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The Christian Farmers
Federation of Ontario:
Integrating Christian
Principles with the
Practicality of Farming

By

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Dissertation

Submitted to the

Department of Religion and Culture

in the Faculty of Arts

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

Doctorate of Philosophy in Religious Studies

Wilfrid Laurier University

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Abstract

This thesis examines the particular Christian identity and characteristics of the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario (CFFO), a general farm organization active in the diverse agricultural sector of Ontario, Canada. It highlights the intersection of religion and farming that emerged from interviews and participant observation within this group of farmers. In particular, the thesis probes how these farmers understand what it means to be responsible Christians in the contemporary Ontario farming economy. In order to place the responses that emerged from CFFO members in context, they are examined in conjunction with Christian and secular scholars who have written on questions of Christianity and farming, and related environmental, social and economic issues within three key areas of scholarship: Dutch immigration to Canada, agriculture of the middle or family farming, and Christian stewardship.

The CFFO's particular Christian identity emerges from Dutch neo-Calvinism. A significant wave of Dutch, including many neo-Calvinists, migrated to Canada after the Second World War. Theologically, Dutch neo-Calvinists believe in sphere sovereignty, which for them is best realized through the formation of Christian organizations and institutions in every sphere of life, from politics, to education, to farming. Each organization then works within its own area of expertise to define and promote a vision of Christian living, to thus exercise God's dominion in that sphere of human life and culture. The CFFO was established as such a neo-Calvinist Christian organization within the sphere of agriculture in Ontario.

From these neo-Calvinist foundations, the CFFO has grown within its current North American context. It now includes members and leaders from a broader spectrum of Christian denominations. Members, leaders and staff, both individually and collectively through the organization, wrestle to connect their Christian faith with questions about the structure of agriculture, methods of farming, and human relationship with both domestic and wild nature. In its work advocating for Christian principles within agricultural policies and practices, the CFFO has turned to two important concepts: family farming and stewardship. Unlike sphere sovereignty, which had its roots in the Netherlands, the focus on these two terms reflects the current North American context of the CFFO. Both stewardship and family farming are tied to questions of appropriate size and scale to glean the best possible benefits from farming.

Family farming expresses for farmers the importance of owner operated farms which support, among other things, strong family relationships, connection to the community, familiarity of the farmer with the land, plants and animals being farmed, and motivation to care for and steward land over generations. Fair competition within the farming marketplace that offers a fair price to farmers for their goods supports the vocation of farming as important work, worth doing well.

Christian stewardship as an ethic within farming is a way of expressing the responsibilities farmers carry for the extensive web of relationships which their work, directly or indirectly, can affect. The particular understanding of Christian agricultural stewardship within the contemporary CFFO illustrates their perspective as both Christians and as farmers, as connected to but also distinct from other formulations of stewardship. The thesis argues that within the CFFO there is a spectrum of opinion on

how best to put Christian stewardship into practice in contemporary farming. The thesis delineates the spectrum as extending between farmers who advocate imitating and maintaining the integrity of creation, and farmers who advocate developing and responsibly using creation. Farmers on the one side are concerned with respecting the original goodness, balance and order of creation as given by God, and thus farming in ways that mimic or work with natural processes and relationships. For these farmers, understanding nature leads to a better understanding of the goodness of creation and to a closer relationship with God. Farmers on the other side of the spectrum advocate for the development of creation through the use of those technologies that allow humans to improve on or better control nature for human use, as a God-granted endeavour. They emphasize the wider benefits of a greater quantity of food for a growing global human population achieved through these technologies. At the same time these technologies, they stress, need to be used responsibly and in moderation.

Acknowledgements

I owe a great debt to many people for their participation in this research, and for the guidance and feedback and help that I have received as I have progressed through the research and writing process. There are far more people to thank than I can list here.

First I would like to thank especially the interviewees, as well as all the members and staff of the CFFO who helped with this research project. They were so generous with their time and their willingness to share with me about their faith, their experiences and work within the CFFO, and their farming work.

At the university I wish to extend my deepest thanks to my supervisor, Dr. Michel Desjardins, and my sincere appreciation to my committee members, Dr. Janet McLellan, and Dr. Erich Fox Tree. I would also like to thank Dr. Ellen Desjardins, and two previous committee members, Dr. Sarah King, and Dr. Richard Walker. Also thanks to Pam Schaus for her assistance with the maps.

Finally I wish to thank my family and friends who have all been so supportive. Most especially my husband Martin Eisenloeffel has been vitally supportive in both practical and intangible ways.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Introduction

This thesis examines the particular Christian identity and characteristics of a group called the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario (CFFO). The CFFO is a farm organization active in the arable regions of Ontario, a Canadian province that has a diverse agricultural sector. The CFFO's Christian identity is founded in Dutch neo-Calvinism, but has broadened to embrace other farming Christians who have chosen to join the CFFO as members and leaders. From the Dutch neo-Calvinist origins, the theology of sphere sovereignty has been foundational to the formation and work of the organization, and to its vision as a Christian organization within agriculture. Through its work the CFFO has added its voice to important North American conversations about the structure of agriculture, methods of farming, human relationships to nature, and Christian responses to environmental issues. In particular, debates about the importance of family farms and of stewardship in farming are two areas of focus that are also tied to all of these broader issues in farming. The CFFO as an organization, and CFFO members individually, illustrate the importance of these discussions for them as farmers and as Christians. What defines a Christian identity within farming is at times contentious. Each farmer must define for him or herself how to live a meaningful Christian life through farming. Collectively within the CFFO they work to find agreement on policies, based in Christian principles as they understand them, which they then recommend to government.

Religion changes; it both affects and adapts. The CFFO's use of religious ideas clearly changed to address the changing contexts, and have been adapted and adopted in

the face of new situations. At the same time, core religious values, however fluid, have motivated people and continue to sustain them in their quest to work towards their understanding of a better world. As an anchoring point, religion provides the foundation from which these farmers have built traditions, holding on to key tenets and defining characteristics that in turn reify religion in people's lives.

The Christian theological vision of sphere sovereignty gives the CFFO its particular structure and purpose. This theological view, which has then been put into practice, grounds the CFFO in the particular Christian characteristics of its Dutch neo-Calvinist roots. The approach the CFFO has taken to family farms and to stewardship has helped to define its Christian identity further regarding farm policy in its current Canadian context. The adoption and adaptation of the concepts of family farming and stewardship by the CFFO is an indication of change and innovation in response to a new situation in time and place.

For the most part, the CFFO is comprised of farmers from the middle stratum of agriculture. These farmers are commercially oriented and farm with the intention of making their primary living through farming. Most are operating family-run farms, even though some of those farms are very large, and some are very small. It is these "farmers of the middle" who have been experiencing the greatest pressures to move out of the middle toward one or the other extreme of either becoming a small farm supplemented by off-farm income, or an extremely large farm. Those farmers in the middle face particular challenges in the current agricultural economy. At times, religious faith provides them with a rudder that helps them steer their course through the various challenges and decisions they face. At other times, religious faith may be the boat itself, emotionally and

spiritually sustaining them and motivating them through difficult times and helping them to stay afloat and keep farming. Farmers face a lot of uncertainty from both natural and economic factors that are largely out of their control. Farmers must adjust their sails in response to these factors that affect the success of their farming work.

Their Christian faith gives them language to more clearly express the importance of family, connection with community, neighbours, and nature in their lives, and through these relationships, to find a deeper connection with their faith and with God. The value of these relationships as they are tied to farming as a way of life is often expressed in connection with family farms as a key element of the structure of the overall agricultural system.

Another key question that recurs in connecting Christianity with farming is defining the appropriate Christian relationship between humanity and nature that is then acted out through the practice of farming. This often means balancing varying environmental concerns with the need to make a living through the use of nature (land, plants, animals) as a source of human sustenance and livelihood. This practical reality gives rise to a particular approach to environmental issues. Bron Taylor argues that there are many things that bring people to environmental concern. Taylor's research is on radical environmental groups whose ideas are often founded in the deep ecology movement. However, Taylor himself is partly critical of deep ecologists' emphasis on the need for a radical change in consciousness, usually through religion or spirituality, to bring about "genuine" concern for environmental issues. Taylor argues instead that:

the history of religion demonstrates the malleability of religion, and contemporary research shows dramatic changes unfolding in many religious

groups and most religious traditions. Meanwhile, the emergence of increasingly plural grassroots environmental movements demonstrates that deep ecological consciousness change is no more likely to spur ecological resistance than ecological education combined with appeals to self-interest and concern for children, families, and communities.¹

Most farmers I met as part of this research do not wish to define themselves as environmentalists. Some pit themselves directly against what they understand as “an environmentalist agenda,” particularly over how land should be used, how animals should be treated, and where government money should be spent in the cause of protecting the environment. Some even contrast themselves with “*those* environmentalists” on religious grounds, claiming that environmentalism makes a religion out of the environment.

Farmers remain concerned, however, about issues related to the environment. They often use different language and focus on different issues than the type of deep ecology environmentalists Bron Taylor is describing above. As North American farmers, they are seeing the effects of changes in the way humans treat the environment on their own families and their own communities. It is primarily their responsibility to these people around them that motivates their concern for the impact of their farming practices, and the farming practices of others on the environment. Furthermore, changes in the landscape of farming—fewer and increasingly aging farmers, fewer and larger (or

¹ Bron Taylor, “Deep Ecology and Its Social Philosophy: A Critique,” in *Beneath the Surface: Critical Essays in the Philosophy of Deep Ecology*, ed. Eric Katz, Andrew Light, and David Rothenberg (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2000), 281.

smaller) farms, and changing rural communities as a result—mean that issues related to farming and the future of farming directly impact them, their families, and their communities. So too do these issues impact the prospects of their children and grandchildren to continue farming, be it on the same farm or a different farm. But it is not solely these concerns which drive them.

Although the CFFO as an organization is actively involved in addressing important environmental issues, it does not define itself as an environmentalist group; nor does it present itself as a grassroots environmental organization. Through their work as farmers they are directly affected by many environmental regulations, as established by municipal, regional, provincial, and federal governments. In addition to this regulated interest, these farmers also have daily direct interaction with “the environment” or “nature” as it is generally understood. In their context this reality is most often described as “the creation.” Using the term creation points directly to their Christian understanding of God as “the Creator,” thus reminding them of their responsibilities in working with nature as a sanctified engagement. Many respond by practicing an ethic of Christian stewardship in farming. However, how this ethic is practiced varies among farmers, within a spectrum of choices among contemporary farming methods and technologies. In particular, the thesis draws a contrast between those within the CFFO who advocate imitating and maintaining the integrity of creation with those who advocate developing and responsibly using creation.

Questions of religion and farming for CFFO members must therefore examine questions of the relationship between God, humanity and nature. What does it mean to be a responsible Christian farmer? How can that responsibility best be expressed through

different farming techniques and technologies and within the current farming economy?

This study examines responses to these questions from within the CFFO, as well as from other Christian and secular scholars, in more detail in the chapters that follow.

1.1 Three Key Areas of Scholarship

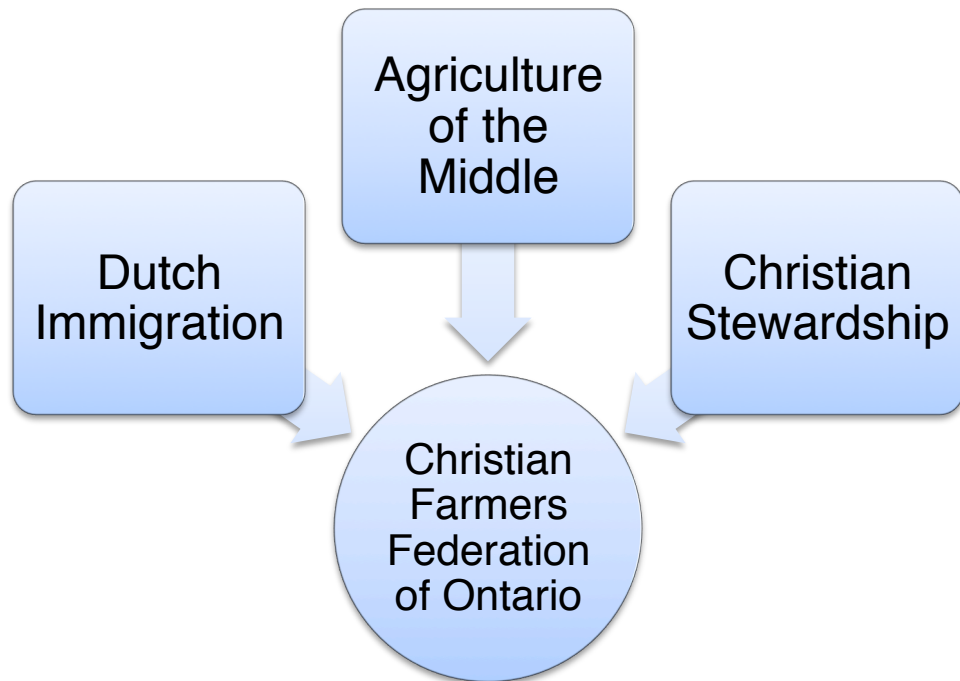


Fig. 1.1

This case study of the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario fits into three sets of literature, related to religion and farming. The first, Dutch immigration and social organization, considers the importance of religion and culture on those who immigrated from the Netherlands (and other ethnically Dutch areas) to Canada. This helps to explain the reason for the CFFO's foundation and the key motivation behind its ongoing work within agriculture in Ontario, far removed from the original Dutch context that gave birth to its theological underpinnings, and social form and structure.

The second, Agriculture of the Middle (AOTM),² or family farming, addresses the changes in the social structure of farming and rural communities as a result of changes in farm operations' size and methods. The concept of family farming is also connected with important family relationships to work, land, and community, which are also connected with Christian values expressed through those social arrangements and relationships.

The third, Christian stewardship, explores the importance of religion in defining the relationship between humans and nature. Food connects humans directly to nature, and is something on which every human depends on a daily basis. At the same time, food also expresses important facets of human culture. Farmers, individually and collectively, have a key role to play in acting as the direct intermediaries between nature and humanity, or between nature and culture, in order to produce, or to foster the production of, food on behalf of all eaters. The concept of stewardship in particular is one key term that has been used to examine the relationship between humans and nature. Stewardship is used by theologians and secular thinkers alike. It is especially favoured within certain Christian contexts. The CFFO has adopted this term as part of their expression of Christian principles in farming. It proves to be important for many who belong to the CFFO in expressing their understanding of their role and responsibilities as farmers, and their responsibilities to God, to humanity, and to nature as a whole. The CFFO is then an important example of lived religion, and how a particular religious or theological idea,

² See for example: Tomas A. Lyson, G. W. Stevenson, and Rick Welsh eds., *Food and the Mid-Level Farm: Renewing an Agriculture of the Middle* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2008); George Stevenson, et al. "Agriculture of the Middle," in *Encyclopedia of Food and Agricultural Ethics*, ed. Paul Thompson and David Kaplan (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2013) [www.springerreference.com].

stewardship, is actually understood and practiced by a particular group of Christians in their daily lives as farmers.

The concept of lived religion emphasizes the value of ethnographic as well as textual analysis approaches to the study of religion. Robert Orsi, an influential scholar in the study of lived religion, defines it thus: “religious practice and imagination in ongoing, dynamic relation with the realities and structures of everyday life in particular times and places.”³ This study fits with this broad definition of lived religion. The CFFO is an organization that exercises both religious practice and imagination. It and its work are also clearly situated in a very particular time and place, and are highly engaged in the issues relevant to the everyday lives of the farmer members of the organization. This study of the CFFO focuses on the particular time and place that defines the Christian aspects of the CFFO in its membership, sense of purpose, and its work. It also focuses on the connection between the everyday lives and practices of CFFO farmer members, and how these are connected by members to their understanding of Christian ideas, principles and values that they hold to be important.

The meaning and use of terms such as sphere sovereignty, family farm, and stewardship change over time and place. Their use indicates particular locations in time, place and sub-culture as well. This study attempts to understand the religious elements of these terms and their use by Christian farmers within the CFFO with particular focus from 2008 through 2013. These terms help to express and define particular religious

³ Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), xiii.

identities, which are then foundational to forming and maintaining larger religious groups and communities. Orsi further states that

[r]eligious practices and understandings have meaning only in relation to other cultural forms and in relation to the life experiences and actual circumstances of the people using them; what people mean and intend by particular religious idioms can be understood only situationally, on a broad social and biographical field, not within the terms of a religious tradition or religious language understood as existing apart from history.⁴

Each chapter examines first a history, be that of immigration, changes in the farming structure, or responses to environmental issues, which then situates the field-research findings of certain present day circumstances of the CFFO.

1.2 Gaps in the Literature

This research set out to address gaps in all three of these key sets of literature. First, within the study of Dutch Immigration in North America, the particular characteristics of the Dutch, and especially Dutch Neo-Calvinists have been the focus of several studies in North America and elsewhere.⁵ Most notably for the purposes of this research, Frans

⁴ Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*, xix-xx.

⁵ Janel Curry, "Social Capital and Societal Vision: A Study of Six Farm Communities in Iowa," in *Religion as Social Capital: Producing the Common Good*, ed. Corwin Smidt (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2003) 139-152; Herman Ganzevoort, *A Bittersweet Land: The Dutch Experience in Canada, 1890-1980* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart and Multiculturalism Program, Canadian Government Publishing Centre, 1988); Herman Ganzevoort, and Mark Boekelman eds., *Dutch Immigration to North America* (Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1983); George Harinck and Hans Krabbendam, *Morsels in the Melting Pot: The Persistence of Dutch Immigrant Communities in North America* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2006); William Petersen, *Planned Migration: The Social Determinants of the Dutch-Canadian Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955); Hendrik P. Van Dalen and Kene Henkens, "Longing for the Good Life: Understanding Emigration from a High-Income Country," *Population and Development Review* 33 (2007): 37-65; Albert VanderMey, *To All Our Children: The Story*

Schryer has done two studies on the Dutch in Canada.⁶ The first, from 1998, entitled *The Netherlandic Presence in Ontario: Pillars, Class and Dutch Ethnicity*, examines the Dutch in Ontario specifically, with attention to the transplantation of pillar social organization into Ontario. The second, from 2006, entitled *Farming in a Global Economy: A Case Study of Dutch Immigrant Farmers in Canada*, focuses on Dutch farmers across all of Canada. This book also particularly focuses on the significance of agricultural work in the immigration wave after the Second World War, and the significance of the continued Dutch presence in agriculture, especially since that wave of immigration. Both of these studies discuss the CFFO briefly, but not at length. My research thus offers a closer and more detailed examination of this particular example of Dutch pillar social organization within the sphere of agriculture as functioning in an Ontario context.

John Paterson is a geographer who has researched and written on the Christian Farmers Federations (CFFs) in Canada specifically.⁷ Paterson wrote his doctoral thesis on the CFFs when there was both a CFFO in Ontario and a CFFA in Alberta. His interview research was conducted with members of the CFFA while it was still functioning under that name in Alberta. He also did a significant amount of research on the archives of the

of the Postwar Dutch Immigration to Canada (Jordan Station: Paideia Press, 1983); Joanne Van Dijk, "The Role of Religion in the Postwar Settlement of Dutch Canadians," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 38 (2001): 57-74.

⁶ Frans Schryer, *Farming in a Global Economy: A Case Study of Dutch Immigrant Farmers in Canada* (Boston: Brill, 2006); Frans J. Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence in Ontario: Pillars, Class and Dutch Ethnicity* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1998).

⁷ John L. Paterson, *Geography and Religion, Agriculture and Stewardship: The Practice of Agricultural Stewardship the Christian Farmers Federations of Canada* (University of British Columbia: PhD Thesis, 1998); John L. Paterson, "Institutional Organization, Stewardship, and Religious Resistance to Modern Agricultural Trends: The Christian Farmers' Movement in the Netherlands and Canada," *Agricultural History* 75 (2001): 308-328; John L. Paterson, "Conceptualizing Stewardship in Agriculture within the Christian Tradition," *Environmental Ethics* 25 (2003): 43-58.

CFFO. His thesis, completed in 1998, came just as a major shift was happening in the CFFO membership. Much has changed in the intervening time since his valuable study was completed. By setting out to explain the CFFO of today, my dissertation research expands on the foundational work that he did, looking at the important changes that have taken place in the CFFO since his work was done.

My research sets out to offer a study of the CFFO as it exists today, and to better understand the importance of the CFFO and its work for members of the organization. Specifically, it focuses on the Christian nature and foundations of the work that they undertake, including how faith and Christian principles are understood, expressed, and practiced through the work of the organization and by its members in the sphere of agriculture.

Second, academic research in the area of “Agriculture of the Middle” has examined the social, economic, and environmental significance of family farms.⁸ Of particular concern in this literature is the relationship between farming and community, and the effects that different methods of farming, and different forms of organization within the farming sector, have on the communities in which they are situated, both socially and ecologically. This literature considers the values of farmers and farming, as

⁸ Wendell Berry, “A Defense of the Family Farm,” in *Home Economics: Fourteen Essays* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 1987); Linda Lobao and Katherine Meyer, “The Great Agricultural Transition: Crisis, Change, and Social Consequences of Twentieth Century US Farming,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 27 (2001): 103-124; Frederick Buttel and Pierre LaRamee, “The ‘Disappearing Middle’: A Sociological Perspective,” in *Towards a New Political Economy of Agriculture*, ed. William H Friedland, et al. (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1991), 151-169; Frederick L. Kirschenmann, *Cultivating An Ecological Conscience: Essays from a Farmer Philosopher*, ed. Constance L. Falk (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2010); Frederick Kirschenmann, “The Current State of Agriculture: Does it Have a Future?” in *The Essential Agrarian Reader*, ed. Norman Wirzba (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2003), 101-120; Lyson, Stevenson, and Welsh, *Food and the Mid-Level Farm*; George Stevenson, et al. “Agriculture of the Middle.”

well as the economic pressures that have been instrumental in the many forms of farm crisis that have occurred over the decades, especially since World War II.

The significance of religion in rural areas, especially as connected to the issues surrounding “agriculture of the middle” and family farms, is often overlooked or under represented. My research more clearly explores the connections farmers themselves make between their religious values and their farming, the importance farming has for their own family relationships, and the connections between their farms and communities.

Third, the literature on stewardship—a vital concept for CFFO members—encompasses both theological and other insider writings on the concept of stewardship, and sociological studies by those who have examined religious and farming responses to environmental problems, including the response of stewardship.⁹ Many theologians have written on the merits of stewardship; so too have other insiders such as Christians who may be both academics and farmers, or who connect their Christianity to their work in science or ethics. There are a variety of theological responses to the importance of the term, concept or symbol of stewardship, including different interpretations of what the term or an ethic of stewardship would entail, up to and including rejection of the concept in favour of other responses.

⁹ See for example: R. J. Berry, ed. *Environmental Stewardship: Critical Perspective—Past and Present*, (London: T&T Clark International, 2006); Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1977); Creation Stewardship Task Force of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, “Creation Stewardship Task Force Report” (Grand Rapids MI: Christian Reformed Church in North America, 2012); Gary W. Fick, *Food, Farming, and Faith* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008); Douglas John Hall, *The Steward: A Biblical Symbol Come of Age* (New York: Friendship Press, 1982), Paul B. Thompson, *The Spirit of the Soil: Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Loren Wilkinson, *Earthkeeping in the '90s: Stewardship of Creation* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991).

Some critics argue that stewardship is not an effective ethic or a significant enough response to environmental issues both within farming and more generally to other wider environmental issues.¹⁰ Non-Christian critics have been skeptical of the overemphasis on the importance of humans, or on the idea that humans have the wherewithal to overcome and control or manage the damage we cause to the wider environment. Christians who see stewardship as insufficient, or see it as an inappropriate Christian response to the environmental problems at hand, have chosen other terms or symbols with relevance for Christianity instead.

Rural and religious sociologists have also examined the concept of stewardship, and its application to either farming specific issues, or to environmental issues generally. Stewardship is an important category for academics who study and categorize the responses of Christians to environmental issues. Most notable in this category for relevance to this research study is the work by Laurel Kearns and, again, John Paterson.¹¹ Kearns' work examines Christian responses to environmental issues in the United States. Most of her work engages Christian activists at a larger national level, but also those who address environmental issues with government. In that sense, her work is particularly relevant for the context of this research. Paterson, introduced above, wrote two articles

¹⁰ Notable among them, and discussed below are: James Lovelock, "The Fallible Concept of Stewardship of the Earth," in *Environmental Stewardship: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*, ed. R. J. Berry (London: T & T Clark International, 2006), 106-111; Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: HarperOne, 1980), 246-252; Thompson, *The Spirit of the Soil*, 72-93.

¹¹ See especially: Laurel Kearns, "Saving the Creation: Christian Environmentalism in the United States," *Sociology of Religion* 57 (1996): 55-70; Laurel Kearns, "Noah's Ark Goes to Washington: A Profile of Evangelical Environmentalism," *Social Compass* 44 (1997): 349-366; Laurel Kearns, "Green Evangelicals," in *The New Evangelical Social Engagement*, ed. Brian Steensland and Philip Goff (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 157-178; Paterson, *Geography and Religion*; Paterson, "Institutional Organization, Stewardship, and Religious Resistance"; Paterson, "Conceptualizing Stewardship in Agriculture within the Christian Tradition."

out of his thesis research, one of which focuses on the term stewardship, and how it is used among Christians in an agricultural context.

Sociologists studying religion and environment together have frequently focused on environmentalist groups with religious foundations or connections.¹² My research, while highly relevant to discussions related to issues of religion and the environment, examines an organization that is explicitly religiously based, but which is not an explicitly environmentalist group. This is an important distinction because it affects the attitude the CFFO and its members take to certain issues related to the environment, and it is also important for the issues they do focus on, and the issues they do not support.

1.3 Methods

1.3.1 Research Interests

Over the course of my university education, I have maintained a significant interest in the connections between religion and environment. Coming out of my MA research on ecofeminism and religion, I was keen to continue exploring this intersection in my PhD research, but in a different way. I had come to have a stronger interest in food issues, in part because of a growing personal awareness of the local food movement, and so was looking for a way to explore these issues further. I was introduced to the CFFO as an organization by Dr. Ellen Desjardins, who knew the former Policy Director of the CFFO, Elbert van Donkersgoed. I went to the CFFO Annual Convention in 2008 as part of initial

¹² See for example: Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Sarah McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters: A Spiritual Ecology* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Kearns, "Green Evangelicals," 157-178.

research for a course paper, and what I found there was fascinating to me. I decided to make this group the focus of my PhD research.

What intrigued me most and has sustained my interest through the entire research was the concept of stewardship, which was used frequently by the CFFO in its literature, and was also mentioned often by my initial interviewees. This topic is developed primarily in chapter 4. My interests in this organization extend beyond just their focus on stewardship, however. The strong ethno-religious identity of this particular group which has been passed down and sustained through at least two to three generations now, and which is expressed religiously not only through the institution of church congregations but also a variety of other independent Christian organizations, makes them a particularly interesting case study within the discipline of religious studies. I focus on this ethno-religious Christianity in chapter 2. Furthermore, the issue of family farming touches on these farmers' sense of vocation, of calling to meaningful work and a sense of belonging in the world. It also touches on the importance of family relationships and social justice issues. This web of meanings is explored primarily in chapter 3.

Farming itself is a complex enterprise, and as an outsider I had a steep learning curve (which I am still climbing) to grasp many of the issues and interests involved in discussions around the table at meetings, or in interviews. I am not a farmer, nor was I raised on a farm. I was relieved to find, however, that farmers are usually most familiar with their own commodity (or commodities produced on the farm) and often are less familiar with other commodities, although some are very well versed in agriculture as a whole.

Frequently my presence, especially at business meetings of the CFFO, stood out. Being both young, compared to the current average age of farmers, and female, since farming is still a male dominated profession, I was usually in the minority, sometimes a minority of one. Also, in a usually tight-knit community, I was often the one who stuck out. Others attending would often ask if I was a farmer, if I was Dutch (or more often for my last name). When it was evident that I was neither Dutch nor a farmer, they would ask why I was there. I explained I was there doing university research. I was surprised to find that many farmers seemed accustomed to being asked to participate in university research, and many were thus quite willing to talk to me or to volunteer for interviews when I asked. One person had even inadvertently agreed to be interviewed by another student at exactly the same time, and had, I think, not realized that coincidentally he had two students independently wishing to interview him.

I was also frequently asked if I was Christian. I would usually answer that I came from a United Church background, and if asked I would also say that I currently do go to church. In some cases (in part in reference also to my last name) I emphasized the Calvinist connection of the Scotch Presbyterian aspects of my ancestry, but not in order to hide my denominational affiliation. I also emphasized that I was there as an academic, to observe and listen and hopefully to better understand the CFFO.

1.3.2 Data Collection

I did ethnographic research, involving both qualitative personal interviews and participant observation. The data collected from personal interviews formed the primary basis for my formal analysis of current membership of the CFFO. However, participant observation was an important aspect of the research as well.

1.3.2.1 Participant Observation

Participant observation was my first introduction to the CFFO, and has continued throughout my research on the organization. As is discussed in more detail below, CFFO meetings usually combine business and social aspects, allowing me different opportunities to get to know the people involved, and the issues of the day.

I attended many different meetings of the CFFO over the period from 2008 to 2013. These include: the Annual Convention held by the CFFO in November every year from 2008 to 2013; six Provincial Council meetings from 2011 to 2013; two policy meetings (one of Stewardship and Policy West in 2012, and one Pork Producers Meeting in 2012); and 13 district meetings in seven different districts over the period from 2011-2012. District meetings included local seminar series meetings (held in 2011), annual business meetings, summer barbeques, and annual banquets. Between interviews and district meetings, I covered a total of 11 different districts, including: Chatham-Kent, Dufferin-Wellington, East Central, Grey-Bruce, Huron, Oxford, Rainy River, Simcoe, Thunder Bay, Wellington, and Wentworth-Brant.¹³ Members from other districts attended Provincial Council meetings and Annual Conventions, so I have heard from or spoken with members from an even wider representation of districts within the organization.

It was primarily through participant observation that I was able to meet interviewees, to establish an initial relationship, and to carry on subsequent informal conversations at different meetings with many interviewees over the course of the years that I have been working on this research. Participant observation also allowed me to

¹³ District names are based on county names, indicating their rough location within the province of Ontario.

carry on informal conversations with many more members, leaders and current staff who were not formally interviewed. As I went through the research process, these conversations at meetings allowed me to gain further understanding of the organization, and to confirm or further question for myself some of my findings from the interview data. My presence as a researcher at meetings allowed some members, leaders and staff to approach me to offer their perspectives, or to question me about my research and its progress.

Participant observation also gave me much better insight into the issues that the CFFO addresses, and the debates around many of these issues that have gone on within the CFFO during the years I have been attending meetings. This helped me to see more clearly the spectrum of perspectives that coexist within the CFFO and to some degree how these different voices are balanced in the debates and policies, as well as in the types of speakers that are invited to CFFO events.

1.3.2.2 Personal Interviews

In addition to participant observation, I also conducted personal interviews. I used several methods of finding people who were willing to be interviewed for my research. The first few interviewees were people whom I met at the Annual Convention held in November each year. I sat next to them by chance and, having found our conversation interesting, I asked them if they would be willing to be interviewed. I also later asked people I met at other meetings, usually district meetings, if they would be willing to be interviewed, and found several other interview subjects this way. I also found some interviewees through snowball recruitment, being introduced to other members by those I had already met, or had interviewees recommended to me by others I had already interviewed.

As I was not able to attend meetings in some districts across the province, I connected with other interview subjects by “cold calling” those who were listed as part of the local executive committees on the CFFO website. I was surprised how many people, having never met me, were willing to have me come to their homes to interview them. In fact, in every district, and at every meeting and interview, I was impressed with how welcoming members of the CFFO were, and how willing they were to take time, many hours in some cases, to talk with me, give me tours of their farms, have me stay for a meal, even overnight, and explain to me their interest and involvement in the CFFO. I had more people willing to be interviewed than I was able to interview.

I also did not interview any of the current staff working at the CFFO. While that is the case, the staff have also been very helpful in allowing me access to CFFO archives, giving me space in the offices to work on the archives, including me in the weekly commentary e-mailing, and generally making me welcome, not only at meetings but in so many other ways as well. My interactions with these people, and countless others I did not formally interview, over time situated me deeply into the CFFO culture.

Because of my methods for finding interview subjects, almost all of my interviewees represent leadership, or spouses of leaders in the organization on one level or another. Those few who are not leaders either at the provincial or district level at the current time likely have been leaders in the past, although not in all cases. At the very least, they are all active members in the CFFO—active enough that I either met them at a meeting, had them recommended by other active members, or found their names on a list of district leaders. This was not my goal when I set out to find interview subjects, but considering the relatively small number of interviews that I did, this has resulted in very

rich material from the interviews. To be sure, this material does not represent everyone. Those who are active, especially in leadership roles, usually have spent time considering the issues, and also have wider networks of contacts within the organization. They have thus encountered a wider range of the perspectives and membership that were beyond what I personally encountered in meetings or interviews. Many of them had been active for an extended period of time, thus also giving perspective on the history and changes within the CFFO.

I conducted interviews primarily in people's homes or on their farms (some were conducted in offices in the barn). Two exceptions included one interview at a coffee shop, and one at the offices of the off-farm job of one of the interviewees. All interviews were conducted in person and were audio-recorded. I also took hand notes during the interviews, and made field notes after the interviews (or during my stay on longer visits).

I conducted 21 interviews with 30 people. It was my initial intention to conduct all interviews individually, but in several cases married couples preferred that I interview them together. It is for this reason that nine of the interviews were conducted with both spouses in the same interview conversation. One of these interviews began as a one-on-one conversation and later the other spouse joined the conversation. The remaining 12 interviews were individual one-on-one conversations. In many cases having couples interviewed together added to the conversation, as spouses would bring up issues, or ask questions of one another in addition to my questions. Because they chose to be interviewed together, even in some cases when I specifically asked to interview them individually, I did not feel confidentiality of the interview was compromised. In the end I interviewed each spouse individually with only one couple. I also became more relaxed

after the first few interviews and no longer pressed the issue of individual interviews when both members of a couple were willing to participate.

I did not always request to interview both spouses, but I often did, especially if I had met both of them at an event or meeting, but even in cases where I had not met them before. CFFO membership is held by the farming couple together,¹⁴ which is in part why I attempted to interview both spouses of farming couples whenever possible. In some cases both spouses of a couple were active in the CFFO and had an interest in the issues addressed by the CFFO. In other cases, only one spouse of the couple was actively involved. Some less active spouses still agreed to be interviewed. In several cases the spouse who was less directly involved with the CFFO declined or was uninterested in being interviewed. In other cases I did only request to interview the most active member of the couple.

My interviews were semi-structured. I kept quite closely to the same set of questions, once it was established. Over the course of the first four interviews, I tested out the questions I wished to use, and adjusted them, so that from the fifth interview on, I used all the same questions for every interview. I interviewed both farmer members of the CFFO, as well as former staff who worked with the CFFO in a significant capacity. The interviews with farmer members were conducted in eight different districts of the 21 currently in Ontario.

¹⁴ CFFO, “Backgrounder” (Guelph: CFFO, 2012), 4.

1.3.2.3 Interviewees

I interviewed 30 people over the period from December 2008 to May 2012. Of the 21 interviews, nine were with married couples, and the other 12 were individual interviews. These interviews were conducted with members of the CFFO and with former staff who had worked in a significant capacity with the CFFO. Of the 30 individuals interviewed, 27 are of Dutch or partially Dutch ethnicity, or family background, but only 10 of them were born in the Netherlands. Eleven of the interviewees were women, 19 were men. Ages of interviewees ranged from retiree farmers to young couples recently married. Number of years farming ranged from less than 5 years to over 35 years. I did not ask for specifics of farm size based on either gross income or acreage. However, many farmers volunteered some information about their farms that gave an idea of size, or gave a self-description of the size of their farm. Based on this information, sizes of farms ranged from very small (less than 10 acres) to large or very large. All farms were owner-operated farms. Some farms did also have hired labour.

The predominantly Dutch ethnicity of the interviewees is also reflected in their religious affiliations or connections over their lifetime. I asked about interviewees' current denominational affiliation. I also asked with which denomination(s) of Christianity they have been associated in the past, with emphasis on the denomination of their childhood. For this reason, the numbers here will not add to 30. The most predominant religious association was with the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), with 27 people expressing a connection to this church either currently or at some point in their

lives.¹⁵ This is followed by affiliation with the United Reformed Church (7 people), followed by Catholicism (4 people), United Church of Canada (2 people), Baptist Church (1 person), and no church affiliation (1 person) at some point in their lives.

Those who grew up in the Christian Reformed Church and moved to the United Reformed Church, either when it was formed or shortly thereafter, did not express this as a conversion, but rather as a change of church to more correctly express their beliefs. Not counting those instances, only four of the interviewees had experienced a form of conversion or change of their religious affiliation. For some this meant they had converted, or fully changed their affiliation. For others this meant they held two religious identities, to some degree at least, at the same time. In three instances, these interviewees changed to the religious affiliation of their spouse around the time of their marriage. One person experienced conversion from no particular religious upbringing to a calling to a religious life. In all four instances, they changed their regular attendance or affiliation to the Christian Reformed Church.¹⁶ Interestingly, there were two other cases within this pool of interviewees where spouses (not interviewed) were born into another denomination but married someone from the CRC, and one interviewee was the child of this type of marriage. In all cases the family worshipped together at the CRC, and children were raised in the CRC.

¹⁵ For those who emigrated from the Netherlands, most identified having grown up in the Christian Reformed Church when asked in interviews, even though the Christian Reformed Church in North America does not share ecclesiastical governance with any denominations in the Netherlands. Interviewees expressed either that the church they belonged to in the Netherlands was the equivalent of this denomination, or that the church they belonged to and the CRC are essentially the same. This is most likely in part because I as an interviewer am not a Dutch speaker, nor am I Dutch myself, so the responses were somewhat simplified for me as an outsider.

¹⁶ Personal Interviews #1-21.

1.3.2.4 Farming Operations

The interviews represent responses based on 17 different farming operations. These farms ranged in size from what interviewees described as very small to very large. Fourteen were conventional, although some who are still conventional self-described their methods as “sustainable” in the sense that they used primarily manure as fertilizer, or may use very limited amounts of herbicide or pesticide, but are not certified as sustainable or organic by any available certification. 3 farms were certified organic. The most predominant supply managed commodity was dairy, on 10 farms, followed by eggs, on two farms. Non-supply managed commodities included: 15 farms with crops (used both as feed for the farm’s animals or sold as cash crops), such as corn, wheat, soybeans, hay, alfalfa, barley, potatoes, and fava beans. Two farms had greenhouses and outside horticulture crops: one flowers, one vegetables and fruit. Non-supply managed animal commodities included four farms that had cow-calf beef operations, while two farms had pork, one farm had rabbits, and one had a small flock of meat chickens, which was not under supply management because the flock was less than 300 birds.

1.3.3 Questions

I conducted all the interviews myself. The interviews were structured to semi-structured, as I’ve noted, following the list of questions. I only added questions for clarification, or to encourage a subject to expand further on a topic that had been raised. Those who were former staff members were asked somewhat different questions to better reflect their role in the organization, but these questions were in a similar vein to those asked of the farmer members.

The questions I asked ranged from specific fact-finding questions to open ended questions that could have been answered in many different ways. I did not, for example, ask farmers their age, but I did ask them how long they had been farming. Some questions focused on specific issues to test the waters and see how farmers understood and responded to them. Other questions were left much more open to see what topics farmers mentioned off the top of their head on their own as being of particular concern to them.

The specific questions are listed in Appendix A. They highlight CFFO membership, Christian identity and attitudes, and important concerns within agriculture in Ontario. They also ask about farming methods, including changes in personal farming methods and techniques over the course of the farmer's career.

Some of the questions, as might be expected, were less meaningful to some farmer members than for others. In some cases, however, I was surprised by the underwhelming response to particular questions. For example question 8, about the issues of food safety, food security and food sovereignty, often received responses that indicated these were not issues of concern for many farmers—especially the concept of food sovereignty. Many farmers interviewed were completely unfamiliar with this term. Interestingly, I included this question because it came up in an early interview, initiated by the couple I was interviewing, and also was mentioned in recent CFFO publications from the head office around the time when I was formulating the questions. While this particular couple may have been more interested in the topic of food sovereignty, or perhaps had recently been to a workshop or presentation on the topic, in other districts,

and later in time, this was not seen as such a pressing issue, or was unfamiliar to many interviewees.

On the other hand, in many interviews, the term stewardship or family farming came up in questions even when it had not been asked. There were no specific questions about Abraham Kuyper or the idea of sphere sovereignty either, but several interviewees also mentioned this on their own initiative.

1.3.4 Data Analysis

I personally transcribed and analysed all the interview data. Initially, I coded the interviews by hand, based on over-arching themes or key topics that I had seen repeated at meetings or in CFFO literature. This helped me to begin narrowing down the most important recurring themes and topics, and to begin some analysis of responses, in particular to stewardship. Later I coded the interview transcripts in more detail using NVivo coding software. This allowed me to code with far more detail, and to see more clearly the patterns of groupings of responses. With the NVivo software, I made a greater effort to move away from topics toward relationships, identity, and important changes in people's lives or within the CFFO as an organization. In grouping responses and in naming themes and perspectives, I have as often as possible used terminology that came directly from respondents. Although the analysis reflects my own categorizations, also in part founded on the previous categorizations of other scholars, I have also attempted as much as possible to reflect the perspective of those expressing it in words that would reflect their own understanding.

My primary interest in collecting the data and in interpreting it has been to understand what was important for members, and to see both the points of commonality

or connection, and also the points of difference or tension between different approaches to certain issues. I have tried to understand what the CFFO does, what motivates and interests members, and most importantly, how “Christianity” functions as an identity, as a means of connecting members together as a group, and as motivation for responsible farming.

1.4 Chapter Overviews

1.4.1 Chapter 2: Dutch Immigration and Pillarization: Foundations of the Christian Farmers Federation in Rural Ontario

Chapter 2 argues that the Dutch orthodox Calvinist roots, specifically those of sphere sovereignty and pillar social organization, are still evident in the CFFO as it exists today. This forms an important aspect of the Christian identity and focus of the CFFO as an organization. Many members continue to be motivated by the Kuyperian theology of sphere sovereignty to maintain and participate in pillar-type organizations such as the CFFO. The chapter seeks to explain the presence of a farming organization with these particularly Dutch orthodox Calvinist characteristics actively working in Ontario, Canada. It also attempts to understand how this characteristically orthodox Reformed Christian organization has found resonance with other farming Christians who have joined its ranks. Those members who are not orthodox Reformed share with the Calvinist members enthusiasm for Christian social engagement, and for connecting their faith to their lives and daily practices, often through reflection on scripture.

Chapter 2 begins with a historical examination of the wave of immigrants who were the founders of the CFFO. Feeling the pressures of lost farmland and economic strain in the period of rebuilding after the Second World War, many, especially rural

Dutch, were encouraged to emigrate. A remarkable number of orthodox Calvinists in particular chose to resettle in rural Ontario, coming first as agricultural labourers, and later purchasing and running their own farms. These farmers grew up with religiously based “pillar” organizations in the Netherlands. They founded the CFFO on the model of the orthodox Calvinist pillar organizational system from the Netherlands, motivated by both social and theological visions. Dutch Neo-Calvinist Abraham Kuyper was the visionary responsible for the idea of sphere sovereignty, the theological foundation for both the pillar system and for social engagement through these Christian-based organizations.

With a foundation of possible members in the significant population of orthodox Calvinist farmers particularly in southern Ontario, and with the motivation for social engagement from the theology of sphere sovereignty, the CFFO was created. It grew steadily through to the 1970s when newly hired full-time staff were able to raise the public profile of the organization, focus on developing policy with an ear to the grassroots members, and actively recruit more members for the organization. The CFFO grew in membership, primarily from within the orthodox Calvinist community, through the 1980s and early 1990s. In the mid ‘90s government legislation, intended to provide stable funding for General Farm Organizations, increased the support for CFFO significantly, moving its membership to include a wider denominational mix of Christians.

Today, many members of the CFFO are still motivated by the vision and theology of Abraham Kuyper, and the importance of sphere sovereignty as a guiding principle for the work of the organization. This is part of the public identity that the CFFO has

established over the years, as having a “long-term vision” that looks for what is best for agriculture as a whole, not what is best for individual members or individual commodities. Dutch orthodox Calvinist Christians still form an important base of the membership, but, especially among the leadership, there are now other Christian voices who have joined around the discussion table as well. Members who were interviewed are still highly socially engaged, not only through CFFO, but also within their churches, Christian schools, mission and charity work, political activity, and in other farming organizations as well. For many, this engagement ties back to the social vision to actively engage with and to transform society as part of their role as Christians exercising God’s sovereignty in all spheres, including the sphere of agriculture. In so doing, members look to various biblical passages to guide them in finding a Christian path within their farming work, and in considering policy issues within farming as a larger sector or enterprise.

1.4.2 Chapter 3: Agriculture of the Middle and Family Farming

Chapter 3 argues that the CFFO’s self-identification as an organization of family farmers is an important part of its self-understanding of its Christian identity. This is true for farmer members themselves, and within CFFO policy documents.

The first section of Chapter 3 considers the question of “family farm,” how it is defined, and the significance family farms have economically, socially and environmentally. Family farms are particularly associated with the change in farming structure commonly described as “the disappearing middle,” where mid-sized farms, usually run by and for families, are becoming fewer in number, and less influential in the overall farming economy, and are increasingly under pressure to industrialize. However, simply measuring farms by size does not capture the most important differences between

farm types. Instead, the ownership model, the management and decision-making model, and the source of the labour on the farm are also important measures that help to distinguish family farms, especially as many continue to increase in size and to industrialize. Family farms are also associated with certain values including the importance of family relationships, neighbourliness, work ethic, democracy (including through the wider dispersal of land ownership), and the importance of environmental stewardship. These values are contrasted with values of “plenty, progress, and modernization”¹⁷ promoted by the business emphasis of industrial farming, with less consideration for local communities and environments. While academics writing on the issue of family farms tend to favour the first set of values over the second, farmers themselves are more divided on the benefits and drawbacks of industrialization and modernization in farming. While this is the case, CFFO farmers are still seeking out Christian values and principles expressed through farming as part of their sense of calling to farming as a Christian vocation.

The second section of chapter 3 examines research data from the CFFO in particular, and their definitions of family farm. It also examines different ways family farms have been an important category of analysis in their policy papers, especially as an expression of their Christian values and worldview. Family farm entrepreneurs often feel a sense of vocation or calling in their work as farmers. They highly value the benefits of farming for raising a family and the opportunity to work in and with creation on a daily basis. The good work they do as farmers is evident in both the economic and the

¹⁷ Marty Strange, *Family Farming: The New Economic Vision* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 39.

environmental stewardship they achieve through their entrepreneurial ingenuity. These elements meaningfully tie their farming work to their Christian faith.

Fairness in farming is also of particular importance for CFFO members. This notion of fairness embraces concerns about farming policies that allow all types of farms to remain vibrant and profitable. Thus, issues of unfair competition were especially important, along with concerns over farmers getting a fair price in the marketplace for the products they produce. Economic pressures can also lead to problems of exploitation and greed within farming, in Canada and globally, which are of concern to CFFO members. The value of food goes beyond its monetary value, and includes the importance of food for human health (physical and spiritual) and social stability. Farmers also feel it is important that people are well educated about how food is produced, and how to prepare food for themselves at home, giving people greater awareness of and connection to the value of food.

1.4.3 Chapter 4: Christian Stewardship in Agriculture

Chapter 4 argues that Christian stewardship, as understood and defined within the CFFO, reflects their particular perspective as both Christians and farmers. It examines in greater depth how this understanding is then applied through farming methods within a spectrum of responses within the organization.

Chapter 4 begins with an examination of scholars, especially Lynn White Jr., who have argued that Western Christian worldviews of dominion and domination have had a negative influence of on treatment of the environment. Following directly from this, I explore the theological (re-)conceptions of dominion and of stewardship that have been used within Christianity, historically, but especially since the second half of the 20th

century, in response to environmental issues and these specific accusations of the role Christianity has played. Stewardship has been particularly important as an environmental response among evangelical Christians, who are also highly focused on the connections of the symbol or concept of stewardship to scripture in particular, thus keeping it a biblically-based response.

Stewardship is also an important concern within farming. Stewardship as understood and used within farming is related to, but somewhat different from, the understanding of stewardship within Christianity more broadly. The important points of overlap, or consonance, between the formulation of stewardship by theologian Douglas John Hall and agrarian farmer-philosopher Wendell Berry illustrate a common “ethic of stewardship” that is shared between theological and agrarian visions of stewardship. These two writers characterize how stewardship is understood within much academic thinking on the topic, within theology and within agricultural agrarianism respectively. In both cases stewardship describes for these writers human efforts to seek balance between control of nature and meaningful connection with nature. This means human cultural creation and order-making is balanced with allowing “the wild” a place alongside and within human culture as well.

Stewardship attempts to find a balance between a holistic view of nature and a dualistic view of nature, between connection and control. Historically stewardship has been a response of moderation or of management over and against practices of dominion—or, when it became more excessive, domination. In its contemporary use by many different people, the understanding of the different responsibilities and rights or privileges granted through stewardship reflects a spectrum that encompasses some

aspects of dominion and some aspects of earthkeeping or emphasis on care rather than control. Within farming, stewardship is still an important aspect of moderating especially the potential impacts of the industrializing aspects of farming. However, critics question whether a stewardship ethic is sufficient or strong enough to counter the economic pressures to industrialize that farmers on all types of farms experience.

Within the CFFO in particular, I discovered that stewardship is an important concept, used frequently by the CFFO as an organization in documents and discussion, and by members personally in their expression of what constitutes good farming. The second part of the chapter examines the ways CFFO members define stewardship, and the many types of responsibilities they articulated as part of their practice of good stewardship. Drawing attention to an area of tension within the CFFO in interpreting how stewardship is best practiced with specific contemporary farming techniques and technologies, the chapter concludes with two categorizations or poles on a spectrum of different approaches to the relationship between humans and nature through farming practices. Farmers within the CFFO expressed views characterized as falling between, on one side, those in favour of imitating and maintaining the integrity of creation, and on the other side, those in favour of developing and responsibly using creation.

Chapter 2: Dutch Immigration and Pillarization: Foundations of the Christian Farmers Federation in Rural Ontario

2.0 Chapter Introduction

Abraham Kuyper is the man who really talked about sphere sovereignty, and to me sphere sovereignty, which means literally and simply that God has dominion over every aspect of life, whether it's education or politics, or farming, doesn't matter, labour unions, it all fits under that sphere sovereignty domain. And to me, I understand that thinking, and I fully endorse that. Christianity is not just about being in church on Sundays and believing in Jesus Christ. It's much broader than that. It's really, "how can we influence all of life on this planet?" ... I believe that God has dominion over the sphere of agriculture, and there's no organization that can do it better than one that uses in its logo a picture of the light on the Bible, showing how we are to farm.¹⁸

This chapter argues that the particular ethno-religious foundations of the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario are still highly evident today. The very existence of the CFFO as an organization, a key motivation for membership of many of its members and the vision for its work as a Christian organization within agriculture, cannot be properly understood outside of the context of this particular branch of Dutch Protestant Christianity, or the particular history of immigration in rural Ontario.

¹⁸ Personal Interview #13.

The above quotation from one of the farmer interviewees clearly emphasizes the importance, for him personally and for the CFFO as an organization, of the theology of sphere sovereignty, which was established by Dutch orthodox Reformed theologian Abraham Kuyper. The first section of the chapter examines the historical emigration patterns of Dutch, and especially of Dutch orthodox Reformed,¹⁹ who came to Canada in the second half of the 20th century. This wave was significant for rural Ontario where many of them settled as farmers. Having brought with them this theological vision of sphere sovereignty, which motivated them to engage with and transform society in every sphere of life, as well as a cultural predisposition to faith-based organizations, they founded the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario (CFFO) in 1954, by federating together smaller locally-based Christian farmer groups.

Many of the identifying characteristics of the CFFO today relate directly to this history and social-theological vision. Immigrants from the Netherlands formed several pillar-type organizations in Canada, of which the CFFO was one. Examples from interview and archive research within the CFFO are included in the first section of the chapter, and in more detail in the second section of the chapter, to illustrate how this history continues to be relevant to the current identity and work of the CFFO. Sphere sovereignty is still an important part of the vision and purpose of the CFFO on many

¹⁹ Writers in this field use a number of terms to describe the different Protestant denominational groups originating in the Netherlands. In this paper (Dutch) orthodox Reformed and (Dutch) neo-Calvinist, or (Dutch) orthodox Calvinist are used interchangeably to denote those groups of Reformed denominations which separated from the established Dutch Reformed Church. Although the related denominations in North America do not share ecclesiastical governance with denominations in the Netherlands, they do share a common history and social vision. These denominations are “neo”-Calvinists because they also follow the theological interpretation of Calvinism from Abraham Kuyper, who was influential in establishing the pillar organizations within this denominational group in the Netherlands. See also note 57.

levels, and is also part of the reason especially those of Dutch orthodox Calvinist faith participate in the CFFO.

The second section of the chapter examines Christian social engagement of the CFFO as an organization, and of the individual members who were interviewed. In a general sense, the publicly presented identity of the CFFO, while not as explicitly based in sphere sovereignty, still reflects the emphasis on long-term and broader visioning in policy, and a concern for maintaining the health and prosperity of agriculture as a whole into the future. This broader long-term vision is part of what the CFFO identifies as its particular Christian perspective within the sphere of agriculture. It continues to be highly engaged with government and public policy debates. Individual members, through the CFFO and many other organizations also demonstrate a high level of engagement within the sphere of agriculture and other social concerns as an expression of their personal Christian faith.

The CFFO has attracted others outside of the foundational orthodox Reformed membership. These members also usually share a particular enthusiasm for social engagement as an expression of faith. This includes high levels of community involvement through church, Christian schools, mission and charity work, political engagement, and active membership and leadership in other farm organizations beyond the CFFO. Members interviewed also reflect on the significance of various biblical stories and passages as a way to connect their Christian faith to practices and policies within contemporary farming.

2.1 Dutch Immigration and Pillarization

The Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario could be seen as an isolated and anachronistic transplantation of early twentieth-century Dutch social organization into a Canadian context. Its related parent organization in the Netherlands, the *Christlijke Boeren en Tuinders Bond* (CBTB), has been disbanded, and no comparable sister organizations currently exist elsewhere in Canada or the United States. However, because of the concentration of orthodox Reformed Dutch farming immigrants and those of Dutch descent or ethnicity in rural Ontario, and because of the particular political climate within agriculture in Ontario, the establishment, growth and continued prosperity of the CFFO within Ontario makes much more sense.

The CFFO is not, however, a mere anachronism, and has grown and responded to the particular context in which it works. The CFFO is actively engaged in the important agricultural debates in Ontario, Canada, and North America. The strength of this organization has also been nurtured by the fertile Ontario ground in which it was planted, grew, and adapted. The acceptance and participation both of a wider group of farming Christians and of the agricultural community at large are important factors in the continued success of the CFFO.

Although the CFFO is thriving only in the Ontario-based context, the wider reasons for its formation and the underlying theological motivation for its work are grounded in the theological and social vision of the Dutch Neo-Calvinist theologian Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920). The influence of Kuyper on the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario is illustrated in first, the initial establishment and subsequent maintenance of a Dutch orthodox-Reformed pillar in Ontario, and second, in the value

within the orthodox Reformed world-life-view of sphere sovereignty as a key motivating factor not only in the creation, but more importantly in the continued work and vitality of this organization alongside many related organizations.

Dutch pillar-type social organization grew out of Kuyper's social vision. In this form of social organization, each religiously-based pillar was comprised of its own separate set of social institutions such as schools, newspapers, political parties, and farming organizations, which formed compete pillars for each of the four main denominational groups within Dutch society.²⁰ Kuyper himself founded or helped to found several of the institutions that comprised the orthodox Calvinist pillar in the Netherlands, including the Free University of Amsterdam and the Anti-Revolutionary Party.²¹

Furthermore, Kuyper's theological thinking was particularly influential on Dutch Neo-Calvinists, who formed a significant portion of those who came to Canada from the Netherlands after the Second World War, many of whom settled in rural areas of Ontario. Migration from the Netherlands continued through the rest of the 20th century into rural areas in particular, contributing to the Dutch presence in Ontario. The major wave of immigrants after World War II played a pivotal role in founding the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario (CFFO) among many other social organizations, all reflecting a

²⁰ Frans J. Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence in Ontario: Pillars, Class and Dutch Ethnicity* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1998), 23-25.

²¹ Nicholas P. Wolterstorff, "Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920); Commentary," in *The Teachings of Modern Protestantism: On Law, Politics, and Human Nature*, ed. John Witte Jr. and Frank S. Alexander (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 29.

Kuyperian-influenced theological worldview that encouraged them to cultivate and establish the Dutch “seeds” they brought with them.

Dutch Calvinists established a strong pillar in Ontario, especially in rural areas, wherein a farming organization was part of the fuller complement of social organizations in the Dutch Calvinist “institutional completeness.”²² This pillar has remained strong, and the CFFO as an organization continues to have strength in rural (mainly southern) Ontario and retains its significant Dutch membership, and religious and social foundations and practices.

In order to clearly illustrate the reasons for a thriving farming organization based on the Kuyperian theology of sphere sovereignty in the context of rural Ontario, I begin this chapter by examining the patterns of Dutch immigration to Canada, with particular attention to the period immediately following the Second World War, then extending through the rest of the 20th century and into the early 21st century. The following section considers this wave of immigration with a focus on the significance it has had for rural Ontario, even though this was not the exclusive settling place for Dutch immigrants. Next, the chapter examines the establishment of Dutch-type pillars in Ontario, where both orthodox Reformed and Catholic pillars were established in rural Ontario. Following directly from this, the chapter explores the establishment and early years of the Christian Farmers Federation as a grass roots movement founded by recently immigrated Dutch farmers in areas of rural Ontario with high concentration of Dutch orthodox Calvinist

²² Raymond Breton, “Institutional Completeness of Ethnic Communities and the Personal Relations of Immigrants,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 70 (1964): 193-205; Stuart Macdonald, “Presbyterian and Reformed Christians and Ethnicity,” in *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada*, ed. Paul Bramadat and David Seljak (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 189-190; Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence*.

population. The following section considers in more detail the significance of the Christian Farmers Federation as an example of an orthodox Reformed pillar organization within the sphere of agriculture in rural Ontario. This final section examines Kuyper's theological concept of sphere sovereignty in the context of current CFFO membership, mandate and policy formation.

Following this first main section of the chapter which establishes the history of the migration of Dutch to rural Ontario, and the theological and organizational foundations behind the formation of the CFFO, the chapter's next main section examines research data from current members that reflect some of these particular characteristics as they are found within the CFFO today. While most of the interviewees are Dutch orthodox Reformed, some are not, yet these characteristics are shared, to a greater or lesser degree, among the interviewees.

2.1.1 Dutch Immigrants to Canada

Dutch immigrants who came to Canada in the decade following World War II survived a war characterized by hardships from the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands and the Japanese occupation of the Dutch colony of Indonesia. Many factors motivated the move of Dutch immigrants to come to Canada during this period.²³ The “push” elements that encouraged this significant wave of immigration included land shortages in the Netherlands and high birthrates. “Pull” factors included a need for especially agricultural

²³ See for example, Herman Ganzevoort and Mark Boekelman eds., *Dutch Immigration to North America* (Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1983); Herman Ganzevoort, *A Bittersweet Land: The Dutch Experience in Canada, 1890-1980* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart and Multiculturalism Program, Canadian Government Publishing Centre, 1988); Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence*; Albert VanderMey, *To All Our Children: The Story of the Postwar Dutch Immigration to Canada* (Jordan Station: Paideia Press, 1983).

labour in Canada, positive relations between Canada and the Netherlands as a result of the war effort, and the work of Dutch religiously-based immigration committees in North America to facilitate settlement.

For farmers in the Netherlands in particular, land shortages were an important factor for emigrating, especially for younger couples. Land was in short supply because of the extensive infrastructure damage of the war, particularly to key dykes causing massive flooding which reduced further the available amount of land.²⁴ Those who wanted to get established in farming but were unable to, either because of the cost or simply the lack of available land, saw emigrating as a good solution. Migration of whole families to Canada enabled extended family to remain together, and allowed the possibility of all the children continuing to farm in Canada.²⁵

High birth rates in rural areas of the Netherlands made the lack of land even more serious. Ganzevoort notes that “[r]eligion played an important part, as Roman Catholic and orthodox Calvinists had the highest rate of fertility. It was clear that the greatest population pressure and its resulting problems could be expected in the countryside among the Roman Catholics and orthodox Calvinists.”²⁶ Not only were citizens interested in leaving home and starting elsewhere, but the government facilitated the exodus as a

²⁴ Frans Schryer, *Farming in a Global Economy: A Case Study of Dutch Immigrant Farmers in Canada* (Boston: Brill, 2006), 37. Schryer notes that there was another flood in 1954, which also significantly reduced the amount of available farmland. Also Ganzevoort, *A Bittersweet Land*, 63. Ganzevoort states that “over 500,000 acres of land had been inundated by salt water, a condition that would retard crop production for years.”

