet a part, and I [said] 'how can you live this close to other people?'....Maybe that's why I like being out here so much because...it feels familiar to me--...there's so much more space--I just...need that. I enjoy talking to people and I enjoy going to the city for a weekend...but I need to come back here. It's kind of scary in a way: I'm dependent on this ecosystem to keep me healthy.

Finally Marg said that farming on a small scale has several advantages:

big isn't always better...farming is I think unlike any other industry on the planet: it's not just a business...it's a lifestyle. It's really sad that it's got to the point where industry is changing the emphasis. It's companies that are farming now not just families. It's become more mechanical. [When] you break that connection between the farmer and his land, you break that whole ecosystem in a way. You're no longer looking after your land, you're just farming it for someone else, or it's a way to make money....You get less aware,...you do things [like say] 'okay, we're gonna spread fertilizer and then we're gonna plant, then we'll take it off, and then we'll spread more fertilizer'....You lose that whole connectedness I think.

**STORY:** My grandfather was here in the Spring, and he was telling me how when they mowed [the fields], his Dad used to mark all the nests in the pasture so he'd mow around them. Nobody does that any more....You're cut off from nature and you don't realize you need those insect to pollinate crops, you need those birds; everything is interconnected and once you start removing that, well then you get into real trouble.

Being small also means you can pace yourself more as a business: "that's one thing [about] going smaller:...it might take you twice as long to get where you wanta be but at least you can go at your own pace and you don't have to worry about being a million dollars in debt;...it doesn't put the same pressures on you either in terms of production."

### Strategies

Marg spoke often of the importance of family in a farmer's life. Although they do not live close to either hers or Rick's, Marg and Rick have developed strategies to keep in touch: "we phone, we call each other a couple times a week and the kids have learned to talk to grandma on the phone before anything else. They're quite used to talking and writing and...just working at it...I think it makes you appreciate your family even more when you have to work at it."

I asked her on our second visit whom she considered her community. She said her family was primarily her community. Even though she does not live close to them, she has brought their support with her. She also said the nearby town of Blyth was becoming their community. She and Rick have made a deliberate attempt to buy and make use of services locally. In this way they support and build their local community. She mentioned that many ecological farmers face a challenge of developing community with their farm neighbours but that that has not been much of a concern for them. She finds that having young children helps their family meet their neighbours.

Marg and Rick also use the 'cross-training' strategy mentioned earlier. This helps them both refresh the skills required for the various aspects of the farming business and keeps them involved. This in turn promotes their partnership.

### Advice for Others

Throughout the interview Marg offered little bits of advice that she has picked up while farming. Above all she stressed the importance of having the support of your family. It is also important to have good relationships with your neighbours: "neighbours [are] very important in farming, that you get along with them...sometimes they can be almost mentors." Her family "lucked out" as far as getting along with their neighbours. One of the families nearby has children three of whom play with Marg's three kids. A retired woman in the area runs a bed and breakfast and uses their freezer meat when she has guests. Another neighbour rents one of their fields and has developed a relationship with them. "it's people like that that really make a community...it's

been good." Perhaps most importantly, especially as a woman, Marg cautioned: "if you're going to be in a farming partnership you better make sure that your partner is someone you can trust and you know really well".

The rest of her advice dealt more with the logistics of farming. She said it's important to be prepared. She suggested getting subscriptions to farming magazines and reading up on what's going on in your field of interest or checking out the Internet for information. She encourages asking questions: "the more you read, the more you ask questions, the better off you are. Don't worry about looking dumb, don't worry about people laughing at you cause you don't know a thing, let them laugh. If you want to know, you find out what you want to know and then you'll know!" Marg also recommended developing a plan and map out not only your daily goals but your long-term vision. This, she said, is an effective way of keeping your focus and measuring your progress.

Yet she also cautions that you need to be flexible. You have to learn to balance your time and be realistic. Sometimes this means not accomplishing something you want to right away but using other measures first. She used the example of fertilizing their one field. It's a dangerously hilly field but they wish to spread it in manure from the sheep. At this point in their lives however they do not have the time or proper equipment to make this feasible and so they have someone come in to fertilize it instead. This is not ideal to them but it's a decision they've had to make given their present situation.

Along these lines Marg shares something's she learned from years of farming: "I think when you're farming you have to almost have a 'that's just the way it is' attitude. If you don't want to be over stressed, you have to be able to say 'well, you know, I can only do so much, and these things are going to happen' and let it go:...sometimes there is no 'why'".

Finally, if you're thinking seriously about farming, Marg stresses that you need to be fully committed: "if you're not really 100% involved in that commitment then forget it, it's not gonna happen". This means being willing to sacrifice regular vacations and days off. Especially if you have livestock, you have daily commitments; you have to make sure the animals are looked after.

#### After the Interview

Our conversation did not end after I turned the tape recorder off. Marg spoke some more



about the importance of her family, especially the support of her mother and mother-in-law. She showed me some of her sweater kits and brightly dyed wools. But I could sense that her children wanted their Mommy back and so I gradually made my way to the door. As we stood on the porch saying our good-byes, a Ruby Throated Hummingbird came motoring toward a patch of blue bells and hovered there for a moment, feeding on the flowers' nectar. As I watched it take off again I thought of something Marg had said earlier... "it's kind of scary in a way, I'm dependent on this ecosystem to keep me healthy". I thought about how we are all, like the hummingbird, dependent on this ecosystem.

## CHAPTER 10: CASE STUDY/ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

### My Background

McAdams (1996) talks about the importance of narratives or life histories in creating self-identity. He explains that we all reflect on our lives, and in order to make sense of it for ourselves we create stories about it and tell it to others (and ourselves). Particularly in today's society we strive for stories that include heroines and have a theme that highlights our life as culminating in a 'calling'--the "individual overcomes all odds and finds his/her destiny in life" theme. To do that we look through our past to pull together the threads that will help us weave those stories. And they become meaningful to us, a painting with which we can show others why we are here, why we exist, and how we exist. But we do not weave these stories alone, we are constantly interacting with those around us who add new characters, new plots and new interpretations.

I live in this environment: in today's individualistic society and in a story woven by my experiences, my culture, and personality. But, I recognize that these are not my stories only but reflect the influence of others as well. My story in turn influences the experiences and stories of others, my perception of their stories as well as what others share with me (Merchant, 1992; Kirby & McKenna, 1989). Articulating my own life story then is important in the holistic paradigm for several reasons. It is important for myself, the investigator and interested individual so that I may become aware of my influence on the women I dialogue with as well as the biases I bring to interpreting those dialogues. It is important also for the women who have spoken with me, as well as those who read what I have written here so that they may be aware of my motivations for carrying out this project as well as to unveil the 'mystery' that often cloaks academic research.

For these reasons, I give you a glimpse into my life story.

#### Herstory

I was raised in a quiet but steadily developing suburb of Winnipeg, Manitoba. My father was originally from a farming community of Dutch immigrants in Southern Ontario. My mother had immigrated with her Dutch parents to Winnipeg and had grown up there but met my father in Ontario. Rumour has it my father's parents were not too thrilled that a city girl had stolen the heart of their first born son. My folks relocated and began a family in Winnipeg.

Let me explain a bit about the Dutch folk that my family comes from. The Dutch are well known for their strong work ethics, farming abilities, and ingenuity<sup>10</sup>. Through sheer stubbornness and resourcefulness they acquired the majority of the land which now makes up the Netherlands from the North Sea. They were/are a fiercely religious folk though divided in Catholic and Protestant camps. My ancestors were from the Protestant group and brought their religion, resourcefulness and yes stubbornness with them to Canada after World War II.

In each North American settlement they set up Dutch religious communities within which to raise their children. I grew up in one such settlement. The sense of community we had was wonderful, as it is in many religious groups. As a kid it felt like being a separate entity within a much larger, scarier world of Winnipeg. As such it exposed me to some wonderful aspects of community living and distanced me from other aspects of city living, good or bad. I went to a Dutch Christian Reformed Church (twice on Sunday in fact, and three times during the week for other church events), I went to a Dutch Christian Reformed school (grades 1-9). Most of my friends were from Dutch families. I was effectively steeped in the values, ethics, and beliefs of this particular group of Dutch immigrants.

### Gardening

I've often asked myself why I feel such a strong connection to the earth when I was raised in the city with largely no exposure to the farming community. I think part of it has to do with my ancestral line or what a friend of mine calls the "collective unconsciousness". This refers to the culmination of information that has been passed down my family lines, information that has to do with my ancestors' preferences, experiences, and lives. My family line is full of farmers of various types and their love for the land has been passed down generations to my parents and to me.

I also attribute my attraction to nature to my parents, particularly my father. My Dad's farming childhood and his subsequent connection to the earth exerted itself in various ways despite the fact that he did not farm while I was growing up. My parents ensured that throughout my childhood, we as a family, would plant and nurture a large garden every summer. Each of us kids would have our own section to be responsible for. I still remember the first time I

---

<sup>10</sup> There is a popular story for example, of a young Dutch boy who stopped the North Sea from flooding the country by sticking his finger in a hole in one of the Dutch dams.

successfully grew an eggplant in my little garden patch. Only one small fruit could be supported by the spindly stalk that emerged from the seed but it was such an exotic thing to me. The look and feel of it at the end of the season filled me with more joy and pride than anything else I can recall since that time. I think perhaps that was when the gardening bug first bit, figuratively speaking.

I loved being able to eat fresh food from the garden. As our lives got busier we spent less time in the garden and eventually pretty much stopped it altogether. This was about the time I hit adolescence. This was not an easy time for me: I was often sick with colds, the flu, even pneumonia, and I always had a problem with acne. I went on a lot of medication to deal with the problem and I think this may have weakened my immune system even more. Today my interest in gardening has a lot to do with my health. I am determined to cleanse my body of the poisons it has accumulated and to re-build it.

### Nature

My attraction to nature was not restricted to gardening and health issues. I went on numerous camping trips throughout my childhood, some with family, some with friends, some through the church; sometimes to my grandparents' Ontario farm (see Photo 13, page 108), sometimes to a park or lake elsewhere in Canada or the United States. In every trip I would seek to find some quiet remote natural spot that would become mine alone, where I would go and just sit and be. These places of solitude in nature became important for my peace of mind.

As I grew older I could offer better guesses as to what these moments meant to me, I find myself even now seeking remote places where I can be by myself with nature. The more time I spend in these places the closer to nature I feel and the more I recognize that it has a personality of its own. I've begun to recognize that those times that I went to be by myself, I was in fact meeting and spending time with a dear and beloved friend. It became important to my spiritual and mental/emotional health. I've begun to realize that, as a new friend of mine so eloquently summed it up, I find my "soul in the soil".



**Photo 13: In my grandparents' barn on one of our vacations**

### Feminism

As I look back on my childhood I see it through two different lenses. When I put on the lens of my Dutch religious community I can see that my parents were fairly liberal in their approach to gender roles. They never discouraged my participation in school sports, chores around the house, or pursuing further education.

When I put on the lens of the public academia community I see that my parents were very traditional in their approach to gender roles. I was expected to be skilled in the “housework” chores (although my brother was never taught how to cook), my sports ventures were never taken seriously beyond their social role at school, and I am the first woman in my family to write a Master’s thesis.

The religion in which I grew up had a lot to do with encouraging traditional gender roles in my community. For the majority of my life I rarely questioned it. Yet when I moved away from home and proceeded to try to conduct a meaningful life on my own, I was struck by how many skills I lacked in order to accomplish it. I had very little financial, automotive, business, or competitive savvy. I was the epitome of a nice, gentle, “she’ll make some man a great wife” woman. To me, this was unacceptable. This realization prompted my interest in the social

conditioning of females, lack of women's representation in decision-making bodies, and lack of information on women's experiences. It also started me on a journey that would explore these issues and develop personal skills to become more independent.

### Agriculture

Part of becoming personally self-reliant for me, was learning more about growing my own food. When my family moved to Ontario (in 1994) and took over my grandparents' farm (see Photo 14), I lived in a farming community for the first time in my life. I witnessed the passion for farming that emerged in my Dad and experienced again my own history of a love for nature.