²⁵ Schryer, *Farming in a Global Economy*, 35-41.

²⁶ Ganzevoort, *A Bittersweet Land*, 64.

strategy to relieve some of the problems it faced in physical and economic reconstruction.²⁷

The Canadian government was initially reluctant to admit significant numbers of immigrants immediately after the war, wanting to allow soldiers to get reestablished before flooding the job market with new immigrants.²⁸ There was still a need at that time, however, for farm labour, and Dutch farmers had a good reputation and were considered desirable immigrants to fill this need. Relations between Canada and the Netherlands were strong after the war, not only because of the positive association with the Canadian soldiers who made such sacrifices to liberate the Netherlands, but also because the Canadian government was helpful to the Dutch royal family during the war.²⁹ In total 1886 war brides and 428 children came to Canada from the Netherlands through marriages to Canadian soldiers who had helped to liberate the Netherlands.³⁰ These war

²⁷ Van Dalen and Henkens note that there is some debate about how serious the overpopulation problem really was. They contrast the opinions of William Petersen writing in 1955 with those of B. P. Hofstede writing in 1964, the latter who thought that “the postwar emigration boom was primarily based on an ‘overpopulation psychosis’.” Hendrik P. Van Dalen and Kene Henkens, “Longing for the Good Life: Understanding Emigration from a High-Income Country,” *Population and Development Review* 33 (2007): 44.

²⁸ Schyer, *Farming in a Global Economy*, 91. See also William Petersen, *Planned Migration: The Social Determinates of the Dutch-Canadian Movement*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955).

²⁹ Michiel Horn, “Canadian Soldiers and Dutch Women After the Second World War,” in *Dutch Immigration to North America*, eds. Herman Ganzevoort and Mark Boekelman (Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1983), 187-195. Horn notes that while the presence of Canadian soldiers created some social tensions immediately after the war, war brides were the start of the large wave of immigration to Canada after the war. He argues that the positive feelings towards Canada were what lingered and that they acted as a positive factor in deciding where to emigrate. Canada hosted the Dutch Royal family during the war, and Princess Margriet was born in Ottawa: Ganzevoort, *A Bittersweet Land*, 61-62; William Petersen, *Some Factors Influencing Post-War Emigration From the Netherlands* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1952), 15; Joanne Van Dijk, “The Role of Religion in the Postwar Settlement of Dutch Canadians,” *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 38 (2001): 59.

³⁰ Ganzevoort, *A Bittersweet Land*, 68. This is the same number of war brides that is given in Horn, “Canadian Soldiers and Dutch Women,” 192.

brides and children were the first of what became a significant wave of immigrants to Canada.

A program was negotiated between the two countries to encourage immigrants with farm experience to settle into placements with sponsoring families in rural Canada. This was called the Netherlands-Canada Settlement Scheme, and the response of immigrants from the Netherlands far exceeded the expectations of the Canadian government. “[T]he Canadian Government ... agreed to accept 500 unmarried Dutch farm workers in the spring of 1947. Because of the need for agricultural labour in Canada, approximately 2738 Dutch immigrants arrived in Canada in 1947, a far greater number than had been agreed upon in the first discussions.”³¹ Through this program, each immigrant or immigrant family needed to be placed with a sponsor in Canada who agreed to provide work and lodgings for one year.

In order to facilitate immigration, organizations were set up in Canada, along denominational lines, to help get new families sponsored and settled. The Christian Reformed Church, then strong in the United States but less so in Canada, established an Immigration Committee for Canada in 1946. It supported and governed the work of fieldmen, who were primarily responsible for arranging for sponsor relationships, and for helping new families to get settled. It also oversaw the work of home missionaries who helped to establish new church congregations as the population of Christian Reformed

³¹ Ganzevoort, *A Bittersweet Land*, 68. This number somewhat exceeds what is indicated in the records listed in VanderMey who cites 2361 emigrants to Canada in 1947. VanderMey, *To All Our Children*, 52-53. However, VanderMey's cited numbers also do not seem to account for the number of war brides who emigrated. Petersen, cited above, estimated the number of war brides at around 2000 plus about 400 finances. See also Petersen, *Planned Migration*, 171-172.

increased in new areas.³² Although it was disbanded in 1966, Ganzevoort characterizes The Immigration Committee of the Christian Reformed Church as “an aggressive and extraordinarily effective organization.”³³

Van Dijk notes that while Calvinist officials encouraged emigration to Canada, this was not the case among Catholic Church leaders in the Netherlands who suggested emigration to Australia, or, if to Canada, then to Quebec, which was seen as a Catholic stronghold. “[Catholic] officials perceived Canada as a largely Protestant country where life was too materialistic and where individuals could quickly lose their faith.”³⁴

However, the Catholic recruiters on the Canadian side were successful nonetheless, having formed their own Catholic Immigration Aid Society, at the same time that the Immigration Committee of the Reformed Church of America was formed, in 1950.³⁵

Ganzevoort notes that the Catholics in Canada were particularly successful in encouraging immigrants, since the proportion of Catholics who emigrated represented only about 14% less than the total Catholics in the population, and Catholics “were proportionally less rural than the Calvinists and this was a rural emigration.”³⁶ As noted above, the higher birth rates of these two religious groups in rural areas may have accounted for some of the particular success among rural Catholics. Furthermore, these Dutch Catholics seem not to have heeded the suggestion to settle in Quebec. Dutch

³² Tymen E. Hofman. *The Canadian Story of the CRC: Its First Century* (Belleville: Guardian Books, 2004), 35, 57. Ganzevoort, *A Bittersweet Land*, 70, also mentions this organization, but dates its beginning as 1947.

³³ Ganzevoort, *A Bittersweet Land*, 70.

³⁴ Van Dijk, “The Role of Religion,” 59.

³⁵ Ganzevoort, *A Bittersweet Land*, 70-71. Note that the Reformed Church of America is a separate denomination from the Christian Reformed Church, and each had its own organization to aid immigration.

³⁶ Ganzevoort, *A Bittersweet Land*, 70.

immigrants as a whole settled instead primarily in Ontario, British Columbia, and Alberta.³⁷

According to the records from the Netherlands of the total number of Dutch who were sponsored by the government to emigrate to Canada, 16,125 people left for Canada between 1946 and 1949, 82,244 people left between 1950 and 1954 (with the peak years being 1952 and 1953), and a total of 38,636 left for Canada between 1955 and 1959 (with a peak in this period in 1957). In total 137,005 people chose Canada as their destination between 1946 and 1959, which is nearly 33,000 higher than those who emigrated for the second most popular destination, Australia, in the same period.³⁸

Dutch immigration was clearly concentrated within English-speaking (and culturally Protestant) areas of Canada. In this period, immigrants from the Netherlands represented about 10% of the total immigrant population arriving in Canada.³⁹ The majority of these Dutch immigrants settled into urban or suburban areas in Canada. In particular, concentrations of Dutch settlement can be found in urban areas of Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia. In terms of the urban population in Canada as a whole, Dutch immigrants are currently most concentrated in Toronto, followed by Vancouver,

³⁷ Government of Canada, "Immigrants from the Netherlands in Canada," in *Immigration Research Series: Netherlands* (Ottawa: Minister Supply and Services Canada, 1996), 1.

³⁸ See VanderMey, *To All Our Children*, 52-53 for the chart of emigration figures from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Public Health of the Netherlands. The total number who went to Australia in this period was 104,111. Of the other destination countries listed, Canada was the primary destination in seven years during this period. Other destinations were most popular by year: 1946, 1947 (US), 1950, 1955, 1956, 1958 and 1959 (Australia). See also Government of Canada, "Immigrants from the Netherlands in Canada," 3, which specifically mentions that "[i]n 1952 and 1953, for example, a total of over 40,000 immigrants arrived in Canada from the Netherlands."

³⁹ Government of Canada, "Immigrants from the Netherlands in Canada," 3.

Hamilton, Edmonton, London and Calgary.⁴⁰ Within Ontario specifically, Schryer notes high concentrations of Dutch (including immigrants and subsequent generations) in suburban areas around Toronto, including North York, Etobicoke, Mississauga, and Scarborough aside from the concentration in Toronto itself. Outside of the greater Toronto area, he finds concentrations of those of Dutch birth or descent in Ottawa, Hamilton, and London.⁴¹ The predominance of Dutch immigrants in Ontario is still evident in the overall distribution throughout the Canadian provinces. “In 1991, 57% [of Dutch immigrants] lived in Ontario, 19% resided in British Columbia and 14% lived in Alberta, while 10% live in the remaining provinces combined.”⁴² Despite significant populations in other parts of Canada, the preference for Ontario remains clear.

2.1.2 Dutch Settlement in Rural Ontario

While Dutch migration was an important part of the immigration for the whole of Canada, it had a very large impact on rural Ontario, where another significant portion of these immigrants settled. Although the majority of new immigrants to Canada currently settle in urban areas, and by sheer numbers more Dutch immigrants and Canadians of Dutch ethnicity are settled in urban, or more often suburban, areas, the Dutch also form a significant part of the rural population. Dutch immigrants have been settling as farmers in the areas of good farmland in rural Ontario since the large wave of immigration following

⁴⁰ Government of Canada, “Immigrants from the Netherlands in Canada,” 4.

⁴¹ Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence in Ontario*, 83.

⁴² Government of Canada, “Immigrants from the Netherlands in Canada,” 4. Note that this document defines Dutch Immigrants as: “those with landed immigrant status (whether or not they are currently Canadian citizens) born in the Netherlands” (p. 9). This does not include children born to immigrants from the Netherlands.

the Second World War. Hofstede notes the particularly high concentration of orthodox Reformed or Calvinists, who came in the early part of the migration.

Although they comprise less than 10% of the Dutch population, this group has always had a more than proportionate share in emigration. Here the accent lies on Canada. The percentage of Calvinists who went there in period 1 [1948-1952] was 41; indeed, this period as a whole was characterized by the (agrarian) emigration of Calvinists to Canada.⁴³

Initially admitted as agricultural workers, many went on to purchase and run their own farms, often purchasing farms from Canadian-born farmers. This pattern has continued with successive waves of farmers from the Netherlands, who today form the single largest group of immigrant farmers in Ontario, which does not even account for those farmers of Dutch descent born in Canada.⁴⁴ In many rural areas of Ontario inhabitants of Dutch ethnicity form a significant percentage of the total population. Concentrations of Dutch are found in patterns and groupings, often with either Dutch Catholics or Dutch Protestants settled together in certain areas.⁴⁵ In particular, there is a significant concentration in Southwestern Ontario, with pockets also in Dundas County, south of Ottawa on the St. Lawrence River, and in northwestern Ontario, around Thunder Bay.⁴⁶

⁴³ B. P. Hofstede, *Thwarted Exodus: Post-War Overseas Migration from the Netherlands* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), 98-99.

⁴⁴ Statistics Canada, "Farm Population: Bucking the Trend in a Country Shaped by Immigrants." <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/ca-ra2001/first-premier/socio/immigr-eng.htm>, accessed Feb. 15, 2013.

⁴⁵ Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence*, 73-75.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Dutch immigrants joined not just the rural population, but specifically the population of farm operators in Ontario. Statistics Canada's summary of the rural and farming population from the 2001 Census notes that "[h]alf of Dutch farm operators came to Canada in the post-war influx of the late 1940s and the 1950s, and nearly two-thirds of them settled in Ontario."⁴⁷ Although a significant number of the current Dutch immigrant farmers came in that one large wave after World War II, the other half of these immigrant farmers came in the decades following.

Despite the ordeals of both the war, and then subsequently uprooting and moving to a new land, often coming over with little money or property, many Dutch immigrants were able to become successful, especially as farmers, in Canada within a short time of their arrival. At the time when the Dutch were coming to Canada, more Canadians were leaving farming, making more farms available for interested Dutch immigrants.⁴⁸ Schryer notes in his book *Farming in a Global Economy* that the farming success of these immigrants established and maintained a positive stereotype of Dutch farmers here in Canada, and in Ontario in particular. Although he notes that this is a stereotype, he also argues that "stereotypes, particularly positive ones, can also reflect observable patterns. In the case of Canada, this stereotyped image corresponds to trends revealed in official census data indicating the predominance of recent immigrant farmers from the Netherlands in agriculture."⁴⁹ Schryer includes many stories of immigrant families who

⁴⁷ Statistics Canada, "Farm Population: Bucking the Trend."

⁴⁸ Schryer, *Farming in a Global Economy*, 49.

⁴⁹ Schryer, *Farming in a Global Economy*, 4.

had varying experiences with their sponsor families, and with settling into farming and living in a new country, which he collected in the 1980s and 1990s.

Although many of those I interviewed between 2008-2013 were second generation or later, or came over with their parents as children or teenagers, one story illustrates some of the struggles immigrants faced coming soon after the war, and the trouble this family in particular had in getting established in farming in Canada.

The husband of this couple told me that as the fifth son in a farming family, he saw no hope for himself of getting land to farm in the Netherlands. His father, keen that he should farm, made sure he had the necessary 4 years of agricultural college to get a farming license in the Netherlands. However, with land prospects so poor, he arranged to emigrate to Canada. He and his fiancée had a civil marriage ceremony to get the emigration process started, and then they had their church wedding just two weeks before they departed for Canada. They arrived in March 1957. Once they arrived, he had to find a job immediately, as they were restricted by the Netherlands to bringing only \$370 with them when they came. He worked at various jobs, and moved to a couple of different places before they found a farm they wanted to buy.

I lived in Southern Ontario, and then we lived in Saskatchewan, and we lived in Manitoba. We just had to get our bearings. And then we finally ended up here [in Northwestern Ontario]. But then I couldn't move any more because I was broke. ...

But, then I came here and I bought this farm. I wanted to get on my own farming, so this farm was for sale, but I told the guy, "I don't have any money." He said, "well no problem." He said, "you can rent this farm, for a

hundred dollars a year for three years,” and the farm was worth \$3000. So, so that’s why I came here. So I got some cattle, and we got some chickens and whatever, pigs, fed some little calves. But then, the quota system came in, they shut down the creamery here, and everything else, and I was left high and dry. I couldn’t afford to buy quota.

He had to take work off-farm again to survive. He wasn’t able to farm fulltime until he retired from his off-farm work.⁵⁰

Immigration of farmers to Canada from the Netherlands continued into the 1990s and beyond, but their choice of province is not as clearly focused on Ontario. “During the nineties Alberta rivaled Ontario as Dutch immigrant farmers’ destination of choice.”⁵¹ The biggest change in the profile of farmers coming to Canada from Europe in general has been the capital assets that they bring with them. While immigrants coming immediately after the war were often severely restricted in the amount of capital and goods they were able or permitted to bring with them, as we have just seen, by the 1990s the opposite was the case.

When examined according to the decade in which immigrant farmers arrived, the eighties mark a changing point. About a third of immigrant farmers who arrived in that decade operated high-value farms in 2001, more than the quarter of those who had arrived in the sixties and seventies. For those who arrived in the first half of the nineties, 40% had farms with capital assets over \$1 million in 2001; for those who had arrived in the last half of that decade,

⁵⁰ Personal Interview #17.

⁵¹ Statistics Canada, “Farm Population: Bucking the Trend.”

the share climbed to 44%. Most of these high-value operations are operated by people born in the Netherlands, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and Germany. Over half are dairy farms.⁵²

Those emigrating to Canada from the Netherlands more recently, farmers and non-farmers, also have different motivating factors that influence their choice to migrate. Looking at an uptake in emigration from the Netherlands (and to some extent across Europe) in the late 2000s, Van Dalen and Henkens point out that while expectations of higher incomes were a valid expectation of those who migrated in the postwar wave of the 1950s, such expectations were no longer the case in the late 2000s. They argue that factors other than expected increase in income motivated the move away from the Netherlands even to the point where an expected loss in income is acceptable in light of other desirable elements. In this case, overcrowding, and a loss of confidence in the welfare state, led migrants to seek “what the Dutch consider the Good Life: nature, space, and less populated surroundings.”⁵³ A significantly greater availability of all of these is found especially in rural Ontario.⁵⁴

As in the urban areas, Dutch immigrants who settled in rural areas were more concentrated in some areas than in others. Schryer notes that they also tended to cluster

⁵² Statistics Canada, “Farm Population: Bucking the Trend.”

⁵³ Van Dalen and Henkens, “Longing for the Good Life,” 56-57.

⁵⁴ Van Dalen and Henkens’ article cites the population density of the Netherlands at the time of their article to be approximately 470 people/ km.² See Van Dalen and Henkens, “Longing for the Good Life,” 59. The population density of southern Ontario is averaged at 86.4 people /km², and is 14.1 people/km² in Ontario as a whole. Statistics Canada, “Population and Dwelling Counts, for Canada, Provinces and Territories, and Census Divisions, 2011 and 2006 Censuses,” <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/hltfst/pd-pl/Table-Tableau.cfm?LANG=Eng&T=702&SR=1&S=51&O=A&RPP=9999&PR=35&CMA=0>, accessed Aug. 13, 2014.

by religious affiliation, with Catholics grouped together and Calvinists grouped together.⁵⁵ Schryer offers lists of smaller cities and townships with significant concentration of Dutch population. Most significant of those he mentions for the purposes of this study are those that correspond to the areas where local groups of Christian farmers emerged and grew into districts within the larger provincial organization. Of the four founding local districts—Strathroy, Wyoming, Woodstock, and Forest—that came together to form a Federation in 1954 all correspond to areas that Schryer lists as having significant Dutch populations.⁵⁶

2.1.3 Pillarization and the Dutch Presence in Rural Ontario

Pillarization refers to a form of social organization established in the Netherlands in the late 1800s. In this form of social organization, religious affiliation rather than class is the primary basis for the formation of social groups and institutional organizations, thus creating parallel vertical pillars. There were three primary pillars in the Netherlands: Catholic; Protestant, or Calvinist; and “neutral” or non-denominational. The Protestant or Calvinist pillar can be further subdivided into two, a liberal Calvinist and an orthodox Calvinist pillar, where the liberal Calvinist church had the status of establishment in Dutch society for some time.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence*, 75. Schryer does note some specific towns that exhibit this sort of religious concentration, but he does not offer a comprehensive examination of specifically each area by religious affiliation.

⁵⁶ Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence*, 74-80. Note that Schryer here is using data from the 1986 Census.

⁵⁷ Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence*, 25-28. The Dutch Reformed Church, or *De Nederlandse Herformde Kerk*, is the more liberal Calvinist denomination, and is connected with the Reformed Church in America. The orthodox Reformed primarily belong to *De Gereformeerde Kerken* in the Netherlands, associated with The Christian Reformed Church in North America, recognizing that there are also other denominations both in the Netherlands and in North America which also belong under the umbrella term “orthodox Reformed.” See also note 19.

These Dutch farmers, both Calvinist and Catholic, brought with them their biases for Dutch forms of social organization such as pillarization. Although not to the same degree, both the Dutch Catholic and Dutch orthodox Calvinist pillars were established in rural Ontario. Furthermore, where a significant concentration in the population exists, especially in rural areas, Dutch immigrants tend to have close kinship ties through intermarriage within their common ethnic and religious group.⁵⁸

The patterns of settlement, and also the significant presence of Dutch farmers in Ontario in particular, and in Alberta as well, indicate why an organization such as the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario would have a greater base for members in this province than in other areas of Canada. It is also not surprising, considering the second preference for Alberta, that this was where a sister organization, the Christian Farmers Federation of Alberta, was also founded in the 1970s. For those immigrants who were Dutch orthodox-Reformed, this concentration of ethno-religious compatriots allowed them to establish a significant network of social institutions, such as church congregations, separate Christian schools, and many others, to meet their needs in these urban and rural areas. Having been accustomed to the Dutch pillarized society growing up, they recreated it anew in Canada.

2.1.3.1 Kuyper and Sphere Sovereignty

The impetus to establish pillar-type social organizations among the Dutch orthodox Calvinists in Ontario did not strictly come out of habit or nostalgia for home. The reason

⁵⁸ Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence*, 94. Schryer argues that it is very uncommon for the Dutch to marry other Dutch outside of their religious grouping. While this may be the common pattern, in my own research I have encountered instances of intermarriage between Dutch Catholics and Dutch orthodox Reformed, as well as between Dutch and non-Dutch.

they were so motivated and so successful in establishing their own complete set of social institutions was in part because this was also theologically grounded and motivated. Such organizations are part of the larger social vision of Christianity and Christians as actively involved in the public sphere, based on a Calvinist, and more specifically a Kuyperian view often referred to as sphere sovereignty. This is a form of social vision that outlines, for many Reformed Christians, God's sovereignty over all spheres of human social and cultural life, and also the need for balanced sovereignty between and among all these spheres of life. Many, even Canadian born, orthodox Reformed members of the CFFO still cite Kuyper's vision, and his notion of sphere sovereignty, as the reason behind the existence of the CFFO and for its continued work, as well as their reason for joining and participating as members. The theology of sphere sovereignty calls on them, as Christians, to demonstrate God's sovereignty in whatever sphere of life they are engaged, be that farming, politics, education, or other forms of business.

Kuyper's theological notion of sphere sovereignty was central to this process because it linked religion and politics, insisting on the importance of religious voices within the public sphere. Kuyper himself was a Dutch politician, writer, and theologian, and Prime Minister of the Netherlands from 1901 to 1905. Kuyper, as mentioned earlier, was also influential in the formation of the pillar form of social organization in the Netherlands.⁵⁹

In Kuyper's theology of sphere sovereignty, human society is understood to be comprised of many different independent spheres, each centered around a particular

⁵⁹ Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence*, 27; Wolterstorff, "Abraham Kuyper," 29-69.

aspect of human cultural life. These many spheres exist and are ordained as part of the original order of creation. God is sovereign over each sphere, and humans exercise sovereignty within each sphere on God's behalf. As Kuyper says, "there is a domain of nature within which its sovereign exerts power upon material things according to established laws. So there is also a domain of personal, family, scientific, societal and ecclesiastical life, all acting in obedience to their own peculiar laws of life and all subject to their own peculiar authority."⁶⁰ Balance between these spheres is particularly important. As Lee notes, "Kuyper was convinced that the monopoly and domination of a single sphere inevitably leads to injustice, and frustrates and stifles a creative and rich social life."⁶¹ This means for Kuyper that neither the state nor the church can function as a dominating sphere; rather each must respect the authority and sovereignty of the other, as well as that of all the other spheres including those of the family, science, industry, and art.

⁶⁰ Kuyper quoted in Gordon J. Spykman, "Sphere-sovereignty in Calvin and the Calvinist Tradition," in *Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin*, ed. David E. Holwerda (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 183.

⁶¹ Hak Joon Lee, "From Onto-theology to Covenant: a Reconstruction of Abraham Kuyper's Theory of Sphere Sovereignty," in *Public Theology for a Global Society*, eds. Deirdre King Hainsworth and Scott R. Paeth (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans, 2010), 89.

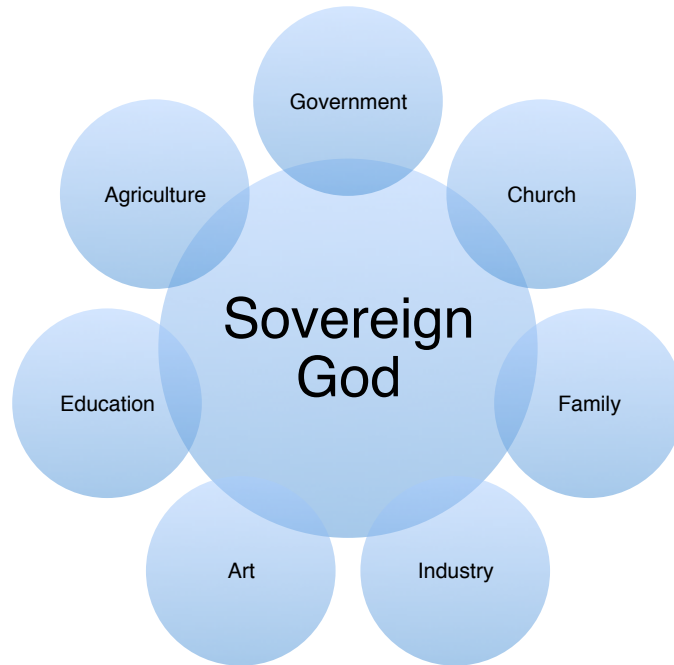


Fig. 2.1

For orthodox or Neo-Calvinists, God’s authority is best expressed through the work of Christians engaged in Christian based institutions functioning in each public sphere of life, including Christian schools in the sphere of education, Christian political parties in the sphere of politics, a Christian labour union in the sphere of industry, and a Christian farming organization in the sphere of agriculture.⁶² The CFFO fills this last role in the province of Ontario. It is important to note also that while these are Christian organizations, they do not fall under the authority of an ecclesiastical body but are sovereign in their own sphere. These organizations together form a pillar founded on ethno-religious identity, beliefs and practices.

⁶² Paterson gives some discussion to the intellectual debates and activism that helped to stir the development of these institutions: John L. Paterson, *Geography and Religion, Agriculture and Stewardship: The Practice of Agricultural Stewardship the Christian Farmers Federations of Canada* (University of British Columbia: PhD Thesis, 1998), 94-103; See Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence*, 131–135, for descriptions of each of these organizations in Ontario.

2.1.3.2 *The Orthodox Calvinist Pillar in Canada*

Within the four main pillars in the Netherlands (Catholic, Neutral, and two Calvinist), the Calvinist pillar subdivides into two key branches, liberal Reformed and orthodox Reformed. The Reformed Church in America most closely relates to the liberal Reformed church in the Netherlands or the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*. Abraham Kuyper founded an offshoot of the Reformed church, the *Gereformeerde Kerk*, or “re-Reformed” church, which is a key denomination within the orthodox Reformed pillar in the Netherlands, and which is closely related to the Christian Reformed Church in North America.⁶³

Of these four pillars, only the orthodox Calvinist pillar has been strongly established in a lasting way in Canada, and in Ontario in particular. Several factors account for this situation. First is that of all the pillar groups in the Netherlands, a larger proportion of orthodox Calvinists came to Canada than from any other group. Second, and perhaps most important, are the different ways the four pillar groups mapped onto the existing religious landscape and social institutions in Canada as they arrived and settled into Canadian life and society. Third is the ongoing influence of the wider Canadian context in accepting and encouraging or in thwarting or retarding the establishment of pillar-type social organizations in Canada.

The first influencing factor is the different proportions of each pillar among those who immigrated to Canada from the Netherlands. When significant waves of Dutch immigrants began coming to Canada, especially after the Second World War, they came

⁶³ Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence*, 25-28; Hofman, *The Canadian Story of the CRC*.

from all four of these pillars, but a disproportionate number came from the orthodox Calvinist pillar.⁶⁴ As Schryer points out in his history, *The Netherlandic Presence in Ontario*, while orthodox Calvinists represented about 9.7% of the total population of the Netherlands during the period of the largest post-war wave of immigration to Canada, they “represented anywhere from 26.4 percent (in 1954) to 45.4 percent (in 1951) of Dutch emigrants to Canada.”⁶⁵ By contrast the neutral pillar had the smallest percentage of members among emigrants to Canada.⁶⁶ Ganzevoort’s comments above about the population problem in rural areas tied to fertility among orthodox Calvinists and Roman Catholics in particular, and their presence in rural areas and professions, may be one indication why these two groups were so strongly represented among those who came in this wave. Clearly a significant proportion of the orthodox Calvinists, especially from rural areas, immigrated into Canada. The proportion of Catholics who came was also significant, although not as dramatic as with the orthodox Calvinists. Ganzevoort notes the significance of the Catholic immigration, especially considering they had a smaller presence in rural areas.⁶⁷

The second significant factor is how each denominational pillar did or did not map itself onto existing social organizations and institutions in Canada, which Schryer notes was very different for the four pillars.⁶⁸ The Catholic pillar mapped largely onto the

⁶⁴ Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence*, 95; Hofstede, *Thwarted Exodus*, 98-99.

⁶⁵ Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence*, 95.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ “Some 24 per cent of the total immigration was Roman Catholic even though Catholics made up 38 per cent of the total population of the Netherlands at that time. They [Catholics] were proportionally less rural than the Calvinists and this was a rural emigration.” Ganzevoort, *A Bittersweet Land*, 70.

⁶⁸ Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence*, 93-106. See also Van Dijk, “The Role of Religion,” 58.

existing separate Catholic institutions in Canada. The liberal Calvinist pillar tended to map onto mainstream Protestant denominations such as the United Church, the Presbyterian Church, and in some cases, the Anglican Church. The neutral pillar eventually established itself with humanist and socialist organizations (especially in urban areas) in Canada. The orthodox Calvinist pillar largely did not map onto existing Canadian society and social institutions, so members had to establish their own congregations and schools, often with support from the established Christian Reformed denomination in the United States.

The two pillars that were most established as specifically Dutch pillars in Canada, and in rural Ontario in particular, are the Dutch Catholic pillar, and the Dutch orthodox Calvinist pillar. While Schryer argues that the Dutch Catholic pillar was largely unsuccessful and has more or less disappeared, it was strongest in Ontario, and where remnants can be found today they are in rural contexts.⁶⁹

Canada already had a well-established separation between Protestants and Catholics, especially in rural areas, before these significant waves of Dutch immigration. A Catholic pillar existed in a sense, although this was most often either French or Irish in ethnicity, depending on the specific local area.⁷⁰ As the Dutch settled into areas where Catholic institutions such as churches and schools were already established, for the most part they joined these institutions, and only in rare cases did they form new schools or

⁶⁹ Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence*, 107-121, especially 118.

⁷⁰ For discussion of the Irish see Mark McGowan, *The Waning of the Green: Catholics, The Irish and Identity in Toronto, 1887-1922* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1999).

churches where there was a need as a result of Dutch Catholic immigration into an area.⁷¹ However, as Schryer points out, “Dutch Catholic immigrants represented a high percentage, sometimes even a majority in some rural parishes. While the situation changed rapidly with the influx of Catholics of other nationalities, Dutch-Canadian Catholics ended up constituting more than half [of] the population in some parts of rural southwestern Ontario.”⁷² Schryer also notes that in areas where there was a particularly high concentration of Dutch Catholics, they tended to intermarry.⁷³

Since a significant portion of the Dutch orthodox Calvinist population in rural Ontario did not find existing Christian denominations in Canada suitable to their religious needs they set up their own congregations as they were able, and established a system of separate Christian schools.⁷⁴ Combined with other social organizations and institutions, this group formed a high level of institutional completeness that also included the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario. Up until the early 1990s the CFFO, with about 650 members at that time, was almost entirely populated by orthodox Reformed membership.⁷⁵

The third highly influential factor on the sustainability of Dutch religious pillars in Ontario has been the wider Canadian context as either fertile or hostile ground to the

⁷¹ Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence*, 110.

⁷² Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence*, 103.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Van Dijk notes that the close proximity of the Christian Reformed Church of North America, which was already well established in the United States, with strong roots in Michigan, was able to extend resources to help establish orthodox Reformed families and congregations in neighbouring Ontario. Some CRC congregations had been established in Ontario before WWII. Van Dijk, “The Role of Religion,” 64.

⁷⁵ Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence*, 132; Paterson, *Geography and Religion*, 137. However, members from other denominations have been present even from this early period of the organization. Personal Interview #14.

establishment of such forms of social organization. The Dutch Catholic pillar, for example, faced difficulties in establishing itself because of conflicts within the church hierarchy, as well as the ethnic diversity of Catholics (immigrants and those born in Canada) in many areas, urban and rural, which prevented concentration of Dutch Catholics, and thus the formation or maintenance of purely Dutch Catholic social organizations in many areas.⁷⁶ Catholic church hierarchy was also opposed to the formation of ethnic congregations, and discouraged this.⁷⁷ Because of this also, intermarriage increased between Dutch Catholics and Catholics of other ethnic backgrounds (or even non-Catholics), breaking down the concentration of exclusively Dutch identity in the population.⁷⁸

Through establishing their own social institutions, orthodox Calvinists have not contested with the tensions within Canadian society that Catholics did. In contrast, the institutions that the orthodox Calvinists established became attractive to some non-Dutch Protestants and other Christians over time, so much so that in some areas, a noticeable portion of the students in private Christian schools are no longer of Dutch ethnicity.⁷⁹ These institutions, founded as Dutch organizations, are now also sustained by a wider Christian population who have been welcomed to join. This pattern of wider acceptance

⁷⁶ Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence*, 107-121. Schryer here also notes the difficulties faced in establishing a network of Catholic credit unions, 115-116.

⁷⁷ Van Dijk, "The Role of Religion," 68. See also W. C. Van den Hoonard, *Silent Ethnicity: The Dutch of New Brunswick* (Fredericton, NB: New Ireland Press, 1991), and Howard Palmer ed., *Immigration and the Rise of Multiculturalism* (Toronto: Copp Clark Publishers, 1975).

⁷⁸ Van Dijk, "The Role of Religion," 60.

⁷⁹ Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence*, 130.

by Christians beyond those of Dutch ethnicity can also be seen very strongly in the case of the CFFO.

The denominations that comprise the orthodox Calvinist pillar in Canada include the Christian Reformed Church, the United Reformed Church (which also includes formerly Orthodox Reformed Church congregations), the Canadian Reformed Church, the Netherlands Reformed Church, and the Free Reformed Church.⁸⁰ These denominations, although related to other Calvinist denominations, are almost exclusively Dutch by ethnic origin.⁸¹

2.1.4 Emergence of the Christian Farmers Federation

In areas where a significant number of farmers had settled together who were Dutch orthodox Reformed, they established local Christian farmer groups. These local groups formed the roots of what later grew into the Christian Farmers Federation.⁸² Having established themselves locally, the districts became interested in federating together into a provincial organization. Members from four local groups founded the Christian Farmers Federation on March 6, 1954, when they met in Strathroy, and discussed and agreed to form a Federation.⁸³ The four previously existing local groups of Christian Farmers had

⁸⁰ A good source for discussion of many of these smaller denominations is Harinck and Krabbendam, with some chapters also discussing the larger Christian Reformed Church and Reformed Church in America: George Harinck and Hans Krabbendam, *Morsels in the Melting Pot: The Persistence of Dutch Immigrant Communities in North America* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2006).

⁸¹ MacDonald, "Presbyterian and Reformed Christians and Ethnicity," 168-203. See also Aileen Marilyn Van Ginkel, "Ethnicity in the Reformed Tradition: Dutch Calvinist Immigrants in Canada 1946-1960," (University of Toronto: MA Thesis, 1982).

⁸² "Of Ontario" was added later, making it CFFO.

⁸³ Paterson estimates that "about a dozen" were in attendance, but no list of names are given in the meeting minutes. John L. Paterson, *Geography and Religion, Agriculture and Stewardship: The Practice of*

been established in Strathroy, Wyoming, Woodstock, and Forest Ontario.⁸⁴ Other local groups were also established, before and after this meeting, in smaller and midsized towns throughout Ontario.⁸⁵ Districts were first listed in CFFO records by the main town where they gathered to meet, and later by the county or area they encompassed, rather than just by town. For an expanded list of the key districts and their historic development in the CFFO, see Appendix B and the maps in Appendix C.

These early meetings opened, as meetings still do today, with a reading from scripture, and a prayer. Early meetings were conducted and minutes were taken in Dutch. The first President of the new Federation was Rienk Feddema from Strathroy.⁸⁶

Since many of these farmers were newcomers to Canada, still most comfortable writing and speaking in Dutch, they were organizing themselves as farmers in pillar-type organizations, not only as Dutch farmers but also as Christian Farmers, and the dual ethno-religious aspects of the group were predominant from the very beginning.

It is significant that the CFFO emerged out of local districts, which then joined to work together as a federation. An important element of the CFFO, still relevant today, is

Agricultural Stewardship the Christian Farmers Federations of Canada (University of British Columbia: PhD Thesis, 1998), 114.

⁸⁴ These four locals are mentioned in the meeting notes of the first meeting to establish the CFFO as a Provincial Federation. See CFFO, "Meeting Minutes March 6th, 1954." However, the Jarvis local is noted as having joined the CFFO at the same time as the other locals that federated at that meeting in the CFFO Accreditation document for 2011 (cited below). Woodstock Local is listed in the same document as established on June 19, 1953. Jarvis Local is listed as established just in 1953, and the other two locals are not listed in the 2011 document, perhaps because the districts were not as active in 2010. See CFFO, *Application for Reaccreditation* (2011), 9.

⁸⁵ In an interview, one member told the story that the Owen Sound chapter was already in existence before this 1954 meeting, but the members were not able to make it to Strathroy for the meeting. They had to turn around near Clinton due to a snowstorm. Owen Sound and Strathroy are about 220 km apart. Personal Interview #4.

⁸⁶ CFFO Document: "Presidents, Vice Presidents, Secretaries 1954-1994."

that its strength comes from the grassroots basis of its districts, and that the CFFO only has farm membership.

The initial interest in forming a Provincial Federation was followed by a burst of growth, but then almost immediate loss of interest. At the meeting in 1955, it was noted that 11 districts were active and that membership was around 286.⁸⁷ Although some of the local districts were still quite active, Paterson notes that interest in the provincial meetings waned, and by early 1956 meetings as a provincial federation were called off.⁸⁸

Paterson describes 7 stages of development of the CFFO from before the first formation in 1954 to the arrival of the Farm Business Registration program in 1994. These can be summarized as follows. *Stage 1) 1950-1956*, early formation of local districts, which then federate together into the CFF (the O is added later) in 1954. A burst of interest rises in 1955, which then fizzles out in 1956. Some local districts are still active, while others lapse. *Stage 2) 1957-1966* is a phase of struggle with weak participation, although the Federation is reestablished at a provincial level. *Stage 3) 1967-1970* is a phase of increasing strength, participation, and greater activity at the provincial level. A part-time fieldman, Hilbert van Ankum, is employed by the Federation. *Stage 4) 1971-1974* marks an important change for the CFFO when their first full-time employee, Elbert van Donkersgoed, is hired (1971) and begins to get more significant media attention for the CFFO. *Stages 5 & 6) 1975-1993* witness a greater public awareness of the CFFO, along with slow but steady growth in membership. Another key employee, Martin Oldengarm, is hired in 1977 as fieldman. *Stage 7) 1994* begins when the

⁸⁷ Cited in Paterson, *Geography and Religion*, 115.

⁸⁸ Paterson, *Geography and Religion*, 118.

provincial legislation on Farm Business Registration is enacted, dramatically increasing member and supporter numbers for the CFFO, and providing a stable source of funding for all of the then three recognized General Farm Organizations in Ontario, of which the CFFO is one.⁸⁹

While Paterson's seven stages break the development down into finer detail, three main divisions show some of the larger patterns. The establishment and early development of the organization from the early 1950s beginning with the local districts, and up until the end of the 1960s, represented the establishment of a pillar-type farming organization, closely founded on the model of the *Christlijke Boeren en Tuinders Bond* (CBTB), the orthodox Reformed farmers' organization from the Netherlands.⁹⁰ In the growth and establishment stage, from 1970 to 1993, the Federation develops not only stronger leadership, especially in the two key staff members, Elbert van Donkersgoed and Martin Oldengarm, but also a clearer articulation of policy and vision from a principled Christian, usually Kuyperian (sphere sovereignty), perspective on agricultural issues in Ontario. This is less a matter of mimicking or borrowing from the Netherlands, as it is finding its own voice and place within the Ontario agricultural scene. Elbert van Donkersgoed's leadership and vision in applying the theology of sphere sovereignty to the particular issues in Ontario agriculture are important for the development of the CFFO and its particular public identity. The work of Martin Oldengarm as Field Manager contributed to growth in membership. In this period the CFFO is large enough to support

⁸⁹ Paterson, *Geography and Religion*, 107-108, for the general summary of the stages, and the chapter "Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario" in *Geography and Religion*, 105-197, for a much more detailed exploration of each stage in this part of their history.

⁹⁰ For more detail on the CBTB and the related Catholic and neutral farm organizations in the Netherlands see Paterson, *Geography and Religion*, 75-87.

full-time and part-time paid staff. It is in this period also that the organization begins to use the concepts first of family farms, and then of stewardship, both of which become key to CFFO policies.⁹¹ Finally, from 1994 to the present the CFFO grows and strengthens as it is embraced by the wider Ontario and Christian society, propelled in large part by the establishment of the Farm Business Registration (FBR) program in Ontario.

2.1.5 CFFO as Part of the Calvinist Pillar in Rural Ontario

A dramatic change in the make up of the membership of the CFFO occurred in 1993 when the CFFO succeeded in being included as a General Farm Organization in the newly established Farm Business Registration program, a source of stable funding for General Farm Organizations in Ontario. Although there was some opposition to including a Christian farming organization among those recognized, the CFFO argued that the government should not dictate how farmers themselves wished to organize, and the CFFO was included in this program, indicating a wider Ontario context of support and acceptance.⁹² As part of this legislation, farms of a certain size (based on their income) are required to pay a fee in support of one of the recognized General Farming Organizations in Ontario.⁹³

⁹¹ Paterson first notes the use of family farm beginning in 1972, and, although mentioned earlier, from 1975 onward as when stewardship becomes an increasingly important part of CFFO policy. Paterson, *Geography and Religion*, 137, 153-154.

⁹² Personal Interviews #11, 14.

⁹³ As of the establishment of the program, farms with \$7000 gross income are required to participate in the program, and so far this number has not changed. In order to be recognized as a General Farm Organization, an organization must meet with the requirements of the legislation, and submit their credentials regularly for review. When the program was established in 1993, three organizations were recognized as accredited General Farm Organizations. As of 2012, there are only two accredited General Farm Organizations in Ontario: The Ontario Federation of Agriculture, and the Christian Farmers

Immediately following this legislation, the membership numbers and make-up of the CFFO significantly changed, as indicated in a 1994 CFFO News Release that stated an increase from around 600 to 3080 supporters, most of whom were not orthodox Reformed.⁹⁴ Although there was already some presence of members from outside the orthodox Reformed community before this change, this provincial legislation marks a dramatic point of increase in the interdenominational nature of the CFFO membership, beyond just those from various Reformed denominations. This change was reflected in the election of their first non-Dutch president of the Provincial Executive Board within a half-decade of the change, and they elected their second non-Dutch president in November, 2011.⁹⁵ Interestingly, neither of those running for the position of president in 2011 were of Dutch background, and the Provincial Executive Board⁹⁶ in general reflects a wider interdenominational trend in the membership. Although the organization began as part of the Dutch orthodox Calvinist pillar in Ontario, as an established Christian institution, it is now being embraced by a wider group of Christians, Dutch and non-Dutch, Catholic and Protestant and other Christians as well.

2.1.5.1 Sphere Sovereignty in the Policies and Purpose of the CFFO

The CFFO undertakes its work within the sphere of agriculture, and agricultural policy.

As a General Farm Organization it acts to advise government in developing farming

Federation of Ontario. The National Farmers Union – Ontario lost its status as a recognized GFO under the reaccreditation review process.

⁹⁴ CFFO, “Changes Underway within CFFO,” *News Release* (September 1994): 1.

⁹⁵ The first non-Dutch president of the CFFO was Bob Bedggood who was first elected to the CFFO Provincial Executive in 1996, and served as president from 1998 to 2001. The second was Lorne Small, who was elected President of the CFFO in 2011, and is the current president of the CFFO. See CFFO, “Convention 2001 – Highlights,” *Earthkeeping* 12 (Feb. 2002): 8.

⁹⁶ Also often referred to simply as “the Provincial Executive.”

policies, and to educate farmers on better farming practices. In doing so, it also attempts to base policies and practices on biblical principles, as it understands them. The CFFO summarizes its purpose as follows:

an organization with the dual purpose of enabling farmers to work out their Christian faith in their vocations as citizens, and to develop policy applications of the Christian faith to agriculture. The CFFO's main service or "products" are Public Policy Development and Advocacy/Dialogue.⁹⁷

While the CFFO's primary role is advocating and advising government based on member input or concerns, member meetings of the CFFO also serve other functions for members. These include providing inspirational and educational speakers, social functions, and peer-to-peer advising and discussion.

As mentioned earlier many farmers themselves express the importance of the sphere sovereignty worldview. When asked what was important in order to understand the CFFO and its work, several of my informants pointed to this Kuyperian worldview as foundational to understanding the CFFO or as their reason for membership. As one farmer put it:

The history of the Kuyperian view of life and the Calvinist view is that you have to claim God's sovereignty in all areas of life, including farming, and you have to make that known to people, you know, you have to make that part of how you do your thing. ... As Christians, go forth into all walks of life and see what you can bring as God's ambassador into that walk of life, into that

⁹⁷ CFFO, "Notice of Meeting – Provincial Council" (Guelph: CFFO, 2014), 2.

sphere. ...It's not only to learn about all spheres of life, but also to transform all aspects of life, [and to] redeem, bring the message of redemption to all aspects [of life].⁹⁸

Adopting the perspective that Christians should have not merely strong representation in, but reflect God's dominion in multiple spheres of life, another farmer said,

Abraham Kuyper is the man who really talked about sphere sovereignty, and to me sphere sovereignty, which means literally and simply that God has dominion over every aspect of life, whether it's education or politics, or farming, doesn't matter, labour unions, it all fits under that sphere sovereignty domain. And to me, I understand that thinking, and I fully endorse that. Christianity is not just about being in church on Sundays and believing in Jesus Christ. It's much broader than that. It's really, "how can we influence all of life on this planet?" ... I believe that God has dominion over the sphere of agriculture, and there's no organization that can do it better, than one that uses in its logo a picture of the light on the Bible, showing how we are to farm.⁹⁹

While these farmers hold on to the importance of the theology of sphere sovereignty, they do not in any other way connect this back to the Netherlands in particular. Another farmer, however, made a direct contrast between the function of sphere sovereignty based organizations working within the political context in the

⁹⁸ Personal Interview #5.

⁹⁹ Personal Interview #13.

Netherlands, and the challenges faced by the CFFO working within the political context of Ontario. He notes that Elbert van Donkersgoed as policy leader of the CFFO nonetheless rose to the challenge.

Farmer: And that was actually Elbert's mandate when he was hired back in the 1970s, you know, build us a farm organization just like what the CBTB was in Holland. So he did his best. And he certainly, he succeeded for 99%, [short pause].

S.M.A.: And that 1%? Is it just because it's different here?

Farmer: No, it is probably, it took Christian Farmers 20 years to be recognized by the government as a viable organization. Where of course in Holland, see here you've got basically your two party system, right? Like the NDP still exists but it is, whatever. But there [in Holland] of course they have a multi-party system, so the Christian Farmers Federation automatically had political connections with the Anti-Revolutionaire Partij [Anti-Revolutionary Party – founded by Abraham Kuyper] and the Catholic farm organization had connections with the Catholic faction, with the Catholic political party. So that connection CFFO misses to some extent, missed to some extent back in its early days. It is different now.¹⁰⁰

Elbert van Donkersgoed himself describes his own sense of calling to the job at CFFO when they were first able to hire a full-time staff in the early 1970s. It was precisely the opportunity to put the theology of sphere sovereignty into practical

¹⁰⁰ Personal Interview #4.

application within agriculture that drew him to the position. Interestingly, after years of work with the CFFO, van Donkersgoed did not use the term “sphere sovereignty” in the interview, as he would not have used it in his engagement with the wider public discussions on farm issues, but the importance of that theological grounding for him and his work are very clear.

Elbert van Donkersgoed: I did a degree in philosophy, primarily with an emphasis on the philosophical thinking that comes out of the Netherlands that is known as the, well, this gets to be somewhat technical, what's my best word? The word Reformational is probably the best. But a worldview that's rooted in Reformational thinking that goes back to John Calvin, and a fair number of other thinkers. Abraham Kuyper is a key thinker in the Netherlands, who is both a thinker and a politician in the Netherlands, and the kind of thinking that says, "people of faith, Christians should take their faith into all areas of life because the Christian faith is important to all areas of life." And without getting into the technical details of that philosophical thinking, that worldview, I was very much of that mind and I was also still very much of the mind of agriculture. So when I came back to Canada... the notion of taking that worldview that says, "all areas of life are part of the Kingdom, that we should be claiming, so to speak, for the Kingdom of God," it appealed an awful lot to me to work that out. Rather than doing technical philosophical thinking I was much more interested in taking the philosophical thinking and seeing now to what extent one could develop this practically. And so when I started looking for work in the beginning of '71 I was looking

for something that one could take this worldview and try to make it relevant, to make the Christian faith more relevant than it was. And make it relevant not in just a personal approach, as in individuals with their own spirituality doing a good job of something, like doing a good job of farming, but also to think it through about how society and culture would look at some part of life. And agriculture was the one that had the most appeal, and then this ad [for the CFF] came along, and it was the right fit.¹⁰¹

Elbert van Donkersgoed brought his North American training in the theology of sphere sovereignty together with his background growing up on a farm in Ontario in his work for the CFFO for over 35 years. This combination was important for his own sense of vocation in his work with the CFFO, as much as it was for the farmers who hired him to work for them.

One important example of the Kuyperian view of sphere sovereignty in the CFFO comes across in the relationship that the CFFO has with government, and the respect they show to the sovereignty, or authority of government in its own particular sphere. Although demonstrations may be common among some farming organizations, this is not the CFFO's approach to dealing with government. One former member of the Provincial Executive put it this way:

Within the CFFO we really believe we have the right to present the case in front of government. We do not have the right to demand. It's a Christian principle. Because government is set in authority over us, when a decision

¹⁰¹ Personal Interview, Elbert van Donkersgoed.

*comes down, we have to accept it, because government was planted there by God. We have a right to present but not to demand, and that's why CFFO has never, hardly ever participated in tractor demonstrations and all these kinds of things, because we believe it's not the biblical way of doing things. ...That's a fundamental principle of CFFO which I hold dearly.*¹⁰²

This principle of non-demonstration was explained in greater detail in a CFFO Newsletter, which goes out quarterly to all members of the organization. In the February 2005 issue, the staff writer reminded members of a decision made by the Executive in 1978 regarding responding to government. The article opens by saying,

The CFFO has a long history of working cooperatively—rather than in an adversarial fashion—with municipal, provincial, and federal governments. This stems from a biblical principle that says citizens need to be in proper relationship to governing authorities.

The article points to the decision to respond to public policy through the channels of “letter writing, brief presentation, news releases, ...[and in more extreme cases to] apply to the appropriate regulatory body, to officers of our governments, or to the course of law for a ruling on the justness of the issue of public justice in question.”¹⁰³ This they suggest strongly as the best route rather than public tractor demonstrations.

It is clear that the importance of the theology and worldview of sphere sovereignty, especially as developed by Abraham Kuyper, is still an important part of the

¹⁰² Personal Interview #11.

¹⁰³ CFFO, “Public Demonstrations,” *The CFFO Newsletter* 3 (Feb 2005): 2-3.

function of the CFFO, and also a guiding principle in their dealings with government and other institutions. As an institution working in the sphere of agriculture, they are not subservient to an ecclesiastical body, and exercise their own sovereignty in their sphere of human society. At the same time, they respect the authority, or sovereignty, of government, and see this as a biblically based principle from within the sphere sovereignty theological worldview.

The creation and the continued success of the CFFO in Ontario is a testament to the ongoing strength of the Dutch orthodox pillar in Ontario. At the same time, it illustrates some of the reasons for that ongoing strength. This pillar was well established not only because of the particular circumstances of those orthodox Reformed Dutch who came to Canada after the Second World War and through the last half of the twentieth century, but also because of the strong theological motivation for these neo-Calvinists to actively engage in all areas of life as Christians because of Abraham Kuyper's influential theology of sphere sovereignty. They developed policy around principles based on the theology of sphere sovereignty, and found application for these principles within the issues facing Ontario agriculture. They have earned the respect of government, and the wider agricultural community, and have attracted members from beyond their original base of Dutch orthodox Calvinists, so that today they are an active and still successful General Farming Organization, thriving in Ontario.

2.1.6 Summary of Dutch Immigration and Pillarization

Following the Second World War, a significant number of Dutch orthodox Calvinists emigrated to Canada, many of them into rural Ontario, and began to establish social institutions for themselves in their new country. This was in part because they did not

find the existing churches and other social institutions suitable to meet their own theological vision. They established churches, Christian schools, and many other institutions, thus creating an orthodox Calvinist pillar in Ontario, and in the rest of Canada. Those Dutch farmers who founded the CFFO in 1954 were among these new immigrants, and they wanted to establish a Christian farming organization similar to the CBTB they were used to in the Netherlands.

From these foundations, the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario grew, initially mainly among the orthodox Calvinist farmers. In 1994, new legislation in Ontario established the CFFO as one of the recognized General Farm Organizations in Ontario, qualifying it for stable funding, and also significantly increasing its members and supporters. This means that today, a wider spectrum of Christians are now active in the CFFO. However, the Calvinist and Kuyperian foundations are still very much evident, and are important for understanding the reasons for its foundations and continued work within agriculture in Ontario.

2.2 Current Realities of Christian Social Engagement in the CFFO

As I have reviewed above, the CFFO was founded and emerged as a pillar-type farming organization sharing many characteristics with the similar Dutch orthodox Reformed farming organization when it was first founded by Dutch farming immigrants in Ontario. Today, however, it is at once still clearly rooted in these Dutch social and theological foundations, while at the same time having grown into something that better reflects the broader Ontario context in which it operates. The “Dutchness” of the CFFO is still apparent, not only in the continued significance of the presence of members who are Dutch immigrants or descendants of earlier immigrants, but also in terms of the

theological basis for its continued work with government in the sphere of agriculture, based on the sphere sovereignty model of Kuyper's theology.

The organization is no longer primarily a Dutch orthodox Reformed enclave, and is in fact embraced by and embracing of Christians who are outside of the traditional foundations and majority. The CFFO has made itself welcoming to members and leaders who are Christians from different ethnic and denominational backgrounds, including Catholics, which would have been almost unimaginable in the context of the Netherlands.

Research data from both the interviews and participant observation I conducted reveals members' perceptions of the identity of the CFFO. They identify the CFFO as being Christian by virtue of being biblically principled, as having policies aimed at the long-term health of the whole of agriculture, and as focusing on justice issues such as family farming and stewardship. They distinguish the CFFO as a Christian organization as distinct from, in particular, the largest provincial general farm organization, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA).

Minority groups and perspectives within the CFFO include those who live and farm outside the main concentration of farming activity in south-eastern Ontario, those who come from outside the Dutch orthodox Reformed community, and those who farm using organic methods. These groups add to the diversity within the CFFO, but also are aware of themselves as not completely fitting with the majority of CFFO members.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Women are also in the minority within the CFFO, as they are still also within farming as a profession. The particularity of women farmers' perspective is not as clearly articulated at present, in part because there are still so few of them around the table in discussions.

The CFFO meetings are the main way that members actively engage in the work of the CFFO. Meetings are not just about policy. They also act as important vehicles for social community building among members at both the district and the provincial level. The variety of meetings gives some idea of the demands on CFFO leaders at the district and provincial levels. Public religious rituals of prayer, scripture reading, devotional reflection and hymn-singing at meetings not only publicly declare the Christian identity of the CFFO, but the particular Protestant heritage and majority that still characterizes the CFFO. The inclusion and participation of the wider agricultural and political community in these meetings, including representation from other farm organizations and elected politicians (such as members of provincial parliament or MPPs), and Ministers of Agriculture, indicate the good relationship the CFFO fosters with government and the rest of agriculture in Ontario. Since each different type of meeting attracts a different cross-section of members, it is clear that having a variety of meetings is important to fostering both the work of the CFFO and the vital sense of community within the CFFO as an organization.

The CFFO members to whom I spoke are highly active not only in the CFFO meetings and leadership, but also in their wider communities. This includes active involvement in their local church congregations, participation in private Christian schools (which require significant volunteer engagement as well as annual tuition for students), mission and charity work, political engagement, and work in other farming or food related organizations or events.

While members identify biblical principles applied to farming policy as an important aspect of the identity of the CFFO as an organization, interviewees themselves

made many direct connections between scripture passages or stories and contemporary farming. These included the relevance of the Bible for their personal farming methods, and for the direction they would like to see in agricultural policy and our food system as a whole. Themes that emerge in their discussion of biblical passages are also explored in later chapters, including the value of food, or the dangers of greed in farming.

2.2.1 Identity of the CFFO

In order to better understand the identity of the CFFO, I looked particularly at interview responses about what motivated people to become members of the CFFO, and also how important it was to them that the CFFO was a Christian organization. Other comments about who chooses to belong to the CFFO also contributed to a better understanding of the identity of the CFFO, as seen from within the organization.

The CFFO, as the data clearly shows, is primarily about being “Christian,” and about “farming.” These two things spell out the foundations of its identity. The CFFO distinguishes itself from other non-Christian farming organizations when, in the minds of members, it effectively combines these two elements. It is precisely where these two overlap that the CFFO lives out its mandate to act as a Christian visionary organization within the sphere of agriculture. In the quotation from the farmer below, he emphasizes to me the importance of the connection between faith and agriculture, and the ways in which this focuses the CFFO on certain issues, and also directs the approach the CFFO takes on these issues. He also emphasizes that it is important as part of the CFFO’s mandate to keep both tied together.

Farmer: I would talk about faith and agriculture, really those are the two things it’s all about. Faith gives rise to stewardship, and policy, and some

kind of social equity, we'll call it social justice a little bit. You know, family farming advocacy, which is a social justice thing. So faith gives rise to those things and agriculture of course is the animals and the crops and the business side of things and primary processing possibly. So, I guess where all those areas happen to connect that's where the CFFO should have some kind of interest.

S.M.A.: *Okay. And that's the sphere that you see them working within?*

Farmer: *Yes, yes, if it doesn't have anything to do with faith or it doesn't have anything to do with agriculture, I don't think it is any of CFFO's business. But that's not to say that they have to have an interest in every aspect of faith and agriculture because that might be just too big of a job for our little organization to handle. But, certainly if it's outside those two areas we shouldn't be involved. Or I guess I should say, we shouldn't be talking about one without the other, I guess that would be fair to say too.¹⁰⁵*

Talking about faith directly in connection with agriculture is not always as easy as it might seem, however. While the importance of keeping a faith perspective and also maintaining long-held Christian principles is important, the main area of expertise of the CFFO is in farming and farming issues.

The CFFO is understood by members to be Christian in vision and outlook, and to be “biblically principled” or “biblically based.” It is primarily concerned with farming, not with theology, however. When asked about any conflicts about different ideas of

¹⁰⁵ Personal Interview #5.

what it means to be Christian, those who mentioned that there are sometimes conflicts stressed that within the CFFO these conflicts are rarely based on denominationalism, and have more to do with farming itself. An example is illustrated in the conversation below I had with a husband and wife who point to the underlying common belief that forms the foundation of the “Christian” identity, and that conversation and debate focuses mainly on farming issues:

***Wife:** I don't think we've had conflicts with, we're here to talk farming, so called, and Christian, and the cultural mandate, and farming.*

***Husband:** There's no differences because of denominations. But there are different views on policy. Actually when they make policy, developing a policy there's different views. No, this is not a denominational issue at all.*

***Wife:** No, we talk farming...we've rubbed shoulders with many people who are not the same denomination as we are...*

***Husband:** Christ is Lord, and every believer recognizes that.¹⁰⁶*

In fact, for some the avoidance or the absence of more explicit theological conversation within the CFFO can be problematic, especially as the common ground of shared theological foundations is increasingly changing with greater diversity within the membership. One former staff member discussed some of the challenges that an organization like CFFO faces in balancing theological principles and debate with the importance of sticking to their own area of expertise and concern: farming.

¹⁰⁶ Personal Interview #2.

Because one of the qualities I think they've lost [is] some of that sort of explicit discussion about principles. At the same time they used to say these things as a matter of creeds, right? You know, that 'the infallible word of God' kind of talk. And so what it always meant, the connection or the follow-through wasn't always there. So I think that that self-conscious articulation of basic principles is probably lost or diminished, significantly diminished over time. And it was assumed, and this is very common in these Christian organizations too unless you engage them actively. Most people want to keep them sort of implicit because they don't want to be just seen as sort of philosophical, or getting into big confessional debates about what the Bible means. They want to be working in their field, rather than having a theological debate. ... So, I think that's a challenge for any organization which is not mainstream, which is a little different. The thing is how do you maintain your core values without talking about them all the time? And if you talk about them all the time you're alienating people. So there's no easy answer to that. I think that just needs to be done to some degree, but not all the time.¹⁰⁷

While members may be more reluctant to discuss theology at meetings for many different reasons, that does not undermine the importance of the Christian aspect of the CFFO for members.

¹⁰⁷ Personal Interview #15.

Most of my interviewees said that the Christian aspect of the CFFO was very important to them, and also a key reason for their choosing to belong to the CFFO. None of the interviewees said it was unimportant to them, in the sense that they had chosen to belong to the CFFO for primarily other reasons. Some did say, however, that while they preferred to belong to Christian based organizations where God as creator or as sovereign was acknowledged, they were not opposed to belonging to secular farm related organizations as long as these organizations did not conflict with their religious worldview.

Many expressed their motivation or reasons for selecting the CFFO as primarily because it was the Christian option, or that they came from a family or cultural tradition of belonging to this or similar organizations. However, some interviewees decidedly did not come from such a family or cultural tradition. Members of their family may belong to either the National Farmers Union – Ontario (NFU-O) or the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA). For them, choosing to belong to the CFFO was based on their awareness of the CFFO’s public identity and work. These members were sometimes more articulate about what attracted them to the CFFO over another General Farm Organization which might, for them, seem a more obvious choice. One such example is in the quotation below.

Farmer: My observation has been that the OFA cancels itself out, because what’s good for, politically good in an organization for the hog farmer is not good for the cash cropper. And CFFO says, “that’s not what we’re about. It’s not who it’s good for, it’s what is good.” And we’ll align ourselves, we’ll do the adjusting as individuals. So if it’s a good policy for corn, and it

disadvantages the hog farmer, okay, that's fine, it's the right policy, and as farmers then we'll adjust to that reality. The OFA never [does that]. It's a lobby. This is good for the hog farmer, that's what we want.

S.M.A.: *So the OFA lobbies for each individual group regardless?*

Farmer: *No, they end up lobbying for no one.*

S.M.A.: *Oh, okay.*

Farmer: *That's what I say, they cancel themselves out. And that's why they get along with the provincial and federal governments so well. They're so weak.*¹⁰⁸

This exchange illustrates some of the contrast that is made between the largest General Farming Organization, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and the CFFO, illustrating some of what characterizes the CFFO as distinct for members. Sometimes what benefits one commodity comes at the cost of another commodity. This makes lobbying more difficult for General Farm Organizations, which must represent member interests from all different commodities. The CFFO's emphasis on what is important for farming as a whole, not for each individual sector or commodity within farming, has attracted members and gained them respect.

In terms of farm policy, the approach of the CFFO has historically been to look at agriculture to see what will keep the industry viable, especially financially and also ecologically. This has included a focus on protecting farmland, both in the sense of keeping it as farmland, and in the sense of sustaining or improving its productivity into

¹⁰⁸ Personal Interview #9.

the future. Some members find it important that the CFFO particularly emphasizes that agriculture should be, as much as possible, self-sustaining, and not rely on “government handouts” to remain financially viable as a basis for their approach to agricultural funding programs. CFFO has also argued for policies that allow farms of different sizes to remain financially viable, especially through measures such as placing caps on government support to individual farms.

In terms of its Christian identity, the CFFO now has a strong interdenominational aspect to the membership and leadership. Few seemed to be able to put their finger on exactly why the overall atmosphere within the CFFO is one of cooperation among Christians, but all agreed that this was the case. Some described the importance of having healthy tension in discussions around the table about policy, while at the same time not attacking anyone personally, and always leaving the discussion as friends or as “brothers and sisters.” Others mentioned being welcomed as individuals to the discussion, rather than being labeled as one denomination or another. Again, the focus on discussing farming policy, rather than theological differences, is an important part of keeping the CFFO welcoming to many different Christians and allowing them to work well together.

CFFO staff and leadership have intentionally fostered two intertwining strands of a rope, as it were. The first emphasizes the importance of retaining the Dutch theological foundations or biblical principles, while the second emphasizes the importance of opening the CFFO to be welcoming of other Christian members and leaders. One illustrating example comes from a former staff member, Martin Oldengarm, who discussed his personal efforts to expand the denominational base of the membership even before the Farm Business Registration (FBR) legislation was brought in.

Initially in the first, I would say the first 15 years my focus was predominantly membership recruitment, membership development, and at that time when I started the organization was at about 400-450 members, and these were predominantly of Christian Reformed, of that denomination. But they are the ones that started the organization back in 1954, just a handful of post-World War II immigrants, farmers. But then slowly, as I was working with the organization out there beating the bushes I pretty much set out from the beginning to expand the membership base also denominationally. So one of my last questions I usually asked when I completed a visit was, "Who of your neighbours should I ask to go and see, of the Christians you know?" That is Catholics, other Protestants, [and] Mennonites. And so slowly I was able to expand the support base that way and that was a very slow one-on-one process. So by the time, well, over the years more and more people came. Whereas now, today, we have over 4500 members and [they are] quite interdenominational. I don't know how many denominations are represented, but a lot. And also we have a number of members who aren't necessarily even of Christian persuasion but they are attracted because of the policies and the nature of the organization, which is not political actually. It is an organization that is concerned about the well being of the environment, of the creation.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Personal Interview, Martin Oldengarm.

On the other hand, when the Farm Business Registration (FBR) legislation came in, members knew this was going to be a sea change in the nature of the organization. A member of the CFFO Executive Board at the time of the change said that he felt it was important to make clear to new members the orthodox Reformed values and principles that they wanted to retain as part of the CFFO's identity. At the same time, he felt that this legislation was very important for forwarding the Christian witness of the work of the CFFO, and making it more widely available as a choice for everyone within Ontario agriculture.

Actually my term [on the executive] was interesting because [it was at the beginning of] the stable funding era, which meant all of a sudden CFFO was a choice outside of our what I would call Reformed community. So I felt at that particular time it was paramount that [we] stood firm on issues of CFFO unashamed and unabashed...for the general public to make a decision whether CFFO was for them. ... Stable funding [allowed] the Christian witness, the Kuyperian worldview to sink into the residents of the area or the agricultural community in Ontario, and let them make a conscientious decision whether they wanted Christian values and policies, or Christian principles underlying policies.¹¹⁰

In fact, it was not easy in the process of establishing this legislation to ensure that the CFFO was included. The largest of the General Farm Organizations (GFOs), the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA), would have preferred to be the single GFO for

¹¹⁰ Personal Interview #11.

all of Ontario agriculture. However, the CFFO emphasized the importance of having more than one voice within agriculture, and felt that the Christian voice they offered in particular was distinct from the OFA, and an important part of the diversity needed for a healthy agricultural sector. The same executive member explains below the controversy, and also states some of what he sees as the particular Christian characteristics of the CFFO in terms of policy issues.

S.M.A.: Do you remember any of those specific issues that you felt you had to stand firm on?

Executive Member: Well the big one was, stable funding they wanted to make it one organization ... because the drift was, one organization, one voice in Ontario, and CFFO said, “we need diversity to create more competition and one voice would not serve as well as a number of voices.” And the voice of CFFO was more in the line of, it was more under the Biblical principle, you [should] only hand out government dollars when there’s genuine need, not necessarily because you thought you ought to have it. And of course interwoven into all of that, that we are stewards of God’s creation and therefore our policies should reflect that.¹¹¹

The perspective of these two leaders, one staff and one CFFO Provincial Executive, illustrate the two underlying thrusts in expanding the CFFO to a wider Christian base: inviting and including Christians from a wider diversity of Christian denominations and

¹¹¹ Personal Interview #11.

backgrounds, but also holding resolutely onto the Kuyperian worldview and biblical principles that had characterized the CFFO since its founding.

2.2.1.1 Strength of the Sense of Belonging to the CFFO

As one might expect, not every member feels the same sense of belonging to or inclusion in the CFFO. There were several factors that came up in interviews that caused a sense of distancing, or lack of full inclusion in the CFFO as an organization. Three important factors were: where a farmer lives and farms in Ontario; a farmer's religious upbringing and current religious denomination; and the methods of farming employed, as well as the commodities produced.¹¹² Three key examples that illustrate these three categories are farmers who live and farm in a more remote area of Ontario, farmers who come from outside the Dutch orthodox Reformed religious circle, and farmers who use organic methods. These farmers often experience some tension or incongruity between their own perspective from that of the official CFFO position, or the majority opinion within the CFFO. It may also mean that they do not feel fully included on a social level for different reasons.

In the first example, living and farming in an area outside of south-eastern Ontario is one factor that diminishes a sense of connection to the CFFO as an organization. Most farming activity in Ontario is concentrated in the south-eastern region. Since Ontario is so large, the issues that pertain to one region are not always as relevant to other regions. The

¹¹² Another important factor determining sense of belonging to the CFFO I would describe as directly related to each spouse's sense of ownership over the key farming decisions on the farm itself. This is an especially important factor determining interest in participation in business meetings of the CFFO. For those spouses (most often but not always women) who were less active within the CFFO, this sense of ownership was one contributing factor.

farming conditions and commodities are different, even from one county to another, and the approaches taken on policies may not reflect the realities of those farming in different regions or counties of the province. The contrast between urban and rural concerns is often an issue when farmers are dealing with government in Ontario. Even within the rural areas, and within farming, the approach taken often is more focused on the needs of farmers in the south-eastern section of Ontario, where a significant portion of the farmers are located.¹¹³

There are pockets of farmland in other regions, however, and the CFFO has districts in many of these areas as well. These regions are physically far removed from the areas where most of the provincial level policy meetings take place. This further isolates members in this region from the organization in the sense that they are not as easily able to join the policy discussions directly. Perhaps more importantly, they miss the social connection that meetings also facilitate for members which is important in building and sustaining community and a sense of belonging within the organization as a whole. While video or conference calling may address the first issue, it will not as easily provide the important casual social interaction. That being the case, these local areas are much smaller, and are therefore in some ways more tightly knit within their own local district than other districts might be.

¹¹³ I should note here that the way regions are defined in Ontario is partly dependent on where one lives. For those living in Toronto, “northern Ontario” is often considered anything north of Barrie. However, for those living in Thunder Bay and Rainy River, they emphasized instead eastern Ontario from western Ontario, speaking of “southern” Ontario as “down east.” They did not refer to where they lived as “northern Ontario,” since there is still a good deal of Ontario north of where they are, although as a resident of the Waterloo area, and having driven more than 20 hours north-west to get there, I consider it “northern Ontario.” I have tried to respect the more holistic perspective on Ontario in my nomenclature of regions here.

In the case of those coming from outside the Dutch orthodox Reformed community, these members are automatically at a social disadvantage. Those who belong to the Dutch orthodox Reformed community tend to belong to several organizations or participate in many activities as part of their weekly routine that connect them to this community. They attend the same church, work together as part of the Christian school, and see each other at the CFFO farming meetings. Those who come from a different church, different school system, and a different family background, but who belong to the CFFO, are participating in only one part of this wider social network and community. In a way, no matter how welcoming the CFFO is, this “outside” group will always be somewhat socially removed from those “inside” this particular community. The different theological and ritual traditions from other branches and denominations of Christianity are another important marker that can serve to separate or differentiate those from outside the orthodox Reformed tradition.

Finally, those farmers who have made the decision to farm organically are in the minority within the CFFO. Even if in every other sense they “belong” within the CFFO, most CFFO farmers have not embraced these particular farming methods. Organic farming involves a different way of thinking about farming technology and techniques. It can be an onerous task meeting all the requirements for organic land, feed, treatment of animals, and record keeping to meet certification standards. Organic methods of pest and disease control take a certain degree of ingenuity and practice to master, since they are different from conventional methods. This kind of change is not made lightly.

Organic farmers are very passionate about the importance of their farming methods, and the implications these methods have, especially in contrast to conventional

methods. Interestingly, religious-type language was used to describe “evangelizing” about organic methods. One farmer also referred to the story of the conversion of Saul from Acts 9:1-19 as he described a local vet who had “converted” from strictly conventional veterinary methods with farm animals to far more organic methods.¹¹⁴ This particular prophetic voice of organic farmers is gaining wider acceptance within the farming community, and within the CFFO itself, but it continues to be a minority voice.

2.2.2 CFFO Meetings

As I mentioned above, I attended CFFO meetings both at provincial and at district levels. Meetings varied in nature. Some were more business-oriented gatherings, while others were more social in nature. All meetings had some time for socializing, and usually included a meal. Below I offer brief descriptions of the various types of meetings I attended as well as outlining some of the important functions meetings fulfill within the organization.

CFFO meetings are a vital part of the organization. They foster community and belonging within the CFFO membership. They engage the broader agricultural and political spheres, and the interested general public as well. Public rituals such as prayer and devotions performed at CFFO meetings reinforce the Christian, and the particularly Protestant, identity of the CFFO for members and visitors. The CFFO meetings are the main way members participate in the work of the organization. These meetings also reinforce and perform who they “are” as CFFO members, gathering and working together.

¹¹⁴ Personal Interview #8.

Business meetings are important for developing official CFFO policy documents and recommendations to government. CFFO meetings are forums for discussion among members, allowing them to air grievances, to share best practices, to debate policy, and to communicate directly with CFFO staff and leadership. Business meetings also provide an opportunity for engaging the wider public on particular issues of concern, since members of the public are also able to attend many of these meetings. This is especially true when political leaders are invited as speakers or participants, or when the speaker attracts other local farmers to come to the meeting. Business meetings also help increase farmers' awareness of ongoing issues, or of changing patterns in agriculture at a broader level. The CFFO addresses a wide range of commodities, as well as environmental issues and regulations that affect all farmers. Business meetings are vital for the debate and formation of policy on all of these issues.

Social meetings are just as important, but for very different reasons. Social meetings are more inclusive of those within the CFFO, having a much broader attendance. Meetings of a social nature tend to attract more participation from women and children, while those that are more business focused tend to have a male-dominated attendance. There are, of course, some women who do attend business meetings, but far fewer of them. One is more likely to find both spouses, and in some cases children of CFFO members, attending social gatherings together. CFFO members are encouraged to invite their neighbours, so these meetings are not exclusive to CFFO members, but tend to be attended primarily by member families.

These social meetings are vital for fostering a sense of connection to the CFFO, including among the younger generation. For example, some of the younger farmers who

are now leaders of the CFFO fondly remembered attending social gatherings of the CFFO as children.¹¹⁵ Since spouses (especially women) are more likely to attend these meetings, getting them connected to and involved in the CFFO is most likely to initiate through attending social gatherings.

Public expressions of the Christian identity of the CFFO are an important part of all meetings as well. Meetings of all varieties demonstrate the ritual of public prayer. All business meetings open with a prayer and devotion, and close in prayer as well. Social gatherings and business meetings include a prayer of grace before meals. The CFFO Annual Convention includes communal hymn-singing twice during the course of the day-long meeting. Prayer rituals are performed in a way characteristic of the Protestant majority. One member will be asked to lead the given prayer, and will pray free-form, although he or she may have previously reflected or prepared for the prayer. Catholic members of the CFFO, for example, do not noticeably include the sign of the cross in public prayer. Biblical devotions also express the wider Protestant tradition, and can be a differentiator between Catholic and Protestant members, who do not share all the same canonical texts or habit of devotional scripture reading. The choice of hymns reflects a more evangelical or praise-style of Christian worship.

2.2.2.1 Provincial Level Meetings

Provincial level meetings include the Annual Convention, Provincial Council, and policy meetings. Policy meetings include Stewardship and Policy East and Stewardship and Policy West, or commodity based committees such as the Sheep Producers Committee or

¹¹⁵ Personal Interviews #6, 10.

the Supply Management Committee. Provincial level meetings gather together people from across the province, or at least from several districts at once, and are primarily business-oriented meetings. The Annual Convention is the biggest and most important gathering of the CFFO of the year, and combines many important business items, as well as speakers, socializing and entertainment. Provincial Council meetings are held three times a year, while policy meetings include a number of different committees within the CFFO, and are held in different locations around the province.

While efforts are made to include members from all across the province in these meetings they are most often located in the general region of southwestern Ontario. The farming region in Ontario is very big, and requires significant driving time for farmers from some districts to attend provincial level meetings.¹¹⁶ While this is true, most if not all districts are usually represented at the Annual Convention. There is a surprisingly good representation of districts at the Provincial Council meetings. One member even drives regularly from Renfrew District near Ottawa to attend Provincial Council meetings, which are currently hosted in Guelph. Policy meetings are located in different areas to allow more members from various districts to better participate. The CFFO has also been making efforts to use conference calling and other technology to better be able to include those from distant districts who want to be involved in these provincial level meetings, although I have not personally witnessed this in practice.

¹¹⁶ There are pockets of good farming land as far north-west as Rainy River, and around the city of Thunder Bay. There are also pockets of farmable land around Sudbury. Most of south-eastern Ontario is arable land. For two excellent maps of the quality of the farmland in Ontario see Schryer, *Farming in a Global Economy*, 50, 52.

2.2.2.1.1 Annual CFFO Provincial Convention

The Annual Convention combines business with socializing on a much larger scale than any other meeting. This is a province-wide meeting that runs a full day from early breakfast to late after-dinner entertainment. Members and CFFO guests can come for the whole day, or just part of the meeting as it suits their time schedule. Some members will come from long distances for this meeting. They try to have members attend from every district in the province, and help to organize transportation for those coming from further away. They also often make efforts to encourage young farmers to attend the meeting, and will highlight the presence of these farmers in the meeting as well.

The Annual Convention is held in November each year, and has been hosted (conveniently for me) in Waterloo, at the St. George Banquet Hall, for the past six years that I have been attending this meeting. In the past, however, the CFFO has hosted it in other places, especially in and around Guelph, and usually within reasonable driving distance of the location of the head offices, which are currently also in Guelph, an important agricultural centre in Ontario.¹¹⁷ The convention is planned by the CFFO staff, and I have heard them comment that they begin planning for the following year almost as soon as the current year's convention is finished.

For those conventions that I have attended the format usually involves a speaker in the morning, a panel, or other guest speaker in the afternoon, and then entertainment

¹¹⁷ The Annual Convention has also been hosted in several locations in Guelph, including at the University of Guelph, at the Holiday Inn in Guelph, and for many years at the Italian-Canadian Club, as well as at the Holiday Inn Cambridge. See for example CFF News Release “Hope for the Family Farm” (1979); CFFO News Release “Christian Farmers Plan Convention” (1983); CFFO News Release “Thirty Years of Tilling – CFFO Convention” (1984); CFFO News Release “Christian Farmers Plan Convention” (1985); CFFO, “Convention 2001—Highlights,” *Earthkeeping* 12 (2002): 8.

(an inspirational or comical speaker) in the evening over dessert. Breakfast, lunch and dinner are served by the banquet hall. As well there is a time for wine and cheese between the afternoon session and dinner. At the Annual Convention, the Provincial Executive is elected or acclaimed each year, the nominations having been submitted at the Provincial Council meeting that precedes the Annual Convention. The annual budget is also approved at this meeting.

Speakers at the CFFO conventions I have attended covered a range of contemporary concerns mostly focused on issues relating to the changing business of farming, family farming and family businesses, and sustainability and stewardship in farming. The perspectives of these speakers were diverse, and this was clearly intentionally so. In some instances afternoon panels included speakers from diverse perspectives within agriculture to help stimulate discussion and represent differing views. In other cases, it was evident over the number of years that I attended that the views of speakers were often very different from speakers that had attended in previous years.¹¹⁸

The convention also hosts many important figures in agriculture who are not members of the CFFO, including at times the Minister of Agriculture (Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food, or Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, OMAF or OMAFRA), other civil servants from within OMAF(RA), or other politicians, usually Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs), such as the provincial critic for agriculture in the official opposition. Members of the other General Farm Organizations (especially OFA) will attend, as well as members of other farm commodity organizations,

¹¹⁸ The diversity of views of these speakers reflects the spectrum of use and support for different farming technologies, as well as theological views of stewardship discussed below in Chapter 4.

such as Dairy Farmers of Ontario. Those organizations that act as sponsors for the event will often be given tickets to attend the conference as part of their sponsorship. These guests usually sit at the tables with the rest of the attendees, as there is no assigned seating for any of the meals. However, in the morning and again in the evening the names of these guests are called out and they are asked to stand and be recognized by those present.¹¹⁹

The Annual Convention, as well as opening with a devotion and a prayer, also opens with the singing of “Oh Canada,”¹²⁰ and one or two hymns. The dinner portion of the meeting also usually opens with the singing of “Oh Canada” and some hymns before grace is said over the meal.

As mentioned above, usually membership is represented from all or almost all of the districts. Naturally, more members attend from those who are closer to the location where it is hosted, but efforts are made to provide buses from some other more distant locations to help members attend. In the past two years the CFFO has hosted a leadership conference the evening before the day of the Annual Convention to provide some training for those who are on the local district executives.¹²¹ The Annual Convention is attended most often by farming couples, some of whom will have come for the whole day, some of whom may have stayed overnight having attended the Leadership Convention the day

¹¹⁹ Since this is a whole day event, special guests and members of the CFFO don't always stay for the whole day, so those who are called out in the morning may not be present in the evening and vice versa.

¹²⁰ Note that they sing the first verse, and then the rarely sung fourth verse, which reads: “Ruler Supreme, who hearest humble prayer, Hold our dominion within thy loving care. Help us to find, Oh God, in Thee, A lasing, rich reward, As waiting for the Better Day, We ever stand on guard” (as printed in the Program of the Annual Convention, 2012).

¹²¹ As this is not open to the public, I have never attended any of these leadership conference events, but I have heard many leaders talking about the event the next day at the Convention.

before. The average age of Canadian farmers is now 54 years old,¹²² and the age of attendees reflects that demographic pattern. However, as mentioned earlier, efforts are also made to invite younger farmers to attend, and other younger couples are also visible who are currently acting in leadership positions in some of the district associations.

2.2.2.1.2 CFFO Provincial Council Meetings

The CFFO headquarters are located in Guelph, and Provincial Council meetings are hosted within the facilities that also host the CFFO offices, although not in the same building. These meetings run from approximately 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., and they serve a hot lunch at each meeting. These meetings are chaired by the President of the Provincial Executive, unless he (or she) is busy with other business, in which case it will fall to one of the two Vice-Presidents of the Executive. One of the staff members, the Manager of Boards and Committees, takes the minutes, and usually the General Manager, Director of Policy Development, and the Field Services Manager all attend these meetings. Usually all or most members of the Provincial Executive also attend these meetings. As many districts as possible are represented around the table, so that members of the executives from local districts make up the majority of the remaining attendees around the table. A reporter from *Ontario Farmer* also regularly attends Provincial Council meetings.¹²³

Provincial Council meetings usually open with a Christian devotion and opening prayer from one of the Executive members, followed by the President's report and the General Manager's report updating the council on what the CFFO Executive, and the

¹²² Statistics Canada, "Canadian Agriculture at a Glance," found at <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/96-325-x/96-325-x2014001-eng.htm>, accessed April 30, 2014.

¹²³ For most of the meetings I attended the reporter for *Ontario Farmer* was Glenn Powell.

CFFO Staff have been doing recently. Provincial Council meetings usually have a speaker come to join the meeting later in the morning, speaking on some new innovation in agriculture, or some other issue of concern. The afternoon is dedicated to reviewing current policy documents, and voting on what will go forward either to upcoming consultations with government (usually the provincial government), or to stewardship and policy meetings around the province for further member input and discussion.

The Provincial Executive is made up of the President, two Vice-Presidents, and 4 Directors. The Past-President may also serve on the executive for the first year after completing his or her term as president. Members of the Provincial Executive Board meet 11 times a year outside of these Provincial Council meetings. The President and Vice-Presidents in particular are also kept very busy meeting regularly with government (the provincial government, and occasionally the federal government), with support also from the Directors on the Executive. Members of the Executive may also be assigned to work on other committees within the CFFO. They also may attend local district meetings, and are given responsibility for certain districts to keep contact between the districts and provincial level of the organization.

Under the current President of the CFFO, Lorne Small, three new committees have been struck to review key issues within the CFFO and the CFFO's structure. One focuses on Supply Management, looking at ways to support but also improve on this system in agriculture. The Marketing Task Team looks at current membership within the CFFO, as well as going forward into the future, considering the demographics of farmers are changing. The third committee examines Sustainability, and what this may mean for agriculture going forward. The 2014 members of the Executive Board are President

Lorne Small, Vice-Presidents Ted van den Hurk, and Clarence Nywening, and Directors Ed Scharringa, Bethanee Jensen, Peter Peeters, Gerald Poechman and Richard Blyleven.¹²⁴

2.2.2.1.3 CFFO Policy Meetings

Policy meetings gather at a somewhat smaller level than the whole province at once.

These are usually based on commodity interests, or are policy development meetings that allow input from interested members based on region rather than district. The CFFO lists policy committees for the following on its website: Supply Management; Sheep Producers; Pork Producers; Stewardship and Policy East; Stewardship and Policy West; and Policy Sub-Committee.¹²⁵

2.2.2.2 CFFO District Meetings

District meetings, like provincial level meetings, come in several different varieties. Most districts will hold at least an annual business meeting and an annual social meeting each year. See Appendix B for a list of the districts across Ontario. Some districts are long established, while others were formed more recently. Longevity in the CFFO is not necessarily an indicator that the district is highly active today.

There are several different types of district level meetings. However, each district is different, so each type of meeting may not be characteristic of each district. Some

¹²⁴ CFFO website, “Executive Board”
http://www.christianfarmers.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=76&Itemid=27,
accessed Aug. 18, 2014.

¹²⁵ CFFO website, “Committees”
http://www.christianfarmers.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=65&Itemid=67,
accessed Nov. 7, 2013.

districts are more active than other districts. This is partly a representation of having more active leadership in some areas, and partly an issue of the commodities that vary from district to district. For example, if an area is predominated by members who are in the dairy industry, and no particular concerns have come forward in dairy farming lately, the district may be less active, or their concerns may be best represented by the Dairy Farmers of Ontario, rather than through the CFFO. Other concerns that are outside of particular commodities, or where there is a wider range of commodities in a district, may be motivating factors for having more active participation in the local CFFO district.

District meetings are important as social gatherings, reinforcing the sense of community and camaraderie among members. The business and seminar series type meetings are also important politically, as they usually engage members and those interested from the public (who are welcome to attend these meetings) on current issues in agricultural policy or other important political issues related to farming or rural areas. Political leaders, such as the local MPP, may also attend these meetings. As in the provincial level meetings, they also publically demonstrate their religious identity through rituals at these meetings, including devotions and public prayer.

2.2.2.2.1 Annual Business Meetings

Annual CFFO district business meetings are usually held in the winter, during the day. These will be attended by the local executive and other local members, and may also include a speaker. The Field Services Manager, currently Paul Bootsma, also usually attends these local meetings, if possible. Sometimes he, or another CFFO staff member, may be the speaker for the day. Local MPs or MPPs may also attend these meetings, even

if only for part of the meeting. Usually only one member of the farming couple will attend.

As an illustration, I attended the Annual Business Meeting for Grey-Bruce district two years in a row. This meeting was held in the same location, a local community centre, and was catered by local community women, who prepared the food in the kitchen, and brought it out for lunch. The first year I attended I was the only woman at the business part of the meeting, but the second year I attended, there were several women attending as part of the business meeting. The second year was better attended in general, including an appearance by the local MPP, who made a brief presentation on issues of Green Energy, and in particular wind turbines as an important local concern.

2.2.2.2 Annual District Barbeque or Banquet

Annual CFFO district barbeques are usually hosted in the summer, and will often be hosted on a farm, usually of either the district President or another member of the local district executive, but can also be hosted at a public park. Members bring a salad or dessert, their own dishes and lawn chairs, and are fed hot dogs and hamburgers from the grill. These are held outside, and visiting can continue even after the long summer day is over and the sun has set. These are primarily social events, and are usually attended by the whole family, including children.

Annual Banquets tend to be held in either late fall-early winter, or in spring, when the weather is not yet nice enough to eat outside. These are hosted in a local social hall or church, are usually catered, and there is a ticket price for admission. These meetings usually host a speaker. Those banquet meetings that I attended had speakers from outside the CFFO, but I have read that sometimes CFFO staff or former staff will also act as

speakers for such meetings. These are also social events where farming couples will usually attend, but children are less common.

2.2.2.2.3 Seminar Series Meetings

These meetings have been held, not necessarily annually, but usually every year, beginning in 1995 under the leadership of Elbert van Donkersgoed as Policy Director. He worked closely with Bill Van Geest as the consultant to organize, run, and summarize the results of these workshops series over the years. Van Geest continued to act as consultant for these meeting series under the leadership of John Clement. Topics have ranged from questions of new technologies in farming, such as genetic modification, to management questions on the farm, including the problems and increasing influence of outside forces on on-farm management decisions. The series in which I participated (2011) focused on government regulations in farming, and was entitled “Enough is Enough.” After this series in 2011, the CFFO management decided to try other methods of engaging farmers in ongoing issues of the day, and as a result no seminar series have been held since then.

Seminar Series meetings are intentionally designed to, at the same time, better understand members’ opinions on the topic under consideration, while also nudging members to explore and consider other points of view on the issue at hand. Elbert van Donkersgoed recounted one way they attempted to encourage farmers to look outside their own business perspective in one seminar series using coloured hats. He noted that getting farmers to see beyond their own entrepreneurial and business mindset can be a challenge. This also illustrates one of the important roles that staff and leaders play as intermediaries between voicing the interests and needs of farmers, and envisioning and

discussing policy within the CFFO and with government, keeping the needs of the wider society and public good in mind.

Most winters in the last decade that I was with the CFFO we did a workshop series around the province, a thoroughly planned, facilitated workshop on some subject, to plumb the view of the members on a subject or other. And one of those workshops we came with red hats and green hats. And when you wore the green hat you are asked to speak from the point of view of your business. When we asked you to put on the red hat, we don't want you to talk about your business, we want you to speak the mind of, what is in the interest of society, public good. Most farmers could not do it. They could not get themselves outside of their own business connection. A few can, most couldn't do it. We did that in one of those workshops, and I thought that this was, you know, that this could be a very interesting piece of the workshop series. We never did it again. Not enough could do it with credibility.

They're just not used to putting their minds there. They're used to knowing what it costs to produce, to send a pig to market, to know those costs. They're not used to whether or not it's worth something to society to offer to pay me such and such to make sure that I stay 10 feet back from the stream when I spread my manure. Now what's it worth to society to not have manure spread right next to where it will go into the stream? I'm willing to consider doing that as a matter of stewardship, if I know the risks. But to ask the question what's it worth to society? No. It's not, I can tell you what it adds to the cost

*of a pig if I stay 10 feet back from the stream. I can't tell you what it's worth to society when that's done.*¹²⁶

This illustrates the creativity of the organizers in preparing these seminar series meetings in ways that challenge farmers to consider the broader implications and interests that are at play in their farming work, and the risks and benefits they offer to society at large, or the public good, through their farming work beyond the balance sheet of their farms as businesses.

Involvement in CFFO meetings for some may be a once or twice a year event, and for others, especially the leadership, may require a significant amount of time throughout the year. The benefits in terms of engaging members in conversation about policy, in keeping an ear to the ground for grievances, in helping farmers to adjust their farming methods and best practices as agriculture changes, and in building social connection and a sense of community within the organization are clear. Meetings also reinforce the public presence and Christian identity of the CFFO as an organization among non-members including politicians, other agricultural groups, and the public who also participate in many of these meetings. However, it is also clear not all CFFO members are equally engaged by the different types of meetings, and that there are many factors affecting the level of engagement in different districts, and at different meetings. Active involvement in CFFO meetings is also, for many members, just one aspect of their broader community involvement.

¹²⁶ Personal Interview, Elbert van Donkersgoed.

2.2.3 Community Involvement

All of the interviewees were involved in their wider community, most in a variety of ways. All attended church regularly, and were also, to a greater or lesser extent, involved in church activities. Other forms of community involvement included participation in the local Christian school, such as on the school board, participation in mission and charity work of various kinds, involvement in politics, including municipal, provincial and federal, and involvement in other farming or food related organizations.

Many were highly involved in a number of different activities and organizations meaning they have to juggle these different responsibilities along with their farming work. As was previously mentioned, most of the farmers who were interviewed are or were in positions of leadership within the CFFO as well as taking on these other responsibilities.

For some, this involvement is part of their worldview of sphere sovereignty, of actively participating in and transforming society through social action and engagement. Many whom I interviewed felt it was natural to be active in church, to send their kids to a Christian school, and to belong to the CFFO, which all went together as part of being Dutch orthodox Reformed and belonging to this wider set of community organizations. For some this extended into broader expressions of this same foundation, in expanding into mission work, sometimes overseas, or participation in or support of Christian political parties as well. This high level of engagement was not exclusive to those of Dutch ethnicity or orthodox Calvinist faith, however. Others, who may not be Reformed in their background, or who did not as clearly emphasize the Kuyperian or the sphere

sovereignty foundations for their engagement, were also involved in a variety of activities and organizations.

Martin Oldengarm, former CFFO staff, mentioned this as a characteristic of people who chose to belong to the CFFO:

*Many people who are involved with the organization [CFFO] are actively involved, and are also invariably very actively involved in local church and community work. It's that kind of people that are attracted to an organization like this.*¹²⁷

This comment reinforces the culture of involvement within the CFFO. For some, their level of involvement came out of their Dutch identity and traditions, while others interested in active engagement in the community have been attracted to the CFFO. These individuals who are not from within this Reformed circle of institutions would feel welcome and in like-minded company within the CFFO among others who share their enthusiasm for engagement in issues and organizations.

In terms of the specific activities and organizations that interviewees are involved with, first are the many different ways they are connected with their own local church congregations and related activities. All interviewees said they actively attended a local church congregation, in some cases twice every Sunday. Outside of weekly worship, some of the activities and roles within church congregations mentioned by interviewees included: acting as elders, visiting local church members (a duty of elders, often shared as a couple), acting as an Eucharistic minister to shut-ins, participation on church

¹²⁷ Personal Interview, Martin Oldengarm.

committees of various kinds, acting as leaders for Sunday school, leaders for boys or girls clubs, youth group leaders, helping to run programs for pre-school age children, leading or helping with Bible study groups of various kinds, participating in Praise teams (lead musical aspects of worship services) or worship leadership, helping with local church publications, helping to maintain the local church gardens, and fundraising locally for local or global charities.

Those farmers with school-age children were most likely to mention active participation in their local Christian school or school board; however, many whose children were grown also mentioned that their children had attended a Christian school, or that they had attended themselves. This represents a significant financial investment, as well as an investment of time and effort, as parents must pay tuition for their children to attend these private Christian schools. Christian schools are an important part of the full complement of Christian organizations within all spheres, but are important also in passing along the worldview of engagement so important to many CFFO members.

*With the Christian school at least you have people who value education, and who want to see the children be able to be transformers of society not becoming conformed to society.*¹²⁸

Often connected with their church involvement, but not necessarily directly through their own congregation, many were also involved in mission work or mission activities of various kinds. Most often mentioned were the locally organized fundraising projects for the Canada Foodgrains Bank. Although this was not officially organized

¹²⁸ Personal Interview #13.

through the CFFO, many interviewees mentioned this as a prime example of cooperation among Christians, many of whom are also CFFO members. Although each local project may be somewhat different, usually in a given local area someone will donate an area of land, or donate the rent for the land to farm for the project for the year, then other local farmers will take turns and donate the various inputs and use of equipment as well as do the labour needed to plant, fertilize, manage weed control, and then harvest the crop from the land. Either the food harvested is sent overseas through the Canada Foodgrains Bank, or the crop is sold locally, and the money is sent to allow the Canada Foodgrains Bank to purchase food from local farmers in the area in need. The value of these crops at the end of the season can be substantial, with one local project specifically mentioned as raising \$205,000 one year, and \$265,000 the previous year in the same local area, and another mentioned by acreage, that they were donating the crops off 80 acres of land, which should amount to “*tens of thousands of dollars. It’s a very substantial amount of aid that can be given.*”¹²⁹ A CFFO News Release mentions that in celebration of their 60th Anniversary, 140 acres have been put into Canada Foodgrains Bank projects this year (2014) across the CFFO as a whole.¹³⁰

Another food related charitable organization that was supported through efforts in another local area is the Ontario Christian Gleaners, which is helping to transform what would otherwise be wasted crops into dried soup mixes to be given to Christian organizations distributing food to the poor overseas.¹³¹ In this case the interviewees

¹²⁹ Personal Interviews #13, 20.

¹³⁰ CFFO, *CFFO News Release*, May 2014.

¹³¹ Ontario Christian Gleaners website: <http://ontariogleaners.org/1281>, accessed Aug. 18, 2014.

mentioned that the founder of the local branch of the organization was a CFFO member.¹³²

Participation in politics at various levels was also important to several interviewees. Two were currently elected members of a municipal government, and three had previously stood as candidates in either a provincial or federal election. Others who were not as heavily involved still expressed interest in parties such as the Christian Heritage Party or the Family Coalition Party, as well as awareness of some of the many CFFO leaders who have also been involved in politics at all levels over the years.

Despite the fact that the overall population of farmers in Canada and in Ontario is in decline, and that farmers themselves make up a very small percentage of the overall population, there are a remarkable number of different farming organizations to which farmers can belong and in which they participate. Although the organizations listed below were mentioned specifically by interviewees, there was no interview question asking them to catalogue their participation, so other organizations may not have been mentioned. Interviewees specifically mentioned involvement with commodity organizations, such as: Dairy Farmers of Ontario (including Dairy Producer Committee membership), Beef Farmers of Ontario, Ontario Cream Producers Association, Ontario Pork, Ontario Corn Producers Association, and Organic Meadow Cooperative. Interviewees also mentioned other provincial level organizations that are not commodity specific. Interviewees were members currently or in the past, or had worked in some capacity with these organizations, including the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement

¹³² Personal Interview #6.

Association, the Agricultural Management Institute, Agricultural Adaptation Council, as well as the other two GFOs, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, and the National Farmers Union – Ontario. Some of the organizations mentioned were more community agricultural or food related organizations, such as membership on the board of a local Agricultural Society, a Food Strategy Summit, a local Health Unit, and the Canadian Lakehead Exhibition’s “Project Pizza.” Ontario Nature was also mentioned, which is a conservation organization that has been supportive of Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) projects¹³³ as well as Greenway Initiatives, both of which involve cooperation between farmers and conservationists.

Some farmers expressed concerns about the changes in farm size and the effects this is having or will have on rural community life and farmers’ involvement in it. The farmer quoted below made particular emphasis on the importance of having time to be neighbourly, and to be actively engaged in local community life. For him, part of that is having a farm that is small enough to allow him time to do more than just farm, and also in a wider context, that smaller farms make for more farmers in any given area, both of which should make for healthier rural community life.

What I would like to see is ... a farmer, a one family operation, that milks anywhere from 10 to 100 cows, and that’s sustainable, and they also have the time to participate in other activities outside the farm, as far as whether it’s church organizations, or even going to church, involvement in school, that kind of thing, involvement in the community, I think that’s important. ... I

¹³³ For further discussion on the CFFO’s involvement with ALUS in Ontario, see Chapter 4 section 4.2.1.2.

think these new farmers have to realize there's different ways to make a living, and that it doesn't always have to be, you know, you have to milk 80 cows in order to cash flow. Maybe that's what the numbers say, and maybe they don't have another choice, but don't jump on the bandwagon of getting big or get out. I really hate that. I think it's more important to a rural economy and environment to have, you know, 20 dairy farmers in a township, rather than 2 dairy farmers that are milking 300 cows each. You're part of the community. You spend money and time. You're involved in organizations. You go to church. You spend your money in the local grocery shop. You have time to talk to your neighbour, that kind of thing.¹³⁴

Not only farm size, but other economic pressures also affect how engaged farmers are in general in various organizations for change. Looking back to the Farm Crisis of the 1980s and early 1990s, one farmer reflected on the patterns of more dramatic change within the farming community, especially in highly stressful periods such as that one, and how this impacts community engagement. His reflections turn at the end to some of the frustrations with social engagement that farmers experience at all times, not just in crisis times.

It's really tough, when you have any organization that's addressing the issues at hand, and over the period of a few short years, a big piece of those members are disenfranchised, you know, they retire or they loose their farm, and all of us in farming are so busy trying to hang onto our business so that it

¹³⁴ Personal Interview #8.

*can continue to somehow feed our family. The preoccupation is so strong we hardly have the energy to give a hoot about anything else. It's really a compounding problem. I see some of these people active now in other organizations, like the [National Farmers] Union or the Christian Farmers, but by and large a good whack of us have either left the farm, or have become so apathetic to the whole issue. One thing too that farmers become, farmers are accustomed to seeing the results of their effort, and organizational work is such a big job at such a glacial pace of progress, many rural people are just so discouraged, they feel disenfranchised. So that leads to this frustration. I guess eventually it gets to be so, you know, we see that they either lash out, they're the ones carrying the placard, or they just withdraw and say "you know, I can't change life, I've just got to be happy with the way things are and make the best of it, and get through it."*¹³⁵

Despite these many pressures working against farmers' motivation to be socially engaged, many still are highly involved. The overall level of engagement among all interviewees indicates that there is a wide culture of engagement, and that farmers continue to work constructively within their local communities and with government at all levels, despite the often-slow progress of such social engagement.

2.2.4 Use of Biblical Stories Related to Farming

One of the key aspects that members described as part of the Christian identity of the CFFO was the biblical principles or biblical basis of the policies it puts forward.

¹³⁵ Personal Interview #7.

Members themselves frequently referred to many different biblical passages and stories in connection to their personal farming work, and to farming policy issues. Christianity and farming go well together for CFFO members, and reflection on the Bible offers members many insights into contemporary farming methods and issues.

The myriad connections CFFO members make between scripture and farming is in direct contrast to Paul Thompson's examination of agricultural stewardship. Thompson suggests that while stewardship is part of agricultural folklore and culture, there can be little basis for it in biblical scripture.

[I]t is unlikely that farmers received much specific advice on stewardship from scripture. Agriculture described in Judeo-Christian religious teachings is not typical of farming during the post-feudal era of concern here. Nineteenth-century farmers could not have learned much about farming from the Bible. What is more probable is that folklore has provided the substance of agrarian stewardship values, and that religion has been selectively applied to sanction common wisdom.¹³⁶

In fact CFFO members find many relevant applications of biblical stories for their lives as contemporary farmers. Rooting the concept of stewardship in scripture is one important area where CFFO farmers find meaningful connections between the bible and farming, which is explored in chapter 4. Other key themes connecting farming or food and biblical passages are explored in more detail below. The examples here illustrate how

¹³⁶ Paul Thompson, *The Spirit of the Soil: Agriculture and Environmental Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 74.

these modern farmers, working in a global economic context, find particular relevance in scripture for their work.

No doubt the relevance they find is in part because of regular study of scripture as part of their devotional practices. Interviewees all attend church regularly, and many interviewees also mentioned participating in or leading Bible study groups through their church. Many houses that I visited read from the Bible as part of their daily routines, reading for example, a passage from the Old Testament after breakfast, and a passage from the New Testament after dinner, together as a family. At every meeting of the CFFO I attended, a biblical passage was read as a devotion, and reflected upon to open the meeting. The passage was usually directly connected to farming or issues in farming of the day.

In the interview data in particular, interviewees often made mention of either biblical stories or scripture passages, or the importance of biblical principles in their farming or in the work of the CFFO. The stories that were connected, and how they were connected, were not the same for everyone. So, in this sense, some of the “selective” nature of the use of scripture to which Thompson alludes above is evident. However, it is clear that in their work as farmers, and in their work on recommendations about government policies concerning agriculture, CFFO members and staff wrestle with scripture in their process of discerning what they think should be done.

In interviews, farmers made reference to both Old Testament and New Testament stories and parables in connection with farming and farming policy. As one might expect, there was in fact a great variety in the interpretation of scripture in relation to farming, and a wide variety of scripture verses and stories connected to farming in different ways.

While this is the case, there were also important points of connection, where some ideas were repeated more than others.

While 17 of the interviews made specific mention of the Bible, or the biblical basis of the work of the CFFO, only some used specific biblical stories in their discussion of farming and farming policy issues. The stories they used were quite diverse, such that almost none were repeated from one interviewee to the next. This again is probably an indication that the stories referenced often come from personal study and reflection, or experiences of finding resonance between scripture and their personal farming experiences. These examples are not just a repetition of something several people read in a CFFO publication, for example. Some stories were specifically to do with agrarian or agricultural issues or examples. Others were not as clearly connected to agriculture, modern or ancient.

The two things that were mentioned the most often were the importance of stewardship and the importance of respecting government, and these were usually connected as biblical principles. Occasionally stewardship was connected to specific verses, but more often it was spoken of more generally as a biblical principle. The principle of respecting the authority of government is also not usually connected to a specific verse (such as Romans 13:1-5),¹³⁷ but is also discussed as a biblical principle. A CFFO article reminding members of the importance of respecting government described

¹³⁷ “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; for it is God’s servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience” (NRSV).

this as a biblical principle, and emphasized it especially in the context of tractor demonstrations by other farm organizations, without specifically indicating specific biblical passages.¹³⁸

Other than these two repeated themes, the biblical stories or passages that members connected to farming were diverse. Furthermore the issues they address are nearly as diverse as the stories they use to address them. Although their focuses may be different, they rarely if ever contradict one another. The practice of connecting the Bible to farming was common. Some used many different stories, while others may have only referred directly to one or two. Some biblical stories were connected more specifically to the personal farming methods that they used, or that they felt farmers should employ. Others applied biblical stories to farming policy issues. Others noted the ways farming gave them particular insight into Christian ideas, or to biblical ideas or passages.

2.2.4.1 The Bible and Farming

Some farmers were particularly emphatic about the relevance of the Bible for contemporary farming. The first two quotes below were given in response to the question at the end of the interview asking if there was anything important that had been missed or not emphasized enough. Both of these farmers wished to stress the relevance of the Bible for farming. They gave specific examples of a variety of stories or passages that they saw as relevant to different areas of farming or farming policy.

¹³⁸ CFFO, "Public Demonstrations," *The CFFO Newsletter* (Feb 2005): 2-3. The passage is most likely Romans 13:1-5.

The first farmer emphasizes the biblical representation of food as related to contemporary farming. In this instance the Bible is held up not so much as an ideal or as an example of an important principle to be followed, but rather as showing problems in the biblical stories that might be related to the problems of today. He catalogues the differences he sees between different sections of the bible, but notes that many pay a great deal of attention to agriculture and food.

***Farmer:** When you read the Bible, you know the whole Bible is laced with agricultural examples, with agricultural connections, now like right from the beginning to the very end. You know, when God created the world, you start reading, right away you start reading about animals, about crops, about people starting to till the land, and it goes on and on and on. In the history books from the Bible you can read about, and some of them are pretty explicit about what they grew in those days, and about pricing and about surpluses, what Joseph had in Egypt, and that goes right on to the very end of the New Testament, in the book of Revelations, when they talk about the trees of life and what the new Jerusalem will be like. And then, in the Gospels, quite frequently there it refers to the fig trees and the fruit trees, and well it goes on and on. There is a whole, the Epistles maybe a little less, like Paul, Peter and James and John they didn't write all that much about agriculture, but anyway, a fair bit. And, the one striking part is this pricing of agricultural products, you know, does it really represent the true value of food? And like Esau who sold his birth right for a bowl of soup. And people in Jerusalem, it was under siege, they paid big money for manure to eat. So, and there are*

*more of those examples. And Jesus gets sold for 30 pieces of silver, as the bread of life. So, no true representation of value. The value has nothing to do with, or the price, the prices that are paid for food, back in those days, I mean, in our day it's the same, has nothing to do with the value of it.*¹³⁹

For this farmer, while he is aware that the farming described in the Bible is very different from the reality of farming in which he lives, he underlines the emphasis on farming that he finds throughout most of the books of the Bible, from beginning to end. Note that, at the very end of this quote, he ties it back to farming of today, and the issue of the value paid for food, in contrast with the true value of food. The issue of the value of food came up in many interviews, and is discussed in more detail below, both in connection to other Biblical stories, and in terms of its importance as a value to farmers more generally (discussed in greater detail in chapter 3). This farmer points out that this problem of disconnection between the price and the value of food is represented in many different stories in the Bible.

The second example is from an interview I conducted with a wife and her husband who farm together. For her the Bible forms a clear guide and basis for forming good farming policy, and her husband voices agreement throughout the conversation as well.

Wife: And another thing that, well you have not asked, or I would like to add is just a little note that I made. It's, if you look to the end of environmental problems and you base the solution on the Bible, same thing if you look to

¹³⁹ Personal Interview #4.

sovereignty, and then you look to the Bible for a solution, and food safety, or food security, a lot of your problems are solved. That's what I think.

S.M.A.: *So what are some examples from the Bible that you see, how do you see them applying to these issues?*

Wife: *God said that we have to take care of the earth. If we take care of the earth, then you are good for the environment. Food sovereignty as I see it, as this self-governing, self-rule, if you base your rules on the Bible, and you have fair rules for everybody, it should not be a problem. Everybody can live with that. Food safety, if you are honest in what you put in your food, you are not, you are treating another the way you would like to be treated yourself. You are not, you're not going to eat the things that you don't trust.*

S.M.A.: *Right, so that's sort of the golden rule of...*

Wife: *So, same thing, treat, don't do to others what you don't want to be done to you.*

Husband: *Love your neighbour as yourself.*

Wife: *Food security, aren't we all told that we should share with the people that have less?*

Husband: *Sure, many times in the Bible.*

Wife: *You know, those are just a few things that come up in my mind. Right away when you ask that, but yeah there is, if you base your life on the Bible, a*

*lot of problems could be solved. ...when you spell them out in the words of the Bible, yeah, it is even clearer.*¹⁴⁰

This farmer saw a great deal more fairness in the biblical principles and stories she emphasized in relation to agricultural issues of today. For her, the Bible speaks clearly about the need to look after the environment, and to be considerate of those around you, with special attention to those who have less, which are principles she applies to many of the farming issues that came up throughout the interview.

Likewise another farmer I interviewed made connections between several different biblical stories and how they can be applied to farming policy. This farmer puts a somewhat different emphasis than the previous interviewees. Where the previous couple emphasized the importance of charity within the general population to ensure greater food security (that everyone should have enough food to eat) this farmer emphasizes the importance among farmers of working hard so that government money isn't needed to bail out irresponsible farm managers in bad farming years. This farmer used two different biblical passages to emphasize the farmers' responsibility to farm well and to save from good years against bad years. He argues that a farmer who does this, who works hard and is prudent with resources, should not need excessive assistance from government in bad years, if good agricultural policies are in place.

***Farmer:** CFFO has always been big on programs like NISA [Net Income Stabilization Account program from 1991-2002], where there's responsibility on both sides of the fence, instead of a direct government hand out with no*

¹⁴⁰ Personal Interview #18.

strings attached. NISA, or right now it's Agri-Invest [noted as similar to NISA, program from 2007-2012], which is really the example of the biblical principle of Joseph and the seven years of famine and the seven years of lean. You know, you put away in the good years to take away in bad years. That's where that principle comes from. ... CFFO has also argued around the table that we're not going to hand out things for bad management, which is difficult to define. But it is also part of that discussion.

S.M.A.: *So, I know you said it's hard to define, but could you give me an indication of what kind of things might indicate bad management?*

Farmer: *Well for instance, somebody that doesn't do a good job in the field, you end up with poor crops due to mismanagement, that individual should not live off of government money. That goes back to that principle of Agri-Invest, and NISA, because if you're a good farmer you should be able to put away in good years to take away from it in the bad years. ... So the biblical principle is, yes there are handouts, they can all work, but there's obviously a little bit of responsibility involved because the Bible in Ephesians says, "he who will not work does not eat." And so, if you keep that in mind, like, you know, yes you help somebody else, but if they don't want to lift a finger for it, well then you don't have to help them. That's really what it comes down to. And that's based on Ephesians, I forget, you have to look up the verse, but I know there's a verse there, "he who does not want to work does not eat."¹⁴¹*

¹⁴¹ Personal Interview #11.

This same farmer emphasized the importance of work with yet a third story, also from the Old Testament, which also illustrates the importance of how work should be regulated, not just that working and working well is important.

Farmer: And if you look at the book of Proverbs, “if he’s a sluggard he will never have food in this house.” I mean there’s biblical principles throughout the Old and New Testament that quantify that. And if you look at manna that God gave to the Israelites in the desert, did He drop in their soup bowl? No, they had to go out in the morning and get it right? They had to do something for it. He could’ve chosen to put in their soup bowl but He didn’t. He made them go and get it yet. And He taught another big lesson, that they weren’t to do it on the Sabbath day.¹⁴²

He uses all of these different passages to emphasize the biblical view that farmers ought to work hard and that they should be good responsible managers of their farms. He does not suggest that there should be no government programs in place to help farmers or to offer them greater security in bad years; rather, he insists that these programs should be designed to encourage good management, and not dependence on government money. He also emphasizes the importance of regulation of work by recognizing the Sabbath, or the importance of rest in balance with hard work.

2.2.4.2 Biblical Stories and the Value of Food

Recall the first quote from the farmer above who saw great disparity between the value of food and the price paid for it in many biblical stories from the Old and New Testaments.

¹⁴² Ibid.

Many farmers found that food is undervalued in our current society, especially in terms of the price paid for it in the market place. However, the farmer quoted above was the only one to point out examples of how food is also undervalued in biblical stories.

Another farmer also examined the value placed on food in the Bible, but he paints a somewhat different picture of the biblical emphasis that he sees. This quote is less specific in its reference to scripture, but is still taken as a reflection on the spiritual value of food in a biblical context.

***S.M.A.:** You said that you want to recreate the food system that people deserve. Can you describe for me what that food system looks like to you?*

***Farmer:** This goes back to earlier where I was saying that there's a lack of transparency in many of the products and or activities of our food system. Food in biblical terms was the celebration of a way of life, intertwined with the blessings of the creation. And it was used to give celebration to the Creator, give thanks and give honour and so on. When you look at people driving a tonne of steel through a drive-thru and ordering some said notion of food through a window, and eating it on the fly, looking at the health impact of the stuff that's on that plate, looking at the connection that eater has with the hands that grew that from the soil, or cared for the animals, it is the most disconnected system that I could imagine, next to eating it in pills. And we have all kinds of health-food pills that will feed you your food supposedly. So if growing food is a spiritual act in cooperation with the Creator, then eating*

*it has to also be a spiritual act, or a moral act if you will. And the system we have in place now, is treating food like any other widget.*¹⁴³

For this farmer both growing and eating food should be spiritual acts, connecting us with creation and the Creator in meaningful ways. He argues that biblical stories demonstrate food as a connecting point between humans and the Creator, and that we should try to achieve this connection as much as possible in our current food system.

2.2.4.3 The Bible, Greed, and Personal Farming Practices

Others use biblical stories to emphasize the problem of greed among farmers. One farmer drew on two parables together which he saw as cautionary tales against the temptation of greed, of the desire to get big and get rich, particularly as a farmer.

*And the bottom line is for me, the people who are successful in agriculture are kind of like in the Bible where it says “a rich man will have a tough time making it to the pearly gates.” So I see that. People have lost their souls in their pursuit of the glory of farming. And my soul aches for that situation or for those people. And so my challenge is first of all to make sure that I don’t get roped into that loss of faith to build another barn.*¹⁴⁴

He refers here to two passages, Matthew 19:24 and Luke 12:13-21, one of which has specifically agrarian connections, and one of which does not. His concern is primarily the effect greed has on the people who fall victim to its pull, on the human impact of greed.

¹⁴³ Personal Interview #7.

¹⁴⁴ Personal Interview #7.

Another farmer emphasized to me the importance of not being greedy as a farmer in terms of how much one takes from the land, rather than in terms of expanding the size of the farm for more wealth. She made reference to an Old Testament passage, Leviticus 25: 1-6, which is specifically focused on farming.

S.M.A.: And most of the crops you are growing are hay?

Farmer: Yeah, it's more hay and then reseeding it when the field doesn't produce any more. But it's not cheap anymore to reseed your field, so when you can avoid it... you know. You know the same thing, the Bible says that all the time too already, we can learn from that. When you have the seven-year thing in the Bible, give the land a rest.¹⁴⁵

Later this same farmer expanded on why she felt it was agriculturally important not to over-stretch the land, not to take too much, and to allow the land to rest.

Farmer: When you have less, when you have a few cows less, but you sustain your fields by not seeding or reseeding, you save a lot of money. So, that's another thing for me that is common sense. I saw my other fellow neighbour last year, he was taking a third crop off and he made square bales, and he said "now I can sell my square bales to the horse people." I drove past his farm, and there's quite a few square bales left. But he took a third crop off. He worked his head all sweaty, when if he had maybe let the field stand he would have a better crop next year. Last year it was dry at the end of the season, and our son, he left the grass tall, let it grow a little bit taller than the

¹⁴⁵ Personal Interview #19.

rest. He could have cut it, but he didn't. My husband was upset about it because he said, "You know, look at that! Eh? It looks awful." But now, when you look in the field, you see how nice the grass is growing because it had protection, and the snow can blow off, and because the older grass, the frost can't kill, all those things.¹⁴⁶

In this case she emphasizes the importance of avoiding greed for the benefit of the land, and the health of the plants that grow. This saves money, but it also saves the fertility and the renewability of the land, which will not require reseeding if the natural fertility is not overtaxed from greedy harvesting, either by humans or too many animals grazing the fields.

2.2.5 Summary of Christian Social Engagement in the CFFO

The research data I analysed in this section illustrates the identity of the CFFO as a "Christian-Farming" organization. The specific Christian theological and cultural foundations of the CFFO come from its Dutch orthodox Reformed and Kuyperian origins. The CFFO continues to express this founding Christian identity through focus on what it interprets as biblical principles, including a focus on long-term vision or a holistic perspective on what is good for agriculture as a whole, focus on justice issues such as stewardship and family farming, as well as respect for government. The CFFO forms its specifically Christian voice within agriculture in the ways in which these principles are then applied to various farming issues of the day. While the Christian or biblical

¹⁴⁶ Personal Interview #19.

principles are important, the focus of discussion within the CFFO is on contemporary farming issues, which is the greater area of expertise and interest of members.

The chapter also examines some of the ways the Kuyperian social vision of sphere sovereignty is lived out by members currently, in their many forms of social engagement and community activity. Although not all members necessarily hold this as a specifically Kuyperian view, many are highly engaged, contributing to an overall culture of social engagement among those who belong to the CFFO. Members are also actively connecting their personal understandings of scripture to their own understandings of farming, be that personal farming methods or wider farming policies. This use of scripture also illustrates the connection between Christianity and farming for them in their personal worldview, as well as through their work within the CFFO—which illustrates the level of interest of the members of the CFFO in connecting their faith to their farming, personally, and in the recommendations that the CFFO extends to government based on discussions among members at CFFO meetings.

2.3 Conclusion: CFFO Foundations and Current Vitality in Rural Ontario

This chapter has looked first at the particular circumstances of the wave of immigration from the Netherlands to Canada in the second half of the 20th century, which resulted in a significant population of Dutch orthodox Reformed coming and settling as farmers in rural Ontario. These Dutch immigrants, urban and rural, founded for themselves a wide range of institutions, creating a high level of institutional completeness, including churches and separate Christian schools. For those in rural areas, this institutional development also included founding a Christian farming organization, in order to actively

engage their Christian principles in the sphere of agriculture, based on the Kuyperian theological view of sphere sovereignty.

This particular orthodox Reformed Christian identity and theology are still important, as they continue to represent the majority of members within the CFFO, and are still important motivators for many who participate in the organization. However, the CFFO as it operates today embraces Christians from beyond that original base of membership, and in so doing also embraces a wider understanding of what it means to be a “Christian farmer.” Those who have been attracted to the CFFO still find the Christian aspect of the CFFO’s identity to be important, and they see this expressed in certain aspects of the CFFO’s approach to policy, especially as contrasted with the largest GFO, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture.

The CFFO currently has a culture of social engagement, which can be seen among all interviewees, and among many members and leaders within the CFFO. Members are engaged in the many different types of meetings that go on within the CFFO at a provincial and at the local levels, throughout the course of the year. These meetings demonstrate the particular Christian identity of the CFFO through public prayer, bible devotions and hymn-singing, and also illustrate the successful engagement of the CFFO with the wider agricultural and political spheres in Ontario.

CFFO members are involved in their wider community, as well as within the CFFO itself. This engagement is clearly illustrated in the devotion of a great deal of personal time and energy, and in some cases financial resources as well, by interviewees in other community and agriculture related organizations and activities. Members are also personally engaged in connecting their faith with their farming practices, as is illustrated

by the various ways in which they connect biblical stories and passages to farming methods and policies. In particular, family farming and stewardship are important areas where Christian values or principles are expressed in farming, which are discussed in the following chapters.