Photo from the van de Klipf personal collection

**Photo 14: My father (left) and grandfather (right) on the family farm**

Throughout my personal journey, I have been on many roads, one of which has led me to the field of psychology. Yet they all seem to point me back to the land in some way. Every summer I try to get work that keeps me outside and in nature for as long as possible. In the recent past, this has included working on a tobacco farm (I don't even smoke!), picking berries at an orchard, and even treeplanting. Despite the sometimes harsh physical labour involved in these jobs, I've always preferred them over any inside job I've ever had.

I was introduced to the concept of ecological agriculture and Community Shared Agriculture in particular, in an introductory community psychology undergraduate course, taught by my advisor Ed Bennett. I became a member of a local CSA called Fairshare Harvest and learned more about small-scale organic gardening. I attended my first Canadian Organic Growers conference in 1998. These experiences prompted me to pursue this topic further.

I ended my undergraduate degree by doing a project that collected stories from people living self-reliantly 'with the land' (van de Hoef, 1998). Their stories inspired me, I wanted to follow their examples--but how? What would it be like? These questions led in large part to this project: collecting stories from women working with the land in ways that reflect their connection to and respect for it. And it has brought me to a point where I can say too that I have found my 'calling', that the events and experiences in my life have begun to culminate at a point that brings them altogether. And like you've seen in the stories of the women in this document, this feeling is very powerful and very complex.

#### My Summer Internship

"I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach." (Henry David Thoreau, as cited in Fetterman, 1989, p.88).

#### Introduction

At the beginning of May I officially became the 'intern' of the Huron Community Garden. Bob is the head gardener and responsible for food production, Bev is responsible for the books, customer relations, and deliveries. They own approximately 100 acres. Three and a half acres are devoted to vegetables. Some of their land has been planted in hay/pasture, a portion is rented to a neighbour, another chunk houses the garden's water supply in the form of two ponds, and the rest

has been planted in trees and is gradually regenerating itself.

It would be as impossible to include all that I experienced in this document as it was to include everything the participating women shared with me. Since I have categorized and edited the stories of the women for easier reading, I will do the same with my experiences.

### Life at the Farm

I moved into a small two room cottage on a portion of the Budd's property. The cottage itself was a basic shelter. There were two beds, a couch, a couple of chairs, a propane fridge and stove, two propane lanterns, a woodstove, and a hand pump. There was no electricity and aside from the pump, no running water. I was at the mercy of an outhouse for the duration of my stay. One of the two ponds on the property was approximately 30 feet from my front porch and I was surrounded by lots of trees and bush (see Photo 15).



Photo by Sherry van de Preef

**Photo 15: My view off the porch of the cottage**

Only a weak walkman and the occasional outdated newspaper connected me to the outside world. A phone in the barn was my primary contact with family and friends but for the



most part I lived on my own, interacting primarily with Bob, Bev, and nature.

Life at the Budd farm certainly had its perks as I described in this May 4 journal entry: "The part of the farm I live on is truly an oasis. Surrounded by weeping willows, pines, poplars...and a micro-watershed (complete with 2 ponds and a creek, fed by natural springs), I and my cottage have the privilege of existing among a myriad of wildlife forms."

In the garden I prepped the soil (pulled twitchgrass, spread manure and straw mulch), planted, transplanted, weeded, irrigated, tilled, pruned, mulched plants, staked and strung up peas and tomatoes, maintained pest control, thinned plants, and harvested. I also occasionally cleaned and bedded the horse stalls, fed the horses, turkeys and chickens, and collected eggs. I helped build an electrical fence and set up a solar pump. I typically worked five and a half days (45 hours) a week, although as in any farming job that was flexible--dependent on weather and external activities.

### Highlights

My first few weeks of journal entries are dotted with the excitement of being in nature:

May 2: So many unfamiliar sounds--we heard a coyote cry tonight...I feel contented and excited. The landscape is beautiful. I'm excited to learn its ways.

May 4: This place is beautiful--I feel like I have a smile constantly on my face. Here I know that the land is bigger than me but that it's made some room for me and it's willing to teach me some of its mysteries if I respect it and take time to listen to it and to those who have learned from it already

Yet these qualities ironically scared me:

May 15: Being outside especially in the dark reminds me how huge the natural world is and how incredibly small I am. And you know--it's scary. I feel like I'm losing something--control? the illusion of control? like [the book] Ishmael talks about--the recognition that this perhaps wasn't all created just for humans, to 'dominate/rule'? It feels so much safer to be in my small cottage with familiar walls and furnishings. That's so sad.

I had no choice but to face nature head on so to speak--I lived in it daily. Gradually our relationship lost its edge of fear and we became better acquainted. On May 30th I wrote about how my relationship with insects--spiders, beetles, even earwigs--was beginning to change: "we can live together" I remarked. It was an obvious statement but one that held many implications.

In the cottage these insects were always around and I had to either spend a lot of energy getting rid of them or recognize them as part of the creatures of the world and co-habitants in something greater than both of us. When I thought of it in those terms, I no longer felt I had any right to squish or sweep them away. They had become partners and fellow travelers in the journey of life, which is not to say I became completely comfortable with them: "May 30: I have a desire to lie prostrate on the grass and let all the bugs walk, fly, land on me. But I dare not--for fear the bugs will walk, fly, land on me."

I ate delicious, healthy food (see Photos 16 & 17, pages 114 & 115). I began to learn more about the cycles of nature, for example, which birds I could expect to see around the pond that month and the succession of available vegetables and fruit. Putting food into your diet as they become naturally available certainly makes one appreciate their presence and notice their absence. It also makes you feel connected to the region you live in and it encourages your respect for the plants that provide in their own time.

May 30 I wrote: "I sit here and am in awe of the beauty, stillness, wildlife--my earth brothers and sisters. I want so much to be in an environment like this forever...." This sentiment echoed throughout later entries to the end of my stay.

I fell in love with the space, the smells, the trees, even the work, and especially the animals. I loved the horses: I loved getting to know their personalities or even just watching their agile bodies fly across the fields. I was amused by the turkeys who were ever curious and ever showing off. I was amazed by the chickens' ability to lay hard shelled eggs day after day.

The animals on the farm became part of my community (see Photo 18, page 116). This also included the 'non-domesticated' friends. I felt so much pride when the mated bluebirds successfully nurtured their babies after their first batch had died earlier in the Spring. I was thrilled when a wren hopped up on to my finger and stared me down one summer afternoon. And I was honored when a monarch butterfly trusted me to guide it on my finger out of the greenhouse to safety. I felt connected to these animals. They, like the insects, had become my neighbours, fellow members of the cosmos within which we all existed.

Photo by Sherri van de Hoef



**Photo 16: A display (first place winner) at a local fair of the produce from the garden**

The animals were not the only community at the garden. I had the privilege of meeting various folks from the area who were members of the garden. I did not meet them only at the garden. At one point a grade school in Goderich held a barbecue and invited Bob (and his garden helpers) to attend so that the students could express their appreciation for Bob's help setting up their small vegetable garden at school. A garden member at another point in the summer offered Bob and Bev (and their garden helpers) an opportunity to see the "Arrogant Worms" in concert in

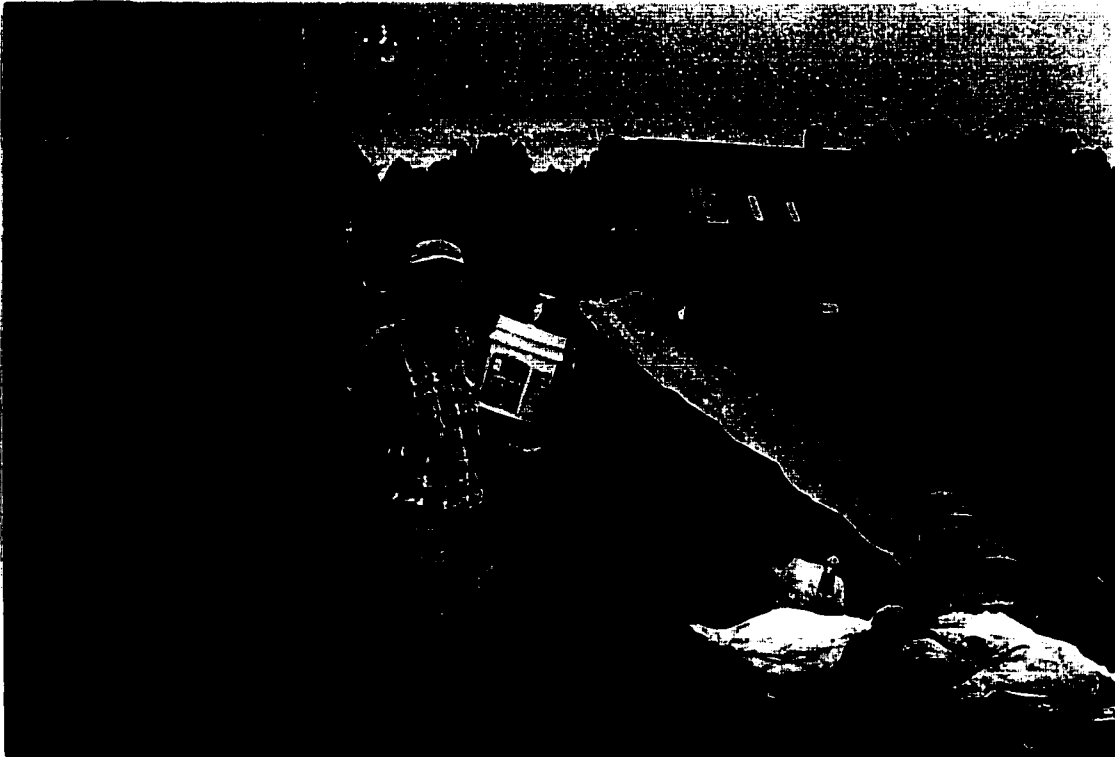
Goderich. I had the pleasure of attending these events and meeting various garden members during pick-up days. Everyone was very open and welcoming. I was offered rides, dinner, and invitations to visit any time in the future.

Photo by Diana van de Hooft



**Photo 17: Tomato and pepper plants in the greenhouse**

Photo by Chris Davidson



**Photo 18: Setting the turkeys free**

### Lessons

August 7: I love the rain, it is cleansing, it is freeing, it is lively  
 the droplets dance on the pond,  
 the moment between when they are a single drop and  
 when they become a part of a larger whole,  
 crashes upon them instantly.  
 i bet they don't know what hit them  
 they are sacrificial,  
 giving of themselves to contribute to a greater whole  
 ...to give meaningful life to the trees and plants around them

Gardening and the plants themselves held many valuable life lessons:

June 9: Hand hoeing is done completely on one's hand and knees. It is humbling...down in the dirt....It reminded me of the line in a U2 song--'if you want to reach the sky, better learn how to kneel'.

June 24: I love sunflowers--they are astute, strong, flexible, bold, diverse, and straightforward. They hide nothing but unabashedly display their heads to the sun. They are a metaphor for the way life should be lived.

I was exposed early on to what I consider to be one of the greatest ironies of life, that is, the cycle of growth and decay. Only one week into my work I made my way to the garden and found one of the farm dogs chewing on a headless rabbit (recently decapitated by a Great Horned Owl).

Shortly after, I accidentally destroyed a nest of baby mice. As I moved straw from a nearby pile to mulch the raspberry bushes I heard a frantic squeaking. I moved my boot to find a half-squished baby mouse and its newborn siblings scattered about it. I felt like I had violated a miracle of life. I did not like it, yet I was aware that from a gardener's perspective it meant fewer mice threatening the garden.

In June it became clear that I had a mouse 'problem' in the cottage. They were chewing through plastic bags to munch on my fruit, and at one point they became so bold I could see them running around my floor and hear them scratching in my easy chair. The romantic notion of cohabiting in this journey of life became a bit too much. I realized I had my limits: I would cohabit with mice as long as they stayed out of my cottage. To salvage my food and my space and to prevent a population explosion in the cottage I realized I would have to take measures I do not typically like taking. I set traps.