The next chapter turns to consider the question of “family farming” in more detail, as it is connected to certain values, many of which CFFO members ground in their Christian values as part of farming as a way of life. Family farming, while closely connected with values such as the importance of family, community and care for the natural environment, is also connected to the changing structure of agriculture in North America as a whole. In embracing the identity of family farming, and in the discussion of stewardship explored in the following chapters, the CFFO shows its adaptation to the North American farming context in which it operates, while also connecting this back to its Christian emphasis, values, and identity.

Chapter 3: Agriculture of the Middle and Family Farming

3.0 Chapter Introduction

The CFFO has built itself from the foundations of the Dutch social structure and Kuyperian theology that are important expressions of the roots and origins of many members and has then expanded and adapted to the wider culture in which it works. One key example of how the CFFO has engaged in the debates of North American agriculture is the focus of members and CFFO publications on the importance and value of family farming. This debate arises from the historical structure of farming in North America, and the changes that have been taking place over the last half-century in particular. Within the CFFO, debate about the significance of family farming reflects the reality of member farmers, and also connects to the emphasis on Christian values in farming that the CFFO espouses.

This chapter addresses the historical context of the significance of family farming, including another significant historical pattern that has been affecting farmers in Canada, and the United States: the “disappearing middle” of agriculture. Significant changes have happened in the structure of agriculture in Canada and the U.S., particularly in the later 20th century, but continuing on into the 21st. Economic changes in farming have resulted in a pattern of increasing farm size, fewer farmers or farm operators, and fewer overall farms. This is described as a process of industrialization, which has been ongoing for decades, if not centuries, but which has become more and more intensified with the passing of time. Most dramatically affected by these changes have been the “middle-sized” farms, usually owned and operated by families.

In the 1970s and 1980s these changes, along with the particular economic climate of the time, resulted in a “Farm Crisis” that was devastating to many family farmers, who either lost their farms, or suffered significant financial difficulties. This crisis raised the flag about the changes that had long been taking place in agriculture, especially related to intensive, large scale farming techniques and the effects these changes were having on rural communities, on ecological treatment of farmland and farm animals. It brought into focus the differences in farming methods between “family farms” and other forms of agriculture, such as investor-owned farms, or very large intensive “industrial farms.”

This chapter argues that it is within this historical context that the emphasis on family farming within the CFFO can best be understood. Furthermore, it argues that family farming is, for CFFO members, also tied to their self-understanding as Christian farmers. These historical changes, and the many issues related to them, are very important for members of the CFFO. The CFFO self-identifies as “a professional organization of Christian family farm entrepreneurs.” Members conceive of themselves as family farmers, even those who may run large operations. The Christian identity of the CFFO is also tied to its “family farm” identity, in particular through the values that are emphasized in the idea and practice of family farming. Farming is important to members as a way of life, as a good way to raise a family, as a religious calling, and as a way to work with and connect with nature. All of this is tied for them to the ability to farm in a family-farming mode of agriculture, not in an investor-owned or industrial mode.

3.1 Family Farming

At the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in 2011, I participated in a tour of local food and urban agriculture in the San Francisco area. As we gathered and

boarded the bus that was to take us on our tour, I was getting acquainted with the person next to me. He asked me about what I was studying. I told him Christian farmers in Ontario, Canada. He wanted to know if they were all organic farmers. I said that some were, but most were not. “Oh,” he replied, somewhat concerned, “are they all industrial farms then?” This binary is not unusual. It seemed for him, as it does for many others, that there are only two types of farms: small organic farms (good) and large industrial farms (bad).

The more I have studied and visited farms, the more I have come to appreciate that there are many different types of farms, and different types of farmers. However, the habit of dividing farms into “good and bad” types is not uncommon, even among farmers themselves. Which farms are considered “good” depends on who is asking. Some value industrial farms as more efficient, and better able to produce cheap and abundant food for a growing global human population. Others value organic farms as environmentally responsible, producing more nutritious and safer food for the benefit of both humans and non-humans. Still others value family farms as protectors of values and relationships: family farming as a way of life fosters richer family relationships for farmers, healthier communities, both rural and urban, and allows a greater number of people, farmers and non-farmers, more meaningful connection to food production.

Marty Strange points out the polarity of the debate almost 30 years ago in the context of family farming, saying there are “two fundamental beliefs held by the opposing sides, neither subject to negotiation: that family farms are good while corporate farms are evil; and that corporate farms are more efficient, else why would they pose a

threat to family farms?”¹⁴⁷ As is evidenced by the anecdote above, the tension of the debate has changed very little. While Strange and others are clearly in favour of the benefits of family farming, or agrarian values in farming, he notes that in fact family farming itself is undergoing a process of industrialization. The enemy in this case lies within.

The CFFO is particularly concerned with family farming in their literature and policy recommendations and has been for many years. While this is the case, the importance they place on family farming and the way they define it is not identical with many academic thinkers who have written on the topic. Members of the CFFO live with the reality that family farming exists under pressures to change that result from a competitive agricultural marketplace. They must constantly wrestle with the question of what aspects must remain, and what aspects can change while still retaining the vital importance the practice of family farming holds for them.

Although there is certainly merit in considering arguments for the benefits and values underlying organic vs. conventional farming methods, this section will consider a different set of differentiators between farms and farming methods. First I begin by considering what some writers in this field have written on the issue of family farming, then I look at how this compares with what the CFFO has written and what CFFO members self-identify as being the important aspects of family farming.

Writers concerned with the importance and benefits of family farming often contrast it with other forms of farming. In some models, as I’ve already noted, two forms

¹⁴⁷ Marty Strange, *Family Farming: The New Economic Vision* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 31.

of farming are considered, such as family farming vs. industrial farming.¹⁴⁸ In other models, three or more forms of farming may be considered.¹⁴⁹ Academics and statisticians tend to prefer more detailed models that account for factors such as the dependency of the farmer on farm vs. off-farm income (as in lifestyle farming), as well as more detailed divisions of differences among farms and farmers, based on motivations (closely tied to values such as stewardship, profitability, or efficiency), stages of life (e.g. beginner, retiree), and sales value of the farm overall in order to differentiate categories.¹⁵⁰

3.1.1 Family Farms

Many different issues about farming are tied to the concept of “family farms.” This concept touches on the agrarian vision of early pioneers in Canada and the U.S., and it touches on the backbone of rural community life resting on the families that make up the surrounding farming community. It touches on the values of family, hard work,

¹⁴⁸ Both Wendell Berry and Marty Strange, for example, present farming with this binary, as discussed in more detail below. See especially Wendell Berry, “A Defense of the Family Farm,” in *Home Economics: Fourteen Essays* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 1987), 162-178; and Strange, *Family Farming*, 32-42. The CFFO also does this in some of their literature, again discussed in more detail below. Mark Graham strongly criticizes industrial trends in agriculture, but does not use the term “family farm” as his contrasting model, although he is discussing many of the same issues, with perhaps greater environmental emphasis. Mark Graham, *Sustainable Agriculture: A Christian Ethic of Gratitude* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005), 78-139. Gary Fick does, however, emphasize the model of “family farm” in his analysis. See Gary W. Fick, *Food, Farming, and Faith* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 115-128.

¹⁴⁹ The three-farm model, as noted above, was used in the influential United States Department of Agriculture report “A Time to Choose.” See: United States Department of Agriculture, *A Time to Choose: Summary Report on the Structure of Agriculture* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1981).

¹⁵⁰ Statistics Canada, for example, has historically taken this much more detailed model of comparing farms. Buttel and LaRamee note that when they were writing in 1991, the statistics from Canada were much more detailed than those generally available from the United States, allowing them to make more detailed comparisons of the situation of farms by size and type in Canada than they were able to in the U.S.. See Frederick Buttel and Pierre LaRamee, “The ‘Disappearing Middle:’ A Sociological Perspective,” in *Towards a New Political Economy of Agriculture*, ed. William H. Friedland, et al. (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1991), 156.

community, and the practice of farming at a “human” level that Wendell Berry discusses.¹⁵¹ How “family farm” is defined, and how the practices and realities of family farming have changed over the decades, especially in the 20th and early 21st centuries, is an area of concern for many, both within and outside rural areas. Today those advocating for the importance of family farming often contrast it with industrial farming. However, farming is much more diverse than can be adequately described by putting all farms into two types. What is important about a family farm is not just a matter of size, or of farming practices. Factors like ownership, capital, and labour are all important in differentiating between types of farms.

Beginning in the 1980s sociologists recognized an emerging pattern among farms in North America that they described as “the disappearing middle”: the number of smaller and larger farms was increasing, and the number of middle-size farms was decreasing.¹⁵² Also, the economic significance of these middle-sized farms was decreasing. These middle-sized farms had previously produced the majority of the food sent to market in North America. Increasingly a few very large farms are taking over this role, both in producing a much larger share of the overall agricultural produce, and also capturing an even larger share of the overall receipts of the agricultural sector.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ See for example Wendell Berry, “A Defense of the Family Farm,” in *Home Economics*, 163-178.

¹⁵² See for example Buttel and LaRamee, “The ‘Disappearing Middle,’” 155-56; Frederick L. Kirshenmann, “A Bright Future for ‘Farmers of the Middle,’” in *Cultivating An Ecological Conscience: Essays from a Farmer Philosopher*, ed. Constance L. Falk (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2010), 317-318; George Stevenson, et al. “Agriculture of the Middle,” in *Encyclopedia of Food and Agricultural Ethics*, ed. Paul Thompson and David Kaplan (Berlin: SpringerReference [www.springerreference.com] Springer-Verlag, 2013) (online); Tomas A. Lyson, G. W. Stevenson, and Rick Welsh eds., *Food and the Mid-Level Farm: Renewing an Agriculture of the Middle* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2008).

¹⁵³ Buttel and LaRamee, “The ‘Disappearing Middle,’” 155-56; Strange, *Family Farming*, 63. This issue is discussed in more detail below.

These middle farms are most closely connected with farms that are also family farms, which is to say farms owned by a family, in which the family members do the majority of the labour, and expect to sustain the family on the living earned from the farm. Thus these changes in the rural farm economy also touch on the issues of the values and social relationships that are changing along with the change in the types of farms that form the basis of the farming economy and rural communities. Those in favour of “saving the family farm” often argue, at least in part, that the value of these farms lies in their social and environmental value, as much or more than in their economic value, especially as they increasingly produce less and less of the total agricultural output, and take in less and less of the overall agricultural gross receipts.¹⁵⁴ The CFFO as an organization certainly examines these issues, and also does make these arguments in some of its literature. Farmers themselves, living on and operating family farms of various sizes, have to struggle with the question of where they place their own values, including what changes from within their own business operations they wish to allow, and what changes they will resist, in order to keep farming while at the same time maintaining the values they espouse. For the CFFO, values are intimately connected to religion—in this case their core Christian values.

Part of what is at issue in the debate about farm size is the question of values. Different farming methods and farm sizes allow or restrict a farmer’s ability to express certain values through farming work. The concern over the disappearance or the decrease in the number and influence of farms of middle size, or farms run by and for families, is

¹⁵⁴ For a contrary argument to the environmental value of middle-sized farms, read Harvey S. James and Mary K. Hendrickson, “Are Farmers of the Middle Distinctively ‘Good Stewards?’ Evidence from the Missouri Farm Poll, 2006,” *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 23 (2010): 571-590.

part of this concern over the effect of farm size on values connected with farming. These values include the importance of community, neighbourliness, work ethic, stewardship of land and animals, quality of food produced, and family relationships, which are all tied to the concept, if not the practice, of family farming. Family farming is often connected with the concept of agrarianism, but the two are not necessarily synonymous, especially as family farms continue to change, often becoming more and more industrialized.

3.1.2 Measuring Farms: The Question of Farm Size

Looking historically and moving into the present, the way farms are measured, valued and compared has significance on how farm policy is developed and applied. What is measured, and what goes unmeasured can have consequences on the types of farms that agricultural policy helps to prosper and those that may not benefit to the same degree from policy changes. One common mode of measuring farms is by gross annual farm receipts. Another important but less commonly used is by farm acreage. Overall, average farm acreage has been increasing, while the overall number of farms, in Canada and the U.S., has been decreasing. The average age of farm operators has also been increasing.¹⁵⁵ However, while these measures indicate important changes in agriculture over time, measuring size only, especially by either of the two measures above, does not capture all that is important about the differences between different types of farms. Of particular importance in North America has been how to measure and define the importance of what are commonly called family farms.

¹⁵⁵ Statistics Canada, "Snapshot of Canadian Agriculture: Chapter 1," in *2011 Farm and Farm Operator Data, Census of Agriculture 2011*, Statistics Canada (<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/95-640-x/2012002/01-eng.htm#II>), accessed April 30, 2014; Linda Lobao and Katherine Meyer, "The Great Agricultural Transition: Crisis, Change, and Social Consequences of Twentieth Century US Farming," *Annual Review of Sociology* 27 (2001): 107-109.

The concept of family farms is important in North America in particular because rural social and economic structures in Canada and the U.S. have historically been based primarily around farms owned and worked by individual families. In the past these farms were the main producers of food in the agricultural sector, and have survived as family businesses long after family businesses in other sectors have ceased to have the same economic and social relevance.¹⁵⁶

However, in the 1980s, looking at statistics starting from the 1970s, rural sociologists noticed a pattern which was described as “the disappearing middle.”¹⁵⁷ In particular, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) released a report in 1981 entitled *A Time to Choose*, which adopted a three-part division of farm types.¹⁵⁸ Marty Strange, writing in 1988, discusses the 3-farm model that emerged from this report, which divided farms into small, medium and large farms, based on size determined by gross farm income. This pattern of small, medium, and large farms became the standard way of understanding issues in American agriculture after the release of this report.¹⁵⁹

As Strange summarizes, small farms in this typology are dismissed as not really being farms by policy developers, since those who operate them either do not derive most of their livelihood from the farm itself, or are the few struggling farmers who constitute

¹⁵⁶ Buttel and LaRamee, “The ‘Disappearing Middle,’” 151-169.

¹⁵⁷ See for example: USDA, *A Time to Choose*; Buttel and LaRamee, “The ‘Disappearing Middle,’” 151-169; Strange, *Family Farming*, esp. 64-66; Labao and Meyer, “The Great Agricultural Transition,” 103-124; Lyson, Stevenson, and Welsh, *Food and the Mid-Level Farm*.

¹⁵⁸ USDA, *A Time to Choose*.

¹⁵⁹ Strange, *Family Farming*, 64-65. From this emphasis on three farms emerges the concern over the loss of the medium or middle-sized farms. This concern has continued into current scholarship. See for example Labao and Meyer’s review of the sociological literature in this area: Labao and Meyer, “The Great Agricultural Transition,” 103-124.

rural poverty. These small farms continue to persevere most likely through off-farm income.¹⁶⁰

Strange continues in his summary of the USDA report to describe large farms as “industrial agribusinesses,” which usually specialize in one or two commodities, and have few income problems. Some even qualify as high-income earners. These farms, Strange also notes, tend to be heavily in debt.¹⁶¹

Strange points out that medium farms are too big to be discounted as not really farms, but too small to profit financially from many of the changes, especially economic changes, that have taken place in agriculture as it becomes increasingly industrialized. Vertical integration and contracts, for example, benefit larger farms much more than medium sized farms. This makes medium sized farms a problem for farming policy as understood from the USDA report.¹⁶² Medium farms are most closely connected with “family farms” in this model. Thus, with the disappearance of the “middle” of agriculture, comes also the loss of the family farm.¹⁶³

The pattern of change noted in the 1980s as the “disappearing middle” has indeed continued, as is evidenced by statistics leading up to the present day.¹⁶⁴ This pattern of

¹⁶⁰ Strange, *Family Farming*, 62.

¹⁶¹ Strange, *Family Farming*, 63-65.

¹⁶² Strange, *Family Farming*, 63.

¹⁶³ Strange, *Family Farming*, 66.

¹⁶⁴ Daft notes that when *A Time to Choose* was written, forecasters felt fairly confident in anticipating the future patterns in agriculture based on the patterns from the 1970s, only to have them completely contradicted in what happened in the 1980s. See Lynn Daft, “A Look Back at the USDA Report on the Structure of Agriculture: A Time to Choose,” *American Journal of Alternative Agriculture* 8 (1993): 149. It may be because of this that writers such as Buttel and LaRamee, writing in the 1990s, were more hesitant to

the uneven distribution of farm production and farm income has continued, and is also reflected in the statistics from Canada. Looking at Canada as a whole, the number of farms divided strictly by gross farm income from 1991 to 2011 show the pattern continuing up to the present day.¹⁶⁵

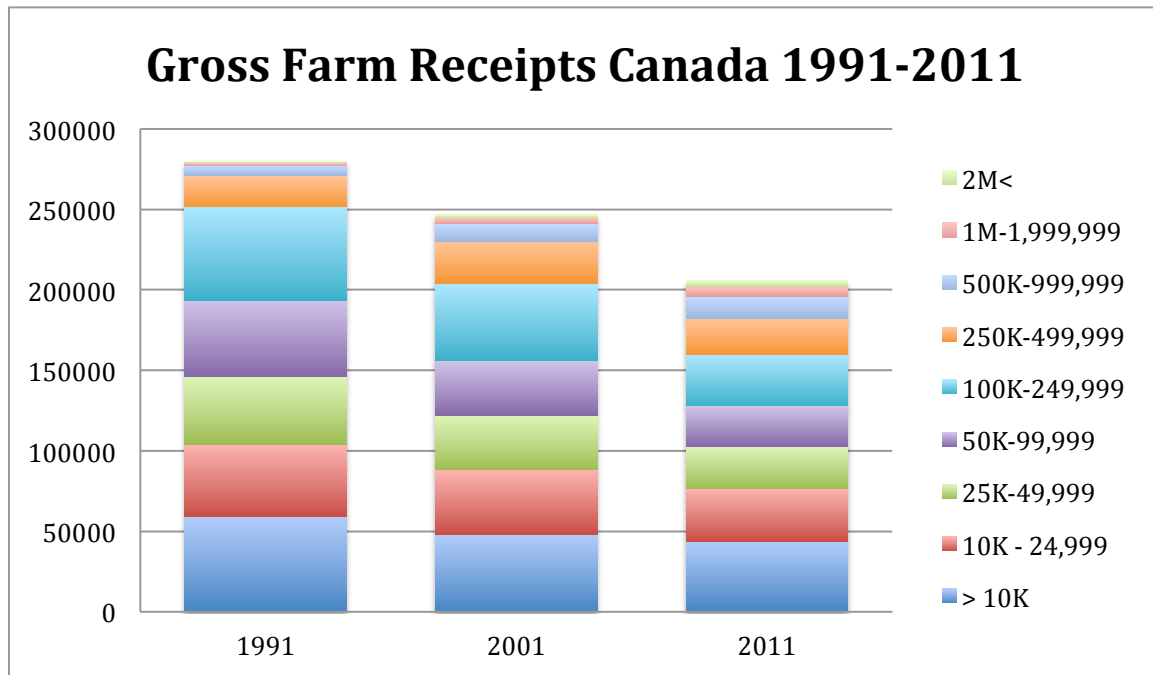


Fig. 3.1

Unlike the USDA, which divided farms strictly by gross annual farm receipts, Statistics Canada has used seven categories of farm types for comparison based on three factors: “age of operator, dependence on farm revenues and income level.”¹⁶⁶ These

declare that the current trends such as the “disappearing middle” were in fact a viable trend. Buttel and LaRamee, “The ‘Disappearing Middle,’” 165-167.

¹⁶⁵ Statistics Canada, Census of Agriculture Table 004-006. Found at <http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/cansim/a26?lang=eng&id=0040006&p2=17>, accessed April 25, 2014. The numbers represented here are in 2010 constant dollars.

¹⁶⁶ Statistics Canada, “Table 002-0029 – Distribution of farm families and average total income by typology group, unincorporated sector,” in *2011 Census of Agriculture*

categorizations are a somewhat better representation of the overall social and economic relationships of the farm than a criterion just based on gross farm receipts alone, as was used in much of the discussion above.¹⁶⁷ The chart below illustrates the number of farms in Ontario in four of these seven categories (excluding non-fulltime farmers) across a ten-year span, showing just the numbers for 2001, 2006, and 2011.¹⁶⁸ The only category where the number of farms is increasing is in the Very Large Farm category.

(<http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/cansim/a26?lang=eng&retrLang=eng&id=0020029&pattern=0020029&tabMode=dataTable&srchLan=-1&p1=-1&p2=9>), accessed April 25, 2014.

¹⁶⁷ “Small farms are those farms with gross farm revenues between \$10,000 and \$99,999. Small farms do not fall into the following categories: pension, lifestyle or low income. Medium farms are those farms with gross farm revenues between \$100,000 and \$249,999. Medium farms do not fall into the following categories: pension, lifestyle or low income. Large farms are defined as farms with gross farm revenues between \$250,000 and \$499,999. Farm families operating these farms generally receive more than 50% of their total family income from the farm. Very large farms are those farms with gross farm revenues of \$500,000 or more. Pension farms are farms with gross farm revenues of \$10,000 to \$249,999 in which the oldest operator is 65 years of age and older or is aged 60 to 64 and receiving pension income. Lifestyle farms are farms that are not operated by full-time farmers. They are defined as farms with gross farm revenues between \$10,000 and \$49,999 that are operated by families with off-farm income equal to or greater than \$50,000, and that do not fall into the pension category. Low-income farms are farms with gross farm revenues between \$10,000 and \$249,999 that are operated by families with a total family income below Statistics Canada's low-income measure. They do not fall into either the pension or lifestyle categories.” Statistics Canada, “Table 0020029 – Distribution of farm families.”

¹⁶⁸ Statistics Canada, “Table 002-0029 – Distribution of farm families.”

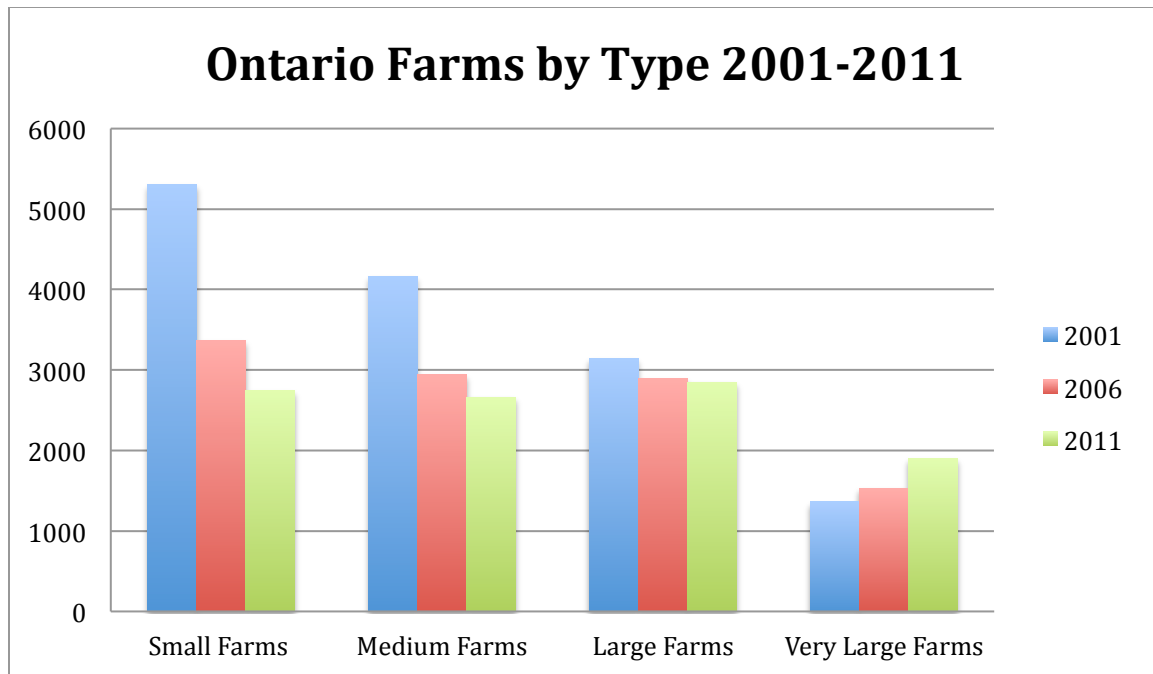


Fig. 3.2

The “disappearing middle,” connected with the disappearance of the “family farm,” has thus been an important rallying cry in farm policy debates in the U.S. and Canada. This debate indicates of a shift in the type of farm that is primarily responsible for the majority of food production in North America as a whole, moving from smaller, family-run operations to larger, industrial agriculture. These “farms of the middle” are still a significant proportion of the total number of farms and also control a significant amount of the farmland.¹⁶⁹ While smaller farms may continue to have important social and environmental significance, they are certainly less and less economically significant as part of the agricultural sector, and are less significant in ensuring food security within North America and in contributing to global food security based purely on output of food.

¹⁶⁹ Fred Kirschenmann et al., “Why Worry About the Agriculture of the Middle?” in *Food and the Mid-Level Farm: Renewing an Agriculture of the Middle*, ed. Thomas A. Lyson, G. W. Stevenson, and Rich Welsh (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2008), 4.

Those such as Strange, Kirshenmann, Berry and others who advocate for the importance of family farms, regardless of their economic significance, do however note the pattern of decreasing share of the overall food production coming from smaller family run farms. Based on the three-farm model from the 1981 report *A Time to Choose*, Strange points out that the market share is very unevenly divided between these 3 types of farms. When Strange is writing in 1988 small farms were defined as those whose farm sales were less than \$40,000 per year: “A whopping 72% of the 2,275,000 farms in 1985 were small farms by this definition, but they produce only 10.3% of the output of farm products.”¹⁷⁰ Strange notes in contrast that large farms, those with sales over \$250,000 per year at the time, despite being “a small portion of the farm population, only 4.1% of the farms in 1985, they produced the lion’s share of the farm products—48.8%. And they seem to be quite healthy for it. They garnered over three-fourths of the net farm income that year.” Medium-size farms, measured then as those falling between \$40,000 and \$250,000 in annual sales, “constitute 23.9% of the farms, and produce 40.9% of the sales.”¹⁷¹

The overall pattern continues in the same vein through to today, although the division markers of farm size change with inflation. Fred Kirschenmann, noting 1997 statistics from the U.S., describes a similar pattern of the decreasing influence and share of production of farms of the middle. He also notes the increasing number of farms under contract or vertical integration, which reduces the independent nature of management on these farms.

¹⁷⁰ Strange, *Family Farming*, 62.

¹⁷¹ Strange, *Family Farming*, 63.

61 percent of our [U.S.] total agricultural product is now being produced by just 163,000 farms, and 63 percent of that production is tied to a market or input firm by means of a contractual relationship. ... 1.3 million American farms, those classified as part-time or retirement or residential farms, account for only 9 percent of the total national agricultural product... In between these two farm sectors we have approximately 575,000 farms, classified as small to midsized family farms, that produce 30 percent of our total national production. Twenty-seven percent of these farms are tied to a marketing or input firm by means of a contract that determines at least some of the management decisions on the farm. So while we still have nearly 2,000,000 farmers in America—slightly less than the total number of prisoners housed in our nation’s prisons—the majority of our production comes from a handful of very large farms.¹⁷²

In this quote Kirschenmann emphasizes that it is the very large farms that are most heavily under contract, with midsize farms also following this trend but not to the same extent. He is also emphasizing the binary divide which continues to grow between very large farms and small farms, with the middle dwindling more and more over time. Middle-sized farms increasingly need to behave either like large farms or like small farms in order to survive.

¹⁷² Frederick Kirschenmann, “The Current State of Agriculture: Does it Have a Future?” in *The Essential Agrarian Reader: The Future of Culture, Community, and the Land*, Norman Wirzba, ed. (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2003), 102-103.

Bringing this pattern into the present, statistics from Agriculture Canada show that this trend is still continuing. The summary of highlights of the 2011 Census of Agriculture emphasizes the economic significance of the largest farms in Canada's agricultural sector. The number of farms reporting gross farm income of \$1 million and over grew by 31.2%, and those reporting gross farm income of \$2 million and over grew by 22% (calculated in 2010 constant dollars) since the 2006 census. The growing numbers of these farms are also capturing a greater portion of the overall gross farm receipts in Canada, where those over \$1 million in gross receipts now represent 4.7% of the total number of farms, and capture "49.1% of gross farm receipts for 2010" while those with gross receipts of \$2 million and over "represented 1.6% of all farms, while they reported one-third of the total receipts."¹⁷³ This means that the two thinnest slivers at the top of the bar in Fig. 1 are currently capturing nearly half of the total gross farm receipts, while all the remaining farms in the bar are capturing the remaining half of the overall farm receipts.

As to those farms reporting less than \$1 million in gross farm sales, as a whole they decreased in numbers. However, they did not decrease in number uniformly across all farm sizes. As the figures 3 and 4 below illustrate, the tipping point is in fact with farms with receipts of \$500, 000 to \$999,999 where the change from increasing numbers to decreasing numbers of farms takes place. The first chart shows the change in the

¹⁷³ Statistics Canada, "Snapshot of Canadian Agriculture: Chapter 2," in *2011 Farm and Farm and Farm Operator Data, Census of Agriculture 2011* (<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/95-640-x/2012002/02-eng.htm#VI>), accessed April 24, 2014.

number of farms in each receipt category in Ontario (Fig. 3), followed by the same measure in Canada as a whole (Fig. 4).¹⁷⁴

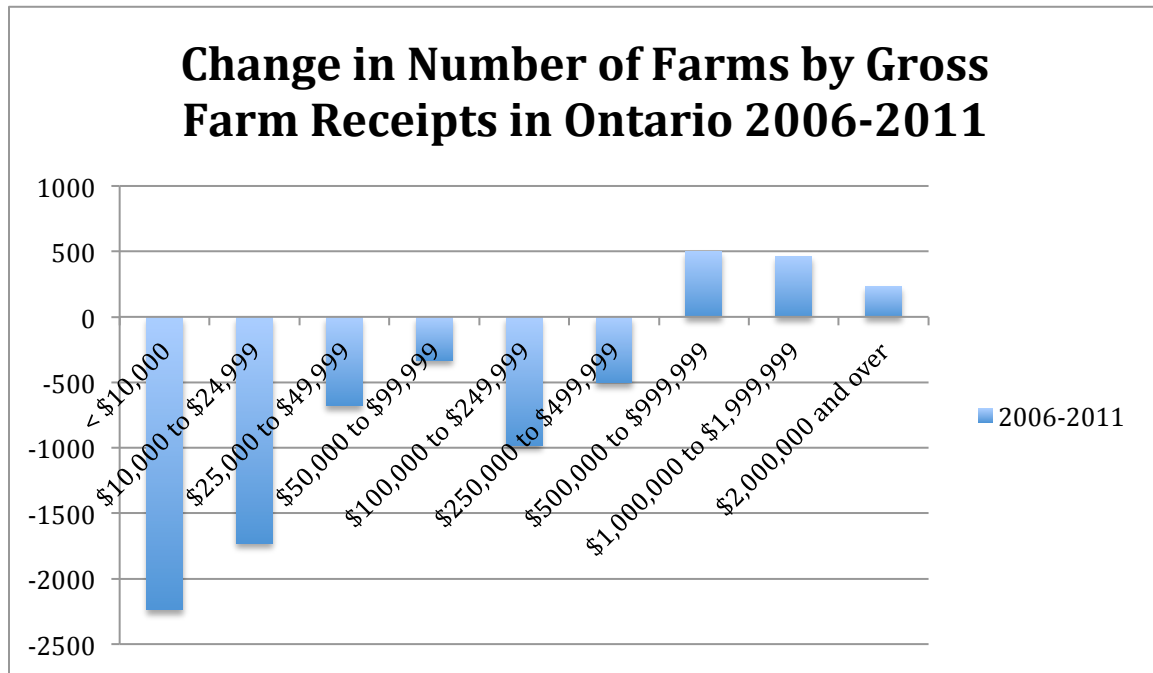
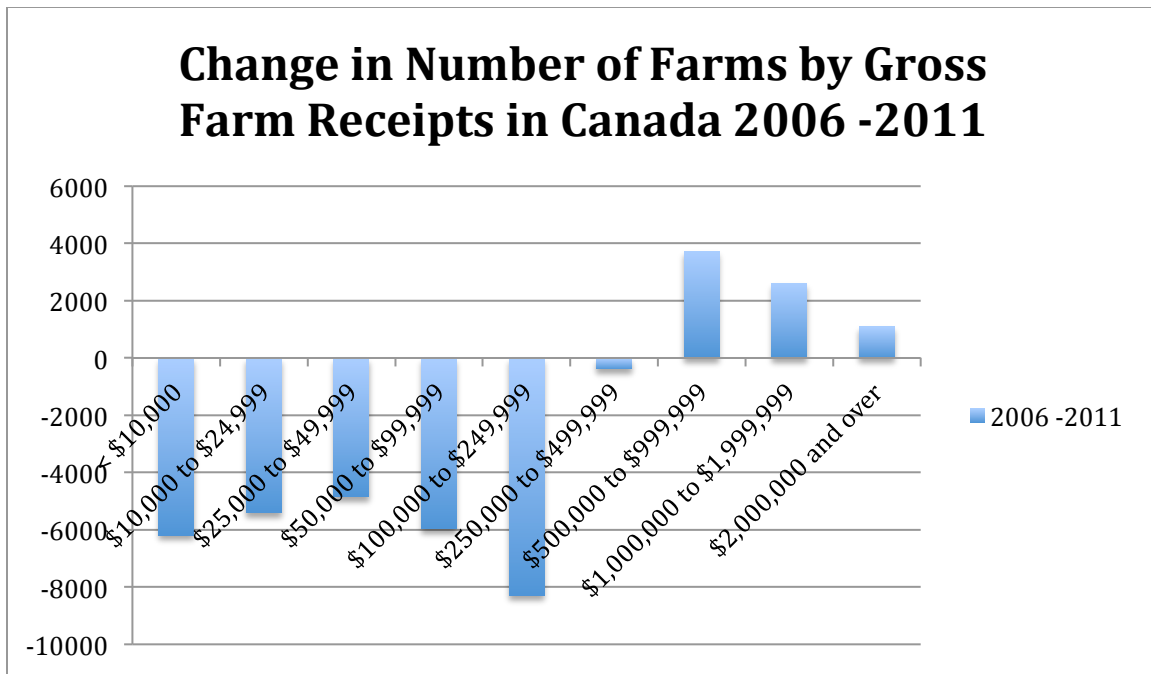


Fig. 3.3

The \$250,000 to \$499,999 category is the tipping point where the number of farms goes from shrinking to increasing, and while it is in the same place, it is not as dramatically shrinking in Canada as whole as it is in Ontario. Furthermore, while in Ontario the smallest size farm category shrank most dramatically, in Canada it is the \$100,000-\$249,999 category that shrank most dramatically in terms of number of farms.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Statistics Canada, “Farm and Farm Operator Data (95-640-X)” in *Census of Agriculture 2011* (<http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/olc-cel/olc.action?ObjId=95-640-X&ObjType=2&lang=en&limit=0>), accessed July 16, 2014.

¹⁷⁵ Statistics Canada, “Farm and Farm Operator Data (95-640-X).”

**Fig. 3.4**

However, measuring by gross annual income of farms is criticized by some scholars as a poor, or too rough, measure of the difference between farms. Strange, Buttel and La Ramee, and Lobao and Stofferahn, among others, argue that it is important to consider a combination of factors in order to gain a clearer understanding of the relationships different types of farms represent. These relationships are not adequately captured by simply measuring gross farm income. Strange notes that gross farm income fails to capture the effects of things like the volatility of agricultural prices, or the overall contribution to the economy of different types of farms, where the latter would be better represented by net income, for example.¹⁷⁶ Strange and Buttel and LaRamee argue for the importance of considering hours of on-farm vs. off-farm work and other sources of

¹⁷⁶ Strange, *Family Farming*, 69-70.

income such as is the case with lifestyle, retired, part-time farmers especially to distinguish among different types of small farms and their associated farmers.

Looking at what better defines “family farms” from other types of farms, and how best to measure them, is important for those advocating the importance of “agriculture of the middle” as a unique category of farms. Strange challenges the starting assumption about the correlation between “medium” and “family” farms by looking more closely at other factors which help to more clearly demarcate what characterizes “family farming” in particular. He advocates considering a combination of the significance of farm sales for family livelihood, the amount of hired labour, and residency of the operator(s) on the farm as a better way to measure what best characterizes a family farm. Alongside these measures, Strange argues that “the ownership and management structure, the land base, the tenure of the operator, the financial structure, and the diversity of crops (or lack thereof) are just as important.”¹⁷⁷ He is not the only one to emphasize the importance of measuring and considering other factors in defining “family farm.”¹⁷⁸ Likewise Buttel and LaRamee are critical of the “imprecision” of those, including the authors of the United States Department of Agriculture’s 1981 report, who approach this problem of the disappearing middle simply by measuring gross farm sales. Instead they prefer the following definition: “that full-time family-farming households, those which own the bulk of the assets, provide the bulk of the labour, and derive most of their livelihood from farm income, are tending toward both absolute and relative decline in the U.S. and North

¹⁷⁷ Strange, *Family Farming*, 72-73.

¹⁷⁸ See also: Labao and Meyer, “The Great Agricultural Transition,” 104-106; Daryll E. Ray and Harwood D. Schaffer, “Toward a Pro-Middle Farm Policy: What Will It Take to Ensure a Promising Future for Family Farming?” in *Food and the Mid-Level Farm: Renewing an Agriculture of the Middle*, ed. Tomas A. Lyson, G. W. Stevenson, and Rick Welsh (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2008), 148.

America generally.”¹⁷⁹ Lobao and Stofferahn, in their review of many sociological studies of the effects of industrial agriculture, draw the distinction between “industrial” farms and “family” farms using both size measures (gross farm income and acreage) as well as what they term organizational measures. Among the organizational measures they consider in making this distinction are: “vertical integration of corporations into farming; production contract farming arrangements; absentee ownership of production factors; dependency on hired labour; operation by farm managers; and legal status as a corporation (family or non-family) or syndicate.”¹⁸⁰

The tripartite pattern of dividing farms does not need to follow the strictly size or gross income based model, while still emphasizing the differences between farm types. Dahlberg, for example, divides farms into three categories that, while mirroring some of the differences outlined in the tripartite divisions discussed above, emphasizes instead characteristic differences rather than size differences. He divides farms into “agribusiness, agriculture of the middle, and alternative agriculture.”¹⁸¹ This way of dividing farms emphasizes much more clearly the different aims and modes of operation of farms rather than just considering relative size. This also leads into the differentiation made by supporters of farmers of the middle, or in particular of family farms, based on

¹⁷⁹ Buttel and LaRamee, “The ‘Disappearing Middle,’” 152. Interestingly, this definition of the farms which are in decline matches very closely with the definition of family farm that the CFFO uses in some of its documents, quoted below.

¹⁸⁰ Linda Lobao and Curtis W. Stofferahn, “The Community Effects of Industrialized Farming: Social Science Research and Challenges to Corporate Farming Laws,” *Agriculture and Human Values* 25 (2008): 230.

¹⁸¹ Kenneth A. Dahlberg, “Pursuing Long-Term Food and Agricultural Security in the United States: Decentralization, Diversification, and Reduction of Resource Intensity,” in *Food and the Mid-Level Farm: Renewing an Agriculture of the Middle*, ed. Tomas A. Lyson, G. W. Stevenson, and Rick Welsh (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2008).

the different values expressed between family farming methods and industrial methods of agriculture.

3.1.3 Values and Farming – Contrasting Agrarian and Industrial Values

In order to emphasize the particular character and value of one type of farm over another, defenders of the family farm focus especially on the differences in values and practices between family farming and industrial farming. Two key writers who have defended the importance of the family farm, especially as a foundation stone for agrarian values, are Marty Strange (discussed already above) and Wendell Berry. Both of these writers emphasize values in their analysis of the benefits and importance of family farms. The arguments they make come at an important turning point in agriculture in the U.S. and Canada. It was in the late 1970s and 1980s that the turn towards greater industrialization in agriculture was really becoming evident. Not only was it clear (or clearer) that the scale had tipped in favour of large industrial farms, but the impacts of that shift were becoming more evident. This was an important time to reconsider the agrarian model and the benefits that were being lost along with the smaller and medium sized farms. Strange and Berry's arguments resonate closely with arguments explored below from CFFO documents on the issues of farm size and family farming.

These two have been joined by other defenders of the importance of family farms, or middle-sized farms, including other scholars such as Fred Kirschenmann, and those writing from within an explicitly Christian faith perspective, such as Mark Graham and Gary Fick. These more recent voices advocating for family farms are looking for new economic opportunities where family or middle farms are best suited to flourish, and are

at a competitive advantage over other types of farms. They also argue for greater public policy to support middle or family farmers in particular.

These newer voices continue to articulate the value placed on the relationship between family and land, which has a longer tradition within the United States and Canada. For example, an ecumenical statement “Man’s Relation to the Land” prepared in 1945 clearly emphasizes the important relationship between the family unit and farming as a vocation as part of a longstanding and popularly supported tradition in the United States.

The family and land. Since the family is the primary institution, access to land and stewardship of land must be planned with the family unit in view. The special adaptability of the farm home for nurturing strong and wholesome family life is the reason for the universal interest in land use and rural welfare. A unique relationship exists between the family and the vocation of agriculture. The farm is the native habitat of the family. The family’s welfare must therefore have the first consideration in economic and social planning. Throughout the history of the United States these fundamental principles have been worked out through national and state legislation, and they have been upheld by court decisions and popular acclaim.¹⁸²

The principles and arguments here for the important connection between the family farm as a productive and socially important unit and the mutual benefit of farming

¹⁸² “Man’s Relation to the Land: A Statement of Principles which shall Underlie Our National, State, and Individual Actions,” quoted in Gene Wunderlich, “Evolution of the Stewardship Idea in American Country Life,” *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 17 (2004): 90.

by families for stewardship, family life, and the overall social and environmental health of rural areas, and perhaps even the country as a whole are repeated in other arguments in favour of the importance of the family farm.

Strange in his book *Family Farming* (1988) begins with a contrast between the family farm model of agriculture and the industrial model of agriculture. Family farms, Strange argues, best represent the agrarian model, and agribusinesses best represent the industrial model, which is why they are often also called industrial farms.

The agrarian tradition, of which family farming is a part, calls for people to be neighbourly, to care for future generations, to work hard and to believe in the dignity of work, to be frugal, modest, honest, and responsible for and to the community.¹⁸³

However, as Strange points out, family farms are changing from within, and may come to express characteristics of industrial farms, even while they maintain some characteristics of traditional family farms. “American agriculture—including the traditional family farm—is becoming industrialized.”¹⁸⁴ Like the evil boil in the film *How to Get Ahead in Advertising*,¹⁸⁵ one wonders at what point the boil takes over, and the head is no longer in charge. At what point does a family farm become too industrialized to continue to have the beneficial qualities of a family farm?

Both Berry and Strange offer defining parameters of what they consider to be family farms. In this case, unlike the more technical definitions examined above, it is the

¹⁸³ Strange, *Family Farming*, 35.

¹⁸⁴ Strange, *Family Farming*, 32.

¹⁸⁵ Bruce Robinson, *How to Get Ahead in Advertising*, 1989.

underlying value system of the farmers that act as the litmus test. According to Strange, “the best test of whether a farm is a family farm is this: Does the farmer feel more pain at the loss of a neighbour than joy at the opportunity to acquire that neighbour’s land?”¹⁸⁶

Strange suggests this testing method somewhat hopefully, implying that neighbourliness would naturally trump ambition and greed. Wendell Berry, more pessimistically, concludes that the weight of history has fallen in favour of ambition and greed, arguing that

the great breakthrough of industrial agriculture occurred when most farmers became convinced that it would be better to own a neighbour’s farm than to have a neighbour, and when they became willing, necessarily at the same time, to borrow extravagant amounts of money.¹⁸⁷

This tipping point, when neighbourliness and self-sufficiency were trumped by competitiveness and indebtedness, for Berry, is the losing point for the family farm, and rural community life.

Berry is even more demanding in his definition of what constitutes a family farm. Berry defines the family farm at the most basic level as do most people: a farm which is owned and operated by a family. Although the farm family may employ some assistance labour, this labour would ideally be employed all year, not seasonally, and the owning family would not merely be landowners, but also labour alongside. For Berry, however, a true family farm needs to have remained in the family for several generations, and a recently acquired farm may be on the way to being a family farm, but is not yet one. He

¹⁸⁶ Strange, *Family Farming*, 35.

¹⁸⁷ Berry, *Home Economics*, 173.

emphasizes here the kind of “familiarity” that increases with each generation on the same farm.¹⁸⁸ Strange does not insist that the farm be owned by the same family over several generations, but he does include the amount of non-family labour as an important indicator of the when a farm moves beyond the characteristics of a family farm.¹⁸⁹

Having defined parameters or characteristics of family farms, Strange draws contrasts between the working methods, values, and impacts of industrial and family farm agriculture. Strange notes that what he describes are ideals which are never fully realized and also never purely expressed in any one farm. He contrasts the ownership and financial models, the types of commodities and the production cycles, the use of labour, technology and physical resources among other things. For him, family farms are characterized as being operated and financed by the owner, growing diverse crops in production cycles that follow natural, seasonal cycles. In this way ownership of farms is more widely dispersed, which also encourages open markets. Family farms use technology, and even adopt new technology, but at a smaller scale than industrial agriculture. Since farming is a “way of life” the primary focus is on family, and it is in the family’s best interest to conserve the resources of the farm (such as soil fertility).

In contrast, he describes Industrial Agribusiness as having very different methods and focus. The ownership and financial model are based on investment from outside the farm, which is then managed by a farm operator. This emphasizes the need for growth (especially financial), and allows the use of technologies and operations at scales that are capital intensive. Because of the needs of the industrial processors (customers), these

¹⁸⁸ Berry, *Home Economics*, 163.

¹⁸⁹ Strange, *Family Farming*, 72-73.

farms tend to operate well in controlled markets (such as through vertical integration or contracting), and are required to meet standardized production requirements, both in terms of the product itself and in the cycles of production. This usually means commodity specialization. Operating under a business model, industrial farming becomes like any other business, where consumption of resources (such as soil fertility) is common.¹⁹⁰

Underlying values are what differentiate family farms from industrial farms for both Strange and Berry. Industrial farming is based on the “economic virtues of efficiency, productivity, and competition...[or] expressed as social virtues...[of] plenty, progress, and modernization.” By contrast family farming is founded on the values of “community, neighbourhood, and family.”¹⁹¹ Wendell Berry argues that the key industrial values are “1. That value equals price...2. That all relations are mechanical. ...[and] 3. That the sufficient and definitive human motive is competitiveness...”¹⁹² Berry is particularly critical of the losses to community life and the value and quality of work that result from industrialization, in agriculture and elsewhere. Family farming as Berry defines it, rather idealistically, supports instead healthy local communities and local economies.

The valuation of these two models for agriculture among the wider public has been shifting. We may now be seeing a revived and wider public interest in the agrarian model of agriculture, despite the more positive valuation of the efficiency of the

¹⁹⁰ Strange, *Family Farming*, 32-39.

¹⁹¹ Strange, *Family Farming*, 39.

¹⁹² Berry, *Home Economics*, 168.

industrial model.¹⁹³ This positive valuation of the industrial model and the value placed on efficiency comes across clearly in the commonly repeated exhortation for farmers to “get big or get out.” The return of more positive valuation of agrarian models of farming is evident in the greater demand for value-based food chains.¹⁹⁴

Berry notes that family farms are likely to be small, and may be also marginal, including economically so. However, “although the economic return might be reduced, the *values* of the family-owned and family-worked small farm are still available both to the family and to the nation.”¹⁹⁵

The contrast Berry makes here is reflected in concerns expressed by the CFFO that as small and medium sized farms produce smaller and smaller percentages of the total farm output, they become less and less significant to agricultural policy makers. This overlooks the significance of these farms in other measures, especially, but not limited to, social measures.¹⁹⁶

Although Berry and Strange lay the foundational theme for arguments in favour of family farming, others carry on the fugal melody in a different key. Some aspects of Berry and Strange’s themes appear in the CFFO discussion of family farming discussed in more detail below. Other writers also look at the importance of values, but do so with somewhat different emphasis.

¹⁹³ See for example Thompson’s discussion of the Productionist Paradigm: Paul B. Thompson, *The Spirit of the Soil: Agriculture and Environmental Ethics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 47-71.

¹⁹⁴ Kirshenmann, “A Bright Future for Farmers of the Middle,” 320; Kirshenmann, “The Current State of Agriculture,” 112-115.

¹⁹⁵ Berry, *Home Economics*, 163-164.

¹⁹⁶ CFFO, “A Place for All” (Guelph: CFFO, 2007), 3.

Kenneth Dahlberg, for example, emphasizes the values of “democracy, cultural and biological diversity, and adaptive capacity.”¹⁹⁷ He does not exclusively associate these with middle or family farming, including also alternative agriculture as promoting these values.

Kirschenmann argues that “[p]reserving the family farm is not an exercise in nostalgia; it is critical to maintaining a resilient agriculture.”¹⁹⁸ This is because farmers working on the land and being familiar with the land are better managers of farms, and thus are the foundation of greater food security now and into the future.¹⁹⁹ Kirschenmann further challenges the notion that industrial farms are in fact efficient. Industrial measures of efficiency are usually based on yield per acre, or as Kirschenmann describes it, “how many non-farmers a farmer feeds.” However, he suggests that a better measure would be “how many calories of energy it takes to put a calorie of food on the table.” Kirschenmann cites nine calories of energy for one calorie of food from farm to table. Michael Pollan cites seven to ten calories for one calorie of food to the table. However, not all of this energy is consumed on the farm, but most is consumed in the processes of transportation and processing. Both authors are drawing in the work of David Pimentel in these calculations.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷ Dahlberg, “Pursuing Long-Term Food and Agricultural Security,” 29.

¹⁹⁸ Kirschenmann, *Cultivating an Ecological Conscience*, 293.

¹⁹⁹ Kirschenmann, *Cultivating an Ecological Conscience*, 267.

²⁰⁰ Kirschenmann, *Cultivating an Ecological Conscience*, 266. Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 183. Kirschenmann cites: David and Marcia Pimentel, *Food, Energy, and Society* (New York: John Wiley, 1979), 164-165. Pollan cites this as well as: David Pimentel ed., *Handbook of Energy Utilization in Agriculture* (Boca Raton, FL: CRC [Chemical Rubber Company] Press, 1980).

The basis on which farms are measured and compared is also an expression of values. The particular measures used to determine farm size or the contribution of different farms to the overall economy indicate which aspects of the economic activity of farms are considered important, and which are not. How best to measure things like efficiency, sustainability, food quality, and environmental impact are also highly debated.

Just as Kirschenmann raises the issue of measuring efficiency above, so sustainability is often connected with differing definitions and measures of efficiency. This comes out in the debates among CFFO farmers, discussed in more detail in chapter 4. The importance of food quality and safety against that of food quantity and affordability come out in debates about organic food production, for example. Gonzalez, in his study of Zapotec farming culture, notes that for them, “food forms part of a broader scheme in which a high value—and an underlying civilizational assessment—is attached to those substances most important for the survival of humans: high-quality food, pure water, and clean air.” This he contrasts with industrial understandings of food quality based primarily on appearance and convenience where “the requirements of a long, economically rational food chain may often take precedence over other criteria” including “taste, texture, or the presence of pesticides.”²⁰¹ These examples all illustrate that differing values are expressed through differing methods of agriculture and in differing food systems from farm production through to consumption.

²⁰¹ Roberto J. Gonzalez, *Zapotec Science: Farming and Food in the Northern Sierra of Oaxaca* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 20.

3.1.4 Summary of Family Farming

The changing structure of agriculture in the United States and in Canada has been an important concern for agricultural policy, and for rural sociologists. Of particular concern has been the effects resulting from the “disappearing middle” of agriculture, the increasing reduction in the number and in the economic influence of middle-sized family-run farms. Important to this argument is the way in which “family farm” is measured and defined, including ownership model, farm management, hired labour, and farm size. The impacts of this change have not restricted themselves to the sphere of economics, and those who have argued in favour of protecting or supporting family farms usually do so by emphasizing the values and social and environmental benefits these farms sustain. Writers such as Berry and Strange contrast agrarian values expressed through mid-sized family farms, with industrial values expressed through corporate or industrial farming.

These underlying values are of particular importance to the CFFO, as many of them connect directly to farmers’ Christian worldview and the important network of relationships with both natural and human communities that are so closely connected to the family farming structure of agriculture. I have touched on their views in this section and now turn to them in more depth.

3.2 Family Farming and the CFFO

As farming seems to become more complex, and less understood and appreciated by non-farmers, the CFFO has an important role in Ontario: to offer a balanced viewpoint, and to encourage and promote environmentally and economically sustainable, responsible agriculture. Under God’s guidance, this organization has always led in matters concerning family farming, land

use, stewardship, and marketing; trade, food safety and public concerns are also on the priority list. As we continue to work together, I trust that our Lord will continue to help us provide direction for agriculture. I consider it a real blessing to be able to serve.²⁰²

The above quotation from Jenny Denhartog is a well-stated expression of the most common issues and approach to those issues within the CFFO. Denhartog is the only woman to date to be President of the CFFO Provincial Executive, and she is currently on staff at the CFFO. In her succinct quotation, we see the balance of sustainability, both in an environmental and economic sense, which for her, and for the CFFO, must work together to be fully effective. Farmers hang in a careful balance between depending on nature and depending on the market to make a living. If either of these falls out of balance, they are at risk of no longer being able to sustain farming, and will be replaced by farmers who can do so, here at home, or abroad in the global market. Soaring interest rates can be as devastating to farming life as a drought or flood. This need for balance of both nature and economy comes across especially in their interpretation of the concept of stewardship, mentioned in Denhartog's quote, which is often applied both to monetary and natural resources. The concept of stewardship in particular is discussed in more detail in chapter 4.

Denhartog also lists the key issues, not just of the day, but longstanding concerns of the CFFO over decades of work in Ontario agriculture: "family farming, land use, stewardship, and marketing: trade, food safety and public concerns." The CFFO has had a

²⁰² Jenny Denhartog, then Vice President, quoted in "Introducing the CFFO Executive – 2000: Continuing to Serve...", *Earthkeeping Ontario* 10 (2000): 8.

longstanding interest primarily in these issues, although the issues of the day may vary in each category. Furthermore, Denhartog's discourse ties all these issues together under the important umbrella of her Christian faith and God's guidance for agriculture in Ontario. This emphasis on faith and God's guidance is also a longstanding concern running through CFFO literature and practices, and continues today.

I have touched incidentally on the CFFO in my review of the discussion concerning the categorization of farms in general, and family farms in particular. In this section of the chapter I turn to focus on the CFFO's self-identification as farming in the middle, or more specifically family farming. For them, family farming is directly connected to their Christian identity and values, including the importance of vibrant community and rural life, of responsible use of resources and stewardship, and the overall importance of farming and food production in a way that balances quality and quantity. At stake is the livelihood of farming as a way of life that is particularly conducive to connection with God and with the creation, as well as with our vital sustenance in food.

The CFFO tagline, often used under its name in documentation and promotional materials, is "a professional organization of Christian family farm entrepreneurs." The concept of family farm is thus one of the central images it promotes of itself, and one of the key aspects of its self-understanding of its identity. Most if not all CFFO members and supporters would describe themselves as family farmers. Family farming is thus of particular concern to the CFFO as a whole, and for CFFO members individually.

The CFFO, as I have noted in the previous chapter, was established in 1954, but was a relatively small and not highly politically active group until the 1960s. At this point, and into the early 1970s the CFFO established itself and developed the key issues it

addressed on the agricultural political stage in Ontario. It is precisely in the 1970s and 1980s, when the CFFO was establishing itself and its voice on the political issues, that the concept of family farms was becoming a particularly important topic. Social and economic pressures were increasing on farmers, especially concerning the question: “get big or get out.” Getting big often means changing to an increasingly industrial model of farming. Some farmers, however, respond to this pressure by getting small, and instead rely on greater off-farm income to sustain their family while continuing to farm. Since CFFO farmers are predominantly operating family-run farming operations, of various sizes and in various commodities, family farming is an important issue for CFFO still today, and has been for several decades. The importance of this topic for the CFFO as an organization and for individual members also illustrates how the CFFO brings Christian ideas and ideals into new ground within this particular North American agricultural conversation.

Among CFFO members, family farming is connected to their self-understanding of the importance of their way of life. In academic, philosophical and theological literature on farming, family farming is most often connected with values, especially agrarian values, and the practice of farming, as was discussed above.²⁰³ For CFFO members, family farming allows for meaningful work and relationships for farmers. It also allows for the expression of Christian principles in farming. For many these values

²⁰³ See for example Berry, *Home Economics*; Kirschenmann, *Cultivating An Ecological Conscience*; Kirschenmann, “The Current State of Agriculture,” 101-120; Lyson, Stevenson, and Welsh, *Food and the Mid-Level Farm*; Fick, *Food Farming and Faith*; Graham, *Sustainable Agriculture*.

are evident to them especially through the lens of their Christian faith as the foundational reason why they place importance on these aspects of their farming work.

On a personal level, farmers often see themselves as fulfilling a calling or Christian vocation through farming. Because they see the importance of their work at this level, they strive to be exemplary, and to farm in the best way possible, as each farmer understands it. This is tied to the value they see in food (important for human health and welfare), as well as the values that they express through the methods they use to produce it (stewardship).

Relationships are also an important aspect of family farming. Most obvious is the relationship within the given family members who are farming together, but also the way family farming can connect generations as well. Concern for the wider health of rural communities is also tied to the value of family farms, and of having more small farms rather than fewer large farms in any given rural area. The relationship between the farmer and the land is also an important aspect of family farming, which is tied to the Christian principle of stewardship.

Christian principles associated with family farming by CFFO members include stewardship, and the importance of fairness in farming. Stewardship is a standard of good work in fulfilling the calling from God to work as farmers. Academics and farmers alike emphasize the importance of the relationship between the farmer and the land for the practice of good stewardship. Decisions on the land need to be made by farmers who are familiar with the land being farmed in order for the best possible stewardship to occur.

Fairness in farming looks more broadly from the individual farmers and farms to the wider community of farmers locally, globally, and to the social justice issues

surrounding the production, distribution, waste, and quality of food. While many of the aspects above emphasize the decisions of individual farmers, interviewees emphasized the importance of the work of the CFFO as an organization to promote justice and fairness in agriculture, and in issues related to food production especially. Fairness in agricultural policy is tied to issues that particularly affect family farming. As was discussed above in Strange's contrast of agribusinesses and family farms, open markets and free competition are more beneficial for medium and smaller farms than they are for large farms, which prefer controlled markets and contracts. This is why fairness in agricultural subsidies and marketing are especially important to the thriving of family farms.

3.2.1 Defining “Family Farm” in the CFFO

Family farming is an important term used very commonly by the CFFO in their literature, and it was a term that came up frequently in my interviews with CFFO members as well. Most CFFO members would describe themselves as operating family farms. That being said, there is a dramatic spread in the size of farms among members, whether that is measured by acreage, or gross farm income. For this reason, among others, the way the CFFO defines family farm in their literature is not strictly size-based. That is to say “medium size farms” is not the definition of a family farm for the CFFO, either in their policy documents, or among farmer members.

3.2.1.1 Defining “Family Farm” in CFFO Policy Documents

When the CFFO defines the family farm in official policy documents, they do so not by size, but by a measure of the primary source of capital, management, and labour. This mirrors the primary concerns of their members, discussed in more detail below. In their

vision document entitled “Closer to the Heart: A CFFO Vision for Farming,” the significance of farm size, and of family farming is addressed. For them size is not the most important factor.

CFFO uses the term “family farm” in a qualitative sense. It is not possible to provide a precise (with numbers) definition. A family farm is a unique form of enterprise or farm business structure where all factors involved in the enterprise come from a family: the manpower comes from the family; the management comes from the family; the ownership and stewardship of the resources are an integral part of family responsibility and the financing of the enterprises based on the family’s personal assets and on its integrity.²⁰⁴

This definition reflects some of the same concerns previously raised by Strange mentioned above, but does not address the influence of industrialization within family farming that Strange points out.

In the CFFO document “A Place for All: Addressing the Policy Implications of Farm Size,” the CFFO takes a two-farm model for the basis of their argument. This document discusses farms as either being big industrial farms, or small family farms. “A Place for All” gives no definition of family farming, and although it uses the term, this is not its primary unit of analysis in this document. Where previous CFFO documents emphasized “family farming” and defended that category as important within agriculture,

²⁰⁴ CFFO, “Closer to the Heart: A CFFO Vision for Farming” (Guelph: CFFO, 2002), 14. A similar definition is found in the 2001 CFFO Workshop Series Report, with a small addition. It concludes, “[t]he financing is based on the family’s personal assets and on its integrity, not on outside equity.” In CFFO, “The New Countryside: Patterns of Change at Loggerheads. Report on the CFFO Workshop Series 2001” (Guelph: Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario, 2002), 18.

this document makes a clear shift to defending small farms and sustainable agriculture as their key units of analysis.²⁰⁵

“A Place for All” argues from a two-farm model of agriculture, large farms versus small farms. It creates binaries to contrast the difference between these two types of farms throughout the document, and many of these are remarkably similar to the contrast Strange makes between industrialized farming and family farming noted above. Here the CFFO aligns small farms with: sustainable agriculture, traditional farming, owner-operated or family owned farms, social sustainability, an “ethic of stewardship and sustainability,” and long-term viability.²⁰⁶ By contrast the document aligns large farms with: industrial agriculture, intensive farming, investor-owned operations, efficient food production, farming as a business, an emphasis on “production and profit” achieved through specialization, intensive methods, and focusing on short-term profitability.²⁰⁷ Although the distinction between commercial and non-commercial farms is mentioned, it is rejected as a binary that matches with the overarching distinction this paper makes between small and large farms, because it implies that small farms do not make money. Because “family owned” is the primary basis for their definition of “small farm” in this case, small farm by this definition would include some very large farms by other measures. For the CFFO, profitability needs to work alongside other important values for

²⁰⁵ CFFO, “A Place for All: Addressing the Policy Implications of Farm Size” (Guelph: CFFO, 2007). Note: The year of publication is not listed on the document, but is listed here based on the most recent reference listed in the document. This shift or change could indicate an emphasis on the increasingly dual nature of agriculture, or a step away from defending the “middle” as a unique aspect of the structure of agriculture.

²⁰⁶ CFFO, “A Place for All,” 2, 7, 10-13.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

social and environmental benefits, but cannot be rejected entirely, as would be the case with a definition such as “non-commercial farms.”

This CFFO document examines the reaction of three perceived “audiences” of changes as a result of farm size: the public at large, rural (especially non-farming) residents, and other farmers. It argues that environmental impact, especially of large animal operations, is the primary concern of the public at large. For those non-farming rural residents, the primary concern with farm size is with smells and risks of greater contamination from concentrated animal operations. For all rural residents, there is a concern over the changes to rural life and sense of community that come with increasing farm size. Finally, farmers themselves are primarily concerned with the ownership model of farms; that is, whether farms are owner-operated, or investor-owned.²⁰⁸

“A Place for All” emphasizes stewardship in several different areas, and certainly tries to argue that family farms offer greater stewardship. It does make a few suggestions about how to better motivate profit-driven industrialized farms to also behave in a stewardly manner. That being said, the arguments in favour of the stewardliness of small farms tend to be qualified, noting that some are more stewardship-oriented than others, even among family farms.

This policy paper concedes that large industrialized farms produce most of the agricultural products in the agricultural sector, and have therefore been the focus of most agricultural policy. However, smaller farms, as defined here, are significant, it argues, beyond just the importance of the amount of product they produce, especially because of

²⁰⁸ CFFO, “A Place for All,” 7-10.

the social and environmental sustainability they contribute to rural areas. The key aspect of the social sustainability of small farms is their greater connection to the local economy than larger farms, both for their markets and for the purchase of their inputs. The key benefit of smaller farms in terms of environmental sustainability argued here is that smaller farmers are more likely to be motivated by concerns other than profit toward stewardly practices than investor-owned operations. The importance of familiarity with the land is mentioned here as well. Specifically the paper points out that:

[t]his does not mean that such [large] operations cannot be good corporate citizens or meet laws against pollution and other matters. It does mean, however, that the interest in doing so is not as likely to be built into the structure or ethos of the operation as with a family farm. Investors are unlikely to have the same awareness of environmental impacts or environmental management as those more familiar with their land.²⁰⁹

One key policy suggestion that this document puts forward is to suggest that heavily industrialized farms do not, in fact, belong in the countryside, but can operate on the periphery of urban areas as other industries do. The paper recognizes that all farms are being pressured into increasing industrialization. It does not address the question: at what point do farms reach the level of intensification that requires them to move out of the countryside and into these specifically industrialized zones? Also, if all farms are under pressure either to become bigger, or to become smaller and rely on off-farm

²⁰⁹ CFFO, “A Place for All,” 13.

income to support the family, these economic pressures are having significant economic and social and environmental side effects.

The economic side effects are on those industries and aspects of the economy at the local level that are no longer able to support larger agriculture, including local input and farming technology suppliers, and small-scale local processors. The social side effects of increasing agricultural industrialization occur in the rural population, with significantly decreasing farming population, and dwindling rural institutions such as schools, hospitals, and other infrastructure (including church congregations). The environmental side effects include lack of concern for stewardship of the land in the long run, as well as greater risk of contamination—especially to waterways from concentrated livestock operations. This policy paper emphasizes the effect of intensive animal operations, but does not examine environmental risks from crop farming methods, for example.

3.2.1.2 CFFO Farmers on Family Farming

Looking at what farmers themselves had to say to me on the issue of family farming, two issues emerge from the discussion above. One is that members themselves clearly want to emphasize the importance of the ownership model of farms as foundational to the definition of a family farm. The other issue that comes across is the pressure on family farms to increase in size (measured by intensity of farming, gross income, or acreage) and how often even those farmers whose farms have grown to be competitive find that it may not be enough.

First, in examining what farmers themselves said about what defines a family farm, several emphasized the ownership model as the most important defining factor. For

them a family farm is one run by an owner-operator farmer entrepreneur. As in the definition from the CFFO policy documents discussed above, size is less important than the model of investment, operation and management in the definition of family farm. While some farmers conceded that their farms were qualified as “large” farms, they still considered these farms to be family farms. What is of primary importance here, especially as I heard it expressed by members in their interviews, is the model of ownership, capital, decision-making, labour, and risk under which the farm is operating. The farm owner should also be the primary farmworker and decision-maker, and should be the entrepreneur risking his or her own capital in the farming venture. When the farm is primarily managed in this way, and the farmer-entrepreneurs are family members, the farm can be understood to be a family farm.

In some cases, “family” may mean a father or mother and one or more children farming together. In other cases, it may be siblings (usually brothers) farming together, and over time this may also involve the next generation as well. Relatives may also form part of the hired staff on some family farms. This family model of ownership is contrasted with investor-owned operations, where the owners of the farm are not working directly on the farm, and capital comes from non-farming investors. Again, the importance of familiarity, knowing the soil and the land, is emphasized as a key aspect of good farm management.

***Farmer:** With our own, so it's a family farm even though it's a large family farm. So I'm not trying to restrict size, but I think it should stay, as much as possible that farming stays in the hands of people who understand the soil they walk on. Not somebody in a corporate office in Bay Street in Toronto.*

S.M.A.: *So the owner of the farm is also running the farm?*

Farmer: *Yeah, owners running it, and he knows what the soil is like, what that field needs and how to manage things in a way that is to improve things, so it is even better than when he got it.*²¹⁰

When pushed to say how far this emphasis on family ownership could serve as the basis to define a family farm operation, one couple said that while they recognized the differences as a farming operation became significantly larger, they could still see the sense in which “family farm” could apply to very large farming businesses that began with a single family.

Husband: *Well, I think, like, it’s important to understand the perspective that they [the CFFO] come from, that they try to encourage stewardship, from a biblical perspective, and that they support the family farm. They’ve made that quite clear ...*

Wife: *Yeah that they’re not about all these big...*

Husband: *... through their policies. Not, not necessarily that they’re against big farms...but that...they...*

Wife: *...big farms ...but that the little guys don’t go out of business just because the big guys are taking over.*

Husband: *Yeah and that farms are run by farmers I think is one of their focuses, that a family runs their own farm.*

S.M.A.: *So, how would you define that notion of family farm?*

²¹⁰ Personal Interview #13.

Husband: *There's a lot of different ways of looking at that, because we have a family farm too and it's quite big. But, a family farm is a farm that's run by a family I guess.*

S.M.A.: *Even if it's larger or smaller?*

Husband: *Yeah, to, to a point. I guess Smithfield is a family farm too right?*

S.M.A.: *I've not heard of that.*

Husband: *They're one of the big vertically integrated pork producers in the States.*

Wife: *What's that supposed to mean? (laughs)*

Husband: *They own all their own packing plant and all their own farms and feed mills.*

Wife: *But they probably have lots of other people working for them too.*

Husband: *Yeah, but they're, they still call themselves a family farm.*

Wife: *They're still run by a family.*

Husband: *Because the major shareholders are all...*

Wife: *Family.*

Husband: *...family.*

S.M.A.: *But would you consider that a family farm?*

Husband: *Yeah, I don't, it's a little different. But, I guess it is still kind of a family farm.*

Wife: *Yeah.*

Husband: *Family, yeah. I guess what I could say is if it was me running it with my family, I'd consider it my family farm.*

S.M.A.: Okay.

*Wife: Yeah, that's right. Clear as mud. (laughs)*²¹¹

The overriding sentiment is that for any family that has built a business, and continues to run it, no matter how big it gets, it would feel like a family farm, a family business, to them. In this conversation, the wife raises the issue of hired labour, but does not explore the significance of that in any depth. Markers such as how much non-family labour is hired, which Strange saw as an important measure of demarcating family farming from more industrial farming, was not a major concern for these farmers. This couple chose Smithfield as an example that illustrates the extremes to which the idea of “family farm” can be used, while at the same time acknowledging that they can still see the sense in which the term applies to this type of farm business.

The second issue, the economic pressure to expand and industrialize, or to contract and become smaller, is also clear when these farmers talk about defining themselves as “family farms.” This may be because the farm they are currently running does not entirely fit with their own ideals of what a family farm is, or it may be because they are aware of the disconnect between the reality of farming and urbanite notions of what “family farm” means.

I guess I always have to identify the two extremes before I can figure out where the middle is, so if I take the big industrial corporate model as the big bad guy, and the little rooftop farmers in Toronto as the good guys, what's actually happened in agriculture, as a result of our economy again, is the

²¹¹ Personal Interview #10.

*whole middle section of family farm in agriculture has become extinct, all but extinct. I had the dream that I was going to be and survive in that middle section, and I've grown from a modest smaller family operation, to now one of what's looked at on the bigger side of the small, in fact at a half a million dollars of gross sales, I'm starting to qualify as bigger agriculture...and yet I cannot in any way, shape or form make a living for my family.*²¹²

So while this farmer has chosen to expand and grow in an effort to continue to sustain a livelihood just from the farm, the farm may not have grown big enough to reap the biggest benefits. This may be an example of the difference between an intermediate sized farm and a large farm, where a small difference in size makes a big difference in the profit margins.

Other farmers chose to stay small, in order to remain farming as a family. This may come at the cost of needing to have off-farm income to survive. The farmer in the quote below works together with his daughters on a small farming operation. The farm was able to stay small only because they were able to support the farm with off-farm income. This farmer had to choose between getting bigger or staying smaller, and so he chose to stay small.

S.M.A.: *So you sell the corn at the farm gate?*

Farmer: *The girls run a farm market. [They] bring it to town where the customers are.*

S.M.A.: *So you have two daughters that run a farm market, is that right?*

²¹² Personal Interview #7.

Farmer: *Yes.*

S.M.A.: *And that sells all of your sweet corn?*

Farmer: *Yes.*

S.M.A.: *Have your farming methods changed in the course of your farming work, and if so why?*

Farmer: *Yes. And why? Opportunity and necessity. So, one is off-farm income. That created the opportunity to stay small and specialize. And necessity is [that] conventional cash crops couldn't be done on a small scale.*

S.M.A.: *So you were growing conventional cash crops before?*

Farmer: *Yes, corn and wheat. And to have the equipment and...*

S.M.A.: *And so, you decided to change out of necessity you said. What precipitated that necessity?*

Farmer: *Well that's the market place.*

S.M.A.: *You just decided to stay small...*

Farmer: *You can't afford to buy the new equipment to stay in the corn cash crop on a small basis.*

S.M.A.: *So you would describe your farm as also a small farm then?*

Farmer: *Yes.*²¹³

In this case, with the primary family income coming from an off-farm job, the question becomes, at what point does the farm operation become a hobby, even if it also creates income? This is the point in the three farm model Strange describes where small

²¹³ Personal Interview #9.

farms get discounted in farming policy because they don't generate enough income to support the family, and they don't produce enough output to get the attention of policy makers. This farm is clearly a family farm, being run by family members, and is also clearly closely tied to the local economy. They survive by selling their farm products directly themselves, either to urban customers at the farm market, or to their neighbouring farmers in the case of the hay they produce. The cost of farming equipment to remain competitive in cash crops of corn was too much, so they found alternative smaller markets for their smaller farm.

The cost of equipment can be prohibitive in other senses as well. Farmers can be limited in the types of crops they can grow, limiting the rotation of crops they can sustain on their farm as well. In this way farm size can be tied to a farms ability to act in a stewardly way.

3.2.1.3 Unmeasured Value vs. Specialization

Another important factor to consider in the definition of farm value and farm size are the unmeasured aspects of farm production. When farms are measured by gross income, this measurement neglects to account for what the farm produces that is not sold in the market, and thus not included in the gross income of the farm. Farms that produce their own feed, for example, do not have the value of that feed measured in their gross income. Highly specialized farms would have all or almost all of the value they produced measured in the gross farm income. However, farms that are more diversified are much more likely to have aspects of the value they produce remain unmeasured in the metric of gross farm income.

Dairy farms are an excellent illustration of this, especially since most of the farms I visited had dairy as at least one of the commodities they produced. Almost all the dairy farms I visited were self-sufficient in producing their own feed. One farmer even described this as marketing his crops through milk. The two cases I encountered of dairy farmers not being self-sufficient in producing their own feed included those farmers who were not able to grow some of the crops they needed for feed (such as corn in the north of Ontario). The second case was an organic farmer who found the regulations required to produce organic corn were not worth the effort required, so he chose to purchase his corn, but to grow his own organic hay. All the dairy farms I visited raised their own heifers to milking age, which is another unmeasured-value produced on the farm. In one interview a couple discussed an example of a farmer who did not breed his dairy cattle. This contrasted sharply with the pride they expressed in the care they have taken to be able to keep cows in their barn for much longer than average. This contrast illustrates very clearly different underlying values about what constitutes wise use of resources and good farming between stewardly family farming and specialized industrial farming.

Husband: *So there are six 12-year-old cows in the barn now.*

S.M.A.: *I don't think I have ever asked anyone how long you could keep a dairy cow.*

Wife: *Not normally that long.*

S.M.A.: *Yeah, not that long?*

Husband: *Actually there is even, I talked on Sunday to a farmer, he mentioned that his friend, he doesn't even breed his cows back. He just buys a*

cow, milks the snot out of her for 2 or 3 years and then [clicks his tongue].

Doesn't even calve them out once.

Wife: *Oh yeah? So he doesn't need a calf barn.*

Husband: *No. It's a very economical way to do it.*

Wife: *Yeah, I was going to say. That's cheap, that way. Less haying to do I suppose, you know to feed your young stock.*

Husband: *That's right, less haying, more silage. Proof.*

Wife: *That's too bad for the cow, because she could last a lot longer.*

Husband: *Yep. They never calve out again, so you never have to worry about calving, problems with calving, to go out at night for calving, nothing.*

Wife: *Well, we almost never do that either. We never get up.*

Husband: *But you don't have calves to feed either right? He never breeds the cows. And he doesn't raise his own heifers. He buys cows in heat, but then still he will breed his own cows, to get calves and then sells the calves and then buys the cows back. But I never heard, I have heard that from the States, but this is the first guy in Ontario I know of who just will just milk the snot out of them as long as you can and then just, see you later.²¹⁴*

The couple mentions here several ways this method of farming, by specializing on just one part of the milk-producing cycle, would save the farm work and money. However, they are likewise somewhat shocked and disgusted at the waste this implies particularly of the cow's life, and of the potential productivity that is wasted in this model of

²¹⁴ Personal Interview #12.

producing milk. Their response underlines the values-based care of the CFFO and their attitude to what constitutes good use of resources and good farming.

Taylor and Lovell, in their examination of household gardens, note that production consumed within the household is usually overlooked or devalued by capitalist economic measures. Although they are specifically discussing home gardens and other forms of household production, this applies also on a larger scale to those aspects of family farm operations that are consumed within the farm itself and not sold. “The devaluation of household production because of (1) its traditional association with the unpaid labour of women and (2) the bias in the capitalist society toward the production of exchange value, of goods to be sold rather than used by their producer or her family, may also play a role.”²¹⁵ Farming, although still heavily a masculine enterprise, is in this case, however, “feminized” in the sense that this labour and production which contributes to the overall value of the farm for the economy is overlooked in the economic measures of farms.

3.2.2 Farming as Meaningful Work

Considering the pressures on family farmers, especially economic ones, it is no wonder that fewer and fewer are either able or willing to start into farming. While economists may have difficulty explaining the persistence of family farms despite the economic conditions, farmers themselves are in no way lacking in passion for their work.

²¹⁵ John R. Taylor and Sarah Taylor Lovell, “Urban Home Food Gardens in the Global North: Research Traditions and Future Directions,” *Agriculture and Human Values* 31 (2014): 286. Taylor and Lovell here reference J. K. Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2006).

3.2.2.1 Farming as Vocation

Although the interview questions did not directly ask about what motivated farmers to become or to stay farmers, many mentioned the reasons why they farm, or what they enjoy most about farming in the course of the interview. Interviewees' Christian faith was connected most strongly to one of the main reasons given, that they felt called to farming as their Christian vocation. Eight people expressed this idea. In addition to this sense of calling, which was expressed specifically as religious, five others expressed that they felt farming was "in their blood" or that they were "born farmers." In both of these cases, farming was where they felt they belonged, and contributed most to society.

Farmers emphasized that they saw their work as important, challenging, and requiring a high degree of expertise to do well. These farmers are entrepreneurs who have a great deal of control over how they farm, and take a great deal of pride in the work that they do. These farmers are also aware that they are among the privileged few who are farming, which makes it all the more important that they do their job well, in part in order to survive as farmers, but also because of the risks that weigh in the balance, such as the global need for food and the need for stewardship of land and resources. The two quotes below reflect these ideas from the interviews.

*We have the privilege to work the land and feed the world. It's not a right, it's a privilege.*²¹⁶

²¹⁶ Personal Interview #11.

I think that we have to understand that we are really stewards of God's creation, and that it's a privilege and that we have to make sure that we are such an example that society as a whole recognizes how uniquely we do our jobs.²¹⁷

3.2.2.2 A Good Way to Raise a Family

The two remaining reasons given for farming are relationship-based reasons. First, six interviewees described farming as a great way to raise a family. They described benefits such as children learning to have a good work ethic, to be responsible, and to be entrepreneurial as well. Parents described the closeness they felt with their children having the opportunity to work together on the farm. The Christian component is also never far from the centre. Working together on the farm was also complemented by worshipping together as a family at church on Sunday for many interviewees.

The children of the interviewee quoted below kept rabbits on the farm as their own small enterprise. This interviewee discusses how his children learn to keep a business mindset as well as develop a strong work ethic.

***Farmer:** Our kids, they know what happens in the end, and they're not physically or emotionally attached to them [the rabbits]. They, you know, they look after them, but it's not like, "oh, the bunnies." No, it's good. They learn, and they have to deal a little bit with inputs and costs, and you know, they're getting money and a little bit of wheeling and dealing, so it's good. ... I was a carpenter for many years, and I enjoyed doing that too. But I think*

²¹⁷ Personal Interview #13.

*there's something about you being your own boss, and the routine, and your kids growing up in the country. I guess the thing too your kids pick up work ethics. ... You realize what they learn, or what they know. So that's, it's maybe not Christianity, but I think it's a work ethic or responsibilities that come with farming.*²¹⁸

Working together on a farm is not always easy, especially when it comes to passing a farm from one generation to the next. For those who are passing the farm on, it can be difficult to navigate decisions such as which children will be part of the family farm business as it continues and which will not. This can include convincing the next generation that they want to take on a family farm. Taking on the mantle of running a family farm is an important question and challenge for the up-coming generation too, who may have new ideas about how they wish to manage the farm, but don't want to rock the boat, or step on any toes. In family farming both work and family relationships are at stake.

3.2.2.3 Working in Creation

Finally, nine interviewees expressed the idea that they derived joy and satisfaction from working with creation, or working in nature. This was often expressed as facilitating a deeper understanding of or connection with God, through connection with creation. These farmers have not lost their sense of wonder and awe at the living things they work with every day. The first quotation below illustrates a combination of the sense of calling, and the sense of the joy of working in creation as a way to be closer to God.

²¹⁸ Personal Interview #8.

Husband: *I guess you could say everybody has a calling. Everybody has something that they've been chosen by God to do. And we feel that this has been what we're called to do, to be farmers.*

Wife: *I find that we have such a hands-on experience of God's creation. I always think it's such a blessing to be where I am because I always find outside here you hear the birds and, just, it's beautiful. I find it really nice to have this calling, and to be here, because I always find you're very in touch with everything that God created.²¹⁹*

Some are more willing to express their religious ideas about working in creation, including the idea of miracles, or of spiritual connection through food production as well as eating. Others, perhaps more comfortable with the language of business, still express the sense of wonder and appreciation of the transformation of life they see through farming, as can be seen in the two quotations below.

Farmer: *You're pretty close to nature and nature is just full of miracles, you know? You see calves being born and chickens laying eggs. You go there and there's 10 eggs from 9 chickens. How can that be? Must've forgotten to pick one up during the day. No, there's always a wonder how nature grows, how things grow. And you can't take it all for granted.²²⁰*

Farmer: *The connection to nature is a huge part of it [connection of Christianity to farming] too. Just, seeing things grow. Working with animals.*

²¹⁹ Personal Interview #10.

²²⁰ Personal Interview #17.

*I mean farmers have, it's a, I think it's the greatest job in the world. I get to work with, like I get to put seeds in the ground that'll grow into a crop and that's just, it's amazing to me to see that.*²²¹

While farmers see themselves as privileged in their vocation and in their work with creation, they also recognize that as there are fewer and fewer of them, and as the very process of farming becomes removed from most people's knowledge and experience there is a spiritual loss as well as the many other losses that were discussed above.

***Farmer:** We hear it's commonly accepted that people need to get out into a natural space to experience the wonder of creation, and I'm saying, part of our urbanization of space has also urbanized our impression of food and of the Creator. So, when you get back out to the basics you start to make those connections, and it deepens and furthers, or at least certainly it gives the opportunity of deepening and furthering whatever your belief and faith is. So, for me food may actually be the one thing that brings us back to a more faithful society. But, unfortunately most of us are so well off we're going to have to be brought back to our knees in some other endeavour first, whether it be health, or poverty, or whatever it is. We're going to have to, as individuals, we're going to have to come to grips with why we're here and what it's all about. And being so affluent, we live in a very wealthy society, it's not easy for us to, as individuals, come to grips, or to grasp at that. But thankfully God has given us an inherent, we're born with an inherent longing*

²²¹ Personal Interview #20.

*for connection to the Creator. So I guess I would have to say, I believe that food is one of those connecting points that has the possibility of doing that for us.*²²²

All of these aspects of farming, which these farmers find makes their work meaningful, challenging and satisfying for them, are all particularly characteristic of family farms. As farms become more industrialized and especially when farms move to contract arrangements and investor ownership, management decisions are increasingly moved away from the farm operators. With the decreasing number of family farms, these aspects of farm work which build a sense of purpose and pride of vocation in the world, which build family relationships, and which foster a closer sense of faith or connection to something greater, for these Christians a connection to God, through close work with creation are diminished or lost. It is these aspects that make family farming so important in comparison to other forms of farm operation, especially for this group of Christian farmers.

3.2.3 Fairness in Farming

One of the key concerns expressed by farmers in interviews was around issues of fairness in farming. These concerns included unfair competition (13 interviewees), issues of fair prices for farm goods (9 interviewees), the value of food (8 interviewees), issues of exploitation in farming (4 interviewees), and issues of greed in farming (4 interviewees), with four people also making more general remarks about the importance of fairness in farming. This section will examine some of the issues raised by farmers within these

²²² Personal Interview #7.

categories of concern, about problems with fairness in farming both locally and globally. Many of these concerns have to do with the importance of keeping farming both socially and economically sustainable or viable, for farmers who are good producers, no matter the size of their farm. Issues raised within this area of concern have to do with allowing many different types of farms to thrive within the farming sector, both in Ontario, and abroad. Some of the issues raised have more to do with the notion of justice within farming including an emphasis on the value of food beyond the monetary value. This focus on the importance of fairness and justice within agriculture ties back to one of the Christian principles that many farmers see as vital to the work of the CFFO as an organization.

3.2.3.1 Unfair Competition

The most prevalent issue that farmers mentioned within the overall concept of fairness in farming was the problem of unfair competition, and the many ways that this comes up within the farming economy. Most of the issues that were raised here are ones that farmers themselves see or face as part of the market places and regulations they operate within. These issues mentioned by farmers have been part of policy discussions within the CFFO at the provincial level.

In terms of federal and provincial government policies, the issue of caps on government funding for agriculture was mentioned as a way to help level the playing field. Also within the area of policy, but beyond just government policy, are issues of factors that benefit larger operations over smaller ones. This was applied not only to farms, but also to the issue of small abattoirs, which have been suffering under regulations from government. Finally is the issue of trade and import and export markets.

Farmers complained about the problem of unfair competition when imports compete in our domestic market that may not have been produced under the same quality or safety regulations that domestic farmers are required to follow to produce the same food.

Likewise, when Canadian farmers export their products overseas, the higher cost of producing food in Canada can make it more difficult to compete in international markets.

Some farmers see an important role of the CFFO in working towards greater fairness or justice within the area of agriculture. One farmer expressed his concerns about this aspect in particular at the end of the interview, to add extra emphasis to the importance he saw in this particular aspect of the work of the CFFO. Although he himself was a dairy farmer, he was very concerned about injustices he saw in the pork industry:

Farmer: I think I probably didn't emphasize enough in all these questions about the value of the CFFO in the justice aspects of things. Advocacy for justice in the world of faith and agriculture, or the world of agriculture, that's pretty important. Because you've got all these sectors, you know, primary producers and secondary producers and maybe there's a third level of marketer type people, and finally you get the consumer, and there has to be justice through that whole system, you know? And I think that's a very important role for Christian Farmers [CFFO] to take too. It has to be fair. You can't have one group lording it over another. It's not right. ... There has to be some, there has to be a balance of power in the marketing process, or the marketing system, the system. And if the CFFO can be visionary and prophetic about a balance of power and making sure it's fair to everybody, that's a good thing. That's a really good thing.

... I think that's a very important role, because you could certainly argue that the role of a Christian is to really strive to take away injustice everywhere they see it. You know, it's scriptural, it's Christ-like, it's a big part of what Christ did here on Earth, and you know you could, you could live your life, you could be a really good Christian if you, if that was your thing, you know? I mean...

S.M.A.: *By...seeking balance from this injustice, is that what you mean?*

...Okay.

Farmer: *Yeah, yeah. It's a perfectly good way to honour God's Will, to seek to get rid of injustice in this world.*²²³

While it may be easier to suggest to government to place a cap on government money going to support farms, it is much more difficult to address the unfair competition and injustice that this farmer is describing happening in non-supply managed industries such as pork. There are certainly many factors that contribute to unfair advantages for larger operations within agriculture, which is part of the increasing pressure for middle and smaller farms to grow larger to compete, or to become smaller and run in a different race.

3.2.3.2 Fair Price

The issue of farmers getting a fair price in the market place for the quality of food they produce was brought up by a variety of different farmers. Unsurprisingly this was brought up by all organic farmers, who face this question regularly, since the process of

²²³ Personal Interview #5.

organic certification is primarily done for the purpose of getting a premium within the marketplace on organically produced goods. However, this issue was also raised by farmers running both very small and very large farms who were conventional producers.

Fair prices for farmers are foundational to the economic stability and sustainability of farming. When the price paid to the farmer for the food that is produced is undercut so much that he or she cannot recover the cost of production from the market, the very livelihood of the farmer is threatened. This is one of the key factors that put pressure on farmers to either get bigger, and produce more at smaller margins to make a profit, or get smaller, and rely on off-farm work for the family income, rather than on the farm itself, to sustain the family. Ensuring a fair price for farmers also ensures more stable economic conditions for family farmers.

Supply management was certainly one other important way that many farmers are able to get a fair price for their farm products. Ten of the 17 farms visited had dairy as one of the commodities produced on the farm, and two had eggs, both of which are under supply management. In many cases, this one commodity was the foundation to the income of the farm.

Interestingly, supply management was also mentioned in the context of concerns over unfair competition as well. One farmer in particular noted that since with supply management Canadian farmers are producing only for their own domestic market, they are not exporting excess production and thus flooding other markets with cheaply produced or cheaply priced milk. This ensures not only fairer competition and a fair price for farmers within the Canadian domestic market, but also that Canadian dairy farmers

are *not* contributing to unfair competition and devalued prices in the global market place by taking away market share from local producers elsewhere around the world.

There are other means that farmers in Ontario use to help ensure a fair price for their products. Organic farmers get a price premium on the goods they produce, both within supply management and in non-supply managed commodities. As this organic farmer emphasizes in the quote below, there are many factors that add to the monetary value or cost of food. This farmer belongs to an organic coop, through which he markets his eggs. This coop, he argues, has to clarify to consumers all the benefits that they offer through the particular qualities of their products, including how they have been produced, and by whom.

***Organic Farmer:** The egg wasn't a very big money making thing, and we've addressed that, we've actually increased the price and we've put that through to the consumer, because the egg, how should I say it, the egg shelf at the super market's pretty competitive, and pretty complicated, and everybody and his brother has eggs there, and it goes everywhere from natural to egg, like natural or green or free run, and basically we believe we've got the, better be careful, the most attractive egg. We're small independent family owned farms. We're hand gathered, our hens go outside. ... You produce a quality food, the consumer has to realize that. The consumer has to be educated, then the consumer will pay. And that's the responsibility of the farmer to get that message across. But the consumer, same as the consumer wants to have animal welfare, wants to have local, wants to have organic, is the consumer going to pay for that? That's what you've got to put out there. The farmer*

*shouldn't do that unrewarded. We can't just keep getting less and less, and, oh now we're organic, you know, no it costs money. It costs time. And if there's some effort and some compassion along with that product then I think the consumer should realize that but also pay for it.*²²⁴

Another method beyond supply management and organic premiums that help farmers get a better price for the value they add to the food produced is through certification with organizations such as Local Food Plus.²²⁵ This certification includes verification that the food is locally produced, but also that the farm's production methods have met other measures of sustainability, which are different and not as stringent as those met for organic certification. However, one farmer who mentioned this in particular said that for their farm the price premium was not high enough to merit going through the hoops necessary to meet this certification. The financial incentive needs to be high enough to counteract the various costs to the farmer, including the administrative costs of any certification, for it to be worth their while.

3.2.3.3 The Value of Food

Within the idea of the value of food, there are a variety of ideas that were expressed by interviewees about the ways food is valuable, and the ways it is often undervalued, or the value of it is undermined. The expressions of this theme had little to do with the actual cost of food (which was included in the question of the fair price of food above). Food's value beyond a mere commodity was emphasized here, in the sense that food should not

²²⁴ Personal Interview #8.

²²⁵ Local Food Plus current website: <http://landfoodpeople.ca/projects>, accessed July 18, 2014.

be treated in the same way as any other widget. Criticisms that the industrialization of the food system has undermined the value of food in many ways, not only in terms of its market value, but also in terms of its nutritional value, were also brought up here.

Instead, the value of food had more to do with its value for human health, physical and spiritual, and the relationships that food represents. Food has costs beyond what we pay for it in money, which include the costs in resources and time to produce it. Moreover, the value of food is also an expression of the value of the work that farmers do in producing it, and in producing it well. Food is important too for human health, security and social stability. In interviews, and in some casual conversations, different farmers expressed the importance of food security for political security, noting that lack of food was one sure trigger of social unrest. Because of all of these aspects of the value of food, several farmers expressed concern over food waste, or placed an emphasis on the special importance of not wasting food. Not wasting food, or the resources used to produce it, also ties back into the importance of stewardship, which is expanded in the next chapter.

Knowing where food comes from and how to prepare meals at home were also important concerns for several farmers, who felt it was particularly important to educate people, young people in particular, about these aspects of food as part of an awareness of its value, and of having greater connection with it.

3.2.3.4 Problems of Exploitation and Greed in Farming

The final two concerns were expressed by fewer farmers, but were nonetheless important concerns about the impact changes in agriculture have had on the treatment of others through farming work and farming economics, as well as on the impact of economic pressures on the “human-ness” of some farmers, drawn into spiraling economic

behaviour of various kinds. Interviewees expressed the idea that they felt their Christian faith pushed them to think beyond a “me first” attitude. They desire to see balance and fairness in agriculture, and reject greed as a primary motivator, for themselves certainly, and, where possible, for others as well.

3.2.4 Summary of Family Farming in the CFFO

CFFO farmers express the value of the enterprise of farming beyond just the production of food as an industrial commodity by stressing family farming as a way of life. Family farming is based on entrepreneurial spirit, connection with family and community, responsible farming methods, and a Christian vocation to farm. CFFO farmers emphasize the ownership model of farms as important to defining “family farms” which also emphasizes the importance for them that the owner and the operator are the same person, keeping management control in the hands of the person (people) most familiar with the land, plants and animals being farmed. This model also keeps farming as a vocation, a calling, even a religious calling, and as meaningful work, rather than just as a job. This is important for farmers’ sense of identity and of having a meaningful place in society or the world, where the work they do and the fact that they do it well is significant and valued. The ability to work with family, to have children grow up in the country learning to farm, and the ability to work in creation, and to thus connect with or better understand the Creator through nature, are also important aspects of farming life highly valued by Christian farmers in the CFFO.

The production of food is an important enterprise because of the value food has for human beings, socially and physically, and also spiritually. Good farming is about living important values including the value of family connections, neighbourliness, hard

work, and fairness. Fairness in farming is seen as an important Christian principle which should be sought in farming policy at home, as well as globally. Farmers were concerned about unfair competition, which prevents farms of different types and sizes from thriving economically. Family farms operate best in fair markets, and when receiving fair prices for the goods they produce, which is often achieved through supply management or in some cases, organic certification. A just farming system thus would allow the economic vibrancy of hard working family farm entrepreneurs, tying directly together with all the Christian values that are expressed in farming as a vocation.

3.3 Conclusion: Agriculture of the Middle and Family Farming

This chapter has demonstrated the clear engagement of the CFFO as an organization and of CFFO members in the North American debate about the value and fate of family farms. The changes in the structure of agriculture have placed increasing pressure on mid-sized family farms to either get bigger and more industrial, or to get smaller and rely on off-farm income as their primary source of livelihood. This has resulted in the diminishing economic significance of family farms across North America. For farmers in the CFFO, this has threatened a way of living and farming that connects closely with their understanding of their Christian faith, values and principles.

CFFO farmers are running family owned and operated farms. Although some have increasingly large farms, with some hired labour, through the spectrum to others who have very small farms, the issues that are at play with agriculture of the middle are affecting this group of farmers. Their response has been to reexamine their Christian values and how they relate to family farms, and farming as a way of life.

CFFO members and CFFO documents assert the many ways family farms contribute beyond mere economic measures. Among these are the importance of smaller farms for the quality of rural community life, and the greater motivation for farm owner-operators to farm in ecological or stewardly ways. For farmers on a personal level, family farming allows them to fulfill their sense of vocation as farmers through meaningful farming work. It also allows them to sustain meaningful relationships with family, community and land. At a policy level, beyond individual farmers, fairness and justice within the wider agricultural system, locally, nationally and globally, is important. This is expressed both as a Christian principle foundational to the work of the CFFO, and as vital to allowing farms of different sizes to prosper and thrive. Food itself is valuable in more ways than can be captured in the monetary cost paid for food, which is increasingly undermined as the industrialization of agriculture continues. Recognizing this deeper value of food is also part of recognizing the importance of good farming work from many family farmers.

Chapter 4: Christian Stewardship in Agriculture

4.0 Chapter Introduction

The dual concepts of dominion and stewardship are vital to understanding connections between religion and environment in North America on two levels. First, it is important to understand the extent to which these two concepts, especially as they have been understood and applied historically within Western Christianity, have been the focus of much negative attention from scholars, since the latter half of the 20th century, who are examining the ideological foundations of the environmental crisis. Second, it is important to understand how these two concepts have been taken up anew by some contemporary Christians, theologians and laypersons, as a response to these very environmental problems.²²⁶

In the first instance scholars argue that dominion and stewardship are often implicit in contemporary treatment of land, in contemporary development of technology, and in the wider religious and secular Western views of how humanity should relate to the environment—and indeed in many cases, to non-Western cultures and peoples as well. Scholars such as White, Merchant, and Leopold among many others, discussed in more detail in the first part of this chapter, argue that an attitude of dominion has been infused into the wider worldview of Western culture, science and technology, which

²²⁶ The article Suzanne Armstrong, “Christian Stewardship in Agriculture,” in *Encyclopedia of Food and Agricultural Ethics*, ed. Paul Thompson and David Kaplan (Berlin: SpringerReference [www.springerreference.com] Springer-Verlag, 2013) (online), was based on an earlier version of especially section 4.1 of this chapter. The current chapter has been much expanded.

began with its use within Western Christianity but has continued from colonization to the present day.

As these scholars contend in their different arguments, the way land is understood, divided, treated, and protected or abused in North America is directly connected to the ideas of dominion and stewardship. The idea of dominion in particular is seen as foundational to our extractive resource economy, including to some degree agriculture. These ideas are now implicit in what most North Americans would consider to be routine, normal attitudes toward land and its uses. Those scholars who are critical of modern treatment of land and environment have thus attempted to reexamine these foundational ideas, and to bring them to the fore, to make people more aware of what has simply become part of a Western society-wide “way of doing business” and looking at the world.

On the other hand, certain groups of contemporary Christians have reclaimed these ideas of dominion, and especially of stewardship, and reinterpreted them as foundational to a principled Christian response to the many environmental problems faced today. The criticisms leveled at Christianity have not gone unnoticed by contemporary Christians, especially not by those who are themselves also concerned about human-nature relations and the current state of the environment, in North America and globally. Many of these Christians are theologians or lay Christians who would self-identify as environmentally minded or concerned. These are eco-theologians, or green-Christians. Understanding how certain Christians have taken up the terms stewardship and dominion and reinterpreted them also illustrates the wider conversation within Christianity about how humans and nature should relate.

Stewardship, while having this long history of use within Christianity, is not a term exclusive to Christianity. It also has a history of use in other contexts, one of which is a more secular use within the field of agriculture. In farming, stewardship traditionally means responsible use of agricultural tools, especially chemical herbicides, pesticides, and fertilizers, to be maximally effective with minimal negative effects. It is still here being used to address environmental impacts of farming practices, however.

For Christian farmers, the term stewardship is thus important already within farming, *and* from within other contexts of Christianity, on both fronts in order to address environmental impacts. For the CFFO, and for CFFO farmers, both of these conversations are important to understanding how *they* define and apply the concepts of dominion and especially stewardship within their farming practices. Since Christian farmers and the CFFO are not explicitly environmentalist, however, their use of the term does not fit clearly into the wider green-Christian use of the term as a form of Christian environmentalism. On the other hand, since they are Christian, and value the concept as a Christian principle applicable within farming, they do not restrict the term to its secular sense as may be used by others within farming. Both the Christian understandings and the secular ways it may be applied within farming practices are important to their particular understanding of the term stewardship.

The stewardship models found within the CFFO reflect the concerns of Christian thought on stewardship, and especially the Christian thought evident through theologians and thinkers in the Reformed theological tradition. Likewise, it reflects the contemporary reality of farmers working in Ontario today, in an increasingly industrializing agricultural system. Farmers must decide for themselves where their values lie, and how they can best

live out those values through their farming practices. The latter part of this chapter examines views of stewardship and dominion held within the CFFO that emerged from my research. In particular, it examines the spectrum of interpretations among Christian farmers in the CFFO on how best to apply the concept of stewardship within contemporary farming.

4.1 Christian Stewardship in Theology and Agriculture

The first section of this chapter argues for the importance of the dual concepts of dominion and stewardship, as they have been interpreted within Western Christianity, especially in North America, as key to the debate about religion and environment in general, and to the debate about agriculture and environment in particular. The chapter begins with an examination of the scholarship concerned with contemporary environmental problems, which has turned to the question of worldview as foundational to treatment of the earth. Scholars such as White, Merchant, and Leopold make the direct connection between religion and environment, and have been highly critical of Christian interpretations and applications of the concept of dominion in relation to nature, with significant implications for relations with other non-Western cultures and particular groups of peoples as well. The scholarship in this area is critical of the worldviews that have resulted in contemporary environmental problems, in the mechanistic view of the living world, and of the increasing industrialization that has resulted from the fusing together of an attitude of dominion and increasing technological and scientific knowledge to impose human uses on nature.

In response to these accusations by scholars, especially to White's thesis, Christians have reexamined Christian thought and history, and have brought traditional

elements to new life in attempts to address contemporary environmental problems. Some Christians have revisited and revised interpretations of both dominion and stewardship to be applicable today by both theologians and laypersons seeking Christian environmental principles. The term stewardship has also been taken up in secular contexts, especially in relation to management of land, in the formulations of contemporary environmental ethics. Dominion and especially stewardship are both used to express formulations of the best relationship between humanity and nature, among humans, and when formulated within a Christian context are also connected with the ordinances of God on how those relationships should be lived by Christians. Contemporary formulations of stewardship within Christian theology have been especially significant among evangelical Christians. For theologians such as Douglas John Hall and Loren Wilkinson, among many others, and for Christian organizations and institutions such as the Creation Stewardship Task Force of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, demonstrating a close biblical basis in scripture for their environmental ethics of stewardship or care of creation are especially important.

Stewardship is also an important concept within farming, and other thinkers have formulated ethics of stewardship specific to the context of contemporary farming. There is, however, in some cases significant congruence between the formulations in theology and in agriculture, as the connections between the theological formulation of Douglas John Hall and the agrarian formulation of Wendell Berry illustrate.

Christian farmers, then, work out how these two discussions on stewardship, one within environmental Christianity and one within secular agriculture, come together for

themselves as Christians (not necessarily environmental Christians) and as farmers, for whom the concept of stewardship is important in both contexts.

Stewardship endows humanity with responsibilities and with rights, and tries to find a balance between the needs of humanity and the needs of nature, aiming to achieve the long-term prosperity of both. Some critics of stewardship, especially within agriculture, argue that such an ethic is not sufficient to counteract the significant economic pressures felt as a result of the industrialization of agriculture. Nonetheless, it is an important motivator for moderation and for greater awareness of the many responsibilities farmers face in the contemporary sphere of agriculture.

4.1.1 Human Relationship to Nature

Two competing attitudes or motivations drive human relationships with nature. These attitudes direct how humans approach and relate to nature, as well as to each other. The first attitude is one of competition from a desire for control. The second attitude is one of cooperation and a desire for connection. Both of these have been vital to human survival and success. Both of these also relate closely to the ideas and practices of stewardship and dominion.

Human desire for connection and control, with respect to nature and with each other, are expressed in the history of the concepts of dominion and stewardship. Scholars examining the current ecological situation and common Western treatment of land and the environment have looked at cultural worldviews as an important factor in the relationship between humans and nature. Dominion and stewardship, while not exclusive to Christianity, do have a particular history within Christianity. Western Christian theological interpretations of the ideas of dominion and stewardship are historically

connected to the development of science and technology, to “discovery” and conquest in the Americas and elsewhere, to land claims and property rights, and to the environmental crises of the 20th and 21st centuries. All of these issues are also directly connected to the historic development and contemporary practices of agriculture in North America.

Scholars who have focused on the influence of worldviews, and on Western Christian worldviews in particular, as foundational to our contemporary environmental problems have charged Christianity with a great deal of responsibility for our current problems.

4.1.1.1 Christian Dominion in Science, Land, and Environment

Scholarly and popular attention turned to focus on environmental issues with both renewed energy and heightened concern in the second half of the 20th century. Writing out of both social and environmental considerations, historians and critics have looked back to Christian attitudes of dominion as the foundation of the culpability of Western civilization for many environmental problems. Often they criticized dominion for being exercised excessively as domination.

Historian Lynn White Jr.’s highly influential argument, published in *Science* in 1967, emphasizes the importance of religion in human relations with nature and the environment. He argues that “[h]uman ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny—that is, by religion.”²²⁷ White points to the creation story of Genesis as particularly foundational in this regard. He famously said that “Christianity is the most

²²⁷ Lynn White Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science* 155 (1967): 1205.

anthropocentric religion the world has seen.”²²⁸ White argues that Western Christian interpretations of Genesis as a call to exercise dominion over nature place excessive focus on the importance of humans. In particular, he notes that human beings are understood as set apart from the rest of nature, creating a dualism between the two, based on the Genesis depiction of humans as “made in God’s image.”²²⁹ In this interpretation of dominion, humans are understood as being placed on earth to rule over nature, which exists for human benefit. This is based especially on interpretations of Genesis 1:27-28, which reads, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (KJV). For many, this verse lays out at the very beginning of the Bible the special relationship between God and humanity, who are made in God’s image, and the special role of humanity, who are given dominion over nature. This worldview, or attitude towards nature, White argues, particularly as it has been interpreted over the centuries, has directly resulted in the increasingly exploitative technology of the northern Europeans, including their farming technology.²³⁰

White’s direct connection between Christianity and environmental problems resulted in a dramatic response from within Christianity itself, as will be explored in more detail in section 4.1.2 below. However, he was not alone in emphasizing the

²²⁸ White, “The Historical Roots,” 1205.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

importance of religious worldviews, and of Western Christian attitudes toward nature in particular as foundational to current environmental problems.

Carolyn Merchant, writing from an ecofeminist perspective, is particularly critical of the dominion/domination over women as well as the dominion /domination of nature founded in Christian interpretations of how dominion was to be exercised.²³¹ Both Merchant and White find that Christian interpretations of dominion have been connected directly to the development of Western science and technology, however secular the practice of science has since become.²³² Merchant traces the development of science and industrialization in more detail, however. She points in particular to Francis Bacon's scientific agenda to regain human dominion, lost in the Fall of the Genesis story, through the control of nature through science.²³³ She also emphasizes more strongly the importance of the changed worldview of Europeans through the medieval and early Industrial period. She describes a transition from an organic to a mechanistic view of nature, where the primary metaphor for nature moves from one of an organism to one of a machine.

The organismic, communal orientation ... was thrust aside to make way for efficiency and production in the sustained use of nature for human benefit. A value system oriented to nature as teacher whose ways must be followed and

²³¹ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: HarperOne, 1980), 170-172.

²³² White, "The Historical Roots," 1206; Merchant, *Death of Nature*, 185.

²³³ Merchant, *Death of Nature*, 185-190.

respected was giving way to a system of human values as the criteria for decision making.²³⁴

Both this worldview and the technology that accompanied it allowed ever-greater exploitation of nature. Merchant notes that both the organic model and the mechanistic model have existed in parallel. “But mechanicism as a metaphor ordered and structured reality in a new way. . . . Among its great strengths were that it . . . functioned as a justification for power and dominion over nature.”²³⁵ Again this changed worldview and changed practices and treatment of nature were directly connected to Christian theological ideas, and to interpretations of dominion.

This same foundational attitude of dominion as interpreted in Western Christianity is found at the base of land claims and property rights asserted and exercised by colonial Europeans, which have legally and philosophically extended into the present day.²³⁶ Michaelsen notes in particular the importance of the hierarchy of beings, extending from God through the various European monarchies, to their representative “discoverers” of various territories in the Americas as the foundational basis for their land claims.²³⁷ Furthermore, the *use* of the land was considered highly important by European explorers and colonists to the claim of ownership, where agricultural or other

²³⁴ Merchant, *Death of Nature*, 238.

²³⁵ Merchant, *Death of Nature*, 215.

²³⁶ Robert S. Michaelsen, “Dirt in the Courtroom: Indian Land Claims and American Property Rights,” in *American Sacred Space*, ed. David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 43-96; Elizabeth A Povinelli, *Labor’s Lot: The Power, History, and Culture of Aboriginal Action* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 203-238.

²³⁷ Michaelsen, “Dirt in the Courtroom,” 51-55.

industrious use was greater demonstration of ownership than other forms of use.²³⁸

Various indigenous methods for managing land were generally ignored or discounted by European colonizers and settlers, in part to justify their own claims on the land through the justification that it was “vacant” or “unused.”²³⁹

Povinelli examines similar claims that land is “vacant” or “unused” in the debate about land use in the Northern Territory of Australia. She examines the ongoing historical debates between the Aboriginal perspective of the Dreaming and Euro-Australian perspective of Development on how land should be used and controlled.²⁴⁰ She also notes that Lockean understandings of property as connected to human labour, or use of the land to make it productive, were part of the justification of colonial powers in taking control of Australia. Interestingly, these same arguments mirror those subsequently made by pioneering squatters who claimed greater right to the land in the Northern Territory because of their use and development of it over the rights of absentee capitalists who claimed ownership through investment.²⁴¹

Although less concerned with the treatment of the Indigenous people, Aldo Leopold argues in a similar vein that the Genesis stories of Abraham, and the wider “Abrahamic view,” have been foundational to the sense of entitlement in the treatment of land, and in particular the treatment of soil, plants and animals that live on and in it, in

²³⁸ Michaelsen, “Dirt in the Courtroom,” 62-64.

²³⁹ Michaelsen, “Dirt in the Court Room,” 53-54. See also Gary Paul Nabhan, “Cultural Parallax in Viewing North American Habitats,” in *Worldviews, Religion and the Environment: A Global Anthology*, ed. Richard C. Foltz (Belmont CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2003), 104-111.

²⁴⁰ Povinelli, *Labor’s Lot*, 203-238.

²⁴¹ Povinelli, *Labor’s Lot*, 214-215.

attitudes of dominion and in the emphasis on property rights in North America.²⁴² Leopold discusses this as the “Abrahamic concept of land” but he also discusses Abraham as a figure. He writes: “Conservation is getting nowhere because it is incompatible with our Abrahamic concept of land. We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.” Later he writes, “Abraham knew exactly what the land was for: it was to drip milk and honey into Abraham’s mouth. At the present moment, the assurance with which we regard this assumption is inverse to the degree of our education.”²⁴³ Although these ideas of property rights and dominion of land have Abrahamic and more specifically Christian foundations, both Leopold and White argue that these attitudes now pervade Western secular culture, and in White’s case, Western science and technology as well.

In terms of farming specifically, although economic factors are important, writers such as White and Leopold illustrate that this biblical worldview is also an important determining factor in how farmers treat their land. White argued that Western Christian anthropocentric attitudes continue to be expressed in forceful and controlling farming technology and methods.²⁴⁴ Leopold says in the conclusion of his essay “The Land Ethic” that “[t]he bulk of all land relations hinges on investments of time, forethought, skill, and faith rather than on investments of cash. As a land-user thinketh, so is he.”²⁴⁵ Both of

²⁴² Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), viii, 204-205.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ White, “Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis,” 1205.

²⁴⁵ Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, 225.

these writers caution that underlying human attitudes toward the land will have far reaching effects on the treatment of it.

White, Merchant and Leopold were writing in particular to address environmental concerns, and looking back historically to find the ideological, philosophical and theological roots underlying our current attitudes and practices towards nature. While Michaelsen was not primarily concerned with environmental issues in his writing, the history he portrays is riddled with the conflicts and struggles not only over ownership of land, but also use and treatment of land, as well as over what qualities and circumstances make land sacred or sacred space. All of these writers are important examples of those who emphasize the importance of worldviews for the treatment of land, nature, and other humans. All of these writers also trace the historical path of biblically rooted theological ideas of dominion into the present day attitudes and practices of science, technology, and treatment of land, particularly in a North American context.

4.1.1.2 Stewardship as Moderation of Dominion

Many different terms get used, and put into binary pairs to create and emphasize different contrasts. Is human treatment of the earth, historically or presently, best described by the term domination, dominion, stewardship, earthkeeping or some other term?²⁴⁶ Human attitudes and practices of domination have a long history in Western culture. Scholars have developed schools of criticism within Western thought on the issues of colonialism,

²⁴⁶ See for example Wendell Berry, "The Gift of Good Land," in *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, ed. Norman Wirzba (Berkeley CA: Counterpoint, 2002), 293-304; Colter Ellis, "The Symbiotic Ideology: Stewardship, Husbandry, and Dominion in Beef Production," *Rural Sociology* 78 (2013): 435-439; Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, 164-190, 264-252; John L. Paterson, "Conceptualizing Stewardship in Agriculture within the Christian Tradition," *Environmental Ethics* 25 (2003): 43-58; Loren Wilkinson, *Earthkeeping in the '90s: Stewardship of Creation* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 275-325.

slavery, racism, sexism, classism, and naturism all of which reflect on the problem of domination of one group over another based on differences of class, wealth, race or ethnicity, sex, and species. Francis Bacon's project to regain human dominion over nature through science is an example that is considered to assert dominion as domination.²⁴⁷

However, the push for greater human control is also moderated by the desire for greater connection and cooperation. In Christianity, historically and more recently, dominion has been complemented by the moderating force of stewardship. Merchant illustrates that the idea of stewardship did not newly develop within Christianity in the 20th century. She notes a moderation of the mechanistic model of nature through the adoption of a vegetative model of nature, which is then connected with the idea of managing nature or stewardship. In particular, she focuses on the 18th century example of William Derham, whom she describes as an early ecotheologian. His theological interpretation of stewardship was, Merchant argues, only a moderation of interpretation of dominion into caretaking and management. She also notes that he makes specific reference to Matthew 25:14 in terms of his understanding of stewardship, quoting him as saying: "That these things are the gifts of God, they are so many talents entrusted with us by the infinite Lord of the world, a stewardship, a trust reposed in us; for which we must give an account at the day when our Lord shall call."²⁴⁸ (This same passage from Matthew returns in other interpretations of stewardship below.) Although this is a move away from dominion as domination, it is not a dramatic move away. For Merchant this is

²⁴⁷ Merchant, *Death of Nature*, 185-187.

²⁴⁸ William Durham quoted in Merchant, *Death of Nature*, 249.

still too anthropocentric to function as a viable alternative. She is not alone in finding stewardship too shallow a response to the problems historically or presently in the relationship between humans and nature.²⁴⁹ However, stewardship as a moderation of dominion is one way of interpreting stewardship, but is not the limit of what stewardship can encompass, as is illustrated in some of the more contemporary interpretations discussed below.

4.1.2 Christian Responses: Ecotheology and Green Christianity

As was discussed above, White argued that contemporary environmental degradation, as achieved through the development and use of science and technology, was a direct result of Western Christian worldviews of dualism and anthropocentrism resulting from interpretations of dominion. The impact of White's argument has been widespread. Whitney writes that "the impact of White's thesis on the community of environmentalists, philosophers of technology, and religion scholars concerned with environmental issues was immediate, and long lasting. In the twenty years following the publication of "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis," over two hundred books and articles used White's ideas as a focal point."²⁵⁰ White's argument has received a great

²⁴⁹ See especially James Lovelock, "The Fallible Concept of Stewardship of the Earth," in *Environmental Stewardship: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*, ed. R. J. Berry (London: T & T Clark International, 2006), 106-111; and Paul B. Thompson, *The Spirit of the Soil: Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 72-93.

²⁵⁰ Elspeth Whitney, "White, Lynn (1907-1987) Thesis of," in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. Bron Taylor (London: Continuum, 2005), 1736.

deal of response from scholars outside Christianity,²⁵¹ but especially from within Christianity the response has been widespread and extended over several decades.²⁵²

Christian scholars and theologians concerned about environmental problems did not take the accusations of scholars such as White lightly. They responded by reevaluating Christianity, looking back historically and looking forward by developing new ecologically focused theologies. Stewardship was an important part of the response of many who sought to retain important aspects of the Christian tradition, while still attempting to address ecological issues and concerns, especially those surrounding the interpretation of dominion.

Stephen Scharper, a Catholic scholar who himself develops an ecotheological response from within Christianity, evaluates and categorizes many of the Christian theological responses to White's thesis in his study *Redeeming the Time: A Political Theology of the Environment*. Scharper creates three main categories, which he calls "apologetic, constructive, and listening." Responses in the first category, apologetic, primarily refute White's argument, reinterpreting both Christian history, and the influence and significance of other factors outside religion in the current ecological crisis.

²⁵¹ A few of the key secular respondents to White include: Lewis Moncrief, "The Cultural Basis of Our Environmental Crisis," *Science* 170 (1970): 508-512; William Coleman, "Providence, Capitalism, and Environmental Degradation: English Apologetics in an Era of Economic Revolution," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37 (1976): 27-44; David N. Livingston, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis: A Reassessment," *Fides et Historia* 26 (1994): 38-55; John Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature* (New York: Scribner, 1974).

²⁵² Some of the key examples of response from Christian thinkers include: Berry, "The Gift of Good Land," 293-304; Robin Attfield, *The Ethics of Environmental Concern* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); Robin Attfield, "Christian Attitudes to Nature," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 44 (1983): 369-386; Douglas John Hall, *Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986); Timothy J. Burbery, "Ecocriticism and Christian Literary Scholarship," *Christianity and Literature* 61 (2012): 189-214; Francis Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man: The Christian View of Ecology* (Wheaton IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1970).

The second, constructive response, primarily accept White's criticisms and attempt to move forward by building on existing elements of Christian tradition to create a new Christian response to these problems. Finally Scharper categorizes a listening approach, which while it may also largely accept White's thesis, does not engage as directly with it. Instead, it turns Christian attention away from Christian history and towards nature itself "listening" to nature.²⁵³ Scharper places theologian Robin Attfield in the first category, and notes that Wendell Berry would also fit there, although he does not discuss Berry in any detail. Scharper places Douglas John Hall in the second constructive category, and cites Thomas Berry as a key thinker in the third category.²⁵⁴ Many, but not all, of these theologians have used the concept of stewardship in their response to the charges of the problem of dominion.²⁵⁵

Some groups of lay Christians have also adopted the symbol and language of stewardship as a Christian response to environmental problems. Laurel Kearns' research on Christian environmental activism in the United States examines this "on the ground" response within Christianity. She categorizes Christian responses into three main categories or ethics: a Christian stewardship ethic, an eco-justice ethic, and a creation spirituality ethic. She also notes that the stewardship ethic has the greatest appeal among

²⁵³ Stephen B. Scharper, *Redeeming the Time: A Political Theology of the Environment* (New York: Continuum), 23-25.

²⁵⁴ Scharper, *Redeeming the Time*, 28-31, 37-41, 46, 194.

²⁵⁵ Scharper cites Robin Attfield, Thomas Sieger Derr, and Douglas John Hall as specifically turning to stewardship as part of their Christian response. See Scharper, *Redeeming the Time*, 28, 31, 37, 39. I will also discuss below the uses of stewardship as a response from Wendell Berry, Lorne Wilkinson, and Gary Fick.

evangelical Christians.²⁵⁶ The next section examines the sources in biblical passages and historic use from which these Christians have drawn the term and symbol of stewardship in order to respond to accusations of domination in Christian history, and also to contemporary environmental problems.

4.1.2.1 The Christian Symbol of Stewardship

Stewardship within Christianity is drawn out of references in both the canonical Christian scriptures. The term stewardship means, at a basic level, responsible management and care. The term is drawn from the relationship of a servant, the steward, and a master, where the steward is left in charge of resources and material goods that belong to the master, with the expectation that they will be well cared for in the master's stead. Human beings are commonly understood in Christianity to be the stewards of those resources that God has entrusted to them to manage.

One common Christian interpretation of stewardship is to refer to wise use of particularly monetary resources. The term stewardship has a history of use within Protestant denominations in North America especially in regards to financial management. North American churches' historical situation of disestablishment, that is to say their lack of financial support through government, has meant that stewardship, especially of financial resources within congregations, has been vital to survival and prosperity.²⁵⁷ In this sense of the word, good stewardship within a congregation encourages donations and responsibly manages financial resources for the maintenance of

²⁵⁶ Laurel Kearns, "Saving the Creation: Christian Environmentalism in the United States," *Sociology of Religion* 57 (1996): 56, 58-62. Kearns' categories are discussed in more detail in section 4.2.4.1 below.

²⁵⁷ Douglas John Hall, *The Steward: A Biblical Symbol Come of Age, Revised Edition* (New York: Friendship Press, 1990), 5.

the congregation and church mission work. Stewardship is less commonly used in this sense in Europe, where the financial need for the concept of stewardship was not felt in the same way because churches often had financial support through government.²⁵⁸

More recently, the concept of stewardship has been broadened beyond just financial resource management to include care for the earth. This principle has been applied to human responsibility for management of natural resources, and then to the care of creation from a Christian perspective. In this interpretation of stewardship, Christians understand God to have placed humanity in the role of stewards of creation. In this role, humans care for creation in order to glorify God, and for the benefit of the whole of creation (especially humanity) as well as future generations. This emphasis on care for creation and natural resources has become a much more popular use of the word. While this is true, the importance of the monetary aspect of the use of the term has not gone away as a result. Many of the farmers interviewed for this research, for example, used both senses of the term in tandem, or in conjunction with each other. For the purposes of this chapter, the primary focus will be on the environmental understandings of stewardship, and later of stewardship in farming in particular.