The first mouse I caught was snagged and making a terrible racket in the middle of the night by dragging the trap around the floor. I got up and let it go outside...a no-no if you're a serious trapper (it's like catching a fish and throwing it back: once bitten twice shy). It wasn't long before the same situation arose. This time I took matters into my own hands. I felt dirty, again like I had violated something. Was this the beginning of my evil demise?:

July 14: caught my second mouse tonight--killed my first. Last night's was snagged and making a terrible racket so I took it outside and ditched it, squirming into the grass. Tonight a mouse was nailed and done away with by the trap. A bittersweet moment--victory and success in the context of death and violence. I truly wonder if it is naturally possible to be a pacifist. I have my doubts.

July 18: the mice in the cottage have been waking me up at night (especially when they

jump in the garbage bag). I've set traps and caught three so far... Two nights ago the trap snagged one by the foot, a little guy. Its eyes pierced mine as it faked death, or prayed, I'm not sure which. I was tired of the mice 'running' the place so I grabbed a log and bopped it on the head. It was effective but didn't leave me feeling much better. Bob said 'good for you'. I suppose if I'm going to set traps I'd better be committed to killing the buggers. Again I realize how violent 'farm/outdoor life' can be. Perhaps this is a natural occurrence as species set and maintain their boundaries--necessary for survival.

I began to see parallels in gardening:

July 10: I am somewhat surprised by how much violence permeates the seemingly tranquil/nurturing act of gardening. It seems that I am always killing or attempting to kill something, whether it be pests (like cucumber beetles, potato beetles, cabbage butterflies, etc.) or weeds. And what are these things anyway? They are naturally occurring phenomenon that just happen not to fit into our plans.

Take for instance weeds. What is a weed? Well by definition it is a plant which we haven't planted, has no real welcome in the garden and yet seems to be extremely prolific in that environment. Ironically many of them are edible yet through some mysterious selection process they have not become staples or even delicacies in our diets. Perhaps this has something to do with their names--why eat lamb's-quarters or pigweed when we can grow and eat corn and carrots, at the former's' expense? And how odd it is that we set up a dinner fit for thousands of pests and bugs (in the form of straight rows of veggie varieties, different stages of growth, and easy access) and then send the message that they're 'off limits'?! Bizarre.

### Challenges

One would automatically expect a section in here on bugs. And yes there were times when they bothered me. For example: "June 10: Annoying!!! the 'midges' are out. They look like blackflies to me--and they swarm. If this keeps up I'll end up eating a whole swarm of 'em. They get in your ears, nose and eyes...Annoying!!"

My past experience treeplanting in Northern Ontario helped me put the bug issue into perspective. Yet oddly I hardly needed to rely on that coping strategy. Even Bob commented on how few bugs there were this summer, and he wondered if that was something he should be happy or concerned about: could it possibly be a symptom of something bigger?

The weather, particularly later on in the summer, was a huge challenge:

June 9: I am tired and sore and grumpy/withdrawn. The heat is oppressive, humidity is rolling in and the bugs are bad. The veggies are beginning to dry up and/or bolt in front of our very eyes. This can't keep up this way and expect us to stay 'happy'. I'm making

stupid mistakes..the fried brain syndrome. Some cool and wet weather would be so nice. Six days straight without a drop of rain and 25 degree plus weather is hard on the garden.

July 14: Pond water's gone down another couple of inches. I'd guess it's down about 4 inches since I got here in May. Soil is real dry--haven't had rain since the quarter of an inch last Thursday...it'll be a week tomorrow [and less than an inch total in two weeks]. They're calling for hot weather straight to the weekend (we're all going to parch).

For 23 days starting July 2, my weather log read: "hot and sunny" and "hot and humid". Throughout this period we only saw about a half inch of rain. Poor weather had implications for our crops, the health of the pond ecosystems, the trees and orchard, and the animals and for the gardeners. Sometimes Bob and I would have tense moments. As I look back through my journal and weather log I can see that a lot of those moments arose during particularly stressful weather conditions. I was glad to have a pond nearby to swim and 'cool off' in, in more ways than one some days.

Learning to use machinery was also a challenge:

May 4: Today I battled with the rototiller. It was my first experience with one and I had the pleasure to work with the Cadillac of rototillers--the Troy-Bilt "horse". I and the "horse" shared some words a number of times but I certainly did not let it get the best of me. By the end of the day we were on better terms--not best friends mind you, but civil. Although I dare say I got the worst of our battle. My body aches tonight, my hands throb from the jerks of the machine, the back of my neck is crispy and my fingers are dry from hoeing weeds--but I feel great!!

And even getting comfortable with the hoes and the concept of hoeing: "May 30: I gotta lower my standards a bit and work on the 'gestalt' I guess. You know, keep in mind that every area is not a goldmine and the idea is to cut back the weed competition so the veggies get the upper hand--not get rid of it altogether." Bob helped put it in perspective: "tilling is like a dance" he said, "hoeing is like ballet". I learned both dances.

Part of my frustrations also stemmed from being isolated, something I was not used to experiencing in the city. In the city I am able to get anything when I want to, call anyone when I want to, and flip on the TV if I begin to feel disconnected. At the farm I had new limitations:

May 26: ...beginning to crave familiarity and freedom/independence. Often feel in the way, like I should be fending for myself. Only I don't have a car, my own phone, a large



water source (for showers) yet, familiarity with this place, nor familiar people nearby nor consistent access from familiar people. Hmmmm....isolation?

May 27: okay, starting to feel 'stuck'. I am completely dependent on Bob & Bev...I'm not used to being so dependent...

### On Being a Woman

I also faced challenges stemming from what I perceived as being a woman in a predominantly male field. Bev and Bob held fairly traditional gender roles. Bev worked several days a week off the farm as the driver of a toybus for kids and a playgroup leader. She was responsible for cooking all the meals when home, cleaning the house, keeping the books, keeping in contact with the garden members, and preparing the pick-up area. Bob was responsible for the garden, the machinery and equipment, the animals, and the energy sources (a windcharger and solar panels). I was curious how my being there would fit into these established roles.

I found it particularly challenging when a 14 year old boy came to help out on the farm for a couple of weeks. My role seemed to dramatically change. Previously I had helped with all aspects of running the garden, now I was relegated to gardening duties only:

July 5: MEN. AACK....what irks me the most is feeling like I'm negligible--just another body to 'keep busy'. Come on surely I do better work than that?! I feel like my role is becoming more and more gendered=do the stuff that doesn't require any 'manly' skills (i.e. hammering, motors/machines, sawing, etc.) While I go out and plant, hoe and water, Bob and Karl<sup>11</sup> rototill, weed wack and drive the tractor. Why does this bother me so much? Perhaps because as an 'apprentice' here I was hoping to prove myself enough to be considered competent at all of the activities required. Perhaps it's a communication thing...Perhaps it's recognizing that many men find their work to be more important and powerful regardless of how mindless and short-term it might be and they in turn treat others accordingly (i.e. "I'm pretty amazing..where's dinner?!").

Several times I was willing to just give in and accept the fact that, because I am a woman, I am just not suited for some things. I began to question whether I or any woman could do the things we are not typically known to be good at:

July 1: Can a woman ever conduct a meaningful life for and by herself (without the assistance of a man?). We sure as hell aren't taught how to. That has to be the cruelest

---

<sup>11</sup> This is not his real name.

trick that society and our parents play on us as women...to raise us incapable of surviving long term on our own. It is the insurance of the neediness of women that assures men of a place in society I suppose. NO, why not raise women and men both to take care of themselves? Think of how strong relationships could be if men and women were taught how to build the skills necessary to survive on their own and then got together because of mutual interest and affection rather than mutual need. Our society is based on neediness...no wonder we're so screwed up!! Even those of us who try to build our own lacking skills aren't taken seriously...we're merely relegated into a box that others before us have decided to be in and others now decide we belong in. Forget that!!!

At this point I was interviewing the women in the study. I decided I wanted to spend more time with farming women. Starting the beginning of August I began working once a week with a woman nearby who owns her own art store and organic garden.

Birgit grows ornamental flowers and exotic herbs and paints. She sells these items and art and craft work of other local women in her new store. She has chickens, ducks, two sheep, two dogs and two cats. Her husband helps out but also works off the farm. Birgit showed me how to make soap, I learned the names and applications of herbs, some of which I had never heard of before and a bit about the strategies of going into business for yourself.

At about the same time I got together with Sue, a member of the garden. We began talking about goddesses and earth religion. She gave me the book Medicine Woman by Lynn Andrews (1981) to read. Andrews describes her journey to Northern Manitoba to learn about her strength as a woman from a Native medicine woman. Both of these experiences inspired me:

August 13: finished Medicine Woman. Wow. I am inspired to live life to the fullest, follow my heart, forget the 'trappings' of the world but go to the deeper places. Dig for the nuances, past the surface to the truth. Be courageous, be a warrior, find the animal spirit within me. Learn to see opposition as play (but competition as pointless). To value and respect my womanness for all things come from woman.

I began to read more about women, women's history, and nature:

August 22: the more reading I do on women, Earth, and power the more I learn about goddesses and 'primitive', traditional cultures. We, North Americans, seemed to have alienated ourselves from everything that is power giving, centred and truly rewarding. Are we all such suckers for punishment? Why can't we be content with the abundance, diversity and complexity around us in Nature? At night I gaze at Grandmother Moon at night and her twinkling children I am surprised and almost defensive to see satellites and planes hurtling across her giant stomach. Why are we always 'pushing the limits'? For

what purpose? Does it truly improve our quality of life? or merely numb our respect for the universe we live in?

I began to think that perhaps women do have a different connection to the Earth than men. And that maybe being a 'whole' woman doesn't necessarily mean imitating men, rather knowing yourself regardless of others' views. I read another book called Judith by Aritha Van Herk (1984). It is about a woman who starts a pig farm and the challenges she faces both from farming and her surrounding community. At one point she refers to a kinship she feels between her and her sows. This sense of connection motivates her to continue farming regardless of her lack of expertise in what is typically considered 'male' domains. You get the sense from reading the book that it is her ability to connect to her sows that makes her a true farmer.

### After the Summer

Returning to the city after four months at the Budds, was I think the biggest challenge:

Aug. 31: Being in town again is depressing. So many people, shiny cars, buildings, foul smells and no quiet—always noise....Being here makes me feel estranged—like I left something or someone really important behind somewhere and I'm not sure I can get it back. It's sad, it's making me angry.

Sept 5:

torn grass

concrete curbs

uprooted trees

"make way for the Monopoly houses!!"

I'm told it's progress

progressing to what?

Sept. 1: "the knowledge I have gained over the summer regarding gardening, nature, outdoors, myself, seems to have no place in this concrete vacuum sealed world."

Sept. 10:      i live now in a manufactured world  
                    my air is manufactured  
                    my rooms are manufactured  
                    my food is manufactured  
                    conversations are manufactured  
                    friendships are manufactured  
                    i live in a humanfractured world

Even though I am surrounded now by people in the city, I can't help but think that something (or someone) is missing. I think Theodore Roszak says it best: "an instinctive camaraderie with nature needs the living presence of nature--as autonomously there before us as we would want any loved one to be. That means scaling back the urban-industrial dominance in order that the wild things may have the autonomy they need to survive with us in biocentric community" (p. 313).

## CHAPTER 11: SUMMARIZING THE FINDINGS

What is the experience of farming like for these five women? As evident in their stories, it is unique and personal. Yet there are similar themes in their stories. My purpose in presenting a collective summary of what they shared is to glean some lessons from their experiences--to help myself and others better prepare ourselves for similar lifestyles, to add to the field of psychology a better understanding of women's experiences in a new area of study, and to gain a better understanding of the potential for ecological agriculture in promoting healthy communities.

### Collective Summary

#### Demographics

All of the women farmed on less than 300 arable acres. All five of the women are married and farm with their spouses. The women are considered legal partners in the farm business, although in Ellinor's case, she is part of an association that holds the farm land in trust and makes business decisions. All of the women had mixed farms (that is, a combination of a variety of animals as well as crops-including vegetables and fruit). Through their choice to farm, Martha, Cathy, and Marg continued a family tradition of farming, Marilew initially farmed as a result of marrying her husband, and Ellinor had an interest in farming when she was a child, although her family did not farm.

Martha, Marilew, Ellinor, and Cathy are currently certified organic. Marg is not but she and her husband utilize responsible, ecological farming practices. Both Ellinor and Cathy use biodynamic farming practices. Ellinor has been farming the longest (27 years) and Marg has been farming the shortest amount of time (6 years). Ellinor and Cathy are the only women who have been farming organically from the beginning, 27 years and 14 years respectively. Martha has been farming organically for 10 years, Marilew for 7 years, and Marg does not farm organically. All five women have children. Martha and Cathy have two teenagers. Marilew and Marg have three young children (ranging from pre-school to elementary school age). Ellinor has two adult children (who no longer live at the farm).

#### Common Themes

Chiappe and Flora (1998) and Beus and Dunlap (1990) highlight eight themes common among men and women who farm ecologically. These are: independence, community,

decentralization, harmony with nature, diversity, restraint, quality of family life, and spirituality (see Table 1, pages 14-15). These elements were evident to some extent in the life stories of the women, though in some they were presented more directly than in others. I will use these elements to highlight the common themes evident in the women's stories. Although these elements have been presented in the above studies as distinctly separate categories, I found that in this study several of them overlapped significantly. To maintain the integrity of their presentation and connectedness I have combined them accordingly.

### Independence

Several of the women said that 'being their own boss' was a highlight of their farming experience. Having a small-scale operation decreased the amount of external inputs required to maintain it and therefore increased their role and involvement. Marilew admitted that she did not initially feel very involved in the business but is taking concrete steps to become more involved, including taking over the book-keeping of the farm enterprise. Several of the women expressed a distrust of technology and highlighted that their farm styles allow them to be self-reliant. All of the women utilized a minimal amount of technology on their farms. Martha's family as an illustration uses horses for their farm work and transportation.

### Decentralization and Community

These two elements typically overlapped in the women's stories. As mentioned, three of the women come from farming families. Their choice to farm therefore continues a rural tradition established among their ancestors. Farm work to all the women, and these three women particularly, was seen as a lifestyle and/or life 'calling' as well as a business.

The food production, processing, and marketing practices among the women, reflect a decentralized system. All of the food is grown and/or raised on the farm premises and any processing (e.g. butchering, sheep shearing) is done by local community members. Cathy, Ellinor, and Martha's primary customer base originates from their closest urban areas. Marg and Marilew's products (lamb freezer meat/wool and organic milk/eggs respectively) are sold in the broader market but still within the country and primarily within their regions. All of the women, verbally or through their business connections, emphasize the importance of connecting to and supporting their local communities.

However, all of the women considered their closest personal communities to be comprised of others who had similar interests to their own as opposed to their geographical communities (which tended to include mostly conventional farmers). These 'communities of interest', although separated in many cases by considerable distances, still maintain an important source of support for the women. Sunnive Farm (Ellinor) provided an excellent example of a community base that rallied together to support the farm when it experienced financial difficulties in 1998. Concerned members of their extended community provided them with resources and financial gifts to support them through that difficult period.

#### Harmony with Nature, Spirituality, and Quality of Family Life

These elements were most often connected for the women. All of the women highlighted their love of nature as an important element for why they farm and why they enjoy farming. All of the women utilized farming practices that attempt to imitate nature. A requirement of organic certification is the complete absence of chemical inputs on the farm. Four of the women meet this requirement. The fifth woman, Marg, utilizes chemical inputs out of current necessity but does so sparingly and cautiously.

An important motivator for the absence or minimal use of chemicals was their potential impact on the health of the women's families. All of the women discussed their wish to provide healthy environments for their children (whether that be in terms of growing healthy food or reducing exposure to potentially harmful chemicals). Additionally, they saw nature as presenting important qualities for their family's life. For example, Marilew, and Marg highlighted the importance of physical space for their children to play in. They also saw farming as an opportunity for their children to become connected to natural cycles and learn responsibility. Martha and Cathy saw their farming enterprises as opportunities to involve their children and provide them with employment opportunities at home. Finally, Martha saw gardening as complementing her nurturing and mothering skills as she raised plants and produce from seeds.

All of the women in some way highlighted that their farming styles were a reflection or important component of their spirituality. Contrary to Chiappe and Flora's (1998) findings, this spiritual element was not distinctly separate from a connection to the natural ecology. For example, Martha stated that: "my spirituality is nature based to a large extent. Gardening

organically is something that I am in tune with spiritually." Marg said that being in nature "really connects me to something, it's almost spiritual...it's peaceful". Ellinor described the need for humans to respect their natural environment. She suggests this would occur if people viewed natural elements, like water for instance, as "holy". Cathy describes the art of farming as if it were an extension of her soul or spirit. Marilew also talks about how the peace and quiet of nature replenishes her soul. For these women, nature is a medium for and a source of their spirituality.

### Diversity

The women in this study appreciated the diversity of a mixed farm. For Martha and Cathy it meant that they could make use of their varied skills and appreciation for detailed work. Additionally they, as well as Ellinor and Marg, highlighted that their love for animals was best suited to a mixed farm where livestock play an important role (e.g. providing manure, labour, and a balance of "kingdoms"). Cathy and Marilew emphasize the fact that mixed farms present a variety of physical and mental stimulation and challenge. Marg also stressed that mixed farms offer more security in a rapidly changing agricultural landscape. Also along these lines, Ellinor and Cathy expressed an appreciation of being able to interact with their customers while connecting them back to the land and to the food production process. In Ellinor's case this includes building a store from earth and animal materials to give her customers a rich natural experience that they would never have elsewhere.

### Restraint

Many ecological farming styles have been given the label 'subsistence farming'. For most people this conjures up images of severe, minimalist, even primitive lifestyles. Ecological farmers reflect a variety of different lifestyles but they are commonly simple when compared to many of their conventional farming neighbours or urban counterparts. The women in this study have made conscious decisions to simplify their lives. For Marilew this means not enrolling her children in a variety of after-school lessons and activities but utilizing the farm as a setting in which her children can explore and learn. For Martha and her family it has meant switching their source of transportation to horse and buggy to minimize excessive use of non-renewable resources. Ellinor, her family, and on-farm help, have been building their new store by hand using basic, locally



accessible building materials which in turn minimizes the need to bring in external sources. Cathy and her husband rely on their own knowledge and experience to develop cultivation timings and alter their field equipment to promote efficient food production rather than buying new, state of the art, equipment. Marg and her husband pay attention to their sheep flock's unique characteristics and qualities to promote lambing cycles that will allow lambs to finish on pasture rather than buying in more grain.

Based on their experience, restraint in ecological farming is partly a product of the financial imitations of small scale agriculture and partly a reflection of their underlying ecological philosophy of farming.

### The Women's Perspectives

Three of the women highlighted that conventional farming in its present state is a 'man's world'. Specifically, Martha, Marilew and Ellinor expressed a dislike for using tractors and other machinery on the farm. Marg also indicated that she drives tractor only when necessary. The women considered small-scale farming an opportunity to grow food in ways that were more rewarding for them. Cathy was the exception in that she genuinely enjoys working with machinery. However, she did comment on the lack of involvement of her female neighbours on their highly mechanized neighbouring farms. She also mentioned that her tractor was 'a small one', again suggesting that women are attracted to more small-scale, detailed farming practices.

Ellinor stressed the need for women to 'bring the female element back into society' and specifically farming. It was difficult for her to explain what exactly that female element is, but she used words like 'warmth', 'mothering', and 'community' to describe it. She indicated that big business farming is a 'cold' way of farming, referring to the lack of connection between big business farmers and their land and animals. She suggested that this type of farming is encouraged more so by men than women. All of the women commented in some way about the importance of their lifestyle for their family, community health and relationships, and nature.

### Advice for Others

At the top of the list of advice for others wishing to farm, the women stressed the importance of a one hundred percent commitment. Before making that commitment they suggested being prepared. Marilew stressed the importance of first knowing yourself and

particularly your motivation for farming ecologically (i.e. that it's a personal conviction not merely a response to a partner's desire). Martha, Marg, and Marilew also suggested doing research about ecological agriculture by reading, asking people questions, surfing the Internet or subscribing to agricultural magazines. All of the women indicated that the Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario is an excellent resource to help get started. Martha and Marg talked about having realistic expectations. Martha stressed that ecological farming is not typically a big money maker and that you should be prepared for that. Marg indicated the importance of recognizing that farming does not always go as planned so farmers need to be flexible and adapt accordingly.

Other preparation suggestions included 'don't worry about money or what others think of you', 'have a positive attitude', 'work at maintaining a balance with your partner', 'get started early', 'learn to appreciate simple things', 'be willing to work hard', and 'be organized/have a plan', and 'stick to your dreams'.

Cathy, Marg, Ellinor, and Martha also stressed the importance of having support, especially from a partner, family, and community. Because small scale farming is labour intensive they emphasized that it is important that your partner have similar interests, be trustworthy, and supportive of your role on the farm. It is important to have a supportive family and community to minimize one's sense of isolation and to provide help when needed.

### Challenges and Concerns

All of the women talked about being physically busy and tired especially during the summer season. The combination of farm work, customer relations, household, and family duties encourage exhaustion among these women. Although several of them indicated that the work was fairly balanced between them and their husbands, I did not get the impression that this type of farming provides more leisure family time, as suggested by Chiappe and Flora's (1998) study. Yet, none of them mentioned this as being a particular concern. Many of the women in this study regularly work with their family or are 'stay-at-home' moms, which could perhaps decrease the amount of time necessary to set aside specifically for family related activities.

Financial concerns were an issue for most of the women. Martha and Ellinor stressed the fact that there is little money in small-scale farming to hire help on the farm. These women rely primarily on volunteer help through WWOOFing and other apprentices. Marg's husband is

forced to maintain off-farm work to supplement their farm income and support their family. Marilew and her husband have recently started a laying hen operation to supplement their income. Cathy did not directly express any financial concerns. However, she is in a unique situation which allows her to take advantage of the financial support of long-term market customers as well as the current demand for organics in a nearby urban area.

All of the women also talked about the challenges of living in rural Canada. They indicated that their geographical neighbours are composed primarily of farmers who have different philosophies than theirs. Although many of them women get along fine with these neighbours, they see their community as primarily comprised of other ecological farmers who in many cases are scattered around the province and in one case overseas. For Marilew and Marg, the lack of like-minded farmers in their area has created some sense of isolation. For Marg and her husband this is coupled with having to relocate near a source of off-farm work and away from family.

Martha, Ellinor, and Marg also discussed the changing landscape of agriculture. Martha and Marg specifically highlighted impending threat to family farms as more people move to urban areas and these areas encroach on farm land. Ellinor and Marg also express concern about the increasing corporatization of the food systems. Specifically they mention that the decreasing number of farms and their increasing size encourage the disappearance of family farms and places the control of the food system in the hands of few.

Ellinor and Cathy also expressed frustration at the lack of public awareness and research regarding organic and especially biodynamic farming. This creates barriers for farmers who wish to improve their farming methods and more effectively market their products. For example, neither of them have chosen to be certified biodynamic growers partly because this form of certification means so little to the Canadian public.

### Conclusion

In summary, the women's stories reflected the elements of ecological agriculture as highlighted by Beus and Dunlap (1990) and Chiappe and Flora (1998) although unlike these studies, some of the elements could not be discussed as distinct from each other. Specifically, the elements of 'decentralization' and 'community' were interrelated as well as 'harmony with nature', with 'quality of family life' and 'spirituality'. The women discussed their preference for

small-scale detailed farm work over large-scale, mechanized work. They gave practical suggestions for others wishing to farm ecologically which centred around being prepared, fully committed to the lifestyle and having support. Finally, the women highlighted concerns about the changing landscape of rural Canada, particularly the future of family farms, as well as the challenges of finances and juggling farm work with family responsibilities.