This very history of adaptation of the term stewardship is a clear indication of the innovation within Christianity in addressing new issues while still keeping longstanding elements of tradition alive. As is clear from the field research below, Christian understandings and applications of the term continue to adapt to new problems and situations. Wunderlich sees this as a sign of healthy vitality within religion. “The

²⁵⁸ See also Gene Wunderlich, “Evolution of the Stewardship Idea in American Country Life,” *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 17 (2004): 81-82.

evolution of the stewardship idea suggests an ancillary principle: religions that perform best are nimble, adapting and recoding ancient wisdom to accommodate newly perceived issues and concerns.”²⁵⁹ This “nimbleness” is also evident in the spectrum of interpretations of the concept that are evident among Christians in different situations, even among Christian farmers within a very specific group. The spread of the use of stewardship by both religious and non-religious groups concerned about care of the earth also illustrates the broader conversation and sharing of ideas within the broader North American culture.

To call humans “stewards” means that humanity has a special role in the care, preservation and cultivation of nature. This role elevates humans, since the position of steward is one of authority and great responsibility. At the same time it maintains a sense of humility and submission to the greater rule of God, who is understood as the true owner and ruler of creation. It also implies that nature or creation requires care and stewardship. Often this emphasis on the important role of humans as stewards is coupled with special concern for human health and benefits that result from proper care for nature.

Interpretations of the special place of humanity and the extent of human control over nature implied in the concept of stewardship vary. Some argue the role of human stewardship extends globally, over all living things and habitats. For them, stewardship is best realized through human control and development of nature, emphasizing the dominion of humanity over nature. Others emphasize the responsibility of humans to care

²⁵⁹ Wunderlich, “Evolution of the Stewardship Idea,” 82.

for and protect nature, with particular responsibility for human impact on the wider environment, with far less of an interventionist emphasis.

4.1.2.2 Biblical Basis

The scriptural basis for the model of stewardship is very important for many Christians, both theologians and laypersons, who are invested in its potential as a model for guiding Christian behaviour toward the environment. As noted above, its particular appeal among evangelicals and members of other denominations who wish to root principles of Christian behaviour in biblical texts explains some of this emphasis. As a result, much of the insider literature examines biblical passages that are used to interpret the symbol of stewardship, and then to apply it to contemporary issues.

The term stewardship in both of these Christian uses, as management of either financial or natural resources, stems from biblical stories of the role of a high-ranking servant, the steward, often given significant authority, who is responsible for the master's property. Stories about this type of servant can be found in both the Old and New Testaments of Christian scripture.

Especially in the case of care for creation, stewardship is also closely connected with key passages in Genesis. Since stewardship in this sense considers humanity's relationship with all of non-human nature, or creation, the opening stories of Genesis are often considered foundational to understanding stewardship in this environmental sense. In this case, Genesis 1 and 2 are understood as the story of Adam, the first steward of creation, given authority and responsibility by God. Key verses here include Genesis 1:27-28, which lays out the relationship between God and humanity, who are in the "image of God," which was quoted above. Then Genesis 2:15 lays out the relationship

between humanity (Adam) and the earth, giving Adam (humanity) the responsibility of tending and keeping the garden (the earth). It reads “And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it” (KJV).

Many consider these stories from Genesis foundational to the attitude of Western Christianity, in the past and in the present, toward the earth and humanity’s relationship to it.²⁶⁰ Critics of the effects of attitudes of domination especially in Western history point to these verses as the foundation of a highly anthropocentric worldview, as I noted above. Proponents of a stewardship ethic have attempted to reevaluate the significance of these verses to better emphasize dominion as a responsibility rather than domination as a right.

Interestingly, neither steward nor stewardship is mentioned in either of these two scripture passages from the beginning of Genesis. Instead, looking at the concept of the steward from both the Old and New Testaments, including the first appearance of the term in reference to the steward of Joseph’s house later in Genesis,²⁶¹ these earlier passages are interpreted in light of these Christians’ understanding of humanity’s role as stewards under God’s ultimate lordship. The model of stewardship from later stories comes to be applied to the stories of Adam as representative of humanity as a whole (a typical hermeneutical move by Christians), and to the overall metaphor of understanding the triangular relationship between God, humanity, and nature.

²⁶⁰ See for example Gary W. Fick, *Food, Farming, and Faith* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008); Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*; Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992); White, “The Historical Roots,” 1203-1207; and Loren Wilkinson, *Earthkeeping in the ‘90s: Stewardship of Creation* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991). Some of these will be discussed in more detail later.

²⁶¹ Hall, *The Steward*, 32, which refers to Gen 43 & 44.

Two examples will serve to show some of the biblical basis that is used when attempting to define a Christian stewardship ethic by insiders—theologians and lay Christians—themselves. These two are both North American Protestant Christian examples, but are separated somewhat in time, and reflect some other differences as well. Both are rhetorically rooted in scripture passages as the foundation for their interpretation of stewardship. The first example, which I will draw on in more detail later, is theologian Douglas John Hall’s book *The Steward: A Biblical Symbol Come of Age*, which was released first in 1982, and in a revised edition in 1990. The second example I use here comes from the Christian Reformed Church in North America, “Creation Stewardship Task Force Report,” released in 2012. These are both good illustrations of examinations of the term and meaning of stewardship, especially in relation to the earth and environmental issues. I use Hall’s book because, although it is older, it has been widely read, and is referenced in other works on the topic. I use the more recent example from the CRC in part because of its relevance for my particular focus of study, and in part because of its more contemporary illustration of how a stewardship ethic can be applied to issues in the modern world, as well as to illustrate that it is still very much in contemporary use among some groups of Christians.

Both of these focus on stewardship in particular, and both begin with an examination of a biblical basis for what they will argue constitutes a Christian stewardship ethic. Hall looks at stewardship in a wide sense of the word. He focuses on environment and stewardship in response to these issues, but does not limit his use of stewardship to this context, including also stewardship as financial resource management, and as important to justice and world peace issues as well as environmental issues. The

CRC report is specifically focused on environmental stewardship, and care for creation. This particular report spends a great deal of attention on climate change, which was not a topic of particular focus when Hall was writing. This is an issue whose importance has changed significantly in the past few decades.²⁶²

Hall begins with the question “who is Adam?” which is to say, how does the Bible understand humanity? So, although he does not draw directly on the Genesis 1 and 2 scriptures as examples of stewardship, he does acknowledge the importance of Adam as a symbol of humanity at large for Christian understandings of the role and nature of humanity as stewards. He does look at specific biblical sources for the symbol of the steward. He looks first at the stories that actually involve the steward, literally or figuratively, as servant. He notes that there are only 26 direct references,²⁶³ and that these are based on several terms on both Greek and Hebrew, which are translated into English as “steward.”²⁶⁴

The Christian Reformed Church in North America’s document “Creation Stewardship Task Force Report” begins in the very first sentences of the introduction

²⁶² The significance of the debate on climate change among environmentally concerned Christians is addressed in more detail in the discussion of Kearns’ research in section 4.2.4.1 below.

²⁶³ The references that he lists in this chapter are: Gen 43 & 44; 1 Chron 27 & 28; Dan 1:11, 16; Isaiah 22: 15-21; Matt 20:8; Luke 8:3; Luke 16:1-9; John 2:8; Luke 12:42; 1 Cor 4:1-2; Eph 3:1-2; 1 Pet 4:7-11; Titus 1:7. Interestingly, neither Hall nor the Stewardship Task Force Report specifically attempt to interpret the Parable of the Unjust Steward from Luke 16, although Hall points out his own omission. See Hall, *The Steward*, 31-41.

²⁶⁴ He notes that “[t]he English word ‘steward’ began to appear in manuscripts in the eleventh century.” It was also used in “the very influential King James Version.” The words being translated with this term from the original Hebrew were not all the same word either. “The Joseph narrative (Gen. 43 and 44) uses *haish asher al* (‘the man who is over’) or *asher al bayit* (‘who is over a house’). Other terms such as *ben mesheq* (son of acquisition—Gen 15:2), or *sar* (prince, head, chief, or captain—e.g., 1 Chron. 28:1) can be used.” He notes that in the New Testament the term *epitropos* is used, but most commonly, it is the translation of the term *oikonomos*. See Hall, *The Steward*, 40-41.

with three scripture references, which are to Psalm 24:1, Genesis 1:26, and Genesis 2:15.²⁶⁵ In the first paragraph alone there are 8 different scripture references, including these three. We can see here the prominence of the two passages from Genesis mentioned above from Genesis 1 and 2. Section 4 of the CRCNA document is entitled “Biblical Principles on Caring for Creation” and goes through a lengthy examination of biblical foundations for the relationship between humanity and God, and between humanity and creation at large.²⁶⁶ However, far fewer of the scriptures used in this CRCNA document correspond with the direct references to the literal or metaphorical biblical references to the steward as a servant. Instead, the scripture references here are arguments for principles of a stewardship ethic, based on scriptural passages.

This report does, however, focus on the importance of the Greek term *oikonomos* (one who manages [*nomos*] a household [*oikos*]), and of the derivative words such as *oikonomia* and *oikumene*, which are the basis for our English words, economy and ecumenical.²⁶⁷ They note here that the first scripture quoted in the document, Ps 24:1, is translated from Hebrew into Greek in the Septuagint translation as:

The *ge* is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the *oikumene* and all who dwell in it. *Ge* is the root of our word *geology*, and *oikumene* is the root for our word *ecumenical*. ...In our day, that remarkable interwoven fabric of life-sustaining habitats, the *oikumene*, is called the biosphere. ...There are more

²⁶⁵ Creation Stewardship Task Force of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, “Creation Stewardship Task Force Report” (Grand Rapids MI: Christian Reformed Church in North America, 2012), 2.

²⁶⁶ Creation Stewardship Task Force Report, 9-19.

²⁶⁷ Creation Stewardship Task Force Report, 20.

words whose root is *oikos*, including ecology (‘oikology’—study of the household) and economics (‘oikonomics’—management of the household). Most important for our task and privilege of caring for creation is the word *oikonomia*, the biblical translation for which is usually ‘stewardship.’²⁶⁸

Within this etymology, this final Greek term, *oikonomia*, translated as stewardship, is in a sense a linchpin. By giving this particular etymology, the authors are tying together ecology and economy with stewardship, to say that true stewardship is connected to both of these concepts traditionally associated with the word: financial and environmental management. This also suggests that good economics is in fact the practice of good environmental stewardship. It can also be interpreted the other way, to say that good environmental stewardship is in fact the practice of good economics.

The CRCNA document outlines the story of the “Creation, Fall, Redemption, Mission of God’s People, [and] New Creation,” which is then followed by eight “Basic Principles for Earthkeeping.” The principles are listed as: 1) Earthkeeping Principle “As the Lord keeps and sustains us, so we must keep and sustain our Lord’s creation,” 2) Fruitfulness Principle “We should enjoy but not destroy creation’s fruitfulness,” 3) Sabbath Principle “We must provide for creation’s Sabbath rests,” 4) Discipleship Principle “We must be disciples of Jesus Christ—the Creator, Sustainer, and Reconciler of all things,” 5) Kingdom Priority Principle “We must seek first the kingdom of God,” 6) Contentment Principle “We should seek godliness with contentment,” and 7) Praxis Principle “We must practice what we believe,” and 8) Con-servancy Principle “We must

²⁶⁸ Creation Stewardship Task Force Report, 20.

return creation's service to us with service of our own."²⁶⁹ Each principle is supported with various scripture passages illustrating its biblical basis.

These principles are quite different in name and in underlying emphasis than those that Hall lists as the founding biblical principles for his understanding of a stewardship ethic. Hall says: "Stewardship implies that we are responsible for the whole earth (1st principle); that we are together responsible for the whole earth (2nd principle); that this responsibility includes the nonhuman as well as the human world (3rd principle); that this responsibility must seek to express itself in just and merciful political forms (4th principle)—and (5th principal) that this responsibility must be exercised in the light not only of the immediate situation but of the near and distant future as well."²⁷⁰ However, Hall's focus is not exclusively on stewardship of creation, which may account for some of the differences. Also, the CRCNA document is interested in foundational principles that will be meaningful to Christians in particular, while Hall is interested in biblical principles that would be a foundation for both Christians and non-Christians, allowing them to work together on issues of common interest in a more meaningful way.²⁷¹

Although their goals in finding biblically based principles are somewhat different, these

²⁶⁹ Creation Stewardship Task Force Report, 9-19.

²⁷⁰ Hall, *The Steward*, 148. He summarizes stewardship by 5 principles which he terms globalization, communalization, ecologicization, politicization and futurization which he discusses in much more detail from pages 127-152.

²⁷¹ Hall, *The Steward*, 124-125. He explains it saying: "The middle axiom is a way of speaking about principles that are at the same time fundamentally related to Christian faith (e.g., liberation is implicit in the biblical concept of redemption) and accessible to many others who take part in the vigils, protest marches, international presence, fund-raising, and other activities geared to human liberation. Both the Christians and the non-Christians understand the language of 'liberation of the oppressed,' and therefore their actual deeds of liberation can be achieved in the spirit of joy and solidarity even when the most rudimentary motivation differs from group to group."

principles are intended as a foundation upon which common ground can be established for applying stewardship in contemporary situations and are founded in both cases on arguments built from scripture as their primary rhetorical device.

4.1.2.3 Domination vs. Stewardship

Stewardship combines a measure of power and humility, responsibility and authority. The extent to which each element is weighted depends on the interpretation of the scriptures or principles in question. That being said, many theologians in particular who turn to the idea of stewardship often do so emphasizing it as a term entailing responsibility more than privilege. These theologians have used the model of the steward in responding to White's and others' accusations that, especially in the West, dominion has been exercised excessively. While accepting that dominion from Genesis 1:27-28 has been interpreted as domination, they do not interpret it this way. Instead they use later verses to give insight into their interpretation of the role of humanity as they interpret it from the early Genesis passages, that is to say, how dominion *should* be exercised. One verse, often connected with the stewardship of nature, is Genesis 2:15 (quoted above), which emphasizes Adam (and Eve)'s responsibility to care for and tend the garden. Writers such as theologian Loren Wilkinson, farmer and essayist Wendell Berry, and agronomist and practicing Christian Gary Fick argue that the true responsibility of Adam, who here represents humanity, is to be the gardener, the keeper and protector of the earth.²⁷² Taking seriously the accusation that too often dominion has been interpreted as domination, the use of stewardship here sees dominion not as a power given to humanity,

²⁷² Wilkinson, *Earthkeeping in the '90s*, 287; Berry, "The Gift of Good Land," 294; Fick, *Food, Farming, and Faith*, 18-20.

but as a responsibility. Humans are to be good stewards of the earth, to tend and keep the earth on God's behalf. For Wilkinson, Berry, Fick, and others, a good steward is defined as a protector of creation.

Modern industrialism asserts human control over those areas of life manipulated or used by industrial techniques and technology. The goal of industrialization is greater control, and greater efficiency in the use of materials and energy. But efficiency here is not to conserve or reduce the use of these commodities, but rather is always increasing the use and consumption of materials and energy. Arguably an attitude of domination is expressed in mining, in drilling for oil, in destroying or using up any non-renewable resource or source of energy or fertility. Using them up completely, and for solely human ends, exerts human power, and insists on the total human right of control over and use of these things.

An attitude of domination can express itself in other ways as well, in the treatment of living beings as commodities, from the practice of slavery, to abuse of labourers including migrant workers, to mistreatment of animals. Where the line between acceptable use and domination or abuse exists is a matter of ongoing argument, as is evident in current debates about animal rights, for example. We now look back and see domination historically in the practices of slavery and colonialism to name just two. We see domination in rapacious consumption of natural resources as well. But few agree where the line of acceptable use and over-use really lies.

Stewardship is thus one response to the problem of domination. It is an attempt to curb the human desire for total control, to moderate it and find a balance between total control, and total chaos. It makes space for human needs, and the needs of others: other

humans, and other living beings of all shapes and sizes on the earth. A stewardship ethic attempts to present a thoughtful reflection on how human beings should interact with other humans and non-human nature, and especially with those aspects of nature to which we are most closely related, such as domesticated species, or those wild species that co-inhabit domesticated or controlled landscapes, urban and rural.

Even within the concept of stewardship, however, there is a wide range of interpretation about what limits an ethic of stewardship sets for human behaviour. Different interpretations expand or contract the privileges or responsibilities implied in the concept. While in some cases, historically and presently, an ethic of stewardship expresses the mindset that all other species exist primarily for human benefit, it need not carry that assumption. On one end of the spectrum, a stewardship ethic can mean an attitude of entitlement or dominion, understanding good stewardship as the best management and use of resources primarily for human benefit. It may even understand the human gift of dominion as requiring humans to actively exercise control over all aspects of nature. On the other end of the spectrum, stewardship may mean an attitude of responsibility, that in so far as human beings must interact with their environment to survive we must do so with a responsibility for our impact on and relationship with our fellow species. The term earthkeeping is often used in theological writings to emphasize greater human responsibility.²⁷³ Most approaches to stewardship fall somewhere between these poles.

²⁷³ Earthkeeping is the term employed by Loren Wilkinson and the co-authors of *Earthkeeping in the '90's: Stewardship of Creation*. Earthkeeping is also one of two subcategories of stewardship delineated by John Paterson, discussed in more detail below. John Paterson, "Conceptualizing Stewardship in Agriculture within the Christian Tradition," *Environmental Ethics* 25 (2003): 45-56.

Considering the current size and technological power of the human species, the importance of human responsibility can be far reaching, and an ethical approach addressing this responsibility has the power to address many current environmental problems. Robin Attfield's interpretation is a good example of stewardship as responsibility for human power and activity. Attfield is a Christian thinker and environmental ethicist, who argues that stewardship does not require humans to manage absolutely, but it should attempt to manage the power humans exercise through science and technology. He writes,

stewardship is not synonymous with interventionism, and is compatible with letting-be...[yet] responsibility remains possible for the entire sphere of nature which humans can affect. ... Unless this extensive power is exercised with responsibility, global problems will be intensified. Thus the choice is between power exercised responsibly, and power without responsibility.²⁷⁴

But where should the line be drawn between intervention to correct problems created by humans, and "letting-be" to allow the natural forces to heal themselves? When is human interference for our own interests justified, and when must human interests be balanced against the interests of other aspects of nature? While it may be arrogant for human beings to assume that we are the intended masters of the rest of nature, to assume that we have the intellect and power to fully control nature, or that nature exists primarily for our benefit, Attfield argues it is important to acknowledge that humans do have a

²⁷⁴ Robin Attfield, "Environmental Sensitivity and Critiques of Stewardship," in *Environmental Stewardship: Critical Perspectives—Past and Present*, ed. R. J. Berry (T&T Clark International: London, 2006), 86.

responsibility for our interactions with the rest of nature, and for the power we wield through science and technology.

Some, such as Hall, have gone beyond stewardship as management of either finances or human relations with nature. Hall argues that it has far greater potential. For him, stewardship is a symbol of human (Christian) vocation in the world, emphasizing that Christians should be engaged with the wellbeing of the material world. In his interpretation of the symbol, Christian stewardship would encompass work toward greater social justice, greater relations between humanity and non-human nature, and a more peaceful world.²⁷⁵ Thus, the literature reflects a fairly broad spectrum of interpretation of what stewardship can mean in terms of human power and responsibility.

Critics and proponents of stewardship often have differing views on its narrowness or breadth. Opponents of stewardship accuse it of leaning too far toward the side of excessive control, as being too utilitarian, and not sufficiently recognizing the intrinsic value of all life. The very starting point of stewardship, the importance of humans as stewards of the environment, is criticized by advocates of other approaches to environmental ethics, especially those who emphasize the fundamental equality of all species, such as in deep ecology.²⁷⁶ Critics point out that humans have long had too strong a sense of our own importance, and of our own ability to control the world around us. The idea of stewardship, for them, perpetuates the overemphasis on the importance of humans, and on the level of control humans can exert over the rest of the natural world.

²⁷⁵ Hall, *The Steward*.

²⁷⁶ There are many collections of writings outlining the key aspects of deep ecology. See for example Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 1985).

They question the extent to which humanity can actually take responsibility for the problems humans have created. While this is true, these critics are also often most critical of particular interpretations of stewardship.

Critics of stewardship, such as Thompson or Lovelock, tend to take more narrow interpretations of the types of demands stewardship places on the human practitioner. Thompson accuses stewardship of being excessively human-focused, saying “agricultural stewardship is entirely compatible with self-interested, anthropocentric use of nature.”²⁷⁷ Lovelock compares stewardship to imperialism, with hubris and nemesis soon to follow.²⁷⁸ As shown above, these accusations are a good description of interpretations of the term that emphasize human control over and development of nature. However, these criticisms do not address the full breadth given to the term by those, including Attfield, Hall, Fick, and Wilkinson, who use stewardship to mean earthkeeping or even a greater responsibility for the potential impact of human activity on non-human life.

4.1.2.4 Characterizing a Stewardship Ethic

Stewardship is a word used to describe one approach to environmental ethics. Many authors have recognized that individuals have diverse ethical codes that have been developed when approaching environmental issues, and stewardship, while not clearly defining one ethic in particular, does clearly denote a particular attitude and approach to environmental problems. In this ethical approach, human beings have a key role to play,

²⁷⁷ Thompson, *The Spirit of the Soil*, 74.

²⁷⁸ Lovelock, “The Fallible Concept of Stewardship,” 108-109.

as stewards, and from this starting point, how humans should act as stewards may be interpreted in different ways.

Douglas John Hall and Wendell Berry, discussed above, are two influential writers on issues of stewardship. Hall as a Christian theologian comes at the issue of stewardship mainly from its common use in Protestant North American congregations primarily as financial stewardship of congregational resources. He expands the significance of the term beyond this simple meaning, however, and uses it as a key symbol or concept of the entire Christian vocation in the contemporary world. Wendell Berry, an influential agrarian thinker and essayist, who is himself both a Christian and a farmer, has offered many criticisms of the effects of industrialization on agriculture, and on society at large. Berry is primarily concerned with farming and the application of stewardship in this context, but he does, however, connect stewardship with moral and religious ideas more widely applicable.²⁷⁹ Although the two approach the topic from these rather contrasting perspectives, and although Hall gives almost no particular attention to stewardship in farming, there is remarkable crossover in the approach, and the topics of focus of each of these writers in elucidating the concept. From an

²⁷⁹ I should note here that while Hall is clearly focused on the term *stewardship* and the symbol of the steward, Berry is not so clearly focused on the term itself. Berry hardly uses the term. However, while Berry is considered one of the key thinkers on issues of agrarianism this is not a term that he uses with any frequency either. Berry's approach in writing is different from that of Hall. Hall has chosen the steward as a key symbol which he then defines, and explores the theological significance of the symbol in the contemporary world. Although Berry writes about issues vital to a perspective of both agrarianism and stewardship, he does not attempt to define either term or concept clearly, and does not define an 'ethic' of either stewardship or agrarianism in so many words. While this is so, what he has to say is clearly relevant to anyone interested in the issue of stewardship, especially within the context of agriculture. The title of one of his books, *Home Economics*, fits with these Greek foundational words that are tied with stewardship, and in this book Berry defines his choice of title in the broader sense that stewardship encompasses. He does address stewardship specifically in his essay "The Gift of Good Land."

I am not alone in connecting Berry to stewardship. Paul Thompson, for example, uses Berry's writings as the primary basis for his chapter on agricultural stewardship in *The Spirit of the Soil*, 72-93.

examination of stewardship from these two writers, some important characteristics can be identified.

The type of stewardship that they each describe emphasizes the importance of balance between two poles, finding an appropriate middle between two extremes. Both agree on the importance of well-functioning communities, respect for nonhuman nature, and the importance of well-functioning democratic and political systems.

Both writers also seek a balance between the benefits of a holistic approach and the benefits of particularism. Hall argues for the importance of globalization, and cautions against an over-emphasis on the particular or the local to the detriment of its connection to the wider, and the global. He is emphasizing here the importance of holism in a stewardship perspective. Berry on the other hand, argues for the importance of deep knowledge of the particular, and a healthy well-functioning localism as the only way to truly healthy globalism. While Hall is emphasizing the importance of holism, and of a globalized vision, Berry is emphasizing the importance of careful attention to the particular, especially the particulars of place and of nature, human and other.

Both agree that from love and attentive care of the particular comes a genuine concern for and greater awareness of the whole. People build from positive relationships at a particular level, to a healthy ability to be concerned for others at a more general level. From those particular beloveds (family, friends, familiar landscapes, favourite foods, flowers, animals) humans can build concern for the health and welfare of all. It is interesting too that both writers turn to the metaphor of romantic relationships to suggest the type of particularity and the type of universalism that is called for here. The proper relationship is one of genuine love, a marriage, which then leads to greater understanding

and sympathy for others through the particular love of one. Anything less than this leads to abuse and unhealthy relationships.²⁸⁰

Both are also concerned with excessive human desire for control, and the opposite, complete lack of control or apathy. Both of the authors' arguments are critical of the kind of technological society they perceive gaining strength in Western societies and cultures. Berry, despite the fact that he has been writing against such developments for decades, says he continues to fight on the losing side.²⁸¹

Hall argues with his principle of futurization that we must take the future fully into account if we are to truly see the damage we are doing in the present. He notes that the apocalyptic emphasis of early Christianity and of later interpreters has led to tremendous neglect of earthly Christian responsibilities.²⁸² Hall's concern here is for our present awareness of responsibility that extends long into the future. This concern for the future is not a form of escapism from the present, but rather brings more urgent concern especially for material issues for Christians in the present.

Berry, on the other hand, is somewhat ambiguous about overemphasis on the future. Berry is critical of those who look to an idealized future as a time of redemption. Berry's criticisms of the problem of specialization in the industrial model, and the metaphor of the machine are both clearly tied to the problems of visions of a technologically controlled future. Nature, chaos, and even humans, who encompass both

²⁸⁰ Wendell Berry, *Bringing It to the Table: On Farming and Food* (Berkeley CA: Counterpoint, 2009), 9-10; Hall, *The Steward*, 129-130.

²⁸¹ Berry, *Bringing It to the Table*, 67.

²⁸² Hall, *The Steward*, 149.

of these characteristics, are controlled or removed as much as possible in this vision of the future, or left to go totally wild or out of control. This type of future, futurism or futurology, Berry sees as negative.²⁸³

But it is in fact this very problem with the future that Hall also recognizes in his work. He writes,

for the whole notion of “reclaiming the future” is bound up with the very modernity that has brought us to the present impasse. Thinking ourselves lords and masters of time, makers of history, we determined to create a technological civilization that would of necessity conform to our bright designs for the future. We know now, if we are alert, that as designers we are not to be trusted.²⁸⁴

Hall recognizes that this project of control, which is part of the technological quest of the future, will in all likelihood lead to disaster.

However, looking to the future does not necessitate an emphasis on technology and control. Having pointed out the dangers of this negative side of this particular type of emphasis on the future, Berry does not disagree with the importance of considering the effects of current actions on future generations. In terms of farming Berry says, “farmers either fit their farming to their farms, conform to the laws of nature, and keep the natural powers and services intact—or they do not. If they do not, then they increase the

²⁸³ Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America: Culture & Agriculture* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1977), 71-72.

²⁸⁴ Hall, *The Steward*, 151.

ecological deficit that is being charged to the future.”²⁸⁵ Berry here uses the metaphor of deficit, of debt. Considering the significance debt and deficits have taken on in an industrial agricultural system, this metaphor is not, I am sure, used lightly.

Industrial farming relies on economic debt, as well as a significant ecological debt to the future. Economic debt tends to be carefully measured, while ecological debt is often overlooked or ignored, and tends to go unmeasured. Good farming, as Berry and Strange argue, carries neither of these debts—or if it does, it does so only for a very short period of time, with the full intention of repaying what is borrowed. Industrial agriculture, however, expects to be perpetually in debt. In this particular article Berry is contrasting destructive farming with conservationist farming. This contrast between ecological debts and financial debt fits nicely with what Strange has to say about the difference between a family farm and an industrial agribusiness. Where a family farm has the goal of paying off the mortgage they may incur, preferably within the lifetime of the current farmer, this is not the case in industrial agribusinesses.

Debt is regarded as the best means of financing growth, the principal goal of the industrial farm. As debt is retired and the value of the farm-firm’s equity increases, earnings are reinvested and more is borrowed in order to buy still more land and other farm assets. Debt is best regarded as perpetual—it is not the goal of the industrial agribusiness to pay off the debt. Burning the mortgage, a symbolic ritual recognizing a point of accomplishment and the state of stability in family farming, is unheard of in industrial agribusiness. A

²⁸⁵ Berry, *Bringing It to the Table*, 73.

debt-free farm is a farm that isn't growing. Debt is a necessary tool of expansion, an instrument of conquest.²⁸⁶

Although Strange himself does not have the same emphasis on ecological debt that Berry raises in his article, the perspective on debt that he describes seems to fit as well with the industrial model for financial debt as for ecological debt. The underlying attitude does not change, and the goal of conquest remains. Echoes of dominion as conquest are evident in the charges Strange is laying at industrial agriculture's feet.

4.1.2.5 A Stewardship Ethic

Stewardship ethics, although they vary in many ways, do share important characteristics that differentiate stewardship from industrialism or from other environmental ethics such as deep ecology that have different approaches and emphases. Below are four basic characteristics found in various publications that address ethics of stewardship. These various characteristics may be emphasized more or less depending on the interpretation of thinker or practitioner in question.

Shared characteristics of a stewardship ethic:

- 1) Human beings have a special role as stewards within the natural, physical world.
- 2) Human beings are responsible for *all* of the earth, human and nonhuman. Human beings belong, and have a special place. There is room in nature for the exercise of human culture, and creation of human cultural products. There must be a healthy functioning relationship between human culture and non-

²⁸⁶ Marty Strange, *Family Farming: The New Economic Vision* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 36.

human nature, as there must also be a healthy acceptance of nature (wildness) within human culture.

- 3) Through good stewardship there is a desire for greater social justice, that is to say, sharing and responsible use of and care for what we (all) have.
- 4) Stewardship is an ethic with respect for the past, which at the same time looks, through proper behaviour in the present, to the future. It is an expression of responsibility to others; those who existed in the past, those who live with us presently, and those who will come in the future. It wishes to respect those who came before and passed on to us both cultural and natural resources that we now share. It is an expression of responsibility to those who live around us and who share with us in community both locally and globally. It is also an expression of the responsibility we owe the future—to those who inherit from us what we have maintained and improved of the cultural and natural resources that we leave to those who will come after us.

A stewardship ethic is different from other ethics expressed through our human treatment of nature. It differs from an industrial ethic on the one hand and from a deep ecology ethic on the other hand, just to give two particularly contrasting examples. An industrial ethic works on the mechanical model, values an understanding of “efficiency” and “productivity” based on the potential for perpetual economic growth, as well as uniformity and predictability, usually achieved by technology and mechanization. An industrial ethic emphasizes the importance of profit and efficiency as the key goals. It operates in a secular context with a focus on materialism.

A deep ecology ethic places humans on a level playing field with all other species in nature. It values what is wild over what is domesticated, what is natural over the products of human culture. It emphasizes the importance of conservation of pristine wild spaces and discourages the practice of agriculture. It encourages decreasing both the

human population and human consumption. It also emphasizes a particular religious or spiritual attitude of deep ecological consciousness.²⁸⁷

Where one ethic emphasizes the products of human culture, the other emphasizes the restriction of human culture. Ideally, a stewardship ethic fits somewhere in the middle, making a place for human beings and human culture, including the use of some technologies, while at the same time making room for the wild and for nature, as an important sustaining aspect of all human cultural activity, and is an important entity unto itself. Stewardship also values the importance of both human and animal labour in balance with technology, often through emphasis on the type of energy being employed through different farming methods.²⁸⁸

Berry argues that an ethic of stewardship, in short, does not stand by itself. It is a value expressed alongside values for community, industriousness, and even to some degree self-sufficiency.²⁸⁹ As stewardship is primarily a question of balance, it raises the issue of limits, and of the effects of size and scale, as much as of kind. It is best practiced in farming, Berry argues, when technology and economy remain at a “human” level, allowing the farmer close enough connection and familiarity with both the land he or she

²⁸⁷ This characterization of deep ecology is largely based on descriptions from Bron Taylor, such as in “Deep Ecology and Its Social Philosophy: A Critique,” in *Beneath the Surface: Critical Essays in the Philosophy of Deep Ecology*, ed. Eric Katz, Andrew Light, and David Rothenberg (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2000), 269-299.

²⁸⁸ Berry is an excellent example of emphasis on the importance of different sources of energy, but he is not alone. See Berry, *The Unsettling of America*, 81-95. Although returning animal labour in the traditional sense of oxen or horses pulling farm equipment is not necessarily the goal of contemporary stewardship, allowing animals to harvest their own fodder, or using animals as pest control or in other ways is becoming more common. See for example Frederick L. Kirschenmann, “Resolving Conflicts in American Land-Use Values: How Organic Farming Can Help,” in *Cultivating an Ecological Conscience: Essays from a Farmer Philosopher*, ed. Constance L. Falk (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint Press, 2010), 248-254.

²⁸⁹ Berry, *The Art of the Commonplace*, 303; *Home Economics*, 187.

farms, and the community in which she or he lives, to be effectively responsible to both. CFFO farmers also raised the issue of the importance of a farmer's familiarity with the land as foundational to good stewardship, as is discussed in section 4.2 below.

This aiming for the middle is evident in the writings of both Hall and Berry. However, what the middle signifies is not necessarily the same for these two authors, nor is it the same for other thinkers looking to establish a stewardship ethic. Hall describes stewardship as finding the important middle place between excessive control and giving up or apathy.²⁹⁰ For Berry, the two extremes can be found in the differences between attempts at excessive control through industrialism, and those who seek a pristine nature entirely without human interference through conservationism.²⁹¹ These two authors here seem clearly to be discussing two different problems in human response to the pronounced control of technology and industrialism. Hall discusses the human response of withdrawal, and perhaps even denial; the giving up of all responsibility, and total apathy to the results of our behaviour, wherein "the comfortable classes of the 'developed' world lose themselves in the exaggerated pursuit of momentary happiness."²⁹² On the other hand, Berry is commenting on the more extreme aspects of conservationism, the human response which is to attempt to erase or prevent all human interference in non-human natural processes and places. This attempt to preserve the wild can extend to the point of human self-sacrifice for the benefit of nature. These two poles

²⁹⁰ Hall, *The Steward*, 151.

²⁹¹ Berry, *Unsettling of America*, 131.

²⁹² Hall, *The Steward*, 151.

are not the same, but they are two common human reactions against the problematic aspects of industrialism.

4.1.2.5.1 Dualism and the Mechanical Model

In the above arguments by both Berry and Hall, themes emerge that illustrate their mutual concern for the problem of technology, the influence of industrialization, the problem of dualism, and the increasing use of the mechanistic model in contemporary, and especially Western thought. Hall is critical of the otherworldly emphasis that has arisen from the dualistic perspective of Christianity, which has been especially strong in Western Christianity, as exemplified in the dualistic split of the body from the soul. Berry's main thesis in this and many of his works is a criticism of the process of industrialization and of the overriding model of and symbol of the machine. Hall's arguments about the problem of dualism vs. holism and Berry's argument against the use of mechanistic models echo the arguments made by many who have blamed or challenged both Western Christianity and Western science for the dualistic and mechanistic models of the universe that pervade the history of these traditions of thought.

Both of these basic criticisms echo those made by many other critics of science and Christianity, such as those made by Merchant discussed above. Other ecofeminists also argue against the pervading Western dualistic worldview, with roots in both Christianity and science. They point out the repercussions this has, not only for the neglect of the body and material concerns, as Hall pointed out, but also for neglect of

women, the poor, and people of other nations and cultures, resulting in naturism, sexism, classism, and racism.²⁹³

4.1.2.5.2 *Holism and the Organic Model*

On the other hand, there is also evidence that while science and religion (especially Western Christianity) have a long-standing tradition of dualism and specialization on the one hand, they also have strains of holism as well. In the case of religion the tradition of holism is perhaps longer standing, or better understood as part of the paradox that is religion and religious thought. Aspects such as mysticism or religious philosophies that emphasize connection, with the divine or other unifying worldviews, are found in many different religious traditions. Such holistic views can often, as is the case in Western Christianity, exist alongside worldviews of dualism. While environmental and also feminist criticisms of Western religions, and of Christianity in particular, have centered on the dualisms in their worldviews, at the same time religion (including Christianity) is recognized by others as having a natural inclination towards holism.²⁹⁴ By attempting to draw on or emphasize these elements of holism many theologians interested in issues of feminism or environmentalism are able to find resources within the Christian tradition to counteract the negative effects of dualism.

In science the emphasis on holism is present, but faces greater resistance from the wider scientific community. This is particularly well illustrated by the problems experienced by the proponents of Gaia theory in attempting to have such a holistic

²⁹³ See for example Ruether, *Gaia and God*.

²⁹⁴ See for example Peter Beyer, *Religion and Globalization* (London: Sage Publications, 1994), 20.

perspective widely accepted within the scientific community. While this is the case, science is increasingly recognizing the importance of both specialization *and* holistic theories that can bring together various fields of knowledge in meaningful ways.²⁹⁵ Merchant points out that these two ways of looking the world, dualistic and holistic, have been in tension with one another for a long time.

The organic and the mechanical philosophies of nature cannot, therefore, be viewed as strict dichotomies, nor can most philosophers be placed solidly in one camp or the other. The tensions between these two perspectives on nature have continued to be influential ever since the Scientific Revolution.²⁹⁶

4.1.3 Stewardship in Farming

Stewardship in farming can be used in a strictly secular sense, or may retain some of the religious sense of the word in its use by those who may not themselves be Christians. Stewardship in farming is to some degree a question of sustaining the balance of livelihood with the renewable fertility of soil, plants and animals being farmed over a long period of time. Good stewardship is exercised by a farmer or farm family having a long-standing relationship with a piece of land. Ideally to many, this is seen in the example of a family farm, which is passed in good or better condition from one generation to the next. In this relationship there is a sense of responsibility both to one's ancestors for that which has been inherited, and to one's descendants for that which will be passed down and carried on through them. Although there can be a greater religious

²⁹⁵ On Gaia Theory and holism in science see for example James Lovelock, *The Vanishing Face of Gaia: A Final Warning* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), 128.

²⁹⁶ Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, 103.

dimension of a sense of responsibility to God, even within this more secular earthy sense of responsibility to the past for the current state of the land, to the present living beings on the farm, and to the future fertility, stewardship in this context must take into consideration the relationship and balance between humanity and nature that is needed within farming.

4.1.3.1 Uses of the Term in Farming

Just as stewardship is connected with the Christian experience in North America, it is also tied with the practice of farming, and conservation of land. The term stewardship has been adopted within the farming community, and within this movement in North America, is usually used in a secular rather than religious sense.

Wunderlich notes that the use of the term stewardship within the conservation movement doesn't begin until the latter twentieth century.²⁹⁷ Within the conservation movement, stewardship is used in a sense almost synonymous with management or sustainability. While it retains the idea of managing on behalf of a higher authority, or of assuming responsibility for management on behalf of another "true owner," the religious notion of this true owner being God is generally removed. Instead, stewardship is practiced on behalf of the benefit of society or nature as a whole, or for future generations (human and non-human). Worrell and Appleby note that "in much of the land use and conservation literature the term [stewardship] is used loosely, with little attempt at

²⁹⁷ Wunderlich, "Evolution of the Stewardship Idea," 77.

definition. This is presumably because people consider the term to be well enough understood so as not to require defining.”²⁹⁸

Here again stewardship is particularly used within North America, and less so elsewhere. Worrell and Appleby point out the use of the term among many different groups, including by the United States government, and cite examples including that “‘environmental stewardship,’ ‘countryside stewardship,’ and ‘forest stewardship’ have become common, and stewardship appears to be starting to replace the term management.”²⁹⁹ While this is the case, they note later that where stewardship is used in North America, Europeans use the term “sustainable management” instead. Clearly stewardship as an idea is particular to the North American conversation. The Christian or religious aspects of this broader conversation, which has resulted in adapting and using stewardship as a response to environmental issues, cannot be discounted or ignored. Wunderlich even suggests that conservationists have pushed theologians to expand the use of the term stewardship because of their own need for greater authority as a basis for their conservation cause.³⁰⁰

One common use of the term stewardship in farming circles is to denote, at a minimum, responsible use of farming inputs, including fertilizer, herbicides and pesticides, so that they are maximally effective, with few negative side effects. Michael

²⁹⁸ Richard Worrell and Michael Appleby, “Stewardship of Natural Resources: Definition, Ethical and Practical Aspects,” *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 12 (2000): 264.

²⁹⁹ Worrell and Appleby, “Stewardship of Natural Resources,” 263.

³⁰⁰ Wunderlich, “Evolution of the Stewardship Idea,” 78.

Northcott, a Christian ethicist, points out that the term, in this more limited sense, is even used by agricultural input companies as well as by agricultural regulators.³⁰¹

Stewardship in farming can, however, encompass much more. Practices of stewardship in farming that are more broadly focused attempt to take responsibility for the positive influence farmers can have on the wider ecological system, as well as the long-term health of their farms. Colter Ellis' study of cattle ranchers in the U.S. illustrates the use of stewardship among farmers who may not be specifically Christian, but who use the term in what I would define as a similar religious sense. Here responsibility may or may not be foundationally to God, but does certainly still include responsibility as a good steward to higher authorities or principles, often intangible, including nature as a whole (balance), as well as future generations. These farmers also include stewardship as responsibility to the land and animals specifically in their care.³⁰² This farming view of stewardship as maintaining natural balance while also making use of nature, Ellis points out, is sometimes at odds with conservationists who see grazing (for example) as contrary to good stewardship.³⁰³

Good farming is an expression of stewardship in the sense that it takes what humans need for sustenance but not at the expense of the renewable fertility of the soil or animals and plants from which this sustenance comes. Good stewardship in farming is commonly understood to mean practices that conserve and improve the health of the soil

³⁰¹ Michael Northcott, "Soil, Stewardship and Spirit in the Era of Chemical Agriculture," in *Environmental Stewardship: Critical Perspectives—Past and Present*, ed. R. J. Berry (London: T&T Clark International, 2006), 213.

³⁰² Ellis, "The Symbiotic Ideology," 434-436.

³⁰³ Ellis, "The Symbiotic Ideology," 434.

and protect the water and species of plants and animals that the farmer depends on to produce food and fiber for the whole community. A stewardly farmer ensures healthy farmland, adequate pure water, and healthy plants and animals. A good current crop must not come at the expense of lost soil, lost fertility, or contamination of the farm ecosystem in the long run. At the same time, a farmer *uses* the soil, plants and animals and from them produces food for human consumption. The symbol of the steward as gardener makes sense in a farming context. Thus, many see using the symbolism of stewardship as particularly apt for approaching environmental issues related to farming practices.

Within farming specifically, the dual terms of dominion and stewardship reappear. Ellis for example argues that the ranchers he studies apply both terms as part of their self-narrative as farmers and how they relate to nature.

There is a tension here between being in balance with nature and the need to produce the goods. Ranchers must be able to use the land to make a living from beef cattle. Stewardship and husbandry set the parameters of this interaction. Dominion allows for use.³⁰⁴

He makes a distinction between stewardship, which he defines as responsibility and care, from dominion, which he associates with entitlement as a basis for justifying use.

Use can also be associated with interpretations of stewardship, however. Humans, Berry insists, need to find a balanced and meaningful relationship with nature to survive and thrive into the future. Berry contrasts the technological ideal of industrial farming

³⁰⁴ Ellis, "The Symbiotic Ideology," 439.

(which could be extended to industry of all kinds) with the ideal of preservation environmentalists.

Neither the agricultural specialist nor the conservation specialist has any idea where people belong in the order of things. Neither can conceive of a domesticated or humane landscape. People ... are perceived by the specialist as a kind of litter, pollutants of pure nature on the one hand, and of pure technology, total control, on the other.³⁰⁵

Berry seeks a middle ground, a meaningful place for humans in a balanced relationship with nature. What that means in practice is what is at issue. Berry's interpretation of stewardship as in-between conservation (pristine nature) and industrialism (pristine machinery) emphasizes the need for balance between use and care in an agricultural context.

Another aspect of the dual terms of stewardship and dominion within an agricultural context connects with private property rights and social responsibilities in owning and managing land and its connected species and resources. Interpretations of dominion and the meaning of stewardship vary within an agricultural context, and affect farmers' relationship with, and treatment of, their land. The issue of dominion is especially apparent in debates about property owners' rights. Farmers often now control large tracts of land on ever-growing farms. The implications of the practices of individual farmers on their own land, however, do not stop at their property lines, and can affect those immediately surrounding the farm, and also the wider ecology of the region. When

³⁰⁵ Berry, *Unsettling of America*, 72-73.

taken together, common practices can have a global impact. Farming becomes more dominating when it mines the fertility from the soil or plants and animals in such a way that this fertility is no longer self-sustaining and renewable.

In fact, as Kirschenmann points out, many practices in the chemical era of agriculture have simply moved the mining and extraction off the farm. Energy on the farm primarily comes from fossil fuels, and nutrients mined elsewhere are then used to renew the fertility of the soil on the farm.

When new land became scarce the strategy shifted from primary resource exploitation to secondary resource exploitation—from mining nutrients directly from the soil to mining them from pockets of mineral deposits and transporting them to our fields. Thus the chemical era in agriculture began. Taken together, the principles of taking inventory, mining resources, and extracting cheap raw materials to produce wealth and power constitute the predominant paradigm shaping U.S. agricultural policy and practice.³⁰⁶

Berry likewise points out that the entire farm system in the U.S. *requires oil before* it can produce food. This he contrasts with the potential for farms to be largely self-sufficient, were they to operate with greater use of human and animal labour, biological fertility, and in “an economy that is not exploitative.”³⁰⁷ Both are highly critical of the exploitative economy on which contemporary farming depends, especially since this need not be the case.

³⁰⁶ Kirschenmann, *Cultivating an Ecological Conscience*, 263.

³⁰⁷ Berry, *The Unsettling of America*, 37.

Kirschenmann, who is both a farmer and an agricultural academic, also points out the sometimes-conflicting values on land-use that European Christians brought over into the New World. On the one hand they felt called to use and develop the land to what they saw as its fullest potential (exercising dominion), and on the other hand they felt called to preserve and protect the land as a place of freedom and prosperity for many generations (exercising stewardship). These values continue to conflict today, argues Kirshenmann, even within the same person. The contrast between these two values is sometimes expressed in the conflict between private property rights, or a sense of entitlement, and stewardship of the land, or a sense of greater responsibility to God or to future generations for the gift of land.³⁰⁸

Stewardship is also tied to ownership of land, but in a different way. Paul Thompson, a philosopher of agricultural and environmental ethics, contends that stewardship in farming is primarily a selfishly motivated act.³⁰⁹ The farmer benefits directly from acting in a stewardly way. Farmers who own the land they farm logically have more incentive to look after their land than tenant farmers. He or she has a greater investment in the long-term health of the soil and surrounding ecosystem, especially if the farmer has aspirations to pass the farm on to succeeding generations, as is the case with a family farm. This self-interest in the farming context moderates the sense of entitlement that also tends to accompany an understanding of private land ownership.

The public is coming to expect more from farms than just food and fiber. Farms now also produce other goods that are recognized by citizens and consumers such as

³⁰⁸ Kirschenmann, *Cultivating an Ecological Conscience*, 250-251.

³⁰⁹ Thompson, *The Spirit of the Soil*, 74.

environmental benefits (including for example benefits to water and air quality, wind and erosion buffers, and pollinator and other wild species habitat), agri-tourism, and even energy production. Property rights are thus being balanced against wider social and environmental goods and the expectations of society at large.

The ability to practice good stewardship on farms is sometimes brought into question as farms increase in size and in their use of larger and more impactful technology. So long as farming methods allow farmers to maintain a direct connection with the landscape, soil, plants and animals they farm, they can still invest time and thought into meaningful stewardship practices. It is the quality of this connection with “the land” that is important in determining the extent and effectiveness of the stewardship that can be accomplished. Through modern industrial agriculture, humanity has ever-increasing control over aspects of farming that were uncontrollable in the past. New technologies and result in bigger crop yields per acre, greater dairy production per animal, and animals that fatten more quickly than ever before. As farming increases in scale and intensification, so too do the uncontrolled risks farming poses to humans and other surrounding species. With the increasing industrialization of farming, the relationships between farmers and the land change, as well as the relationships between farmers and eaters, and among rural and urban communities. The wider consequences of new farming technologies may not be immediately apparent. These are the issues that stewardship attempts to address.

4.1.3.2 Stewardship vs. Conservation (The question of Wilderness)

As was mentioned above, the question of use of nature is often a point of contention between agriculturalists and conservationists. Stewardship in agriculture is primarily

about sustainable use of nature. It is about managing certain areas of land and certain species of plants and animals in a way that provides a stable source of food and other benefits for humans. Farmers are thus primarily concerned with preservation of soil and water resources, the basis of their livelihood, while (often urban) environmentalists may be primarily concerned with preservation of wild species habitat and pristine areas for conservation. Farmers argue that agriculture makes room for the needs of human beings as part of nature, while at the same time doing so with an awareness that a balance of give and take must be maintained. Environmentalists argue for the preservation of nature based on its intrinsic value, or based on the recreational and aesthetic benefits it provides in a more pristine natural state.

Thompson points out that this apparent cross-purpose is founded in the religious notions of the role of humanity and the myth of the garden. If humans are primarily seen as gardeners of all of nature, as is sometimes the case in interpretations of stewardship, then the environmentalist agenda of preserving wild nature seems anathema.³¹⁰ On the one hand, the gardener need not garden the whole of creation, as expressed in other interpretations of the term above. Yet some suggest they may go hand in hand. James Lovelock, an independent scientist famous for his work on Gaia Theory, which postulates the earth as a self-regulating system, argues that more intensive farming methods allow greater production from smaller areas of land, making it possible to leave alone larger areas for conservation purposes.³¹¹

³¹⁰ Thompson, *The Spirit of the Soil*, 87-88.

³¹¹ James Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia: Why the Earth is Fighting Back—and How We Can Still Save Humanity* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 121.

Unlike some who are critical of stewardship as either too conservative an approach to the issues, or expressing attitudes of superiority to nature,³¹² I would argue that stewardship is an appropriate attitude especially with respect to domesticated animals, plants, and habitats. In the context of agriculture, where humans have developed close relationships to these particular species and in many cases also, landscapes, over a long period of time, a stewardship view reflects the role humans play with these particular species and semi-domesticated ecosystems, whereas it may not be an appropriate attitude in dealing with wild species and habitats. Furthermore, although stewardship of the domestic species of plants and animals is a key aspect, because most farming takes place on land that is inhabited by both domesticated and wild species, stewardship in agriculture has an important impact on those wild species as well. Conservationists and environmentalists are increasingly recognizing the importance of stewardship on land that is still in use for farming and other human needs. There are important areas where conservationists and farmers are increasingly finding common ground to allow them to work effectively together on environmental issues.

4.1.3.3 The Importance of Conservation within Farming

There are many ways that farmers and conservationists can and do cooperate. One model is the potential for balance between intensive agriculture and conservation of more pristine areas of wilderness mentioned above. Another model is choosing farming methods that allow for a greater diversity of wild species to exist alongside domesticated

³¹² Lovelock, "The Fallible Concept of Stewardship," 108.

species on farmland. Still another model is paying for environmental goods and services, including habitat for wild species, provided on farms.

Farming takes place on land that is considered managed by humans for human ends. While some farming takes place in more controlled environments, such as in greenhouses and enclosed barns, much farming takes place in less controlled environments, the open fields of the rural landscape. This rural landscape is a patchwork of different farms, some larger, some smaller. In some areas all the farms may focus on one or two commodities that are particularly well suited to the region. Other areas may allow for more diverse types of agriculture. In either case, farmers and conservationists alike are becoming more aware of the interaction between the domesticated species which are a form of planned biodiversity on the part of the farmer, and wild species, or unplanned biodiversity that also exist in the same landscape. These wild species may be perceived as beneficial, such as wild pollinators or beneficial microorganisms in the soil, or they may be perceived as detrimental, such as predatory species that damage crops or kill livestock. Other species are more neutral, or can become nuisance species. The relative degree of their nuisance status may also depend on their conservation status. An example would be the bobolink, a bird that nests in hayfields, and which is under the protection of the Endangered Species Act in Ontario. This bird is neither a predator, nor a beneficial species, but becomes a nuisance animal to farmers when conservation laws interfere with their ability to harvest their crops in a timely manner, as they wait for the bobolinks' eggs to hatch and the young birds to leave the nests.

Although conservation efforts have traditionally been focused on preserving pockets of undisturbed or natural wilderness, some, such as Perfecto, Vandermeer and

Wright, argue that the quality of the land, and especially the farmland, surrounding and separating such preserves is equally, if not more important.³¹³ They point out that the survival and health of any species at a larger regional or global level largely depends on the ability of members of that species to migrate from one suitable habitat to another. The traditional approach of selective wilderness conservation does not easily facilitate the necessary level of healthy migration patterns within species. Instead, these authors argue for a focus on the wild species or unintentional biodiversity that is possible within working agricultural land. They point out that differing farming methods allow for greater or lesser wild species diversity to co-exist within the farming landscape.³¹⁴ Thus, farming practices have a key role to play in maintaining a healthy matrix that allows for species migration, and thus sustains greater overall biodiversity in the wider regional ecosystem. From this argument it is clear that the stewardship practices of farmers, depending on the methods they choose and their attitude toward wild species that are part of their larger farming ecosystem, can have a significant effect on wider conservation efforts in the region, and even globally, especially for those species that migrate significant distances.

A good illustrating example of this can be seen in the reduced population of migrating monarch butterflies experienced recently in North America, which came to the media fore particularly in 2013. Some scholars are concerned that increasingly effective control of weeds through herbicide resistant crops has significantly reduced the amount

³¹³ Ivette Perfecto, John Vandermeer, and Angus Wright, *Nature's Matrix: Linking Agriculture, Conservation and Food Sovereignty* (Earthscan: London, 2009).

³¹⁴ Perfecto et al. *Nature's Matrix*, 196-198, 203-204.

of milkweed found in agricultural land, and thus has reduced the population of migrating monarch butterflies, which are entirely dependent on milkweed for breeding and survival. Since these butterflies migrate over long distances, the farming practices across North America have an effect on the migration and breeding potential of the population of these migrating butterflies as a whole.³¹⁵

At a more philosophical level, Wendell Berry has many things to say about the balance needed between the domestic and the wild in order to maintain healthy farms and healthy relationships more generally.

An enduring agriculture must never cease to consider, respect and preserve wildness. The farm can exist only within the wilderness of mystery and natural force. And if the farm is to last and remain in health, the wilderness must survive within the farm. That is what agricultural fertility *is*: the survival of natural process in the human order.³¹⁶

Thus, although wildness and wilderness are threatening to the farm, they are also what sustains the life-force on the farm. It cannot be totally contained and controlled without disastrous effects on the farm as well. Instead, for Berry, farming is about keeping culture and nature in a healthy balance, allowing the life-force, or the wildness, to be both

³¹⁵ CBC Radio One, *The Current*, Sept 27, 2013. "Have Monarch Butterflies Been Deposed?" Interview with Dr. Chip Taylor from University of Kansas. Paper forthcoming; Evelyn Boychuck, "Monarch Butterflies Threatened by GM Crops in the U.S., Study says," *Globe and Mail*, June 4, 2014; Emily Chung, "Monarch Butterfly Decline Linked to Spread of GM Crops," *CBC News*, June 4, 2014 <http://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/monarch-butterfly-decline-linked-to-spread-of-gm-crops-1.2665131>, accessed Aug. 5, 2014; D. T. Tyler Flockhart, J.B. Pichancourt, D. R. Norris, and T. G. Martin, "Unraveling the Annual Cycle in a Migratory Animal: Breeding-Season Habitat Loss Drives Declines of Monarch Butterflies," *Journal of Animal Ecology* (2014) in press.

³¹⁶ Berry, *Unsettling of America*, 130.

contained in fruitfulness, and sustained in flowing and moving within and beyond the limitations of culture.

Farmers cannot be too idealistic in their consideration of wild species on their farms, however. They can suffer losses to predation, weeds, and pests, or lower crop yields as a result of some practices intended to help wild species. Setting aside land as buffer strips, woodlots, or wetlands takes the land out of production for paying crops. This is why models such as payments for “environmental goods and services” has become another model for helping farmers to make these allowances, while also giving the farmer some financial compensation for the benefits these practices provide. In Ontario the initiative called Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) is based on this idea. This initiative is discussed in more detail in section 4.2.1.2 below.

4.1.4 Summary of Christian Stewardship in Theology and Agriculture

This first section of the chapter has focused on the adaptation in the use of the term stewardship to address environmental issues from within Christianity in response to the accusations, especially from White, that Christianity was largely responsible for the current ecological crisis. Tracing this development of the use of the term stewardship, both by environmentally conscious Christians, and increasingly by secular conservationists and farmers, all of whom use it with different environmental foci and goals, helps to map out the territory that is encompassed by the term “stewardship” in an environmental sense. From this it is easier to see the contexts from which the CFFO’s use of stewardship has come, but also easier to differentiate the CFFO’s use of the term from these other uses. All of these conversations are influential on the CFFO and its definition or use of the term stewardship. However, the CFFO does not neatly fit into these

conversations. The CFFO is not, strictly speaking, a Christian environmental organization. Nor is it a secular farm organization. Therefore Christian agricultural stewardship, as CFFO members define it and practice it, is a category unto itself, while still closely tied to Christian stewardship, and to agricultural stewardship. The CFFO is also not the only voice attempting to define Christian agricultural stewardship. Just as there is a spectrum of opinions within the CFFO, there are also other Christian farmer academics who have formulated different understandings of what Christian farming should look like in contemporary North America.

4.1.4.1 Stewardship in Christian Farming

Stewardship, with its roots in both farming culture and Christian tradition, seems a natural ethic for Christian farming. However, Christians do not agree on the meaning of stewardship, nor on what is demanded of farmers in applying the concept to contemporary farming. Thus the multifaceted nature of stewardship presents challenges to Christian farmers who attempt to practice it on their farms.

Wendell Berry, discussed already above, is a prolific and influential writer in terms of the ethical or theoretical ideas behind the concept of stewardship especially in relation to agriculture. Since he himself is both a farmer and a Christian, as well as a writer, he does write with an awareness of the practical issues in farming, and with a faith perspective. He does not, however, write explicitly with reference to biblical passages very often, but still has a Christian viewpoint infused in his work. Two other important writers who have specifically connected Christian faith, tradition, scripture and

agriculture are Gary Fick and Mark Graham.³¹⁷ All three of these writers have some practical familiarity with farming and rural culture as part of their writing on the connection between Christianity and agriculture. Interestingly, while both Fick and Berry discuss family farms and stewardship, Graham does not use either terms in his discussion of Christianity and farming. Both Graham and Fick attempt to look at the question of sustainable agriculture as connected with Christian faith. The similarities and differences even between these three perspectives illustrates that there are important points of connection, but also a range of interpretations that arise connecting Christian ethical principles with farming in contemporary North America.

The farmers within the CFFO are another good example of active Christians and active farmers who strive to connect farming with Christian ethical principles. The practical ways in which these two are connected again show a range of interpretation even within this relatively small organization, in a very particular area of North America; the farmable regions of the province of Ontario.

4.1.4.1.1 Practical and Theoretical

In terms of its practical application, theories of stewardship and the practice of stewardship are often not explicitly connected.

Links between the modern management-oriented usage of stewardship and the recently modernized ethical concept appear to be relatively weak. Thus few if any of the practical references draw on the ethical tradition of

³¹⁷ Fick, *Food, Farming and Faith*; Mark Graham, *Sustainable Agriculture: A Christian Ethic of Gratitude* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005).

stewardship, and similarly most of the ethical material stops short of exploring practical aspects of the concept.³¹⁸

Farmers interested in stewardship, and Christian farmers in particular, then, are left in the challenging position of determining for themselves how they will apply the ethical or the religious conception of stewardship in relation to their actual farm and farming practices. In some ways, however, the farmers would not have it any other way. Farmers like to practice voluntary stewardship, and like to be able to determine for themselves what works best on their farm, and in their particular economic, social, religious, and environmental situation. Since they are not commonly in the habit of discussing the theological aspects of stewardship in detail, their use of it reflects the feeling mentioned above that it does not need to be defined at length, since the main principles are well understood. However, it is clear that there are both shared understandings of some elements of what stewardship comprises, and also some points of contention or difference in understandings of the term as a Christian ethical principle applicable to contemporary farming. The term must, however, retain its flexibility and applicability to new situations, which has been one of the strengths of the idea, and has contributed to its wider use by so many within North America.