### My Experience Farming Ecologically

My experience farming ecologically was both different and similar to the experiences of the five women I interviewed. First, I interned which meant my time and my responsibilities were limited. Second, my motivations for farming ecologically are similar to many of the woman, as I will discuss in a bit, but a major difference between us is the fact that I am a single women with no children. Finally, it was my first time farming on a scale that fed others beside myself, and although it is a lot of work, the novelty of it certainly had not worn off by the end of the summer. Therefore my experience can hardly compare to these women. Yet, that said, there were many similarities as well.

To begin, like many of the women, my motivation for farming ecologically is primarily my love for nature and my desire to live in a healthy environment. I was not disappointed. I ate amazing, healthy food, and I had an opportunity to develop a connection with nature that has convinced me even more so of its importance in my life.

I certainly do not want to romanticize my experience however. Physically and mentally, farming ecologically is very exhausting. Day after day of hoeing, weeding, irrigating, harvesting, pruning, etc. kept me in shape but did not leave me with energy to do much at the end of the day. The weather and bugs, particularly at certain parts of the summer, were particularly hard on my psyche. This was evident with Bob, the head gardener and my 'boss', as well. We had many discussions about the dramatic change in weather over the past few years and current research on climate change. Part of the tensions of farming ecologically is being at the mercy of the climate that everyone around the world has an impact on.

Like the women I talked to, money was a frustration for me. At one point in my internship, I had decided that I wanted to start my own farm as soon as possible. I sat down and played with numbers to determine how I could make it happen. It was a depressing exercise. I

quickly realized the expenses of purchasing land, equipment, and paying off my school debts, were too much to deal with in a short period of time. Even if I was to find farm land cheap enough I most likely would have to let it regenerate for several years to replenish the land naturally before growing anything on it. In today's currency directed world, it's next to impossible to survive without some form of meagre income. I've set my sights a bit further in the future, after I have paid down more of my debts. And although I would love to farm ecologically in the meantime to build my farming skills, positions like my internship do not pay nearly enough to make this a realistic option.

Yet there is so much I love about farming this way. I particularly enjoyed the presence of animals on the farm and getting to know them as part of my community. I was in awe of the enormity of the natural world around me, even on our little piece of it. And I was pleasantly surprised by the connectedness between the all who were involved in the garden. Garden members would come out to help with the harvest in exchange for discounts on their produce. Doctors would work beside bank tellers, actors worked with homemakers. Members were there because they believed in healthy food, healthy environments, and healthy community. Subsequently, they supported the garden as their own, through financial resources, by physically helping out, or generating ideas for the farm. One group of garden members designed and sold garden t-shirts and sweaters while I was there, on their own initiative as a fundraising project.

Godwin Ashiabi's (1995) Masters thesis about the Huron Community Garden went studied in-depth the psychosocial benefits of this particular CSA. He found that the CSA promoted a sense of empowerment, increased social vitality, and prompted educational opportunities among the members of the garden. Although my research at the garden was less rigorous than Godwin's, my experiences certainly validated his findings.

Finally, I loved the sense of self-reliance that I developed while on the farm. I value the ability to provide for myself whenever possible. Farming ecologically provided me with a sense of what it will be like when I can grow food for myself, use my creativity to develop efficient farm practices, and share these experiences with others. It was a huge boost to my sense of ability and possibility.

## CHAPTER 12: DISCUSSION

This project was motivated by several specific questions centred around the experiences of women farming ecologically. First, based on the fact that the research gathered about ecological agriculture was primarily from men (Chiappe and Flora, 1998; Meares, 1997), I was curious whether women perceived this type of farming in the same way. Second, given that ecological agriculture is based on an interdependent, egalitarian model (see Figure 6), I was curious about whether Canadian women farming ecologically (specifically in Ontario) experience balanced, rewarding work settings (as highlighted by Chiappe and Flora's (1998) study of American women) or if they feel overwhelmed (as highlighted by Meares (1997) study of American women). Thirdly, Chiappe and Flora's (1998) study of American women suggests that ecological farming practices frees up leisure time for families. I wished to determine if ecological farming was a viable and healthy opportunity for families. Finally, as suggested by Bennett and Campbell (1996), I wished to expand the ecological perspective of community settings subscribed to in Community Psychology to include the natural ecology. Specifically, I explored the role of the natural ecology in these women's experiences.

These areas were studied using a flexible research method that recognized and validated the unique individual experiences of the participating women while incorporating my potential biases. Specifically I used a life story, narrative approach coupled with a case study and ethnographic perspective of my experiences.

This section will discuss in concise terms how the findings of this study illuminate the above questions and my experience in using these methods, as well as pull together the answers to the above questions as presented by the women's life stories and my personal case study. It will also highlight the contributions and limitations of this research as well as make suggestions for future research and action on this and related topics. I will end with some personal thoughts about the journey that this project has taken me on and its impact on my life.

### Overview of Findings

#### The Women's Perceptions of Ecological Agriculture

Recent studies on male ecological agriculturalists propose several core elements that differentiate ecological agriculture from conventional agriculture (Beus and Dunlap, 1990). These

elements are independence, community, decentralization, harmony with nature, diversity, restraint (see Table 1, pages 14-15). Chiappe and Flora's (1998) study suggested that women farming ecologically also reflect these elements. Their study added two unique and distinct elements to those generated by Beus and Dunlap, namely "quality of family life" and "spirituality".

The women's life stories in the present study reflect all eight of these elements, demonstrating the importance of the additional elements highlighted by Chiappe and Flora (1998). However, unlike the above studies, the elements were not distinctly separate from each other but were intimately related. Specifically the elements of 'decentralization' and 'community' overlapped. That is, the women and their community have developed a reciprocal relationship that allows the women's businesses to thrive in their local markets. The elements of 'quality of family life', 'spirituality' and 'harmony with nature' were also significantly related. That is, the primary motivator for most of the women's choice to farm ecologically was its promotion of a healthy physical and spiritual environment for themselves and especially their family. Being able to provide a healthy environment for their family in turn gave them a sense of wholeness.

Chiappe and Flora (1998) also suggested that ecological farming practices allowed for more family leisure time. The life stories of the women in the present study do not suggest that this is the case. However, several of the women were 'stay-at-home' moms and those who were not did work with family members in the field(s) or barn(s). Cathy for example, highlighted the difference between her family's farm and the neighbours' farms. She stressed that, whereas the neighbours hesitate to allow their children to become involved in the operation (and subsequently their children are not interested), her children are employed at their farm, and they love it! The women therefore present ecological agriculture as a viable option for promoting family cohesion and health. They also stress the importance of family and community support for farming. However, they also highlight the lack of local infrastructure supports available to them. Specifically, family members typically did not live in their local areas (the women had to relocate for financial reasons or to available parcels of farmland), and the community they feel most connected to outside of their family also tended to be scattered outside of their local geographic area. The inaccessibility then of these supports could also contribute to the lack of leisure time the women have.

Goldberger et al (1996) and Cummins (1996) have found that women more so than men emphasize the ability and opportunity to build meaningful relationships as crucial to developing a healthy and meaningful lifestyle. The stories of the women in this study validate these findings. All of them indicated that interacting with their communities and family were motivators and highlights of their choice of farming style and again, it is tough if not impossible to farm without the supports of these groups. Yet ironically few of them have these supports available to them within their local areas. However, as Ellinor's experience highlighted, communities of interest can be effectively supportive even from outside of their geographical area.

### Women as Farm Partners

The underlying holistic philosophy of ecological agriculture suggests that women would also experience more balanced, egalitarian roles on ecological farms (see Figure 6). Yet, Meares (1997) found that in families who made the transition to organic farming, the women found their days to be more busy than their husbands' because of their increased involvement in the farm in addition to their family and house responsibilities. All of the women in the present study were considered equal partners in the farm business, some were solely responsible for specific enterprises on the farm (e.g. Ellinor and Martha). However, they also indicated that they are primarily responsible for the house and family duties in addition to field and/or barn responsibilities. Not surprisingly, several of the women expressed being exceptionally busy and often very tired. Physical exhaustion, in fact, was one of the main challenges of farming ecologically that these women addressed. These findings would suggest that women's dual roles and responsibilities place them in unbalanced positions on the farm.

Yet, several of the women also discussed the effect of changes in rural communities. If we look at these changes closely they shed a bit more light on the subject. Many of them talked about the movement of people from rural areas to urban centres. Therefore there are fewer people in rural communities to support each other. This is coupled with the fact that many of the women's neighbours subscribe to an individualistic, large-scale farm-style and as such have little in common with ecological farmers, nor much opportunity to get to know their ecologically farming neighbours. Additionally, there appears to be more of an individualistic emphasis in today's communities (in both rural and urban areas) versus a collective one. Marilew in particular



highlighted the frustration of having someone offer help but not be willing to act on that offer. Most of the women also indicated that their perceived community was comprised of like-minded others who were typically scattered around the province or overseas. Finally, the isolation that several of the women talked about originates not only from a sense of loneliness but also a lack of resources to assist them in their mothering and household duties. As Mann (1999) and Ceborateg (1994, 1988) highlight minimal to no supportive services (such as rural child care) presently exist in most rural communities.

Previous studies have indicated that women tend to put in 'double' or 'triple' days on the farm because of the lack of supports available in their communities and the financial strains of farming that force them to take a more active role in the fields or barns (Meares, 1997; Waring, 1997). House and family work, as highlighted earlier, is not considered an economic contribution to society and therefore is overlooked when it comes to agricultural policy-making. This problem is exacerbated when we look at the lack of female representation at decision-making levels. As Nesmith and Wright (1995) explain, only 40% of the workforce in the four primary resource ministries in Canada (including the Ministry of Agriculture) are women. Of these, over 90% are in clerical/supervisory clerical jobs. Without adequate representation at policy-making levels there are minimal challenges to the assumption that women's household work is less meaningful than economic agricultural transactions (and therefore less worthy of government support) (Waring, 1997). I would argue that the exhaustion and frustration that many of these women experience has much to do with the tensions of practicing lifestyles built on the philosophy of the Alternative Paradigm within a society that is built on the philosophy of the Conventional Paradigm. That is, these women emphasize collective self-reliance within a setting that does not provide adequate infrastructure supports.

In an effort to challenge these assumptions and situations, the women in this study are all considered legal partners on their farm. As Marilew put it "it's a statement that says 'no matter what my wife does, even if she's in the house a hundred percent of the time, she's still contributing to the farm!'"

#### Women's Advice to Others

It was unanimous among the women (and I would agree from my own experience) that

ecological farming is a lot of work. It's even more so now, given the climate of agriculture today, as highlighted above. Most of them spoke first or the most about the challenges of farming ecologically. Therefore all the women stressed the need to be 100% committed to the lifestyle and all that it embodies. It is not an easy way to live. However, their stories also demonstrate the rewards of such a lifestyle. It is equally evident that these rewards and highlights are powerful and important enough to warrant the extra work and sacrifices that are a part of living simply.

In addition, the women stress the importance of support, from a partner, family, and community if possible. Ecological farming is not merely an attempt to remove oneself from mainstream society. It's based on a philosophy that requires and promotes a support system that in turn builds healthy individuals, families and communities (see Figure 6).

#### The Importance of Nature

Current research demonstrates the importance of the relationship between the natural ecology and human health (Suzuki & McConnell, 1997; Winter, 1997; Kidner, 1994; Roszak, 1992). The role of the natural ecology was and is primary in these women's experiences and my own. Additionally, it is intimately related with the women's interest in the quality of their family life, as well as their own sense of spiritual wholeness. As highlighted in the women's stories, several of the women chose to farm ecologically as a result of their appreciation and respect for the natural environment. Additionally they see the natural environment as an important component of the health of themselves, their family, and their community. That is, they stress the importance of a healthy environment for healthy people. Specifically, the women expressed that they feel a sense of wholeness from being and working in nature with the soil and animals. They also value the ability of the natural ecosystem to produce nutritious, tasty food for their families and communities. Finally, they recognize their role in nature as simply a component in a bigger ecosystem, which subsequently should be treated responsibly and with respect. These qualities in combination also promote healthy individuals, healthy families, and healthy communities.

This again is offset in part by the isolation the women feel in a rural community that is losing its community, as well as among neighbours who farm with very different life philosophies. Yet it is a strong motivator and component of meaningful, healthy living. Threats to nature, as highlighted by current climate change concerns, directly threaten the health of individuals, families

and communities.

Community Psychology has typically ignored this element of human existence (McKenzie-Mohr & Oskamp, 1995; Oskamp, 1995; Kidner, 1994). The women's stories suggest that psychology must broaden its focus to include the natural ecology when evaluating and promoting individual, family and community health.

#### Personal Reflections on the Research Process

My choice of a combination of a narrative and case study/ethnographic approach was based on a desire to ensure that the research process itself was an empowering one for all involved. In recognizing the historical silencing of women in various arenas, it was important that the methods were flexible and collaborative. It was also important to me that these women recognized my own personal motivation for conducting this research (i.e. my desire to farm ecologically) and therefore interning on an organic farm added credibility to my claim, increased my skills and knowledge base in ecological farming, and increased my understanding of the women's experiences.

I feel that the chosen methods accomplished these goals. Several of the women took advantage for instance of the flexibility of the topic guide (Appendix A). Two of the women preferred a more traditional interview format and again the narrative approach was flexible enough that I could ask these women direct questions without dominating our conversation.

Each of the 'interviews' felt more like conversations to me and, judging by the women's comments afterwards, to them as well. Several of the women commented to me that they valued the time we had sat and talked together. One stated that "it's important that women talk like this with each other". In addition to appreciating an opportunity to share their stories with me, most of the women indicated to me on our second visit together, that they had also shared their stories (in the form of the summaries I had written) with their families and/or partners. Of those who had, they all commented that their family members enjoyed the opportunity to learn more about the women and their personal views of their lifestyles. For myself, listening to and writing stories from these women helped ground the experience of farming ecologically (as suggested by Gussow, 1999).

Finally, encouraging the use of different art forms to illustrate the women's experiences,

was also an opportunity to explore different methods of expression. By doing so I learned for example that Marilew is a commissioned artist and that Marg is an accomplished designer in addition to being mothers and farmers. By including examples of their work in this document the women's stories are more expressive of various elements of themselves, rather than relying on their verbal expressions alone.

My own experience interning added to the richness of this project. Not only was I able to spend time with these women, but I could better understand the elements of farming that they shared with me. It also gave me a greater appreciation for their commitment as I was often exhausted as well during our conversations. The combination of all of these elements made the research process a rewarding one for myself and for the women who participated.

#### Contributions to the Literature

By exploring the experience of women farming ecologically in Southern Ontario, this project contributes a new collective voice in the Canadian literature about alternative agriculture. Past research in this area has focussed primarily on the United States (Chiappe and Flora, 1998; Meares, 1997). It also adds to an area of literature that has only superficially looked at women's experiences in ecological agriculture. This addition critiques and builds on the information available about ecological farming practices.

Specifically this study demonstrates that women's experiences in ecological farming do reflect more opportunity to be meaningfully involved in the food production process as suggested by the underlying holistic paradigm of ecological agriculture. However, this experience is limited by the conventional paradigm that permeates the majority of the agricultural field. As highlighted earlier, women's reproductive capabilities and roles bind them to their families and households more than men. The lack of appreciation for these roles in policy making and the lack of like-minded community members in close proximity to mothers, increases their burdens on the farm and therefore promotes tensions and challenges for women farming ecologically.

The women's life stories ultimately do present ecological farms as a healthy environment for raising a family in spite of these challenges. The opportunities to connect to nature, eat healthy nutritious food, and help out on the farm are qualities that the women highlight as important for their children.

The natural environment was highlighted as an important component of the women's personal overall health, as well as their family and community's health (refer to Figure 6). This relationship between natural ecology and individual and community health is particularly important to the field of community psychology. This project contributes evidence to the community psychology literature that natural ecology is an important element of an ecological understanding of health issues. This affirms it as a mandatory area of exploration for community psychologists.

Finally, the process of this project contributes documentation of a non-traditional approach to researching community settings that is based on holistic, empowering principles. As Kathryn Church (1995) courageously illustrated in her dissertation Forbidden narratives: Critical autobiography as social science, personal stories are not typically seen as acceptable research in academic institution. I hope that through this project I have challenged that assumption. I think these women's stories describe and illuminate their personal experiences in ecological farming better than any survey or rigid interview format ever could. The use of a narrative approach coupled with a personal case study and ethnography encouraged a well-rounded, honest presentation of the experiences of women farming ecologically. This process ensured that the participants and researcher had an enjoyable, collaborative role throughout the study.

#### Research Limitations and Suggestions for the Future

##### Future Research

Although it was attempted to include the women as much as possible throughout the process it must be highlighted that their involvement was limited by many factors, including geographical distance and time constraints. Therefore I was the primary contributor to the study. This increases the potential for my biases to permeate the study as well as present inaccurate representations of the women involved. To ensure that this is not the case, the women have been involved in a consistent feedback process. Additionally, by including my experiences in the project, the potential biases that I had while interpreting these women's stories are made more clear.

This project attempted to gain an understanding of women's experiences in ecological farming in comparison to a male experience. Because current research has been conducted

primarily with men I chose to interview women only. To get a better sense of whether unique qualities, similarities and any differences exist between genders, future similar research should be conducted with both men and women. Additionally, the women I interviewed were white and from European backgrounds. To gain a more cross-cultural understanding similar research should be conducted with people from diverse backgrounds. Similarly, all five of these women farmed with their male partners. To find out more about different women's experiences on the farm it would be important to study women who farm on their own or with female partners. I interviewed five women which made it logistically possible to develop in-depth descriptions of their experiences. However more research needs to be conducted incorporating these suggestions and involving more women in Southern Ontario (and perhaps throughout Canada), to encourage women's visibility in this field.

As evident in this study, ecological agricultural presents an excellent example of promoting healthy individuals, families and communities, and as such provides a challenge to the present Conventional DSP in agriculture. Yet, these examples exist primarily in small pockets. Meares (1997) suggests that ecological agriculture has the potential to transform the present mainstream agriculture paradigm, which in turn can promote healthier communities on a broader level. Current research has been exploring the potential for Canada to adopt more self-reliant agricultural practices to maintain national self-reliance (EAP, 1997; Van Bers & Robinson, 1993) and is finding it a good and in some cases necessary step<sup>12</sup>. More research needs to focus on exploring the far reaching potential of the ecological agricultural paradigm among community and government groups.

The women's stories highlight the role of the family in ecological farming as an important component of their motivations, experiences and concerns. As Cebotarev (1994, 1988) highlights, the family is potentially the most effective setting within which meaningful community and society transformation will take place. It is important to conduct further research on the

---

<sup>12</sup> EAP (1997) research indicates that in 1987 Canada provided only 71% of domestically grown fresh vegetables and 45% of fruits and berries. Regional data demonstrated that Ontario had a \$1.9 billion international deficit in agricultural trade in 1990. Over one quarter of this was in horticultural products. Both EAP and Van Bers & Robinson (1993) present the importance of developing more sustainable farming practices in order to promote national self-reliance as well as curb environmental costs in Canada.

relationship of the family and women's experiences on the farm.

I was personally intrigued by the connection of spirituality to the earth and ecological farming. My exploration of this field of literature was brief but fascinating. Yet the women, for whatever reasons, did not address this issue in any depth. Personally speaking, I found the opportunity to connect to nature in a more spiritual way extremely fulfilling. Further studies in this area would be particularly illuminating in light of the unique feminine connections proposed in the readings I encountered and my own intuitive sense this past summer.

#### Future Action

Community psychology's contribution to community research includes a long term vision of action steps based on that research. Several suggestions for action arise from this project.

Future action is required to provide women on farms with more support in terms of family/child care and financial resources. More lobbying needs to occur at the government level to include more women's voices in high level positions in the agriculture field and promote decisions that have women's interests at the forefront (Nesmith and Wright, 1995; Waring, 1995).

As a trained Community Psychologist, I hope to utilize my skills to facilitate some of these changes. The Ontario Farm Women's Network is in the process of conducting an extensive study of farm women's needs in the province (Mann, 1999). Another project based out of University of Waterloo is promoting an action research approach to exploring the impacts of the changing food system on farm women in Ontario, Saskatchewan, Mexico City, and Iowa (Whitton, 1999). Many exciting opportunities exist for developing understanding as well as promoting change in these areas. I hope to connect to projects like these to apply what I have learned and develop practical strategies for change.

Part of my initial motivation for this project was my personal interest in creating and developing my own ecological farm. The experiences and advice shared by the women who participated have direct applications to my future action. My hope is that, like these women, I will be able to promote and encourage healthy attitudes to food, the environment and community through establishing an ecological farm. At the same time I will be able to live in a way that validates my love of nature and working with the soil.

### Personal Thoughts

I opened this document by sharing my family connection to farming. The process of researching and writing about women who farm differently than most, gave me a unique opportunity to combine my passion for nature with my love of psychology. Through my internship on an organic farm this summer, I am more realistically aware of how tough a lifestyle ecological farming is. It requires hard work, dedication, and a willingness to make sacrifices and enjoy simplicity. I also learned the reality of being self-reliant. It can be isolating, especially in the field of agriculture where more and more farmers are at the mercy of corporations and the global economic market.

Yet, I've also learned this summer that these same qualities that make ecological agriculture challenging, are imperative to promoting healthy people and healthy environments. We can no longer demand more sacrifices from nature than we're willing to give ourselves, nor can we continue to maintain lifestyles that thrive on personal indulgence. And we certainly can not keep giving our power over to corporations, the rich and the powerful if we wish to promote meaningful lives for ourselves and others.

As a woman, this latter issue is particularly poignant to me. Many of us, as women, have been struggling with reclaiming our power as individuals in a patriarchal society. I at first was disappointed to see that many of the women I interviewed (especially those with young children) spent the majority of their time in the home with their family. I was hoping to find women who were really 'involved'! But the more I talked to these women, the more I realized they are involved. As mothers and farmers they promote the health of not only themselves, but their families, their communities, and their ecosystems. Even more so, they demonstrated to me that a woman does not need to be like a man to be 'whole'. It is okay if women do not like to work with big machines, in fact, it may be the thing that saves our human and natural ecosystems.

Finally I recognized again the importance of community, especially but not only, for farmers. Ecological farmers for the most part rely on their communities to survive, whether they are running a Community Shared Agriculture initiative or raising a flock of sheep.

Yet this too is primarily devalued by the mind-set prevalent in today's society. This was most clear to me as I began the task of writing this thesis. As I wrote about the



importance of community and social support I became vividly aware that the process of writing a Master's thesis is in essence isolating and alienating. The academic world typically demands that students do their work 'independently' as opposed to 'interdependently' (especially when working on "important" work like theses or dissertations). I dealt with this in part by visiting the women in the study a second time to talk and explore this subject with those who are living it. It was their personal stories that helped ground me and inspire me to continue. I hope that this project demonstrates that research does not have to be sterile but can be an interactive process that proposes unique understandings and rewards.