The two underlying motivations for human relationships with nature, the push for greater control, and the pull for greater connection, are evident in the various interpretations of dominion and stewardship within Christianity in particular. Scholars such as White, Merchant and Leopold, concerned about the contemporary treatment of

³¹⁸ Worrell and Appleby, "Stewardship of Natural Resources," 265.

the earth, looked back to Christian worldviews of dominion as foundational to many of our contemporary secular ways of relating to nature in Western industrial societies.

Dominion has, therefore, been the theological foundation of many aspects such as the development of science, the claiming of land, and the process of industrialization, all of which are tied to contemporary farming in North America.

On the other hand, stewardship has also been a long-standing theological response to relationships with nature, which is in some cases a moderation of dominion, and in other cases a much more dramatic step away from the notion of dominion. A stewardship mindset places humans on a special plane in a management role over nature, but on the other hand it shoulders humanity with the heavy responsibility to care for nature, to protect and sustain it into the future.

Evangelical theologians in the 20th century in particular have turned to the concept of stewardship to help them address environmental issues from within a Christian and biblically based perspective. Various elaborations of a “stewardship ethic” thus focus on passages from scripture as the foundation for their interpretation of how stewardship should be practiced in the contemporary world.

Stewardship is also applied in a somewhat different way in farming. Within farming agrarian values of the wide-spread ownership of land, close-knit vital rural communities, and environmentally responsible farming are all tied to the concept of agricultural stewardship. The question remains whether a stewardship ethic is strong enough to counter the current economic pressures placed on farmers by the increasingly industrial nature of agriculture.

4.2 Stewardship in Farming within the CFFO

Within the CFFO there is a great deal of common understanding of what stewardship is, and how it should be lived out in farming practices. Primarily, stewardship is understood as responsibility. Humanity has been given responsibility to care for and sustain creation by God, and humans, as stewards, are responsible first and foremost to God. This responsibility extends to land, plants, animals, family, communities, and humanity globally. Resources need to be used wisely in order to protect and sustain the fertility and health of nature and of humanity.

The economic pressures on farmers are pushing them to choose either to expand their farm operations in order to maintain farming as their primary source of livelihood, or to shrink them and to seek their livelihood elsewhere, while still farming part-time, or perhaps by leaving farming altogether. Some find a third economic option in different value chains, such as organic farming or supply management, that give greater assurance that the farmer can recover most or all of the cost of production from the marketplace. These pressures have pushed farmers in two ideological directions as well. One is toward the use of conventional farming technology and techniques to achieve greatest efficiency and produce food to sustain a growing global population. The other is to seek nature as a guide for farming techniques, and to emphasize the importance of the integrity of creation, and of maintaining a close connection to it through the production of food.

The characteristics of this separation of opinion or interpretation of the best or correct Christian relationship between humanity and nature indicates that the discussion within farming is quite different than the more urban discussion between different factions of green evangelicalism, for example. Farming has its own particular concerns

and circumstances that come out more clearly in the expression of the ideal relationship between humanity and nature through farming methods and practices.

4.2.1 Stewardship in the CFFO

Paterson argues that the understanding of stewardship in the Christian Farmers Federations began as primarily a dominion perspective, and developed into an earth-keeping perspective.³¹⁹ Based on my participant observation and qualitative interviews, I argue that in fact members of the CFFO reflect a range of views on stewardship and environmentally related agricultural issues, and that both the dominion and earth-keeping as well as other understandings of stewardship, are present among members.

While there remains a diversity of perspectives and practices of stewardship among individual farmers, the CFFO at the provincial level must find a middle path in its advocacy of agricultural policy to government and farmers at large. This becomes more of a challenge as perspectives and practices among farmers can be diverse, sometimes making it hard to find consensus or suitable compromise positions to put into policy statements. While some issues are more controversial, other issues gain support more easily. Because of this, most of the literature from the CFFO staff and provincial level of organization expresses a view of stewardship somewhere between a dominion and an earth-keeping view of stewardship in terms of its theological orientation.

Stewardship is an important foundation of the CFFO's approach to farming in a responsible Christian manner. At the provincial and district levels, CFFO leaders

³¹⁹ John Paterson, "Institutional Organization, Stewardship, and Religious Resistance to Modern Agricultural Trends: The Christian Farmers' Movement in the Netherlands and Canada," *Agricultural History* 75 (2001): 316.

encourage stewardship by working for suitable policies that protect quality farmland, and that give financial support to encourage farmers to exercise greater conservation and environmental practices on their farms, especially voluntarily.

Two key programs that the CFFO has promoted at a provincial level for many years are the Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) with the Ontario government, and the Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) program that is currently run independently in Norfolk County, and has been started in other counties as well. Both of these reflect the emphasis on voluntary participation and thus voluntary stewardship as mentioned above.

4.2.1.1 Environmental Farm Plan

The Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) is a program in Ontario, partially initiated by the CFFO, which encourages farmers to voluntarily make environmental improvements to their properties by helping to partially fund these projects. Most if not all of the farmers I interviewed had participated in the Environmental Farm Plan at least once on their farm.³²⁰ In this program farmers who participate in a workshop may choose to complete a workbook of environmentally related concerns on their farm. This workbook can also be peer-reviewed. With approval, projects undertaken on the farm to improve key aspects of environmental concern may be partially funded by the government through this program. Supplementing the cost of some of these changes can be a good incentive to help farmers make changes that are needed, and may allow them to do so sooner, considering the large investment required for some types of changes, such as manure storage, for example.

³²⁰ Some have been critical of the effectiveness of the Environmental Farm Plan, and the equitable distribution of funds is becoming increasingly problematic. See Alison Blay-Palmer, *Food Fears: From Industrial to Sustainable Food Systems* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008), 75-76.

The Environmental Farm Plan emerged from the cooperative work of the Ontario Farm Environmental Coalition (OFEC), which consists of participation from four farming organizations in Ontario: two general farming organizations, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) and the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario (CFFO), as well as the Ontario Farm Animal Council, and AGCare (Agricultural Groups Concerned About Resources and the Environment), and is implemented through the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (OSCIA).³²¹ Elbert van Donkersgoed himself was particularly important in the leadership behind the work that led to the EFP.

Under the new Ontario NDP government in the early 1990s there was increased interest within government in greening agriculture. Elbert van Donkersgoed describes the reaction among farm leaders that led to the establishment of the Environmental Farm Plan.

Elbert van Donkersgoed: You know, everybody, every department, every section of every ministry had a plan for greening agriculture. And most of the farm leaders were fairly, uh skittish would say mildly, were frustrated by the image [of agriculture] that was being created. Now I'm very comfortable with saying agriculture and the environment should be working together. We should be a plus. Agriculture should be a positive in the environment. So I ended up saying to the others [farm leaders], "Everybody's got a plan for fixing agriculture's environment problem. Why don't we have our own? Why don't we have our own agenda?" We all kind of looked at each other and we

³²¹ Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs, "Canada-Ontario Environmental Farm Plan." Found at <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/environment/efp/efp.htm>, accessed Jan. 7, 2015.

said, "We're meeting tomorrow." We met, and that was the beginning of the agriculture environmental agenda green booklet that we then wrote over the next 6 to 12 months. But the farm leadership, we met very regularly to write this document, and it was an interesting exercise within the farm community because out of that grew the Ontario Farm Environmental Coalition. ... And by the end of 1992, none of those groups within government that were going to fix agriculture continued to function. They all disappeared back into the woodwork, because the way to change agriculture's relationship to the environment became the agenda document and the Environmental Farm Plan. And we wrote this big document, this big binder with 22 modules in it that farmers were going to be asked to do as the planning process. And then we proposed to farmers, you gotta come out to a workshop, and then you need to do this, this planning document. And then in due time we also asked if farmers actually undertook concrete projects and government should step up and contribute financially to some of these concrete projects. And that Environmental Farm Plan concept has survived to this day, and it has gone national.³²²

A key aspect of the Environmental Farm Plan was that it was created and run by farmers themselves. This is important to many farmers who tend to prefer to innovate for themselves rather than be forced by legislation into compliance. It is important for farmers in the CFFO in particular both in the sense that this is a form of voluntary

³²² Personal Interview, Elbert van Donkersgoed.

stewardship on their part, and also in the sense that farmers are exercising sovereignty to self-regulate within their own sphere of expertise. Again van Donkersgoed explains this connection in more detail, noting that not only with the Environmental Farm Plan, but also with the earlier farm stewardship programs in the 1980s, the CFFO was arguing for these to be run by farm organizations themselves.

When they [two land stewardship programs] were first announced we said, “government, you should not deliver it.” We said this very strongly at Christian Farmers at that time, and this is part of the Reformational worldview that says, “people need to take responsibility for their own areas of life and do what’s good for their areas of life. They need to reclaim their areas of life for Christ, and for the Kingdom, and we should do that properly.” But that also means we need the controls, and broader society needs to trust us that we’re going to do a good job. Now if you want to do some oversight of whether or not we do a good job, we don’t have a problem with that. You can do some oversight if you like, but you should leave it to us to do the job right to begin with, and only if we flunk badly should you pull the rug out from under us. And so we started proposing in the early 80s that these kind of programs should be delivered by the farm community itself.³²³

In this case the CFFO and farmers generally were successful in convincing the government to allow the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association to run the land stewardship programs, and then later the Environmental Farm Plan.

³²³ Personal Interview, Elbert van Donkersgoed.

4.2.1.2 *Alternative Land Use Services – Norfolk, Grey and Bruce Counties*

Another project the CFFO participates in and promotes is the Alternative Land Use Services, or ALUS, which pays farmers to turn less productive farmland into wetlands, pollinator strips, or other forms of habitat for wild species. These are considered “environmental goods and services” for which farmers are paid annually for maintaining these areas. This project is currently running in Norfolk County, and is newly established in Grey and Bruce Counties as well as other areas in Ontario.³²⁴ The program is receiving a lot of positive attention. Similar projects also exist in other provinces.³²⁵ Funding for this program is not currently provided through government, but instead comes from donations and partnerships, often with conservation groups.

4.2.1.3 *Stewardship and Farming Methods*

The consistency among CFFO farmers in the key points they raise in their definition of stewardship indicates that there is a shared common basis of understanding the term. There is a strong belief in the importance of conservation and improvement of the quality of their farmland, and of proper care for their animals.

Most of the farms I visited for interviews, and through other participant observation opportunities, produce a mix of farming commodities on their farms, usually both animals, and crops (where crops may be for feed or profit). They use crop rotation, and many are able to incorporate manure back into their land-base to a greater or lesser

³²⁴ Ray Ford, “A Working Landscape: With Support from Ontario Nature and Other Conservation Groups, Farmers are Creating Habitats that Benefit Both People and Wildlife,” in *Ontario Nature Winter* (2012/2013): 18-23.

³²⁵ Similar projects can also be found in Prince Edward Island, Manitoba and Alberta to date. More details can be found at www.norfolkalus.com under the FAQ section (Dec. 13, 2011).

degree, either on their own farm, or by negotiating between neighbours. Some of these common stewardly farming practices may be a result of the hospitable growing conditions in (particularly southern) Ontario. Agriculture is the largest industry in Ontario at the present time, including production and processing.³²⁶ Ontario has a diverse agriculture industry, and because farmers are able to produce many different commodities and still find them profitable, it is common-place for farmers to have more than one money-making crop as part of their farm income. This means even conventional farmers, and even very large farms, will likely have both land based crops and animals, or will have neighbours who are either crop-focused or animal-focused where they are not, so that manure and land can be managed together. This is also aided by the Nutrient Management Act in Ontario. The crops that are possible, or those that are most emphasized, do differ significantly from county to county, however. Further north in areas like Rainy River and Thunder Bay, crops such as corn are harder or impossible to produce, whereas in the southern-most areas, conditions are warm enough to allow for significant fruit and vegetable production. The quality of soil, the number of frost-free days and average temperature, the amount of daylight hours, and the rainfall vary across the province, allowing for this diversity of crops. Because of this, general farming organizations, concerned not just with the issues of one commodity or another, have a key role to play in the farming sector in Ontario. At the same time, they have many different concerns to juggle in making recommendations to policy makers.

³²⁶ *Globe and Mail*, "A Snapshot of Canada's Food Industry," Tuesday, July 19, 2011.

Members of the CFFO said that good stewardship in farming means leaving the land in as good or better condition than when they received it. They also understand the land and animals in their care as entrusted to them, but as not truly belonging to them. They hold them as a sacred trust, being responsible to God. This means for them that farming must be about more than just the bottom line, about more than just higher yields for the sake of making more money. For some this means an emphasis on the importance of farming for a growing hungry population, while others might see this wider importance as including more equal emphasis on communities and nature as a whole.

However, as one farmer said in an interview, “probably more conflicts come from different ideas of what it means to be a farmer than from different ideas of what it means to be a Christian.”³²⁷ This becomes more evident in the different ways this basic understanding of stewardship is actually practiced through different farming techniques. The overall sense of responsibility that farmers have extends to many different levels, which farmers attempt to address through their differing farming methods.

4.2.2 Definitions of Stewardship

One of the more specific questions I asked in interviews was “What does stewardship mean to you?” From this question, and sometimes at other points in the interview, interviewees gave their own interpretations or definitions of stewardship. At many other points in the interview, they discussed issues that related to stewardship, but the information included here is only in reference to their specific definitions of stewardship.

³²⁷ Personal interview #10.

Many CFFO members defined stewardship with commonly repeated ideas. In defining stewardship, 13 interviewees directly connected stewardship with the importance of responsibility (using that term). Likewise 13 interviewees (not all the same as the 13 above) emphasized the importance of stewardship of the land in particular. Nine interviewees used the idea that everything really belongs to God as an important underlying principle upon which the idea of stewardship is based.³²⁸ Eight interviewees mentioned the importance of stewardship of animals in particular.³²⁹ Seven interviewees used phrasing that indicated that good stewardship was leaving something (especially the land) in as good or better shape than when it had been received. Likewise seven interviewees expressed stewardship as taking care of creation. Seven respondents also clearly connected the importance of stewardship to the benefits it yields for future generations or for others living in the local community. Five respondents directly connected land or environmental stewardship with financial stewardship, stating that these two go hand in hand, or that it is important to balance both of these in order to achieve good stewardship. No one discussed financial stewardship without also mentioning land stewardship. The four quotations below are some examples of short definitions that include one or more of these concepts together in a definition of stewardship.

³²⁸ Note here that some respondents used the wording that creation, or the land and animals in their care, were gifts from God. Unless they also clearly stated that these did not belong to them, but belonged to God, this idea of “gifts from God” is not included in the count of those who expressed the idea that these things given to them do not belong to them.

³²⁹ Based on some of the specific examples given, some emphasized domestic animals in this understanding of stewardship, while others emphasized wild animals, and some seemed to encompass both in the idea of stewardship of animals.

*Stewardship to me is more or less God has given this family this chunk of dirt, this chunk of ground and I, we are given the task to use it responsibly, and so that it is in good, as good or better shape when we leave it for the next generation.*³³⁰

*Stewardship first of the environment, stewardship of the land, and stewardship of animals, but also stewardship of your money.*³³¹

*Stewardship basically means you're responsible for the gifts that God gave you. You do not squander them. And the government is there to enhance that process, but cannot make it happen unless the individual is motivated towards stewardship in all areas of life. And that stewardship flows out of the fact that it's not ours. It's not ours. We're just here for a period of time to look after God's creation.*³³²

*To me [stewardship] means that we take care of God's creation to the best of our abilities, to the best of our God-given talents. That sums it up pretty well.*³³³

³³⁰ Personal Interview #2.

³³¹ Personal Interview #13.

³³² Personal Interview #11.

³³³ Personal Interview #12.

4.2.3 Understanding of Stewardship as Responsibility

Listening to members of the CFFO it is clear that for them stewardship is primarily about taking responsibility through a greater awareness of the network of relationships in which we live and work, and the effects our actions have on those around us within this web of relationships. Each person is entrusted with the care of those things within his or her influence. These include resources, land, animals, plants, and other humans. Thus through the practice of stewardship this responsibility is taken seriously, and humans are kept in right relationship with those around them, but most importantly with God, who has entrusted all of these things to human care.

From the responses to stewardship in the interview data that I analysed through NVivo, I have broken down the many areas of responsibility that CFFO members expressed as part of their practice of stewardship. The diagrams below help to illustrate the radiating web of responsibilities that farmers feel in their farming work.

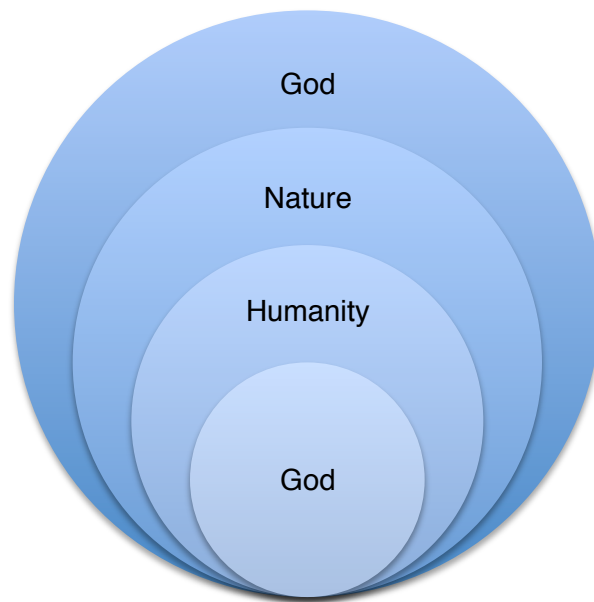


Fig. 4.1

Stewardship encompasses responsibility on three planes. First is responsibility to God, who is understood by members of the CFFO to be the true owner of all of creation. In this stewardship model, human beings are temporary caretakers of those things entrusted to them by God. This plane is foundational to the two others. Second, stewardship is responsibility to other humans, illustrated on the diagram 4.2 in the next section below. Third, stewardship is responsibility to nature or creation. The responsibilities to nature reflect a similar pattern to the responsibilities to humanity as is illustrated in diagram 4.3, and both circles are founded on and encompassed by the responsibility to God, as illustrated in the graphic 4.1 above.

4.2.3.1 Responsibility to Humanity

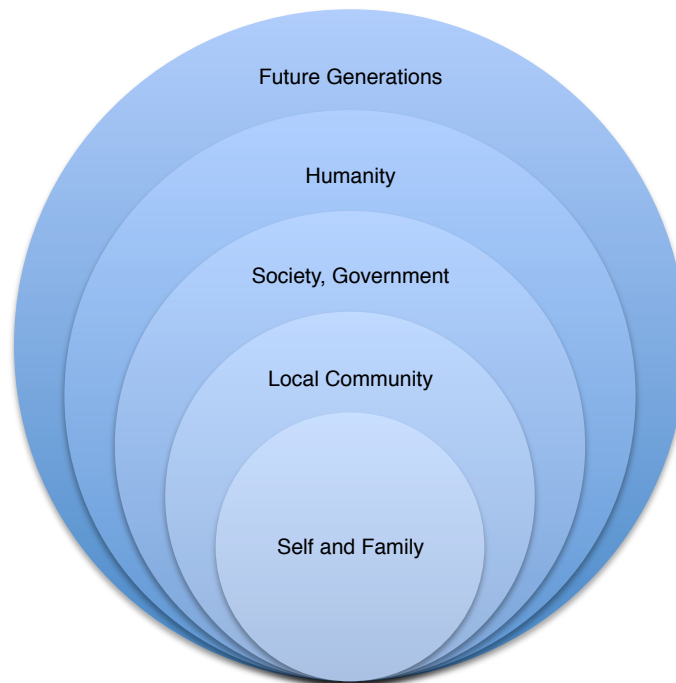


Fig. 4.2

The responsibility to humanity breaks down into different types of specific relationships and responsibilities. This diagram 4.2 illustrates the sense of responsibility that CFFO

members expressed on different levels to those other humans around them through their farming methods. First comes the responsibility to self and family to work and provide a living through farming. Farming also fosters good family relationships where family work closely together, where children are able to grow up in the environment of a farm, which is good for them primarily in two ways: that they are connected to nature, and also that they learn the value of a strong work ethic and strong sense of responsibility.

Second comes responsibility to the local community. This can be on many levels and in many different ways. For those farmers who grow food for local eaters, the amount and quality of food they produce is part of their responsibility to the local community. However, good stewardship for many farmers also means that they are involved with the local community, and contributed their time, and also their patronage to other local businesses, thus contributing to the prosperity of their local area, be that through church, local schools, local politics, or other local community engagement. Responsibility to local community, stretching into society as well, comes also from the impact farming techniques have on human health. This relates especially to the local community with issues that put residents who live near farms at risk, such as through waterways, which might expose humans to contaminants from farms.

A key example mentioned by several farmers that would illustrate this responsibility is the Walkerton water crisis of 2000. In the small town of Walkerton, Ontario, seven people died, and 2300 residents of the area were infected from “contamination of treated municipal water by *Escherichia coli* and *Campylobacter jejuni* bacteria” and where “a particularly deadly strain of *E. coli* ... found in the stomachs of

cattle was implicated in the most severe cases, and in all of the deaths.”³³⁴ Although the farmer in the Walkerton case was exonerated from blame, this water crisis illustrated for farmers the key importance of their responsibility to their neighbours, farming and non-farming, to be careful in their farming practices.

Third is responsibility to society, here used in the sense of a responsibility to a more abstract community, such as province or nation, to governments and the laws of the political jurisdictions in which they work, at either the provincial or federal levels. This is still a defined community, but much larger and more abstract than the local community, which would have a much more face-to-face, familiar character to it. Responsibilities here include participation in the processes of establishing agricultural policy, while at the same time acknowledging governmental authority, and following the laws once they are established. Farmers who produce commodities especially which are supply managed are held to responsibility for ensuring the food security of the population at this level, since they produce exclusively for the domestic market.

Fourth is responsibility to humanity on a global scale. Here farmers are responsible for using the arable land under their control to ensure the food security of humanity generally, and many farmers take this responsibility very seriously as well. In a world of a growing human population, with limited resources with which to produce food, farmers have an important role to play in ensuring the overall prosperity and security of all humanity. This is particularly true for those farmers producing commodities

³³⁴ Scott Prudham, “Poisoning the Well: Neoliberalism and the Contamination of Municipal Water in Walkerton, Ontario,” *Geoforum* 35 (2004): 344. For more details and analysis of the Walkerton crisis see Prudham, “Poisoning the Well,” 343-359; S. Harris Ali, “A Socio-Ecological Autopsy of the E. Coli O157:H7 Outbreak in Walkerton, Ontario, Canada,” *Social Science and Medicine* 58 (2004): 2601-2612.

which are, in Canada, primarily produced for the export market. This responsibility is also tied by some farmers to the value of food as the foundation for other forms of security and prosperity. Lack of access to food, these farmers point out, will lead to political instability, so farmers have an important role to play in helping to ensure food security as a foundation to political security and cultural prosperity. At the same time, how the food they grow is distributed is not within their control, so other farmers point out that there is enough food to go around, in the sense that they, the farmers *are* doing their job. The problems happen in the distribution of the food that lead to the political unrest that occurs in areas where food security is a problem.

Finally is responsibility to future generations. My interview data showed that this may be as specific as the next generation of their own family who will (they often hope) take over and make a living from the same land that was farmed by the previous generation. It may be as generalized as the importance of protecting farmland for future production, both in the sense of keeping it as farmland, and in the sense of maintaining its fertility for future use, not mining the soil, for example. Stewardly farmers are not, of course, producing food for eaters who are not yet here, but they are protecting or improving the foundation of fertility that will allow more food to be produced from the same land in the future. All of this together expresses some of the responsibilities of stewardly farming expressed as responsibilities to other human beings.

4.2.3.2 Responsibility to Nature

A similar diagram illustrates the gradually widening sense of responsibility to different elements in nature. Some of the responsibilities here are parallel to the responsibilities to humans, while others take on a somewhat different characteristic. The needs of humans

and nature are sometimes congruent, but sometimes they require compromise of one to make allowances for the other.

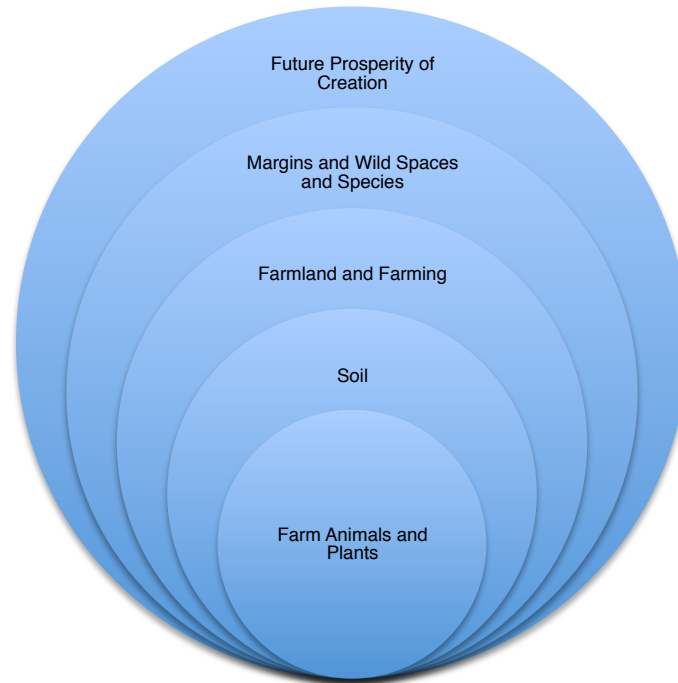


Fig. 4.3

In this case the closest sense of responsibility is to the actual animals, plants, and land (of which the biggest concern is soil quality) that is immediately under the farmers' control.

Second there is a sense of responsibility to the land that farmers collectively control, as to how it is used, and protecting it as a resource in itself on which humans collectively depend. The CFFO as a General Farm Organization has long been particularly concerned that farm policy protect farmland for farming, and especially that the highest quality farmland in any given region or county should be protected, even if it is not the highest quality farmland on a province-wide measure.

Third there is the question of the margins of farmland, and the wild species that surround or are beyond farmland. This domain includes the questions of conservation and the use of land primarily for the benefit of non-human species, rather than for human benefit primarily. It also includes the importance of water and waterways that pass through the farm as well.

Finally my interviewees made it clear that farmers have responsibility to protect the future fertility and prosperity of nature or creation as a whole.

4.2.3.2.1 Attitudes to Wild Nature and Conservation in the CFFO

The attitude of farmers to “nature” as a whole, and to the distinction between the domesticated and the wild species they deal with as farmers can be quite striking. On the one hand I found some farmers who express views toward nature that call for a great deal of control and human intervention, especially for human benefit. These views as expressed by farmers seem to be moderated somewhat from similar views expressed among others who do not have daily interaction with nature in a rural or wild context.³³⁵ On the other hand are farmers I interviewed who are very concerned for their impact on the environment, especially through their daily decisions as farmers. Even these farmers, however, may hold an attitude, which seems to be prevalent among farmers, that good

³³⁵ Eg. Kearns, “Green Evangelicals,” 163-164. Kearns describes the perspective of dominion from within the Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation as expressing a strong sense of entitlement, and also denying intrinsic value to nature. She writes that “the Cornwall Declaration reinforces the secular wise-use movement’s emphasis on the continuing improvement of the environment through human technology and on the abundance of resources, seen as God’s gift to humanity, put here for human utility.” There may be many factors that could help to explain why interviewees would not express a sense of entitlement as strongly as this, or why they might have more concern for moderation in use of technology, especially in farming, including urban vs. rural, United States vs. Canada, and also the differences among evangelical denominations, in the case of the CRC in particular, in their concern for “this worldly” problems as opposed to focus on personal salvation, for example. The theology of sphere sovereignty gives a strong “this worldly” focus to many in the CRC.

farming is clean farming, and that the “messiness” of wild species should be controlled and eliminated as much as possible. Even if they don’t hold to this attitude entirely, they still use the language of the “messiness” of nature, especially in the face of farmers who may disagree with the value they place on the balance between messy wildness in contrast to cleanliness and control.

Conversation about stewardship, and indeed all issues, within the CFFO happens primarily at two levels: the staff and the membership. On the first level are the staff and to some extent the volunteer executive (particularly at the provincial level). Those in this group of people, while usually coming from a farming background, have also built their skills in research, writing, and other academic tasks as well, and so they bring different perspectives and expertise to bear on the issues of stewardship. This group also spends a great deal of time discussing issues with government, and thus have developed clearly articulated formulations of their views on important issues. What is written in the CFFO publications may reflect common opinion in the CFFO, but it may also challenge members to move beyond the common understanding or commonly held opinion, and nudge them to consider other points of view and opinions. This is characteristic not only of the CFFO publications, but also of the workshops that the CFFO staff and leadership prepare for members.

Second is the level of the members themselves. Some members are more active than others, as one might expect. For those members who do actively participate, be it locally or in provincial council meetings, most are still actively engaged in farming issues. Although some may be less involved in the CFFO in particular, they may be more involved in other areas such as other farming organizations, or even local politics. The

wider membership represents a diversity of farmers, but they must all be actively farming to be members of the organization. On some issues especially, a spread of opinions among the membership is evident. On other issues, there may be more common ground.

The differences in opinion on wild species in particular can be seen in the three examples below: first, in the opinions expressed by Charlotte McCallum in an article in one of the CFFO past publications, *Earthkeeping Ontario*, and second, in the opinions of two farmers during interviews. Charlotte McCallum, a regular contributor to *Earthkeeping Ontario*, specifically discusses wild species' place on the farm in her article, and looks at not only weeds, but also at wider attitudes toward "wild species" among farmers and non-farmers alike. She concludes her article by saying:

Today, environmental initiatives in Ontario's farming areas include attempts at small-scale conservation—along hedgerows and field boundaries, along highways. Even in many front yards of urban dwellers, the banality of the homogeneous, chemical-laden lawn is challenged by those with an alternative vision to diversify and naturalize these spaces. I find it somewhat sad, then, to see references in the farm press to efforts to conserve or rehabilitate patches of natural vegetation on farmlands, stream courses, wetlands or along highway corridors as allowing an untidy "mess" to thrive.

Can opposing perspectives be brought together in a wider fashion? Surely in this era of regular surplus and overabundance of food production, there is

enough space to go around—to give the “wild” a place on the farm too—just because it is right.³³⁶

Farmers with whom I spoke also expressed this attitude of wild nature as “messy” while still seeing the importance and value of leaving a bit of this “mess” on their property. Sometimes this “mess” needed to be defended against the consternation of others, be that family members, or neighbours, or just an imagined “other” who might stand in judgment. One farming wife outlined her view of stewardship saying:

***Wife:** Stewardship means to me, like other than farming, you know little things like not littering even, and then it goes all the way to big things like, yeah, the importance of looking after the land. Even that mess behind our pond, I want to keep it there because it’s a natural habitation. I told him [her husband] ‘you’re not allowed to clean that up because it might look a little messy, but there’s all kinds of things living in there that might need to live somewhere, right? Like ducklings, ducks, and geese, and what else is there?’*

***Husband:** Turtles?*

***Wife:** Turtles. There’s turtles and now, there’s that bird, the blue heron. There’s always a blue heron by the pond too.³³⁷*

While she clearly sees the value of leaving habitat for wild species in this area on their farm, and while she clearly enjoys the wild species that come to this pond, and is aware of the diversity there, she still expresses this importance with the attitude that it is in fact “messy.” Furthermore, she was somewhat self-conscious about having expressed this

³³⁶ Charlotte McCallum, “Weeds or Wildflowers?” in *Earthkeeping Ontario* 11:4 (2001): 20.

³³⁷ Personal Interview #10.

concern on the record. She interrupted the interview a few minutes later to ask, “*So, when I’m talking about the blue heron, is that going to be recorded and put in an article?*”

After explaining to her that I was not sure what would be quoted, and I would have to wait and see how the important themes emerge, she replied, “*People might think I’m a bit of a fruit, but...okay.*”³³⁸ Her reflection back on her own earlier comment shows that she is concerned about how she might be perceived by others for intentionally allowing these species on her farm. This is likely because her opinion in favour of protecting these messy areas of the farm for the benefit of wild species may not be shared by others in her social circle.

Another farmer expressed his own concerns in a similar manner. Again, the attitude of wild spaces and species as “messy” is expressed along with a concern that there are benefits to the mess or that the costs of clean may be too high. This farmer contrasts both the former and the following generation’s attitude to “neat vs. messy” farming with his own attitude, saying that both his father, and his daughter and her husband lean more toward the “neat and clean” style of farming, in contrast to his concern for sustainability and the impacts of what that sort of perfection costs, especially to the environment.

S.M.A.: So your methods, emphasis on sustainability, is that significantly different from the methods that your father used for example when you were growing up?

³³⁸ Personal Interview #10.

Farmer: I think what I have to admit, when I think, my daughter and her husband are much more, are a bit more, and this is not negative, is they're less prone to taking risk, less idealistic about being sustainable, and more concerned that everything is done properly, timely, neatly, the rows are straight, everything looks, you know, everything's... So I have to admit, I mean people will say, "you know your desk is a mess, you're a bit sloppy with how you run everything," because that's my style. My style is not being a perfectionist, and that's why I say, the perfectionist in [sustainability] may have some weeds in his field, and that's okay. I don't care about a few weeds. My daughter doesn't like weeds. But if that happens, if you become too hard on the weeds, you become, you start having higher inputs, it still may pay, but is it as sustainable as before? ... And that is a delicate area that we have to have give-and-take. So I have to give also. [On the other hand] we try to do tillage, I think, and [my daughter and her husband] are totally onboard with this, to do tillage where we leave the refuse on top, for example. That, I mean, I used to say, "well, let's not even bother tilling in the fall, we just till in the spring when we plant," but they want to till in the fall? Okay, let's leave the junk on the top so there's no erosion or less wind erosion and water erosion. ... There's lots of ways that we are on the same page. I mean there's no doubt about that. But I think for the younger generation it's a little bit more, my dad is also very proper, everything neat and clean, the rows had

*to be straight as I said, no weeds allowed in the field. You go out and pull them out. That [presence of weeds] doesn't bother me a bit.*³³⁹

This view of wild species, including “weeds” as well as other types of neutral or nuisance species, is not uniform, even within families, and not even necessarily from one generation to another. Some may see greater importance in allowing space for wild species, while others do not. Those who do must defend or argue in favour of their decisions within the context of an attitude of wild spaces and species as messy, which also implies chaotic. Some of the battle of the farmer to control chaotic nature, to wield a battle against nature for human survival, is still found in the language here. This is also evident in the opening paragraph of the article by McCallum quoted above, and in the following comment she makes:

It is well known that farming can be one of the most environmentally damaging of humankind's activities. The act of producing an economically competitive crop from the land is often seen as a virtuous battle against nature itself. Natural plants are normally regarded as so many ‘weeds’ to the farmer, especially when poisonous. When allowed to proliferate, they do indeed threaten the highly bred, genetically altered and pampered descendants of other wild plants which we now cultivate for food and fibre. The war on weeds, once waged by hoe and cultivator, has escalated to a biochemical onslaught rivaling the attack on household germs and body ailments encouraged by the pharmaceutical industry and its advertisers. In agriculture

³³⁹ Personal Interview #13.

the war on weeds is virtue enough to justify the genetic manipulation of food plants to survive the chemical deluge even though the real beneficiary of the use of agri-chemicals has yet to be determined.³⁴⁰

Clearly more than just the agenda of the “war on weeds” is in question here in this short commentary by McCallum. However, she is pushing the reader to consider the wider influences, and the wider costs of such a war, and of such an attitude toward nature, of which farms and farming are still a part, even if the relationship between the domesticated plants and the wild ones seems far removed.

This overarching theme of the “messiness” of nature, commonly viewed among farmers as problematic, is expressed even by those within the CFFO who see the importance and value of the wild species living within the farming landscape, and being allowed space and conditions to thrive alongside the domesticated species for the wider benefit of soil, fertility, and the environment at large. The broader discourse around the messiness of nature indicates that the conversation in favour of conservation within farming is fraught with some tension, even though many farmers are concerned about conservation issues beyond the economic costs and benefits to their farm businesses.

4.2.3.3 Responsibility of Society in Stewardship

The responsibility for stewardship of the environment is not solely the burden of farmers, however. Even within agriculture, the wider society has a role to play in supporting farmers in their work as stewards on their farms. The model of payment to farmers for environmental goods and services on which the ALUS project is based is founded on the

³⁴⁰ McCallum, “Weeds or Wildflowers?” 20.

idea of broader societal support for the stewardship farmers undertake for the benefit of all in society. Likewise the government support that partially funds projects through the Environmental Farm Plan could be said to work on the same principle.

Elbert van Donkersgoed in his vision of stewardship emphasizes this wider societal responsibility not only for directly supporting farmers in their stewardship work, but also for the broader social context in which farmers work to achieve better stewardship. In the extended quote below he discusses the balance needed between individual stewardship best achieved through familiarity with the thing (especially land) being stewarded, but also the important role society plays in the context and broader relationship of support for that stewardship as well. The theme of fairness, and fair price, discussed in Chapter 3 above, comes across in his discussion of stewardship here as well.

See, the view of stewardship that I've worked with, coming out of this Reformational worldview, says that stewardship is the land managers, landowners, not necessarily identical land managers and landowners, is a responsibility of the land manager, landowner, but there can easily be times in which you can't expect the land manager-owner to shoulder all the burden by themselves. Because society creates patterns, and patterns is the best word, society creates patterns that individuals cannot be expected to stand up against all by themselves. And the best example that there is a limit to the individual stewardship is the whole land use question. Can we go to the individual and say, "you can't, you shouldn't be selling your great farmland to the developer"? Or, "you shouldn't be chopping off an acre for retirement, or for a house for your son-in-law." To put that burden solely on

the individual, whereas there's this pattern in society that offers a pile of money for a last crop of houses, as opposed to a crop of corn in a given year.

Then you can't put that burden on the individual. There's a point at which you have to take stewardship responsibility as a society.

So in the thinking that I've brought over the years to CFFO is that there's a clear area in which we have to take the stewardship responsibility to society.

On the other hand, there's also some clear areas where the stewardship responsibility is best off with the individual who knows the land. And there's the key. If you know the land, if you've taken time to know the land, who better to know what it needs? Now, knowing the land means testing the soil, it means knowing its history, it means, and today you can track what you produced the year before with your, you can put a GPS on your combine and you can have your combine track exactly how much is coming off certain parts of the field, and you can feed the field accordingly the following spring. So there's, there is a possibility of stewardship on the part of the individual, but I am, I don't ever want to put all the burden on the individual.

There is a shared, there's a very strong sense in my concept of stewardship that society has to do its part, the individual has to do his part. If society doesn't do its part you can't expect the individual to be very successful with their part no matter how committed they are. And then if we're asking the individual to take good care of the quality of the soil, but then we turn around and we import cheap stuff from wherever in the world, and we don't pay a fair price, well that erodes the individual's ability to be a steward.

I've always worked with saying that stewardship is always in a context of how well society is prepared to do its side. And society at some points is into ideological patterns or other kinds of patterns that simply make it very difficult for the individual to do good stewardship. The individual may not be able to afford to put everything back if in fact society has simply said, "oh we'll just buy it from wherever happens to be cheaper right now and we won't establish any long-term relationships." So there's an ongoing tension with that because of the interplay of the larger society's sometimes, let's say careless attitude to its stewardship responsibilities.³⁴¹

Society thus has responsibility to farmers in many ways, from the influence of the economic context and regulations on land use and value, to the shopping choices of eaters and the relationship or lack of relationship this fosters with farmers, local and global. Aspects such as fair price for well-produced food, and other forms of wider societal support for good farm stewardship, are all part of the balance of responsibility that both society and farmers share for the overall stewardship that can happen within agriculture.

4.2.4 Different Understandings of Stewardship

Having looked at the broader ways in which members of the CFFO define stewardship, and also at the many relationships and responsibilities that they encompass within their understanding of stewardship, it is important also to look at ways in which members differ in their interpretation of stewardship. While there is a very strong common

³⁴¹ Personal Interview, Elbert van Donkersgoed.

grounding in terms of what stewardship means, there is less agreement in terms of how stewardship should be practiced.

As mentioned above, others have made categorizations to differentiate between different Christian responses to environmental problems. Stewardship fits into these categorizations. Theological interpretations of the rights and responsibilities of stewardship are important. However, they are not the only, or even the most important, aspect of differentiation when it came to the responses of the farmers I interviewed. I did find the work of two authors in particular, Laurel Kearns and John Paterson, useful in parsing out the differences in interpretation and application of the concept of stewardship to environmental issues by the Christians I interviewed. I also had to move beyond the distinctions that Kearns and Paterson make in order to more fully explain the contrasts between certain approaches to stewardship in farming among CFFO members.

4.2.4.1 Kearns' Categorizations of Evangelical Environmentalism

Laurel Kearns, a sociologist of religion, has focused in particular on Christian responses to environmental issues. She categorizes three types of response among Christians (considered broadly) within the United States, including a Christian stewardship ethic, an eco-justice ethic, and a creation spirituality ethic.³⁴² Kearns' Christian stewardship ethic is most closely associated with evangelical Christian responses to environmental issues, being based on reinterpretation of scripture, especially Genesis 1:26-28, and emphasizing the call to "take care of and protect (but not to rule or perfect, as in older interpretations

³⁴² Kearns, "Saving the Creation," 56, 58-62.

of the passage) the Creator's creation."³⁴³ Kearns also notes herself that this perspective has been particularly influenced by members of the Reformed Church of America.³⁴⁴

Kearns' focus has been on environmental activism, particularly among evangelical groups, and usually has an urban focus.³⁴⁵ More recently the issue of climate change has been a particular dividing point among evangelical Christians in their response to environmental issues. Kearns describes two groups within the larger evangelical response, one holding on to the term "stewardship" in what she has called "wise-use stewards" and the other she has termed "creation-care evangelicals." Where the second group argues for the importance of climate change as an environmental issue, the first group denies the significance of climate change. Some of the specific groups that Kearns describes as belonging to the "Christian stewardship ethic" in 1996 belong in their current iterations to what she describes as falling under "creation-care evangelicals."³⁴⁶ There is a strong connection also to some of the same ideas of moderation of scriptural interpretations of dominion between Kearns' category of a "Christian stewardship ethic" and what Paterson describes in his category of "earthkeeping."

³⁴³ Kearns, "Saving the Creation," 58.

³⁴⁴ Ibid, 59. See also Laurel Kearns, "Noah's Ark Goes to Washington: A Profile of Evangelical Environmentalism," *Social Compass* 44 (1997): 349-366.

³⁴⁵ Characteristic of both articles cited above, and also Matthew B. Immergut and Laurel Kearns, "When Nature is Rats and Roaches: Religious Eco-Justice Activism in Newark, NJ," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 6 (2012): 176-195.

³⁴⁶ The groups mentioned in both cases include the Au Sable Institute, and the Evangelical Environmental Network. See Kearns, "Saving the Creation," 59, and Laurel Kearns, "Green Evangelicals," in *The New Evangelical Social Engagement*, ed. Brian Steensland and Philip Goff (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 158.

While some of the overarching patterns and differences described by Kearns are evident in the two categories I describe below, there are also elements of Kearns' descriptions of these two categories that seem more characteristic of the primarily urban and American evangelicals she is studying—different from the Canadian and rural farming Christians I have been studying. In particular, she notes, for example, that those she categorizes as “creation-care evangelicals” are concerned with issues such as “species extinction, conservation, pollution, land, water and ecosystem degradation, waste, mountaintop removal, energy use and climate change.”³⁴⁷ In this sense they are closely akin to other mainstream environmentalists, and largely express urban environmental concerns.

The Christian farmers in my study are not self-defined environmentalists, but do have particular environmental concerns and agendas in their work. This is an important point of differentiation for the sake of categorization. Because of the particular work that they do, the CFFO as an organization is generally concerned with protection of farmland for farming, protecting and improving soil quality, and protection and controlled use of water resources and water systems. They are leery of accusations of poor treatment of farm animals by animal rights or animal welfare activists, and can be apprehensive of legislated protection of wild species, especially those that may cause predation or crop damage problems, or those for which protection practices directly interfere with farming practices.

³⁴⁷ Kearns, “Green Evangelicals,” 158.

4.2.4.2 *Paterson's Two Categories of Stewardship: Dominion and Earthkeeping*

Paterson's research, however, does focus specifically on farming Christians, and even on Dutch farming Christians in particular, giving it a different emphasis and context in which the concept of stewardship is understood and applied. In his analysis of stewardship, he divides the concept into two poles on a spectrum, which he calls "dominion" and "earthkeeping" or just "keeping." The key distinctions he draws between these two are, first, that a dominion perspective emphasizes careful management of resources in how they are used and consumed, but not in how they are produced or acquired. On the other hand, earthkeeping emphasizes that both production and consumption require moderation, and should give consideration to the wider impacts that they create. Second, he notes that a dominion perspective maintains the notion of a hierarchy of beings, thus making it more anthropocentric, and also in some cases more androcentric or patriarchal than an earthkeeping perspective. By contrast, an earthkeeping perspective emphasizes the intrinsic value of non-human beings and the rest of creation beyond usefulness to humans. He notes a greater interest in human justice issues as well within an earthkeeping view. Third, Paterson notes a stronger interest in economic issues within dominion in contrast to a more ecological concern within earthkeeping.³⁴⁸

A dominion perspective exhorts the importance and permission of use. Notably, Paterson mentions specifically the passage from Matthew 25:14-30, often called the "parable of the talents," as interpreted in support of a dominion perspective to "use what

³⁴⁸ John Paterson, *Geography and Religion, Agriculture and Stewardship: The Practice of Agricultural Stewardship in The Christian Farmers Federations of Canada* (University of British Columbia: PhD Thesis, 1998), 48-62. A very similar description but somewhat condensed also appears in Paterson, "Conceptualizing Stewardship in Agriculture," 45-56.

has been given to them.”³⁴⁹ In the differentiation that Paterson has given here, the earthkeeping perspective is really a moderation of the dominion perspective, which gives greater value to nature as a whole. He places earthkeeping in the middle between dominion, which he calls a “shallow” environmental response, and deep ecology.³⁵⁰

These characteristics were helpful to me as a starting point in teasing out contrasts between different interpretations of stewardship within the contemporary CFFO. I began with these categorizations in my first attempts to divide my interview responses on the concept of stewardship into categories. However, I found that they were not sufficient to fully distinguish between or to encompass the perspectives found in my interview data.

I found immediately that primarily organic farmers did not fit into the definitions of stewardship given within either of the two categories from Paterson. Most specifically, there seemed to be a certain range missing that went beyond what Paterson described in his “earthkeeping” perspective. I began by taking the two categories that Paterson defined as a spectrum, and extended it out further, by adding a third category which I called at the time “organic” to encompass some of what I heard, especially from organic farmers.³⁵¹ However, this did not fully address the expressions of stewardship or the methods of practicing it that I found from the interview data from this research. Also, although his description of the dominion perspective is more useful in describing or categorizing some

³⁴⁹ Paterson, *Geography and Religion*, 55.

³⁵⁰ Paterson, *Geography and Religion*, 56-57.

³⁵¹ Organic is a term used for a defined and controlled method of agriculture, which also can correspond to certain approaches to human-nature relationships in agricultural practices. The organic movement had not yet gained the momentum that it currently enjoys at the time of Paterson’s work, which probably explains why he did not have to account for it as much in his own research. However, the term “organic,” unlike the terms “dominion” and “earthkeeping,” is not a theologically based term, and so it does not fit well within the spectrum he created.

of the data from my interviews, I felt some detail and important aspects and emphasis are missing. Although I thought at first that I would be adding a third perspective, and thus expanding the spectrum he started, I found later that I was still working with two rather than three clear perspectives, but that they were articulated somewhat differently than Paterson articulates them above. I have therefore created a new spectrum to describe the differences I found among CFFO farmers.

While these ethics or perspectives I categorize show patterns in the responses that I found, and show some clear connections and points of difference, or different characteristics, not all farmers clearly fit into one or another of these categories. Not only are they a spectrum of perspectives, such that one person may fit in between “ideal types” of each perspective, but some farmers also did not clearly fit any category. This spectrum especially illustrates the spread of opinion or polarity between those who advocate for particular farming methods, and illustrates an important aspect of interpretations of stewardship where conflict is evident. As is illustrated above, there are many other aspects of the interpretation of stewardship that show significant agreement or consensus among farmers. Those farmers who are not especially invested in the issues brought out in this aspect of the debate may, therefore, not fit into either of these categories.

Those farmers who most clearly expressed the characteristics of the two perspectives that I outline are indeed passionate about the religious, social and environmental significance of their connection between what stewardship means in their religious worldview, and the effect that their farming practices then have on the world, human and non-human, around them.

The perspectives described below clearly reflect the rural and agricultural focus of those expressing them. The biblical passages they may choose to discuss, the issues that are uppermost in their minds, and their often very practical grappling with the balance of environment and economics are a result of their work as farmers, and their placement in a rural setting. Farmers have a very practical connection, through their work, that requires them to put the ideals of their worldview to the test in real life situations. The principles these farmers bring from the perspective of their faith challenges other farmers around them to consider farming issues from a different perspective. At the same time, the practical realities of the farming industry often present challenges for farmers to consider from the perspective of their religious worldview. In some cases, compromises must be made in order to survive as farmers, particularly economically, while they continue to work towards the ideal they would like to see happen on their own farms, and in farming as a whole.

4.2.5 Two Key Approaches to the Relationship of Humans and Nature

In discussing the relationship between humans and nature, especially through farming work, interviewees expressed many different ideas. Overwhelmingly, they expressed a sense of responsibility, to many different parties, which is achieved primarily through taking responsibility to carefully manage all that they have within or under their care or control. This emphasis on responsibility is not contrary to what Paterson described above. However, my own research data showed different points of emphasis, as well as greater overall emphasis on the varieties of responsibility connected with stewardship.

As was mentioned earlier, conflicts or tension in the CFFO occur primarily around issues of farming. This is no less the case with tension or differences in

interpretation of stewardship; the main differentiator surrounds preferences for particular farming methods. At the present moment, the most contentious technologies and techniques are genetic modification, use of chemical pesticides and herbicides, as well as to some degree chemical fertilizers in contrast with other methods of renewing soil fertility. There is a spectrum of interpretation of stewardship which extends from those who advocate imitating and maintaining the integrity of creation, to those who advocate developing and responsibly using creation.

Paterson noted an attitude of dominion, and even in some cases of domination, in the organizational literature of the CFFO of the 1970s and 80s in his study of the Christian Farmers' organizations.³⁵² Although Paterson argued that more recently these attitudes of domination especially, but also dominion had turned to an attitude of earthkeeping within the CFFO, I have not found that the dominion attitude has disappeared from the CFFO in my own research. Some interviewees very clearly expressed the importance of human dominion in the relationship between humans and nature, especially as lived out in agricultural work. Some of the CFFO literature, and also some of the invited speakers to CFFO events, express an attitude of dominion, while others express instead an attitude akin to what I will describe below as imitation of nature.³⁵³ My results did not demonstrate as clear a progression from one perspective to

³⁵² Paterson, "Institutional Organization," 315-316.

³⁵³ Examples from within CFFO literature will be discussed below. Two speakers at recent CFFO Annual Conventions illustrate these differing theological perspectives. First, Daniel Salatin (son of Joel Salatin, who spoke at the Annual Convention in 2007) spoke at the 2009 Annual Convention. He clearly expressed a theological perspective in line with what I have described below as an attitude to imitate and maintain the integrity of creation. Salatin argued in favour of domesticated farm animals eating and living as they were created to do, by mimicking patterns in nature through alternative farming methods. The afternoon speaker at the 2013 Annual Convention was Dr. Nelson D. Kloosterman. In contrast he clearly expressed a

another, and instead demonstrate that these perspectives continue to exist in tandem and in tension within the CFFO.

There is some important overlap between what Paterson described as a dominion perspective of stewardship, and the first perspective I found in my own research. Instead of using the theological concept of dominion to describe this particular perspective however, I have chosen to describe this as *stewardship as human development and responsible use of nature*. This is in part because I found both the theological idea of dominion *and* the moderated “earthkeeping” perspective advocated by those who espoused this perspective as I have defined it. This perspective is primarily defined by belief in the value of modern technological innovations for greater control in agriculture as useful and beneficial ways to practice agricultural stewardship. This perspective emphasizes the use of science and research to develop nature, and to use nature for primarily human benefit, based on the understanding that human beings are the most important part of the created world. This perspective is also particularly utilitarian in nature, emphasizing the importance of efficiency in order to make the greatest benefit available to the greatest number of people with the best management of resources.

In the case of the other pole of the spectrum of interpretation of stewardship, Paterson’s description of earthkeeping was primarily a moderation of the theological perspective of dominion. I found that the primary differentiator between the perspectives I described was the CFFO farmers’ attitude toward various current farming techniques and technologies. These methods were, however, clearly tied to religious calling and

perspective of the importance of dominion, and the hierarchy of created beings with humanity at the top of the hierarchy, as part of his theological understanding of agricultural stewardship.

responsibility, and emphasized different theological distinctions than those that Paterson teased out with his two categories.

I heard many interviewees express ideas that creation has a certain given integrity to it, being perfect, ordered or balanced from its very beginning, and that humans are responsible to protect that original integrity, whenever and as much as possible, because creation was and is good. It is a gift to us from God for which we are responsible. This perspective emphasizes the importance of the integrity and goodness of creation, not as developed by humans, but as given by the Creator. An important part of this perspective on the relationship between humans and nature is the call by those expressing this perspective to attempt to imitate nature in their farming methods, which may include allowing farm animals to behave as much as possible in the ways they would behave in nature. This may also mean attempting as much as possible to mimic, in the farm ecosystem, patterns or cycles that are found in larger natural ecosystems. It is because of this that I termed this perspective *a call to imitate and maintain the integrity of creation*.

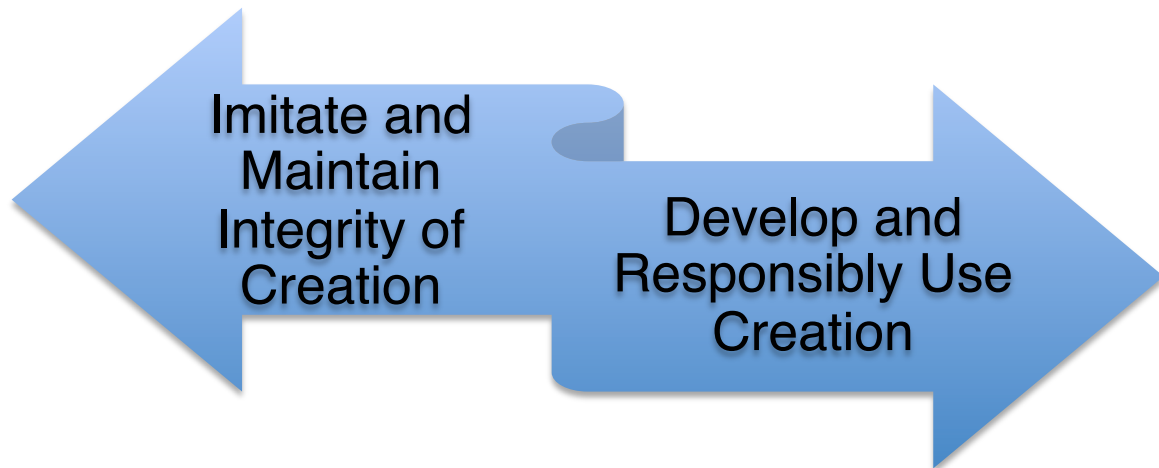
Of course in both cases some elements of control are desired, and some element of relying on and working with given natural processes is also important. These are not fully opposites, but do express different starting attitudes about where human research, ingenuity, attention and observation, should be directed, and about what techniques and technologies are best used in working with nature and natural processes. Both conventional and organic farmers will say that they are trying to prevent weeds, pests or diseases from destroying their crops, and that they want their farm animals to produce well without disease or other problems within their herds and flocks. They need a certain amount of control over nature, and natural processes in order to do this. However, the

technologies and techniques they employ are often very different. Different attitudes about the relationship between humans and nature underlie the choices they make about which technologies they wish to use. For Christian farmers from both of these positions, however, the underlying goal is to glorify God through their farming work, especially through good stewardship.

The first issue is the question of how best to achieve enough control over nature in order to produce food for human consumption. Technologies and techniques are what humans use to achieve this control—in particular over natural elements that work against the goal of farmers—but the methods and technologies used differ among different farmers. On the one hand are technologies that selectively kill weeds, pests, or disease as one method of achieving the needed control. These include antibiotics, herbicides, and pesticides, and also include genetic modification, which is another tool employed in the same process of killing one element to allow another element to prosper more fully in an agricultural context. At a very basic level, these technologies could be considered tools of war in the battle against the wild aspects of nature that work against the domestication and production processes of agriculture. On the other hand you have those who attempt to achieve control over nature by imitating patterns within nature. Here the idea is not so much to kill an undesirable aspect of nature as it is to foster the health and strength of the desired aspects of nature, or to prevent the undesired aspects from being expressed by working *with* instead of against natural processes and forces.³⁵⁴

³⁵⁴ Different speakers at the CFFO annual conventions also have argued in favour of these differing farming technologies and techniques. For example, at the 2011 Convention the afternoon panel included Patrick J. Lynch, Bryan Gilvesy, and John Kelly, each with very different perspectives across this spectrum on which farming technologies and techniques will be most beneficial for farmers now and in the future.

The second issue is not how to gain and maintain control over nature and natural processes, but a question of the importance of the integrity of creation, or of the importance of developing creation. Underlying the differences here are theological arguments about the powers and responsibilities humanity was given in relation to nature, as understood in a biblical context. Are human beings charged to develop creation, to build on what was given in the beginning and improve it through technology? Or are humans responsible to protect the original integrity of creation, which is of course always changing, but which has a given balance and order that needs to be respected and maintained? From these theological or foundational questions come the perspectives expanded below, and the differing farming methods and technologies that these farmers employ. These perspectives are outlined as two sides to a spectrum, and no farmer fits exactly into one or the other. Also, the need to control and the need to cooperate with nature are expressed in both perspectives, but with different approaches to how to accomplish both of these things.

**Fig. 4.4**

4.2.5.1 Imitate and Maintain the Integrity of Creation

Within this perspective, the two key ideas expressed as a foundation for the relationship between humanity and nature are, first, the idea that nature was created by God with a certain balance, order, and goodness, the integrity of which needs to be protected and maintained. The second is the idea that, from this goodness and order in nature, humans, and especially farmers, can learn a lot about how to work with natural processes, cycles and balance in order to produce food safely that is healthy and nutritionally rich.

Furthermore, farming with these methods is not only more beneficial to human health and nutrition, but also to the health of the soil, farm animals, and the wider environment (including wild species) as well.

Unsurprisingly, those interviewed who are organic farmers are most vehement in expressing many of these ideas and concerns, but they are not alone. Six other interviewees also included expressions of these ideas, and these were usually shared by

farmers who are conventional, or not certified organic, but who make conscious efforts in their farming methods to be sustainable, as they see it, through greater use of these methods and techniques. The organic movement in particular is a significant departure from conventional methods and attitudes toward human-nature relations. However, many farmers who are not organic still see the value of learning from natural processes and imitating these within their own farming techniques.

Those more grounded in the importance of the integrity of creation express some common concerns about the effects of certain farming practices. In particular they are concerned about the effects of the use of chemical agri-toxins, or other chemical means of controlling or manipulating growth or natural processes. In terms of chemical tools used to kill weeds, pests or disease, farmers within this perspective emphasize the interconnectedness of nature, and that killing one part has wider implications on the whole. A poison for pests such as rats may concentrate as it works its way up the food chain. A chemical used to kill weeds may also reduce the life in the soil itself, which is vital to crop growth.

Farmers I interviewed who viewed the world within this “integrity of creation” perspective are also critical of pushing natural processes too far in order to achieve higher or more regulated production. The issue here is one of degree. They argue for the importance not to drain or overextend nature in production, and not to force natural cycles by chemical controlling means. It sets a moral limit not to force or push beyond the “natural limits.” One example given was the chemicals and artificial hormones that are often used in many conventional operations to better control natural processes such as when a dairy cow comes into heat for breeding. This is at once forcing the natural fertility

cycle, but is also done usually for the larger purpose of more easily being able to manage larger herds, thus pushing production in another way. Another example was cutting three or four crops of hay from a field, rather than just one or two as a way of pushing production.