Finally, current research suggests that there needs to be some fundamental changes in mainstream society and psychological research soon to reverse the destruction that human behaviour has imposed on the natural (and subsequently human) ecology (Waring, 1997; Winter, 1996; Oskamp, 1995; Kidner, 1994; Roszak, 1992; Berry, 1988). This project presents ecological farming, as highlighted by these five women, as a model of hope for the future health of individuals, families, communities, and the natural ecology. At the conclusion of this project I share Suzuki and McConnell's (1997) vision that:

the key to human survival will probably be the local community. If we can create vibrant, increasingly autonomous and self-reliant local groupings of people that emphasize sharing, cooperation and living lightly on the Earth, we can avoid the fate warned of by...the world scientists and restore the sacred balance of life. (p. 8)

As Kidner (1994) suggests, it will take a fundamental paradigm shift to create an environment conducive to constructing such communities. These women's stories demonstrate that not only is this shift necessary but that, in some parts of rural Canada, it has taken place.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Topic Guide

I would like to hear about your experiences farming sustainably. To put these experiences in context, it may be helpful to tell me a bit about your life history. The following topics are meant only as suggestions to aid the both of us in creating an opportunity for you to do this, you may add more or ignore any. Feel free to use any words, objects, pictures, etc. that will help you share your story.

farming background	sustainable farming	farm roles
farming women	land ownership	difficult moments (times when I wonder why I'm doing it)
highlights/best moments (what keeps me at it)	strategies for change	advice for others (interested in ecological agriculture)



## Appendix C: Information Letter

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to chat with you about your experiences as a woman farming sustainably. With your permission I would also like to share this knowledge with others. To accomplish this I will be tape-recording our conversation and making brief notes about it, with your consent. I anticipate our conversation to last approximately an hour to an hour and a half. However, that is flexible. I would like to schedule a second interview with you as well at a later time so that whatever we don't get a chance to discuss or clarify today we can talk about later.

I have a number of topics that we could touch on but this is your time to share your stories and experiences in any way you choose. I am interested in how you got here and what it's like. This may include details about your farm background, the challenges and advantages of farming sustainably and whether you see your being a woman as having a particular influence on those areas. I encourage you to follow any path you would like in describing your experience to me and use any items that you would like to do so (eg. pictures, artifacts, etc.). You may choose to stop our conversation at any time. If you do decide not to continue participating in this project, any information you've given me to that point will be destroyed unless we decide and agree not to. I personally hope that this project may be a meaningful experience for you and I am open to discussing ways in which we can accomplish that.

I assure you that anything you share with me will be kept in confidence. No one else will hear these tapes. I will be transcribing them and no one else will have access to those transcriptions. The transcriptions and tapes will be kept in a locked room and when I'm done with them, they will be destroyed. I hope to be done by the end of December, but for sure by the end of January 2000.

This project is being done out of personal interest and as a thesis for my Masters program in Community Psychology at Wilfrid Laurier University. With your permission, I will use the information you give me in that thesis. I may also use some quotes which I will identify with either a false name or your name depending on what you prefer. Any information that I include in the thesis will be sent to you first for your comments. Therefore if you decide at that point that you choose not to have parts of your interview included you are free to do so.

Again, I'd like to highlight that the information you share with me is yours alone and so you will have the final say of what is done with it. I will make every attempt to make sure that I present it accurately but I will need your help to help me see where I may be reading something into your experience that is not there. That is why I feel it is important for you to have every possible chance to look at how I am presenting your story. You are also entitled to a personal copy of the final report. If you would like one, please include your address or some way of getting it to you.

If you have any questions or concerns please contact me (519) 524-6729 or my supervisor (Ed Bennett, (519) 884-0710 ext. 3527). This study has been approved by the WLU Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions regarding the ethics of the study, please contact Linda Parker, Chair, WLU Research Ethics Board, at (519) 884-0710, ext. 3900.

I am looking forward to hearing about your experiences. As a woman who hopes to one day run her own farm, I know that I personally will be able to learn a lot from our conversation. As a student who has been researching this topic I also know that there are many other women and men who will be able to benefit from the information you share as well.

Sherry van de Hoef  
c/o Bob and Bev Budd  
R.R. 2  
Goderich, ON N7A 3X8  
519-524-6729

**Appendix D: Consent Form for Participation in the Research Entitled:  
"A Study of Women's Experiences in Sustainable Agriculture"**

**Sherri van de Hoef, (519) 524-6729; Principal Investigator, Department of Psychology,  
Wilfrid Laurier University**

**Ed Bennett, (519) 884-0710 ext. 3527; Supervisor, Professor, Department of Psychology,  
Wilfrid Laurier University**

**Linda Parker, (519) 884-0710 ext. 3900; Chair of the Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier  
University**

I have been informed of the purpose and methods of this study and what will be required of me to participate. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my involvement at any time for any length of time without penalty to me. I understand that the information I provide will be kept confidential and that I will not be identified at any point throughout the research process unless I explicitly request this. I give permission to the researcher to record our interview and I understand that this tape will be erased on completion of the study. I understand that this information will be used for a Masters thesis and for eventual publication and/or presentation. Any further use of this information will be approved of by myself. I understand that I am free to contact the investigator or supervisor at any time if I have questions and that I will receive an opportunity to clarify, modify, and confirm the accuracy of my answers before the final thesis is submitted.

Name (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to participate in the interview(s) for this research. Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

I wish the researcher use my real name \_\_\_\_\_; a false name \_\_\_\_\_ (check one)

I agree to be tape recorded during our interview(s) Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

A first draft should be completed by October. The final report should be done by the end of December, 1999 (or by the end of January 2000 at the latest). Please indicate how I can best reach you for your feedback:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix E: Feedback Letter**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

Well, the summer has just about come to an end, and for me that has meant the end of farming for now and the beginning of school once more. I am back in Waterloo spending most of my days behind a computer, but I certainly haven't forgotten everything I have learned and experienced this past summer.

Although things got really busy, really hot, and a bit tense in July and some of August, I did survive and have even found myself wishing to go back lately!! The concrete parks in Waterloo just can't compare to the oasis I lived and worked on this past summer.

The reason I am writing however is to let you know I haven't forgotten you. I have finally finished the typing up, reviewing, and summarizing of our interview. You will find that summary enclosed. I would appreciate your feedback on it. That is, does it say what you were trying to say? Did I get some things wrong and how should I correct them? Is it missing something? Does it represent you fairly? If not, how can I change it? Etc. I have also highlighted a few places where I had questions or was still missing some information. Could you fill these areas in?

Finally, now is the time to get together any extra pictures, drawings, paintings, poems, stories, song lyrics, or other form of art that can represent some aspect of your experience farming and/or that you think would add to your story. Please keep in mind that the copy you have right now is not a finished copy and will potentially be re-arranged and/or edited some more by myself and my advisor sometime in October. So feel free to help me begin that process now.

I would like to come visit you once more if it fits into your schedule so we can talk in person about any changes you would like to see happen. I will pick up your artwork then (rather than rely on the postal service to get it to me in one piece). I will also be bringing a camera with me this time (and no tape recorder...rest assured!) as I would love to take a picture of you on your farm somewhere, with your permission.

I will call you at the beginning of next week to make arrangements. I hope to visit sometime around September 29 - October 4. This should give you about a week to look through the summary, make comments and collect your artwork. Because I'm on a deadline I would prefer to stick to that schedule but if this doesn't work out for you please let me know when I call and we can make other arrangements.

Thanks again for being a part of this project. I was inspired when I met you and no less inspired as I re-read what you had said several times afterwards. I truly hope my summary expresses your story in a meaningful way as my wish is that others who read it will be inspired as well.

Talk to you soon.  
Sincerely,

Sherri van de Hoef

(P.S. My new phone number in case you would like to contact me is: (519) 883-7934. You may call collect.)

## REFERENCES

- Abramovitz, J. & Dunn, S. (1998). Weather-related disasters. Worldwatch Briefing 98-5. Washington, DC: Worldwatch Institute.
- Agar, Michael H. (1986). Speaking of ethnography. In John Van Maanen, Peter K. Manning, & Marc L. Miller (Series Eds.), Qualitative research methods series: Vol. 2. Newbury Park, London & New Delhi: Sage.
- Allen, John C. & Bernhardt, Kevin. (1995). Farming practices and adherence to an alternative-conventional agricultural paradigm. Rural Sociology, 60, 297-309.
- Anderson, Kathryn & Jack, Dana C. (1991). Learning to listen: Interview techniques and analyses. In Sherna Berger Gluck & Daphne Patai (Eds.), Women's words: The feminist practice of oral history. (pp. 11-26). New York, London: Routledge.
- Andrews, Lynn V. (1981). Medicine woman. San Francisco: Harper and Row.
- Ashiabi, Godwin S. (1995). Food systems: Community shared agriculture, a means of empowerment and social vitality. Unpublished master's thesis, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada.
- Baltaz, Diane. (1998). Why we do it: Organic farmers on farming. Ayr, Ontario: Sand Plains Publishers.
- Barlett, Peggy F. (1993). American dreams, rural realities: Family farms in crisis. Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Barnsley, Jan. & Ellis, Diana. (1992). Research for change: Participatory action research for community groups. Vancouver, BC: The Women's Research Centre.
- Bennett, Edward. (1987). Social intervention theory and practice. In Edward Bennett (Ed.), Social intervention: Theory and practice. (pp. 13-28). New York, Ontario: Edwin Mellen Press.
- Bennett, Edward. & Campbell, Stephanie. (1996, August). Fair share farming: Putting community psychology ideals into practice. Paper presented at the American Psychological Association, Toronto, ON.
- Bennett, Edward, & Heise, Dianne. (1997, Summer). Celebrating the community in CED. Making Waves, 8(2), pp. 14-17.



Berry, Thomas (1988). The dream of the earth. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.

Beus, Curtis E. & Dunlap, Riley E. (1990). Conventional versus alternative agriculture: The paradigmatic roots of the debate. Rural Sociology, 55(4), 590-616.

Bronfenbrenner, Urie. (1977). Toward an experimental ecology of human development. American Psychologist, (July), 513-531.

Butala, Sharon. (1994). The perfection of the morning: An apprenticeship in nature. Toronto: HarperCollins.

Callicott, J. Baird. (1990). The metaphysical transition in farming: From the Newtonian-mechanical to the Eltonian-ecological. Journal of Agricultural Ethics, 3, 36-49.

Carbert, Louise. (1995). Agrarian feminism: The politics of Ontario farm women. Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press.

Cebotarev, Elanora. (1988). Women, human rights and the family in development theory and practice (with reference to Latin America and the Caribbean). Canadian Journal of Development Studies, 9 (2), 187-200.

Cebotarev, Nora. (1994). Households, gender and sustainability. In John M. Bryden (Ed.), Towards sustainable rural communities: The Guelph seminar series. (pp. 105-118). Guelph, Canada: University School of Rural Planning and Development.

Chiappe, Marta. (1999 October 29). Agriculture, sustainability, and regional integration: the case of Uruguay. Community Psychology Colloquium, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario.

Chiappe, Marta, B., & Flora, Cornelia Butler. (1998). Gendered elements of the alternative agriculture paradigm. Rural Sociology, 63(3), 272-293.

Church, Kathryn. (1995). Forbidden narratives: Critical autobiography as social science. Australia, China, USA: Gordon and Breach Publishers.

Cohen, Michael J. (1999). The missing link in the way you think: Discover and recover it. Available Internet: <http://www.ecopsych.com/webstlifeweb.html>.

Coleman, Eliot. (1989). The new organic grower: A master's manual of tools and techniques for the home and market garden. Camden East, Ontario: Old Bridge Press.

Cummins, Helene. (1996). Ties that bind farm men and women to the land.

Unpublished master's thesis, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada.

Domanig, Robert. (1989). Permaculture, an ecological design for diversified family farms. American Journal of Alternative Agriculture, 4, 51-52.

Ecological Agriculture Projects (EAP). (1997). Organic food and farming in Canada. Available Internet: [http://eap.mcgill.ca/RM/RM\\_P.htm](http://eap.mcgill.ca/RM/RM_P.htm)

Eisler, Riane. (1987). The chalice and the blade: Our history, our future. San Francisco, Cambridge, Hagerstown: Harper & Row.

Feldman, Shelley & Welsh, Rick. (1995). Feminist knowledge claims, local knowledge, and gender divisions of agricultural labour: Constructing a successor science. Rural Sociology, 60, 23-43.

Fetterman, David M. (1989). Ethnography: Step by step. In Leonard Bickman & Debra Rog (Series Eds.), Applied social research methods series: Vol. 17. Newbury Park, London, New Delhi: Sage.

Freud, Sigmund. (1961). Civilization and its discontents. (James Strachey, Trans. & Ed.), New York: W. W. Norton & Company. (Original work published 1930).

Freud, Sigmund. (1961). The future of an illusion. New York: W. W. Norton.

Frisvold, George & Kuhn, Betsey. (Eds.). (1999). Global environmental change and agriculture: Assessing the impacts. Cheltenham, UK and Massachusetts, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Gale, Richard P. & Cordray, Sheila M. (1994). Making sense of sustainability: Nine answers to 'what should be sustained?' Rural Sociology, 59, 311-332.

Glendinning, Chellis. (1994). My name is Chellis and I'm in recovery from Western Civilization. Boston & London: Shambhala.

Goldberger, Nancy, Tarule, Jill, Clinchy, Blythe, & Belenky, Mary (Eds.). (1996). Knowledge, difference, and power: Essays inspired by women's ways of knowing. USA: Basic Books.

Griffin, Susan. (1978). Woman and nature: The roaring inside her. New York, Grand Rapids, Philadelphia: Harper & Row.

Groh, Trauger. (1997). Essay 3: Ten steps towards the farm of tomorrow. In Trauger

Groh & Steven McFadden (Eds.), Farms of tomorrow revisited: Community supported farms–farm supported communities. (pp. 22-30). Kimberton, Pennsylvania: Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association.

Groh, Trauger, & McFadden, Steven. (1997). Introduction. In Trauger Groh & Steven McFadden (Eds.), Farms of tomorrow revisited: Community supported farms–farm supported communities. (pp. xiii-xvi). Kimberton, Pennsylvania: Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association.

Gussow, Joan Dye. (1999). Telling stories. Syracuse Cultural Workers: Tools for change 1999/2000 catalog. (p. 12). Syracuse, New York: Syracuse Cultural Workers.

Halonen, Jane S. & Santrock, John W. (1996). Psychology: Contexts of behavior. Madison, Toronto, Mexico City: Brown & Benchmark Publishers.

Harcourt, Wendy. (1994). Negotiating positions in the sustainable development debate: situating the feminist perspective. In Wendy Harcourt (Ed.), Feminist perspectives on sustainable development. (pp. 11-25). London, New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd. and Rome: Society for International Development.

Hay, David A. (1992). Rural Canada in transition: Trends and developments. In David A. Hay & Gurcham S. Basran (Eds.), Rural sociology in Canada. (pp. 16-32). Toronto, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.

Hodne, Carol. (1987). We whose future has been stolen. In Gary Comstock (Ed.), Is there a moral obligation to save the family farm? (pp. 54-58). Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press.

Hollway, Wendy. (1989). Subjectivity and method in psychology: Gender, meaning and science. London, Newbury Park, New Delhi: Sage.

hooks, bell. (1994). Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom. New York, London: Routledge.

Keating, Norah, C. (1994). Family, gender and sustainability: Studying the farm family. In John M. Bryden (Ed.), Towards sustainable rural communities: The Guelph seminar series. (pp. 85-92). Guelph, Canada: University School of Rural Planning and Development.

- Keeney, Dennis R. (1989). Toward a sustainable agriculture: Need for clarification of concepts and terminology. American Journal of Alternative Agriculture, 4, 101-105.
- Kidner, David W. (1994). Why psychology is mute about the environmental crisis. Environmental Ethics, 16, 359-376.
- Kirby, Sandra. & McKenna, Kate. (1989). Experience, research, social change: Methods from the margins. Toronto, ON: Garamond Press.
- Kneen, Brewster. (1989). From land to mouth: Understanding the food system. NC Press, Toronto.
- Levine, Murray & Perkins, David V. (1997). The ecological analogy. In Principles of community psychology: Perspectives and applications. Second Edition. (pp. 111-148). New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lincoln, Yvonne & Guba, E. (1989). Fourth generation evaluation. Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications.
- Lincoln, Yvonne & Guba, E. (1985). Naturalistic inquiry. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Lind, Christopher. (1995). Something's wrong somewhere: Globalization, community and the moral economy of the farm crisis. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing.
- Lugones, María C. & Spelman, Elizabeth V. (1983). Have we got a theory for you! Feminist theory, cultural imperialism and the demand for 'the woman's voice'. Women's Studies International Forum, 6(6), 573-581.
- Mann, Susan. (1999, September 28). Survey of farm women shows how stress, finances and lifestyle come together. Ontario Farmer. p. 1, 4.
- McAdams, Dan P. (1996). Narrating the self in adulthood. In James E. Birren et.al. (Eds.), Aging and biography: Explorations in adult development. (pp. 131-148). New York: Springer Publishers.
- McAdams, Dan P., Diamond, Ann, de St. Aubin, Ed, Mansfield, Elizabeth (1997). Stories of commitment: The psychosocial construction of generative lives. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 72(3), 678-694.
- McCaw, Donna. (1996). Spiral to the heart. Canada: OASIS Publishing.
- McKenzie-Mohr, Doug & Oskamp, Stuart. (1995). Psychology and sustainability: An

introduction. Journal of Social Issues, 51(4), 1-14.

McStay, Jan R. & Dunlap, Riley E. (1983). Male-female differences in concern for environmental quality. International Journal of Women's Studies, 6(4), 291-301.

Meares, Alison, C. (1997). Making the transition from conventional to sustainable agriculture: Gender, social movement participation, and quality of life on the family farm. Rural Sociology, 62, 21-47

Merchant, Carolyn. (1992). Radical ecology: The search for a liveable world. New York, London: Routledge.

Minister, Kristina. (1991). A feminist frame for the oral history interview. In Sherna Berger Gluck & Daphne Patai (Eds.), Women's words: The feminist practice of oral history. (pp. 27-42). New York & London: Routledge.

Mitchell, Bruce. (1997). Resource and environmental management. Essex, England: Addison-Wesley Longman Ltd.

Nesmith, Cathy & Wright, Pamela. (1995). Gender, resources, and environmental management. In Bruce Mitchell (Ed.), Resource and environmental management in Canada: Addressing conflict and uncertainty. (pp. 80-98). Second Edition. Toronto, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.

Neth, Mary. (1995). Preserving the family farm: Women, community, and the foundations of agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940. Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Oskamp, Stuart. (1995). Applying social psychology to avoid ecological disaster. Journal of Social Issues, 51 (4), 217-239.

O'Reilly, Janet Ann. (1999). Community gardens: Planting the seeds of a sustainable future. Unpublished master's thesis, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada.

PAN-AP: Women in Agriculture. (1999). Women in agriculture. Available Internet: <http://www.poptel.org.uk/panap/wo.htm>

Patton, Michael Q. (1990). Qualitative evaluation and research methods. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Personal Narratives Group. (1989). Origins. In Personal Narratives Group (Ed.),

Interpreting women's lives: Feminist theory and personal narratives. (pp.3-16). Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Plumwood, Val. (1993). Feminism and the mastery of nature. London & New York: Routledge.

Polkinghorne, Donald, E. (1988). Narrative knowing and the human sciences. New York: State University of New York Press.

Prilleltensky, Isaac. (1999). Critical psychology foundations for the promotion of mental health. Annual Review of Critical Psychology, 1, 100-118.

Project seeks 1,000 sustainable farmers, ranchers. (1999, Winter). The community farm: A voice for community supported agriculture, 1(4), 10.

Rappaport, Julian. (1995). Empowerment meets narrative: Listening to stories and creating settings. American Journal of Community Psychology, 23(5), 795-807.

Rappaport, Julian. (1993). Narrative studies, personal stories, and identity transformation in the mutual help context. The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 29(2), 239-256.

Reguly, Eric. (1999, 24 April). The 'sustainable development' sham. The Globe and Mail, p. B2.

Reinharz, Shulamit. (1992). Feminist methods in social research. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Riessman, Catherine K. (1993). Narrative analysis. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Roszak, Theodore. (1992). The voice of the Earth. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Sachs, Carolyn. (1996). Gendered fields: Rural women, agriculture, and environment. USA: Westview Press.

Sachs, Carolyn, E. (1983). The invisible farmers: Women in agricultural production. Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman & Allanheld.

Sarbin, Theodore R. (1986). The narrative as a root metaphor for psychology. In Theodore Sarbin (Ed.), Narrative psychology: The storied nature of human conduct. (pp. 3-21). New York, Connecticut & London, England: Praeger Special Studies.

- Sattler, Friedrich & Wistinghausen, Eckard v. (1989). Bio-Dynamic farming practice. West Midlands, England: Bio-Dynamic Agricultural Association.
- Schaef, Anne Wilson. (1985). Women's reality: An emerging female system in a white male society. San Francisco: Harper & Row.
- Schneider, Joseph W. (1991). Troubles with textual authority in sociology. Symbolic interaction, 14(3), 295-319.
- Shiva, Vandana. (1989). Development, ecology, and women. In Judith Plant (Ed.), Healing the wounds: The promise of ecofeminism. (pp. 80-90). Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers.
- Simpson, Brent, M. (1994). Gender and the social differentiation of local knowledge. Indigenous Knowledge and Development Monitor, 2(3). Available Internet: <http://nuffic.nl/ciran/ikdm/2-3/articles/simpson.html>.
- Sjöö, Monica & Mor, Barbara. (1987). The great cosmic mother: Rediscovering the religion of the earth. San Francisco, Cambridge, Hagerstown: Harper & Row.
- Smith, Pamela. (1987). What lies within and behind the statistics?: Trying to measure women's contribution to Canadian agriculture. In Growing strong: Women in agriculture. Canada: Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women.
- Statistics Canada. (1999). Canadian Census of Agriculture, 1996. Available Internet: <http://www.statcan.ca/daily/english>.
- Stivers, Camilla. (1993). Reflections on the role of personal narrative in social science. Signs: Journal of women in culture and society, 18(2), 408-425.
- Suzuki, David, & McConnell, Amanda. (1997). The sacred balance: Rediscovering our place in nature. Vancouver, Toronto: Greystone Books and the David Suzuki Foundation.
- Troughton, M. J. (1995). Agriculture and rural resources. In Bruce Mitchell (Ed.), Resource and environmental management in Canada: Addressing conflict and uncertainty. (pp. 151-182). Second Edition. Toronto, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Van Bers, Caroline. (1991). Sustainable agriculture in Canada: A scenario of the future. Unpublished master's thesis, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada.
- Van Bers, Caroline, & Robinson, John B. (1993). Farming in 2031: A scenario of

sustainable agriculture in Canada. Journal of Sustainable Agriculture, 4(1), 41-65.

van de Hoef, Sherri. (1998). Self-reliant living: Off-roading in the journey of life. Unpublished undergraduate thesis, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada.

Van Herik, Judith. (1982). Freud on femininity and faith. Berkeley: University of California Press.

van Herk, Aritha. (1984). Judith. New Canadian Library Edition. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited.

Waring, Marilyn. (1997). Three masquerades: Essays on equality, work and hu(man) rights. Canada, USA: University of Toronto Press.

Whitton, Bob. (1999, November 24). 'Action research' seeks to mobilize farm women. University of Waterloo Gazette. p. 7.

Wiebe, Nettie. (1995). Farm women: Cultivating hope and sowing change. In Sandra Burt & Lorraine Code (Eds.), Changing methods: Feminists transforming practice. (pp. 137-162). Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press.

Winter, Deborah Du Nann. (1996). Ecological psychology: Healing the split between planet and self. New York: HarperCollins College Publishers.

Zweifel, Helen. (1996). Biodiversity and the appropriation of women's knowledge. Indigenous Knowledge and Development Monitor, 5(1). Available Internet: <http://nuffic.nl/ciran/ikdm/5-1/articles/zweifel.htm>.