Nutritional value is another important consideration, both in the food that is produced for human consumption, and in the feeding of livestock and the feeding of soil microbes for overall soil health. When production is pushed to higher and higher levels, for example, some within this perspective question whether or not the overall nutritional value of the food is reduced over the larger volume produced. Also, with the nutrient quality in the soil reduced, or artificially added with fertilizer, the nutritional quality of the food itself is in question.

4.2.5.1.1 Specific Farming Practices

The practices described by farmers who also express this attitude toward the relationship between humans and nature indicate that the attitude is expressed not only in words, but in their choices, technologies and techniques of farming as well. Among the factors was the use of manure, especially composted manure (usually using straw or another carbon-rich material in the composting process to help the manure compost more fully). Fully composted manure is considered much more nutritionally beneficial to soil and soil microbes than raw manure, but also had other benefits, such as reducing viable weeds.

Farmer: Well if you are composting manure, that will mean all your nitrogen gets fixed in all your carbons, so you don't have releases of ammonium, so it doesn't smell. When you smell manure you basically lose nitrogen. What you smell is NH_4 , ammonia, so if you smell manure then you lose nitrogen, a

*good source of growth. So if you are able to put carbons on every nitrogen molecule that means that the nitrogen doesn't go anywhere, it stays in the soil. And if you compost on top of that you get rid of a lot of weeds, and you feed the microbes in the soil, which can grow organic matter as well.*³⁵⁵

Another important farming method was the use of forages. Almost all of the farms I visited for all the interviews in this research produced hay or forages as part of their crop rotation, especially those who raised ruminant animals. However, for those farmers from within this perspective, forages are an especially important part of both caring for soil and feeding ruminant animals. One of these farmers' only crop was forages, which meant the land was never tilled on that farm. Others in this group have forages for many years in a row as part of their crop rotation. One farmer said, for example that he keeps forages for 5 years in a row, then plows for one year of corn, one year of soybeans, then back to 5 years of forages. This contrasts with other farms that may rotate between annual crops, keeping the soil tilled every year, or who may include a year of forages among a rotation of annual crops, leaving forages in the ground, but for a much shorter length of time.

Forages are also important as a method of imitation of nature in farming practices for these farmers. Feeding grass to ruminant animals is seen as beneficial to their health, in particular because that is what a cow is *supposed* to eat.

***Farmer:** We don't feed grain to our calves. They get hay as soon as they're able to chew it, and again they get milk to six months. That goes against the industry standard of wean them as soon as you can. Introduce grain so they*

³⁵⁵ Personal Interview #12.

*start eating that as soon as they can, but then you have a dependence on grain, which is more expensive to produce than forage. A cow is a ruminant, so she's supposed to chew her cud, she's supposed to take up forage.*³⁵⁶

This is just one example of the ways in which farmers within this perspective attempt to mimic nature or natural systems in their farming methods, working within the logic of God's creation as they understand it.

Another important example of this is maintaining a diversity of animals and crops as part of their farming system. Although more than one farmer emphasized this aspect of their operation, the quote from this farmer in particular illustrates the many pressures that work against maintaining such a diversity, including food safety standards and regulations, not to mention the challenge of orchestrating and managing the different needs of the different crops and animals.

***Farmer:** Diversification is important. I think that's important, how can you balance both of them [food safety and diversification]? We've worked with the egg farmers, and the turkey farmers, they were exposed to this because a lot of farmers could let the turkeys run outside and HACCP [food safety standard system] was saying "you can't let birds outside." So I think that conventionally the turkey farmers have gone up against this, and they've done some research, and basically that's why we as organic chicken farmers, we think it's critical that the chickens are allowed outside. That gives us a market advantage as well, but it also, people realize that birds have to go*

³⁵⁶ Personal Interview #8.

*outside. Then they're exposed to goose shit falling out of the sky or whatever, I know, but what do you do? I mean, this is God's earth. They've got to build up their own immunity.*³⁵⁷

This illustrates that balance is needed in farming practices between the benefits and value of diversification and allowing animals to be outside in less controlled environments, with the potential food safety risks this poses.

In terms of the question of research and development, those who expressed this integrity of creation perspective sometimes emphasized how little humanity already knows about nature itself. For them, science and research need to focus on better understanding the natural processes and diversity that already exists. This, they argue, is a vastly under-explored area, demanding a great deal of human effort and attention. As a corollary they are critical of the emphasis of science and technology on developing (interfering and tampering with) forces and processes that, they argue, we understand very poorly. In particular farmers from this perspective are concerned about genetic modification.

The extended quote below illustrates some of these key points, including the importance of research into existing soil life, the issue of building the life force rather than diminishing it, and the importance of natural balance that all characterize this perspective. Interestingly, a metaphorical “battle with nature” is apparent here as well, but the approach to this “battle” is to find a win-win situation, rather than a win-lose for either the farmer or nature. Finally, this quote clearly connects the importance of this

³⁵⁷ Personal Interview #8.

perspective as an expression of faith, and of closer understanding and connection with God through these methods of farming.

***Farmer:** One of the other things we realized is the soil biology is 95% yet unexplored and unnamed. So you know we're going to the moon and we're going to Mars and we know so much about space, but the very sustenance comes from the earth, and we, it is 95% yet unexplored. But one thing I do know in life, and the easiest comparison to make that is visible for people, it's like a fire; it's either declining or inclining. You're either feeding it fuel so it's growing or it's declining. And, when you're dealing with living processes, because fire is a living entity there, it's changing and dynamic, same with soil life, or water life, or any kind of life. You're either feeding it and it's growing, or it's declining. So when you use an agrichemical, you're declining some portion of the biology. You're manipulating it somehow and if you're killing any portion of it, I contend that you are putting the biology as a whole into decline. So the more often you use that product or the more aggressive that product is, the more decline you inflict upon the soil's biology. So, the soil biology responds. But then God didn't make nature to be sterile and remain open concrete. He made it to respond to the prevalent condition, and revitalize and re-fertilize and re-establish that balance again. So, when you understand that this balance is always on nature's path, whatever you do, nature will try to restore balance. So, if we're trying to kill a weed, nature will give us another weed, or a pest, or a stronger weed. It just always brings us back to that balance.*

So when you, as a farmer, when you start looking at the way things are going, we see a greater prevalence and a much stronger impetus of certain weeds in certain fields, you get to understand well, gee, there's something causing that. And an example here would be, the first year when I break up my hayfield, and I grow corn there, I don't have any annual grasses. The natural condition that makes annual grasses express themselves isn't there, and they don't express themselves. You go to mainstream agriculture. They cannot leave annual grasses grow on any acre, once, it just, they just go nuts. And the same with the broadleaves [weeds], and they get more progressively stronger as broadleaves as we keep eliminating the smaller, littler ones. So, for me, it becomes a fairly pragmatic measurement. How long can I keep beating nature at what nature's trying to do before all of a sudden something breaks, and there's some catastrophe when nature wins again. I don't want nature to win again, because it means I lose my crop. So I have to find a way to keep nature happy, and coexist in that to harvest a crop.

So, once I understand that, I realize that many of the things that we take for granted in terms of our understanding of science, or progress, or of productivity, have to be re-evaluated from mother nature's standpoint. And when we do that, sometimes we find out that we can just tweak what we're doing a little bit, and nature's happy, and everybody wins. Other times we have to look at it and make a major change because what we were doing was in stark contrast to what nature was trying to do, and nature just keeps coming back with another punch. So that's what's been really exciting for me,

and it's dynamic in both place and time. And it's a call, and a need to grow. And in growing you grow in understanding. And if I understand nature as part of God's creation, that also then means that I'm growing in wisdom. So you see why I like doing this? It just keeps feeding my desire to get closer to God's Will.³⁵⁸

Another important part of this perspective is how to respect the integrity of creation as farmers. Mimicking nature and protecting the integrity of nature as it was created fulfills this responsibility to God and creation. Two examples here illustrate some of the ways this idea was expressed. In the first conversation, organic farming methods are expressed as part of the solution, and genetic modification as a dangerous path to tread.

Wife: *It all comes down to the organic again. Trying to be closer to creation, the way it was intended, the way it was created. That is the way you try to almost like preach to other farmers. He does. [laughs]*

Husband: *Really?*

Wife: *Yeah, you do. Because God created it and He knew it was perfect, so who are we to think that things need to be different? Why do we go and take our plants into a lab and change them? I think we're asking for trouble.*

Husband: *We are in trouble.*

Wife: *We are in trouble, and there's going to be more trouble.³⁵⁹*

³⁵⁸ Personal Interview #7.

³⁵⁹ Personal Interview #12.

In the second conversation, this farming couple gives a simple example like the weather, but stresses the risks that come with greater human control, and the conflicts that then arise as a result.

Husband: *We never will be complaining about the weather, never. Because that's something nobody can do anything about. Take what you get. And you can start complaining, but on the other side, be happy with it. Nobody can do anything about that. But if somebody, people will be able to regulate the weather, I tell you there will be lots of war around the world. The one wants to have sun and the other one wants to have rain because then the fish are biting better and all those kinds of things. I think that that's the creation of the Lord. And there are things that He created that we should just take for granted.*

Wife: *Just leave it the way it is.*

Husband: *Leave it the way it is.*

Wife: *It is good.*

Husband: *It's good.*³⁶⁰

Finally, within this perspective there is an important spiritual and religious value in respecting natural processes. Food in particular is thus an important point of spiritual connection to nature, thus allowing humans to connect more deeply with the Creator. This spiritual connection through food comes from both growing and eating food.

³⁶⁰ Personal Interview #18.

Farmer: What I will say about the spiritual side of it, it's in this experience of eating and growing food that we also experience another level of appreciation for the awesomeness of the Creator's creation. And when you come into contact with that, you realize that this is the same Creator that we honour and adore, and aspire to in our religion, in our spiritual development. And for me, food is that link between the spirit world we can't see or feel nearly so easily, to the real physical world. And it's one of those links that connect the two worlds together and allow us to have an experience and helps us to grow deeper in the spiritual understanding, the appreciation for where food came from, and why it's growing in the balance that it does, and how creation was made for so many different things to all grow in balance to feed different aspects of life, you know, of other plant life, of soil life, of animal life and of human life. So as you get deeper into the appreciation of the complexities, and of the master plan that was there.³⁶¹

This quotation clearly draws this perspective back to the Christian connection and view of the importance of food and food production as a religiously motivated endeavour or vocation.

4.2.5.2 Develop and Responsibly Use Creation

Those grounded more within this second perspective understand their religious calling in relating with nature as a responsibility to develop nature and to use it, but to use it responsibly. Here human technologies to control or improve upon nature are appropriate,

³⁶¹ Personal Interview #7.

as long as they are used with care, demonstrate clear benefits, and do not cause excessive harm. The role of research and technology here is to find new and better ways to meet the growing global human needs, especially for food, but also for fuel among other things. Research also demonstrates the value of new innovations by proving the benefits and testing for possible harms. Unlike those who expressed a mechanistic worldview in Merchant's analysis, those imagining the world from within this perspective expressed an idea of God as actively caring for creation, and demonstrating grace to humanity through directing and allowing research and technology to develop in a way that keeps pace to meet the needs of human beings.

It is not appropriate to apply the term dominion here to describe this perspective, nor to all those who expressed this perspective. While some within this perspective expressed theological ideas of dominion, others expressed theological ideas more closely resembling earthkeeping or a moderation of the idea of dominion. What all these farmers have in common, however, is faith in the importance and benefits of developments within modern agriculture as foundational to providing the needs of humanity within farming, and also as foundational to sustainability and good stewardship. For those advocating development and responsible use of creation, chemical and genetic tools for controlling pests, weeds, and diseases, as well as for managing large herds and flocks, are appropriate as long as they are used responsibly. Furthermore, with the growing demands of the human population, and the constant reduction in resources with which to produce food, efficient modern production through these methods, they believe, is the most appropriate method of farming based on God's call to be good stewards.

It is important to note that this perspective has been favoured within the CFFO over the course of its history, and is still predominant in the CFFO literature and policies today. Elbert van Donkersgoed, who was so influential in the development of the ideas of stewardship in its formational stages and over decades of work within the CFFO, himself expresses an understanding of stewardship that fits within this range of the spectrum of perspectives.

Another thought about stewardship is the recognition that the land that God has given us can be more. Because one of the things about the Reformational worldview is that the role of humankind in the creation is that humankind is in a certain sense a co-creator with God and is making the creation more than it was. Now even, I'll refer to the Garden of Eden and Adam and Eve being put in the Garden of Eden, their first job was to name everything. And they had to care for the garden. And caring for the garden is not preserving. As far as I'm concerned it means making it more than what it was when God was done. So my understanding of caring for the garden is that making it more than it was. And so the notion of stewardship to me is making it more than it was.

So I'm very comfortable with farmers saying, "Well, you know, I'd like to do 200 bushels of corn." But it can't put the goals of simply producing bushels of corn at the expense of the long-term ability of that creation to produce that. The notion that this has to be long-term has to be part and parcel of stewardship. But I'm very comfortable that stewardship does mean that we are going to make it more than it was. Stewardship is not preservation. It is

*not static, stuck in some past, or going into the past. It is about making it more than it was. And that's one of the things about Christian Farmers Federation, that the fundamental attitude of the vast majority of members are on that page of saying, "I can make this more than it was. I can make this more." And that they're very comfortable as entrepreneurs on that page. And so it was also very comfortable for me to work with this worldview. I generally saw my task with them as trying to put into words what they really thought, and at the same time maybe convince them of the few things, but generally help them articulate what they really thought would work. And one of those things is that, yeah, it can be more. Part of me being a human being is to make it something more than it was.*³⁶²

Elbert van Donkersgoed here clearly articulates the theological perspective that is foundational to this approach to farming methods and stewardship. He also notes the historical prevalence of this perspective within the CFFO, no doubt in part because it is also the perspective that he holds personally. In articulating this view of stewardship, van Donkersgoed points back to the Genesis stories again, in order to explain his interpretation of the role of humanity connected to both God and nature, as co-creators with God in their work as stewards of nature.

4.2.5.2.1 Continued Presence of Dominion and Keeping

Some "responsible users of God's creation" did clearly express ideas reflecting the theological concept of dominion and its importance as foundational for human relations

³⁶² Personal Interview, Elbert van Donkersgoed.

with nature. Those farmers who hold a dominion perspective understand humanity as having been given dominion over creation by God primarily based on passages in the first and second chapters in Genesis, especially Genesis 1:28-29, and secondarily on Genesis 2:15. A dominion perspective emphasizes the centrality of humans, both in their role as stewards, and as the central concern of God and creation. This perspective understands human dominion as extending over all living and non-living aspects of creation, and this may be to a greater or lesser extent exercised primarily for human benefit. Human developed technology plays a key role in the exercise of this dominion.

An example of a more dominion-oriented definition of stewardship can be found in the report prepared for the CFFO by Charlotte McCallum, who was also a contributor to the CFFO's *Earthkeeping* publication, to whom I referred earlier. Although the report is primarily focused on the economic and scientific aspects of programs to protect the environment through farming practices in Ontario, it does look briefly at religious and social aspects that may affect participation in these programs. One such religious aspect it considers is the importance of stewardship of land for religiously oriented farmers.

McCallum begins, however, with a secular definition of stewardship, and further implies that this is the norm, before she moves to a religiously based definition. I have included her secular definition here because it emphasizes the importance of individual private property rights, and voluntary stewardship, which are views also often expressed within the dominion perspective of stewardship. McCallum defines land stewardship as follows:

Land stewardship, as used in its general secular sense, is many things, but is often associated with a special relationship between an individual and his or

her land as private property, that is real property, to use the legal term. This relationship often includes an innate concern and sense of duty to act in ways which guard and nurture the value and well-being of that property for its future owners or stewards.

When we talk more specifically about Christian land stewardship, we understand that it is part of a long Judeo-Christian religious tradition. It originated in the creation story of Genesis. This holds that God gave man (kind) dominion over the material world, including all other life forms. At the same time, mankind was also charged with the care and nurturing, that is, of the stewardship of this material world. In the same religious tradition, mankind was also given the quality of free will; to decide whether to obey or not. To be a good land steward in a Christian sense, then, is both an ethical and a religious responsibility, but is one which is to be performed consciously and willingly, that is, voluntarily.³⁶³

Her emphasis here is on religious reasons why the voluntary nature of agri-environmental programs has significance for some participants. However, the definition she has offered has other significance as well. She has chosen the term “dominion” and defines this as extended to humans who are given power over and responsibility for “the material world...[and] all other forms of life.”³⁶⁴ From this definition dominion is all

³⁶³ Charlotte McCallum, “Voluntary Agri-Environmental and Other Incentive Programs to Protect the Environment in Ontario: Report to the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario” (CFFO Publication: Guelph, April 2002), 33. (From the CFFO website, http://christianfarmers.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=71&Itemid=73, accessed Oct. 10, 2012.)

³⁶⁴ McCallum, “Voluntary Agri-Environmental and Incentive Programs,” 33.

encompassing. It is given over all living and non-living things. She does not identify, however, in the religious part of her definition, the purpose for which this dominion is to be exercised.³⁶⁵ More important for her purposes here is that this dominion of stewardship is to be exercised *freely*, or voluntarily. This is an emphasis that comes across in the environmental stewardship incentive programs that the CFFO has historically helped to create or has particularly supported, such as the Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) and Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) that I described earlier. This idea of the importance of voluntary stewardship as well as property rights are also echoed by a select few of the interviewees who reflected this perspective.

Dominion stewardship is connected with the concept of “the cultural mandate” by some farmers in interviews. One such farmer even read the relevant passage from Genesis to emphasize his view of humankind’s relationship with creation. He argued that humans were commanded by God to develop creation, and strongly disagreed with any movement (such as some environmental groups) to preserve or restore wilderness, or to reduce the human population.

See God created man...kind, man and woman, to take care of creation way back, shortly after creation or as part of creation and...so [reading from Gen 1: 27-28] “God created man in His own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. Then God blessed them and God said to them, be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air and over every

³⁶⁵ McCallum does not cite any sources for her definition.

living thing that moves on the earth.” So, man was given the task to develop creation, and we have a movement nowadays to un-develop creation. We want to make it one big nature park again, and that’s the outcome of evolutionary thinking. When man, when God is not a part of our worldview, and man is no longer the crown of creation, as Genesis teaches, man is the crown, he is made in God’s likeness, has been given the task to develop creation, but evolution denies God, and we’re the result of a big bang, and we’re an animal just like any other, and why should we have rights over any other animal? And so, let’s reduce our population because, yeah, we’re polluting the earth, we’re a carbon footprint, reduce the population, so that it’s in line with the rest of animal life. Basically it’s a culture of death, whereas Christianity is the culture of life.³⁶⁶

Those with a strong dominion stewardship view have an antagonistic view of those who hold a deep ecology view, as is made evident from the above quote. Their perspectives are almost complementary opposites. That is to say, where deep ecology movements primarily promote the preservation of wilderness, and the reduction in the human population, dominion stewardship argues that humans should develop all of creation, leaving no area outside of human control and care, and that the human population should be allowed to grow. Dominion stewards often argue that our ability to produce food will meet the population’s needs by the grace of God, through developments in agricultural technology.

³⁶⁶ Personal interview #2.

On the other hand, some who also fit within this “develop and responsibly use creation” perspective instead expressed a theological stance of keeping-type stewardship, which is a moderation of dominion. These farmers still fit within this perspective, however, because they emphasize the importance and value of responsible use of conventional agricultural techniques and innovations. The farmer below clearly rejects the idea of dominion and moderates it in his interpretation of the biblical principle.

Farmer: I think there are places in the Bible where, there are places where some people try to say that, you know, “man has dominion over the earth” kind of thing. But I read it myself to say that we are responsible for creation. We are responsible to do it effectively. We are responsible to do things that aren’t wasteful and aren’t harmful.³⁶⁷

It is not the theological attitude of either the dominion or the moderated keeping stances that clearly divide farmers in the farming methods they will use; both of these stances potentially support an attitude towards the benefits of development and responsible use of creation in farming.

4.2.5.2.2 Specific Farming Techniques

Farmers who believe they have a divine mandate to develop God’s creation are clear about the specific farming techniques and methods that they use and support. These include (among others) genetically modified seeds, Roundup and no-till, chemical fertilizers and weed control, tile drainage in fields, robotic milking machines, modern barn designs, large farming equipment, and yield tracking methods, all of which, they

³⁶⁷ Personal Interview #20.

argue, need to be used responsibly in order to be most effective. The main benefit most often cited from these innovations in farming methods is that they allow farmers to produce greater amounts of food to meet the growing global need. Technology needs to be used with care, to produce more and better quality crops, but not for greed. At the same time, however, farmers also emphasize the ways in which these techniques and technologies improve or protect soil quality, and also allow them to improve the quality of their harvests. Some also expressed the benefits of these technologies for their farm animals as well.

One conventional farmer, self-described as running a large farming operation, but still family run, saw his use of new technologies, including the herbicide Roundup and large farming equipment, as part of his stewardly practices of caring for the soil and for creation at large. This is because of the reduced tillage or plowing, the increased yield, and the ability to harvest large amounts at peak times for better quality produce.

Roundup has saved more topsoil in the universe than any other thing that has been developed, and has enhanced more yield [because] Roundup allows no-till to work. Roundup allows organic matter to actually remain put, because you're not destroying organic matter with tillage. It doesn't mean we don't do any tillage, but compared to sixty years ago the tillage is maybe 5% of what it used to be, and that's because Roundup is able to do the weed control effectively.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁸ Personal Interview #11.

Likewise, the increased yield has allowed farmers to feed an ever-increasing human population. This is a responsibility that many of the Christian farmers take very seriously. This same farmer described his perspective thus:

The Reformed worldview has always been that yes, this creation has been scarred by sin, but it still belongs to God, not the Devil. ... You don't separate this earth from heaven, ...they're connected. And if you have any doubt about that, [ask yourself] why would God continue to bless this world and feed four or five or six billion people every year? Just think about that for a while. After we blew it in the garden, He didn't have to do that for us. I think the best example is if you take that graph that the president of Cargill showed at the CFFO convention last year. That's part of my life. He took that from 1970 to 2010, which is the story of my life, where we've seen corn go from 40 bushels to 200 bushels an acre. And now we're making fuel out of corn and everything else. To me, ...all I saw in that graph was the hand of God, looking after his Creation.³⁶⁹

Here the theological perspective and the farming techniques are directly connected, illustrating the importance of these farming techniques as understood within in a faith context.

The question of responsible use also includes concerns with the effects of poor use of any of these technologies on the wider environment, or on the health of creation, and of humans in particular. These farmers see the benefits of practices such as efficient

³⁶⁹ Personal Interview #11.

and proper use of fertilizer with the aim of reducing its necessity and preventing over-use, including through the use of animal manure instead, reduction of tillage (which reduces soil erosion and the use of fossil fuels), the importance of buffer strips and wind breaks, and practices that prevent soil, fertilizer and manure from entering the water systems.³⁷⁰

The ideas of sustainability and of natural balance show up among those who advocate development and responsible use of creation as well, but are articulated somewhat differently than they are within the “imitate and maintain the integrity of creation” perspective. Here there is a greater emphasis on profitability, but also on efficiency as an important aspect of sustainability, or maintaining the natural balance.

Farmer: Sustainability means that number one, well I don't want to number them, because that would imply that one is more important than another. But sustainability means that number one we have to be profitable. It means that we are maintaining our natural environment so that we are not mining the soil. We're doing things that enable us to keep going for the long-term. I think sustainable also is maintaining our relations with our non-farming neighbours for instance. That could negatively impact our business. Just being good stewards of the land and good stewards of the environment. That's what sustainable means to me. Do you get different definitions of sustainable?

³⁷⁰ Personal interviews #2, #11.

S.M.A.: To some degree, and it depends on how they put it into practice. So I know you've outlined the principles well. For you, how do you put this into practice on your farm?

Farmer: Running a farm that's modern, using modern technology, and the latest, you know, putting into practice the latest research to me is sustainable. To some people sustainable, I'm assuming, is doing things the old way. But that's not sustainable to me. I think modern agriculture for the most part has been, it's focusing more and more on sustainability.³⁷¹

Development and responsible use of creation is not solely advocated by those operating large or very large farms, although farmers with such farms are among those who advocated this perspective. None of these farmers I interviewed specifically advocated the benefits of large farms over small farms, and some clearly emphasized the importance of protecting the viability of small farms, especially because larger farms were less likely to need such support and protection. The quotation below comes from a farmer who was himself operating a smaller farm, and illustrates his concern for small farmers globally, not just at home. He also sees particular benefits to genetically modified seeds for small farmers in particular.

Farmer: I think they [CFFO] are advocating small farms. Small farms, and clean farming, you know, like you can't use... I'm not too puffed up about, what do you call that farming without chemicals?

S.M.A.: Oh, organic?

³⁷¹ Personal Interview #20.

Farmer: Organic. I think that's a pipe dream. If you go to organic then half the world will starve. And if it's properly done, if you use chemicals, if you have to use chemicals and it's properly done, with the right chemicals, I don't have a problem with it. The CFFO doesn't either. I'm not against organic farming. I think it's a very noble cause, but people have to eat. And more and more people have to eat. And it just doesn't fit in. You know, GMO is, I think it's great. You see on TV that these people in Africa where they never used to grow anything they can. They developed a corn that got almost, even when they were drowned out it was still growing. And these farmers they've cancelled their insurance because they knew they had a crop. So if it helps these people that helps everybody. You can't make money off people that are poor. But you've got to make it so they can eat and they can spend money.³⁷²

Social justice concerns are here an important consideration among the benefits of newer technologies. This is another expression of the concern for global food security, here achieved in part through genetic modification, which ensured the security of a locally grown crop, rather than achieving security through trade.

Two common Bible stories that I have heard used to argue for developing creation are the commandment in Genesis 1:28 to have dominion over the earth and to subdue it, as well as the parable of the talents, found in the Gospel of Matthew 25:14-30 (with a similar version in Luke 19: 12-27). Below is an extended quotation from a question and answer period at the conclusion of three presentations at the CFFO Annual Convention in

³⁷² Personal Interview #17.

2012. In particular, two CFFO members came up to discuss issues raised in the report from the Sustainability Committee. The first questioner makes specific reference to the parable of the talents, and the second questioner makes reference to the importance of fully using all the God-given resources available to him as a contemporary farmer. Although this quotation is included primarily as an example of the development perspective, it also illustrates some of the debate that goes on within the CFFO between those who hold differing perspectives on these issues.

***First CFFO Member Question:** I can't let [the Sustainability Committee] get away with a sustainability without asking the question, "what is not sustainable about an operation growing corn-soy-wheat mix on a livestock operation, and using all the latest technology, what is not sustainable about that?" If we don't use the latest technology, there's a Christian principle that is about not burying our talents.*

[Humming laugh at the table next to the recorder.]

***Sustainability Committee Member:** I think you are correct, there are many sustainable practices that we do use. But one area that I would suggest that may be missing there is the long-term viability of that soil in terms of soil health from the long-term forages, those perennial forages at least once in the rotation. But if you are using that somehow in the system, and keeping that soil open and porous, with all the soil life working in there, you are smack on. This isn't against technology, this is against practices that lower the viability of the soil life. And we do still have some of those practices*

lingering in agriculture. We need to start finding better ways to enhance our soil.

Second CFFO Member Question: *I guess this is where the statement from practical experience comes in, and I believe in the KISS [keep it simple stupid] system. There is one system that has not failed me as a farmer. When you take over a piece of land that's totally destroyed, number 1, tile drainage; number 2, proper phosphorus levels; number 3, proper potash levels. I.e. I get a big crop and the big crop will grow the earth. It doesn't have to have forage in the middle at all. You start growing heavy crops, you stay the soils from [level] one and two organic matter up to four and five under that formula, and that is sustainable because a crop is so big that it returns back to the soil. But it starts with one core foundation, tile drainage which takes away the erosion problem, and at the same time you end up with a sustainable [system] because you end up being balanced and the crop refuge, i.e. root system, and the foliar that grows on top if it becomes organic matter, even without manure. Now manure is a huge asset in that. It's a KISS, I call it a simple system, and it has not failed for more than 2000 acres. Thank-you.*

Sustainability Committee Member: *I agree. One thing to keep in mind in terms of sustainability and that is the seven generations. Just put a \$5 leader on the cost of your diesel fuel and close down some of our roads that you can't get the nitrogen or the potash to your fields, how long will those yields sustain themselves? I don't think it's going to be indefinitely. You keep high*

yields for quite a while but eventually it is running short. If we can keep the livestock on there and keep that energy cycle on the farm, and then as Ralph [Martin, University of Guelph speaker in the morning] was talking about bringing the food energy from our toilets back to the farm yes, when we've closed the cycle we're going to be far more sustainable.

Second CFFO Member: *I've got one more question for you. We have one field where we've done that since 1967, and it yields more every year, and I'd like you to answer that question. That's not a bad track record.*

Other Audience Member: *Without nitrogen being added?*

Second CFFO Member: *Of course not. I use all the resources God gave me in the proper way.*

Sustainability Committee Member: *Exactly. I'm just suggesting that we may not have free access to nitrogen in the future, as available access to nitrogen or as cheaply as we've been getting it. The fossil fuel industry is highly subsidized. We're not assuming that's going to be there forever.*

Nathan Stevens: *And this is why the sustainability debate is important, because there are so many different approaches and ways to go about achieving sustainability.³⁷³*

The debate on sustainability and stewardship evident in this conversation among members illustrates that farmers are invested, sometimes deeply, in these differing views on the best farming practices and technologies. It is important to remember that these

³⁷³ CFFO Annual Convention 2012 Question and Answer following Sustainability Committee presentation.

perspectives or poles I have described are not cut and dry, and that the response of farmers to given technologies is generally carefully considered in each case.

Within the CFFO as an organization, the literature and policies have tended to favour the “develop and responsibly use creation” perspective, as mentioned above. While this is the case, it does not mean that farmers give carte blanche to new farming technologies. One key illustrating example is the response of farmers to the potential introduction of genetically modified (GM) alfalfa to Ontario. Alfalfa is a perennial crop, different from the now commonly used annual GM crops. After debate within the CFFO committees and at Provincial Council, in April 2013 the Provincial Executive Board approved a CFFO position statement on Round-up Ready alfalfa as follows:

Whereas the Round-up Ready trait provides little apparent benefit to alfalfa production for Ontario farmers due to the poly-culture approach to hay generation in the province, Whereas the Round-up Ready trait in Alfalfa poses a significant contamination threat to organic and conventional alfalfa production, Whereas a viable co-existence plan for RR-GM alfalfa and organic/conventional alfalfa does not exist, Therefore be it resolved that the CFFO oppose the introduction of the Round-up Ready trait in alfalfa in Canada at this time.³⁷⁴

The passing of this resolution at the provincial level indicates that there is not strong support within the CFFO for this particular form of GM product, even among farmers who otherwise support GM crops. This same contrast came out in

³⁷⁴ CFFO, “CFFO Position on the ‘Round-up Ready’ Trait Being Added to Genetically Modified Alfalfa” (Guelph: CFFO, 2013), 1.

one of the interview conversations with a farmer who was strongly in favour of annual GM crops, but not the perennial alfalfa.

***Farmer:** Yes I use Round-up. We use Round-up Ready corn, and soybeans.*

***S.M.A.:** And is alfalfa available yet?*

***Farmer:** No.*

***S.M.A.:** No, but it could be, right?*

***Farmer:** It's been available in the U.S. It has not been available in Canada. I wouldn't hold my breath for it being available in Canada.*

It's not, the alfalfa, it's a different type of crop. It's a perennial crop. There wouldn't be as much, I don't, I can't see a place for it on this farm. But for corn and soybeans there certainly is. And it makes weed control very effective. It's cost-effective. It's less negatively impacting the environment because Round-up is a relatively benign chemical compared to some of the other ones that we have used in the past. It's safe, at least, I mean it's as safe as any other chemical, and it's a lot safer than some of the other chemicals. And so it's effective, cost effective is a big reason.³⁷⁵

From this quote we see that in the same breath that this farmer argues for the many benefits on his farm of annual GM crops, he sees no place for the perennial GM alfalfa in his farming methods. This position indicates that the perspectives on stewardship and different farming technologies are not cut and dry, and that farmers do consider the benefits and costs of different technologies in different ways.

³⁷⁵ Personal Interview #20.

4.2.5.3 *Contrasting the Two Perspectives*

The chart below summarizes some of the key points from each of the two perspectives outlined above for closer comparison. The main basis for differentiation between the two poles of the spectrum is farming techniques and technology, which is why this category is listed first.

	Imitate and Maintain the Integrity of Creation	Develop and Responsibly Use Creation
Farming Techniques and Technology	Composted manure, forages – constant or many years in a row, diversity of animals and crops, animals as in nature (outside, eating appropriate diets), natural cycles of production	Roundup and no-till, chemical fertilizer and weed control, GMO seed, tile drainage, robotic milking machines, modern barn designs, large harvesting equipment and yield tracking
Theological Grounding	Nature created by God with an original order, balance and goodness—needs to be maintained and protected Much can be learned from imitating nature (relationships, processes, cycles) in farming	Humans are called to develop nature as co-creators with God, through the use of technology Humans are to use nature, but to use it responsibly God’s grace to humanity is evident in technological developments

<p>Use of Science</p>	<p>Understand the complexity of nature, e.g. soil</p> <p>Develop techniques and technology that work with or imitate natural cycles, processes, and relationships</p> <p>Measure benefits and risks of these methods</p>	<p>Increase yield, disease and pest resistance, tolerance to different conditions</p> <p>Measure effectiveness, benefits and risks of new technologies</p>
<p>Key Concerns</p>	<p>Use of toxins of any kind reduce the overall life and health of nature (especially in soil)</p> <p>Pushing or forcing production and natural cycles stresses animals and plants, reduced nutritional value and is not sustainable</p> <p>Food safety risks – unknown consequences of GMOs and agri-toxins</p>	<p>Responsible use of any new or existing technologies</p> <p>Efficiency allows greatest benefits to the greatest number— is more sustainable</p> <p>Greater global food security</p>

4.2.6 Summary of Stewardship within the CFFO

Stewardship within the CFFO is an important concept, tied closely to Christian identity and Christian principles or values. It is interpreted broadly, and applies to a wide range of concerns for farmers. Within the CFFO as an organization, policy recommendations have traditionally emphasized programs that encourage farmers to engage in voluntary stewardship on their farms, such as the government supported Environmental Farm Plan

(EFP) and the privately run Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS). In terms of policy recommendations, because on some issues member opinions differ, CFFO policy often seeks a middle road, stressing a cautious approach to issues that are contentious.

The CFFO members I interviewed gave specific definitions of stewardship which demonstrated significant common understanding of the term among members. They interpret stewardship broadly, not focusing exclusively on financial or land stewardship but embracing many important aspects in their definitions.

Among CFFO members, stewardship is primarily understood as responsibility. This responsibility is first to God, who is seen as the true owner of all of nature. After this, however, farmers have responsibilities through their farming work to the wider human and non-human world around them, including their families, neighbours and communities, the wider societies in which they live, and humanity as a global population, now and into the future. Likewise farmers are responsible to nature, specifically for the land, animals and plants under their care, for the protection of farmland as a valuable shared resource which is under private ownership, for the margins of their land and the wild species that also inhabit it alongside the domesticated species, and for the future fertility especially of food-producing aspects of nature.

Stewardship within a farming context has particular characteristics which distinguish it from urban Christian environmentalist interpretations of the concept. The enterprise of farming demands close connection between humanity and many forms of nature, all of which fall under the farmers' responsibility and care. Farmers are also concerned with different environmentally related issues than most urban environmentalists, Christian or not. The theological distinctions of dominion and

earthkeeping are still evident among CFFO farmers. However, this is not sufficient to describe all the theological approaches to the relationship between humans and nature that farmers described in their explanation of the reasons behind their choices of farming methods and technologies.

Based on the research data that I gathered, there are clear tensions between farmers who advocated for certain farming methods and others who clearly espoused very different methods. From this point of contrast and tension, I have characterized a spectrum of understandings of farming stewardship as directly related to specific contemporary farming methods. These perspectives are also grounded in theological understandings of the relationship between humanity and nature or creation as members understood that God has ordained. These two perspectives reflect different approaches to the need for humans to balance control with connection when dealing with nature in order to produce food through farming. The two perspectives are: to imitate and maintain the integrity of creation and, to develop and responsibly use creation. Both of these perspectives embrace innovation in farming, but wish to push innovation in different directions. Each farmer is thinking carefully about the biblical principles and doctrinal interpretations of the principles, as well as advice coming his or her way about the efficacy of various scientific and corporate discoveries and recommendations, and about the type of world their farming methods help to create. The complexities within each perspective, and between them, should make us cautious about generalizations.

4.3 Conclusion to Christian Stewardship in Agriculture

Within contemporary farming, economic pressures to industrialize have resulted in dramatic changes in the structure and in the methods of farming. The consequences of

these changes have been felt economically, socially and environmentally. In response, the concept of stewardship within farming is used to help counteract the negative effects of industrialization on all of these areas, but on the environmental impacts especially.

Farmers are highly aware of the widespread impacts of the farming methods they use, and the changing patterns within agriculture on their own lives, and on the lives of people and nature around them. The focus on the importance of stewardship by members of the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario demonstrates their Christian values lived out in how they farm, and in the farming policies they recommend to government.

The concept of stewardship arises within Christian thought as a moderation of understandings of dominion. The importance of dominion over nature remains for some Christians, in particular in their interpretation of what stewardship means. The contrast between dominion and stewardship, historically and in the current day, illustrates the ongoing tension between a need and a desire for control, and a similar need and desire for connection. Stewardship in a Christian framework attempts to find a middle ground that allows humans and nature to prosper, guided and motivated by an awareness that God is the ultimate owner of all of creation, and the shaper of humans, made in God's image. Interpretations of stewardship spell out the ideal relationship between humanity and nature, especially within a farming context.

How that ideal is lived out in specific contemporary farming methods and techniques is a point of debate among farmers, especially with the CFFO. The debate, while dividing along lines of farming methods and technology, is grounded in theological understandings of creation, and God's intention for humanity's use of and responsibility

for nature. This debate is indicative of the wider discussion about the sufficiency of a stewardship ethic to counteract the negative effects of industrialization within agriculture.

Within the CFFO interpretations of stewardship ranged between two poles, advocating either imitation and maintaining the integrity of creation, or development and responsible use of creation. Imitating and maintaining creation involves working with natural cycles and relationships, and learning from nature through careful observation and research. Developing and responsibly using creation involves building on what was given in creation through technological development, and is comfortable with the use of more controlling farming methods and technologies, as long as these are used with moderation and due responsibility.

The extent to which stewardship, practiced in either of these models of farming techniques, can effectively moderate these negative impacts will be a measure of its success. If neither model is sufficient, then Christian farmers will be challenged to new and innovative interpretations of what good Christian farming stewardship will mean into the future.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario is an intriguing example of lived Christianity. In living out their Christian faith within a specific field of work, agriculture, CFFO farmers have both principles and practical aspects to consider. They must map their way through the many issues that farmers face in their daily work, and in the wider changing patterns within agriculture. Collectively as an organization, they discuss and develop policies directly applicable to the ongoing issues in agriculture, but specifically with a long-term view for what is most beneficial for the whole of agriculture, and for the wider public good, based on their understanding of their Christian calling within agriculture.

On their individual farms, farmers must also make decisions for themselves about how they will farm, and how their farming methods and their farming way of life connects with and lives out their Christian faith. In some cases, economic realities constrain the present possibilities within which the farmer may choose. Finding a balance between the ideal, the sense of calling to do better, and the practical manifestation in the current, ever-changing situation is always a challenge.

5.1 Farming and Faith

Farming and faith do not always fit easily together; they mutually challenge one another. The economic, social and natural pressures of farming challenge farmers to retain their values and faith, and at the same time make a living through their farming work. Dealing with the cycles of life and death on a daily basis, facing challenges and loss of various

kinds through farming work can be jarring to personal faith, and to finding meaning and purpose in life, leading some to wrestle with God.

In the extensive fieldwork I conducted within this group, more than one farmer mentioned specifically that in farming they are reminded just how much they depend on God and God's grace, especially in their farming work. But that doesn't always make the challenge and the sense of loss when things go wrong any easier.

S.M.A.: And does farming play any role in how you see yourself as a Christian?

Farmer: Yeah I depend on God. I don't know. I don't always agree with God.

S.M.A.: How is that?

Farmer: You really work, I just, what happened in February, I had a heifer cow here, I got it from my son, it was from a twin, and sometimes the gender is not really male or female, and it looks like a female. I got it from my son, he said, "Mom, you can have it, I won't take it because it's not really female." And I had my eyes so high up, I was so proud, and I gave it a name, and I said, "you know, after a couple years you will beg me to buy that cow back." And then it was dead on the 16th of February, in the morning it lay dead. It was just dead. It was still warm. I said, [whispering] "God why did you do that?" [full voice] You know? I had such high hopes.

S.M.A.: Awe, yeah.

Farmer: And when I was a kid already I was kind of, kind of dumb, I was kind of judgmental too but there was always a man who was drunk, every day

he went to the liquor store a kilometer away from the place, he bought liquor, and then he drove back. And then at that time we had little lambs, but we bottle fed them. My mom and dad and I were doing that, and then one died too. I thought, “why did that lamb die? And that man is drunk. Why did God do that?” I said those things. Disagreements with God. But, I don’t see that as a sin though, when a child is upset. I heard a nice story not too long ago of a grandfather that was talking about his granddaughter, when, they had kitties, little kittens, kitties, and then the bald eagles took one.

S.M.A.: *A kitten?*

Farmer: *Yeah. And “why did God create that bald eagle when he had to eat my kitty?” So that means God is totally in our lives, involved in us, in our thinking, God is a part of us. We are a part of God. So, that’s the way I like to live. ...*

S.M.A.: *And you never had a falling out with God then?*

Farmer: *Oh, I had sometimes, there was sometimes. I had times in my life, but I came always back. Yeah. That means something. You know? I find God, God keeps me in line.³⁷⁶*

God can be seen as working in mysterious ways, which are not always congruous with human desires. But despite the sense of loss this farmer reaffirms that she feels God is very active in her life.

³⁷⁶ Personal Interview #19.

For many farmers, farming offers particular insights into matters of faith, especially because of the deeper interaction with nature and creation that is required of farmers through their work. The Christian story, as CFFO members note, connects directly to the patterns visible in nature, and enhances the quality of farming.

S.M.A.: And does farming play any role in how you see yourself as a Christian?

Farmer: The only thing I would say, the Christian aspect of the farming part of it is that you get a direct correlation between taking the seed, which is as dead as a doornail, and you put it into the ground and it grows and becomes food for the masses. And that, as a Christian, you understand that once you were dead and that Christ raised you up. There's a direct correlation. Does that mean that others that are Christians in other vocations can't be Christian? Absolutely [they can]. It's just that we're spoiled by seeing that in a practical way in every sense in front of us.³⁷⁷

The farmers in the CFFO, I have found, are challenged by their faith to farm differently, with more than just the bottom-line in mind. They point specifically to the Christian aspect of their identity as Christian farmers as the key motivation for this broader perspective. This faith-based perspective also keeps them constantly aware of the wider implications of what they do, both for possible good and for possible ill. This gives farmers a sense of pride in doing their jobs well, to the best of their abilities. It also delivers a sense of the weight of the responsibilities they carry in their work every day.

³⁷⁷ Personal Interview #11.

The dynamic Christian identity of the CFFO and its work can be seen in how its Christian roots have stretched quite significantly, especially over the last 20 years. Its Christian identity is both specific, foundationally orthodox Reformed, but at the same time it is concerned with finding meaningful common ground between increasingly different Christian perspectives. By focusing their discussion on farm issues, and not dwelling deeply on theological debates that could easily cause divisions, the shared Christian identity is still present, and does not become a hindrance to an inclusive atmosphere of finding common ground connecting faith and agriculture from a broadly Christian perspective.

Meaningful relationships are particularly important for CFFO farmers. These connections include a meaningful relationship with God, lived out through regular devotions, church attendance, and active Christian witness through the example of their work as Christians in the world—in particular, through good farming. For many the particular theological foundations of sphere sovereignty—the Kuyperian view that Christians must exercise God’s sovereignty in each area or sphere of life, especially through Christian based organizations—lead them to act out their Christian faith in all aspects of their life, and to take active interest in worldly concerns as a religious calling. The importance of relationships also includes meaningful relationships within their families, which is often closely tied to their work together on their shared family farm, as well as worshipping together and engaging in other family devotional practices. The family farming way of life builds these important close relationships within family, as well as with land and natural processes.

These close meaningful relationships with God, and with family and land, animals and plants, then extend to a greater awareness of the local and global implications of the work farmers do, and the land they control. As Berry and Hall suggest,³⁷⁸ through meaningful particular relationships humans then have a greater sense of responsibility and awareness of wider general interconnection and relationships. Members of the CFFO demonstrate how active engagement with their faith, with God, with family, and with land, leads to greater connection with community, through church or farming organizations, and extends out to a sense of responsibility towards humanity and nature in a wider sense. This sense of responsibility is best encompassed in the idea of stewardship, taking responsibility to care for and nurture all of these relationships in an appropriate way.

In placing the CFFO within the literature on religion and environment, it is important to distinguish between its role as a farming organization, and religiously motivated environmental activism. The CFFO is not an environmentalist group, although it is religiously motivated in its work. While it considers the religious importance of concepts like stewardship, which are often shared with certain Christian environmentalist groups, it has a distinct interest in certain environmental issues, and has a particular approach to the issues it addresses because of the farming focus of the members.

Likewise, when examining the CFFO as an example of a group of people who operate and advocate for family farms, the religious aspect is important to consider.

³⁷⁸ Wendell Berry, *Bringing It to the Table: On Farming and Food* (Berkeley CA: Counterpoint, 2009), 9-10; Douglas John Hall, *The Steward: A Biblical Symbol Come of Age*, Revised Edition (New York: Friendship Press, 1990), 129-130.

There are many parallels between the arguments of the CFFO and those from secular supporters of family farms. However, the religious motivation the CFFO's arguments in favour of family farms as fostering strong relationships within both family and community in particular gives an added dimension beyond mere nostalgia. The importance of these two spheres of relationship for CFFO members is evident in many aspects of their lives, including but not limited to farming. The particular religious worldview, especially of sphere sovereignty within the Dutch orthodox Reformed community, directly connects to the high level of institutional completeness within this group, and the social engagement of these Christian institutions (i.e. of their members through these institutions), of which the CFFO is an important example.³⁷⁹

Finally, the particular lived aspects of Christian stewardship within the context of modern agriculture go beyond the theological or other theoretical formulations of Christian stewardship. Stewardship from a Christian farming perspective is distinct from practices and arguments for stewardship from within other groups of Christians, such as Christian theologians, or lay urban evangelicals. This being the case, there are important points of connection between all these groups in terms of the sharing of ideas, and in terms of the common history of the development of the concepts of dominion and stewardship within Christian thought and within the practices of land-use and relations with nature that have occurred, especially in North America.

³⁷⁹ Janel Curry, "Social Capital and Societal Vision: A Study of Six Farm Communities in Iowa," in *Religion as Social Capital: Producing the Common Good*, ed. Corwin Smidt (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2003), 150-151.

Ideas and worldviews are very powerful. It can sometimes be hard to tease out the underlying assumptions behind why things are the way they are, or why humans behave or have certain attitudes towards land, or nature, or food. Attending to the idea of stewardship brings these questions and underlying assumptions out more clearly, especially within agricultural practices. It also draws attention to the interconnected nature of the world in which farmers work, where the food they produce, the soil, plants and animals with which they work, and the people they feed are all part of the responsibility they carry to be good farmers. For Christian farmers, motivation to keep all of these responsibilities in mind comes from their underlying understanding that the land they farm and the food they produce all really belong to God, and are expressions of God's grace active in the world.

Putting the idea of stewardship into practice on contemporary farms requires a great deal of consideration of the potential impacts of various farming methods and technologies. Within any overall method of farming (organic or conventional), there are many different possibilities in how to produce commodities and improve farmland, as well as prevent pests and diseases, soil loss, and other risk factors on farms. Entrepreneurial farmers are highly engaged in the decisions on their farms about all of the means and methods they use, seeking improvement and efficiencies in many different ways. Within the CFFO there is a spectrum of interpretation of stewardship based on the different farming technologies and techniques farmers employ. This spectrum is also based on differing interpretations of the most appropriate Christian relationship with land and creation generally. The spectrum extends from those farmers who see humans as responsible to maintain the integrity of creation as given by God with original balance,

goodness and order. For them, farming should attempt to imitate nature, while also maintaining the integrity of creation. Other farmers perceive humans as having been given authority to develop and build on creation using human technology to change and more highly control creation for human benefit. This must, however, be done with a sense of responsibility for the potential impact of these changes. These farmers advocate stewardship as developing and responsibly using creation.

The key ideas from each chapter are summarized below, after which I consider questions of the broader relevance of the findings within this particular group for religion and religious worldviews as an academic category. The function of religion in identity, in motivation, and in orienting the believer in the world are examined in relation to this particular group. These help to illustrate how the lived religion of the members of the CFFO has broader implications for understanding religion and its impact more generally.

5.1.1 The Religious Foundations of the CFFO

Chapter 2 examined the origins of the CFFO as a Dutch pillar-type organization within an Ontario context, as indicative of the history of Dutch orthodox Reformed immigration in the second half of the 20th century. The significant wave of immigration from the Netherlands following the Second World War brought to Canada a particular cross-section of Dutch society. In particular, a large number of Dutch orthodox Reformed came to Canada, and many of them settled in rural Ontario as farmers. They were joined by a number of Dutch Catholics who also came into rural (and urban) areas. The wave of immigrants also included members of the more liberal Calvinist pillar and those from the neutral pillar in the Netherlands, although these were under-represented compared to the Catholics, and orthodox Reformed. Overall Dutch immigrants who came to Canada

settled primarily in urban or suburban areas, but because of the smaller population of immigrants in rural Canada, the impact of those who settled in rural areas has been significant. Compared to the Dutch population as a whole, and to other destinations of choice, a disproportionately large number of orthodox Reformed chose Canada as their destination of migration, making for a significant population in Canada, including rural Ontario.

Because of the significant wave of Dutch neo-Calvinists, and because they did not find the existing Christian denominations and institutions suitable to meet their particular needs and religious worldview, that allowed them to establish a significant network of Christian organizations and new church congregations in Canada. Among these non-church but still Christian social organizations include a significant network of separate Christian elementary and high schools, among other institutions and organizations. The CFFO is the Christian organization in the sphere of farming within this set of orthodox Reformed social organizations.

The specific Christian and Kuyperian identity and worldview of sphere sovereignty are still clearly evident among members of the CFFO. This was an important part of the motivation for the original founders of the organization, and is a social vision that has been carried on through the development of the organization. As Elbert van Donkersgoed, former staff, told me,

Abraham Kuyper is a key thinker in the Netherlands, who is both a thinker and a politician in the Netherlands, and the kind of thinking that says,

“people of faith, Christians should take their faith into all areas of life because the Christian faith is important to all areas of life.”³⁸⁰

This was the foundational thinking behind the work of the CFFO in developing policy recommendations as a way to put this social vision of actively bringing Christianity into the sphere of agriculture.

While Kuyper’s vision of sphere sovereignty is particularly emphasized by Dutch orthodox Reformed members of the CFFO, other aspects of actively living out Christian faith in the sphere of agriculture are shared among members, even from other denominational backgrounds. These include active engagement in the wider community, including through involvement with church congregational activities, with mission projects locally or globally, with local Christian schools, with politics at all levels of government, and with other farm organizations beyond their involvement with the CFFO. Members also actively drew on biblical stories and passages which they connected directly to issues within farming and agricultural policy. In this way they personally connected the narratives of their Christian faith to their work as farmers, seeking in the scriptures guidance for and interpretations of how to be good Christian farmers.

5.1.2 Family Farms

S.M.A.: Does Christianity play any role in what you do or how you see yourself as a farmer, and if so in what ways? So I think you started to talk about that, do you want to expand on that a little more?

³⁸⁰ Personal Interview, Elbert van Donkersgoed.

Farmer: I said this probably in 100 different ways. Well the answer is definitely yes. Absolutely 100%. And in what ways? Well I think the first thing is the value system. I've mentioned the value system of family farming. I've mentioned the value system of sustainability. I've mentioned the value system of profitability, yet not using net profit for, using profit in wise, stewardly and benevolent ways. I think those are probably the 3 key elements that I would suggest are my value system as a Christian farmer.³⁸¹

CFFO members are also family farmers, as I explored in chapter 3. They are owner-operators of their farms, working alongside family (spouses, parents, children, siblings, cousins etc.) as a joint business effort with the aim of sustaining the family through the livelihood of farming. As such, CFFO farmers have been significantly affected by changes in the overall structure of agriculture, which have been happening both in Canada and the U.S., often referred to as the “disappearing middle.” As agriculture has moved to increasing industrialization, both within smaller family farms and within large and very large corporate farms, the lion share of the food production and even more of the overall gross farm receipts in either country has been going to the largest farms. The marketing opportunities for middle-sized farms have diminished, although not gone away completely.

Family farming for CFFO farmers is important to them personally, as part of their self-identity and way of life. In particular, the ownership model of the farm is most important for them in defining what constitutes a family farm, especially considering the

³⁸¹ Personal Interview #13.

range in sizes of farms that CFFO members operate. However, as is evident from the quotation above, family farming is also closely tied to the identity of Christian farming, as an expression of the importance of relationships and values that are most easily practiced through family farm operations.

Family farms are closely associated with particular values expressed through this structure of farming. In particular, the importance of family, community, hard work, and sustainability or stewardship are associated with family farming, and for Christian farmers, with their own Christian valuation of the importance of these things from within their particular Christian worldview.

For CFFO farmers, fairness in farming was also important as a way of maintaining the sustainability and the profitability of family farms through agricultural policy. This included ensuring a fair competitive marketplace, as well as fair price or fair reward for the farmers' efforts in producing good quality and quantity of food.

Among the values they expressed to me as important included the value of food beyond its monetary value in the market; food as important to human health, social stability and security; and food as an important connection to the natural world and through it to the Creator. Because of this understanding of the value of food, farmers also felt it was important that more people are better educated on where food comes from, what is involved in producing it, and how to prepare good meals from basic ingredients at home.

Family farming encompasses the importance of entrepreneurship, family connection, neighbourliness and active community life, and connection with and stewardship of creation, all within the Christian vocation of farming. Family farming has

economic, but increasingly more important social and environmental impacts connected with the specific values of family farming that are different from the values espoused and promoted within industrial farming.

5.1.3 Christian Agricultural Stewardship

Farmer: Stewardship means to me, it means that anything I'm doing to the land, or to my cattle, or just generally as a member of the community is something that's going to have long-term benefit to both the environment and to the community. So I guess for instance when we do, I'm not organic, but any of the practices that I use on my land, I'm trying to maintain the land and improve it all the time. I'm not mining the soil for instance. I do use chemicals to combat weeds, but I think it's the responsible use of chemicals. It's enabling me to be more efficient in the use of my land. More efficient in the use of my time and fuel, and it produces a healthier crop for my cattle. I guess that's it in a nutshell what stewardship means to me. I think, as far as an industry and as an occupation, farmers have a really unique spot in society in that we control a lot of the environment, a lot of the actual land. So it's a very important thing that we have the responsible attitude towards it.³⁸²

This quotation illustrates the importance for farmers of their varied responsibilities, within their farm, and through their farm work that extends into wider networks of influence. The responsibility on the farm itself encompasses land, animals, responsible use of resources such as fuel, time, and chemicals. This responsibility then

³⁸² Personal Interview #20.

extends out to the wider community, the broader protection and care for agricultural land, and land in general, and for the long-term or future health of both community and environment. Although this particular quotation does not specifically mention it, this farmer and other CFFO members also emphasize the connection for them between this responsibility as stewards of their farms to their religious identity as Christian farmers, responsible ultimately to God. This emphasis on stewardship is pronounced among members of the CFFO, and I devoted considerable attention to it in Chapter 4.

The terms dominion and stewardship have an intellectual history, particularly within Western Christianity, that extends into the present day. This history, and the many different situations in which these concepts have been applied all come to bear to some extent or another on newer formulations or interpretations of these concepts as new situations and challenges arise for which Christians find them useful concepts.

Looking at some of the theological developments of the concept of Christian stewardship in response especially to environmental issues since the latter half of the 20th century is important to understanding some of the breadth and limitations of the concept. It is also important for seeing the differences, sometimes subtle, sometimes more obvious, between the different thinkers and groups who make use of the concept in different arenas of action. The use of stewardship within Christianity broadly is not the same as its use in response to environmental issues more specifically, and again not the same when used by urban Christian environmentalists, as when used by rural Christian farmers.

The CFFO's use of the term stewardship, and its use by members in reference to their own farming practices, has characteristics that reflect their particular situation as

both Christians and as farmers, concerned with environmental issues, but not themselves necessarily environmentalists, Christian or no, per se. Stewardship expresses the intricate nature of the responsibilities they take on as farmers, and as Christian farmers specifically, in their farming work. These responsibilities are seen to be directed to God, humanity and nature, working from very specific people, plants, animals and land, out to future prosperity and fertility beyond their own lifetimes. This responsibility is also to use the resources, physical and cultural, available to them as farmers in the wisest way possible.

There is a great deal of agreement or congruence between the different ways CFFO farmers and staff defined stewardship. There is, however, also tension between different interpretations of what the most appropriate relationship between humanity and nature should be, and more importantly, how that relationship is best expressed through different farming techniques and technologies. To better express this tension, a spectrum of opinion illustrates some of the differences in approach that farmers in the CFFO take. On the one hand are those who argue in favour of developing creation and responsibly using nature through technologies of control. On the other hand are those who argue in favour of mimicking nature, and of protecting and maintaining the integrity of creation, using techniques and technology to better work with nature and natural processes. This binary is helpful to understand how farmers have reacted to the forces pushing them to find new ways to continue to make a viable living through farming. CFFO farmers don't typically fit neatly into one camp or the other; moreover, the CFFO itself, on these issues, has not proceeded along a single path, although as an organization official policy tends to favour development and responsible use, with the voice in favour of protecting and

maintaining the integrity of creation acting as a cautionary force of moderation. The quest to link God and humans, land, plants, animals and technology, is ever nuanced.

5.2 In Conclusion: The Function of Religion

The real world has a certain “messiness” to it. Humans are always trying to bring the messiness or wildness under control. However, too much control can strangle out the vital life-force. This is true in farming, and it can be true in academia too. While I have tried to organize, to categorize, and to represent my findings here in a clear, controlled, way, in fact some of the messiness survives. I hope there is enough messiness to see the life-force that is working within this particular farming organization. Tension and discussion, different personal perspectives and experiences, all contribute to the meaningful discussion around the table, and to the diversity of Christian perspectives that come together in the CFFO.

Too much academic categorization and analysis may do more violence than good, and render the findings more like a butterfly on a pin in a collection, rather than as a living specimen, with a vital life that will not remain neatly controlled. Understanding the function of religion is important, and offers key insights. However, strictly regarding religion or religious faith for its function denies something important, and does violence to the vitality and life-force of lived religion in the real world.

Religion, as seen here in this research project, functions in part as a foundation for a common identity, offering members cultural tools such as rituals, shared texts and a sense of a common worldview or outlook from which to work together as a group. This gives at once a common foundation for identity, but also is open enough that this identity is not so exclusive that it must be ethnically, or even denominationally based. It is open

enough to allow a diverse representation of Christians within farming to express their voice, and to join in the conversation, and to feel they are embraced within the common Christian identity.

It is important, however, that some aspects of the particular nature of the original, more specific Christian orthodox Reformed identity remain. Protestant rituals such as bible devotions and forms of prayer are practiced and followed by all at CFFO meetings. There is a common culture of social engagement and involvement, important within a specifically orthodox Reformed worldview of sphere sovereignty, but which many members of the CFFO embrace, regardless of their denominational background.

Looking more broadly at how religion functions to give human life meaning and direction, the particular emphasis within this farming group does offer some important aspects to consider for understanding religion in general. Religion here is much more oriented to relationships than it is to place. This is somewhat surprising considering the closeness with which these farmers work with the land. However, many of them have made significant relocations within their lifetime. Even those who were born and grew up here in Canada may have changed farms for different reasons at different points in their lives. Thus, what is important to maintain is their identity as Christians and as farmers, and the relationships that are foundational, including relationship with God, relationship with family, and relationship with community, and even relationship with land, all of which are movable, and not rooted or grounded in a specific place.

Contrast for example, the responsibilities farmers expressed to family, community, society, and to humanity at a global scale all connected to their Christian faith, as ultimately a responsibility to God. These situate believers within important

spheres of relationship, but not specifically in geographic space. These contrast with the list of spatially related terms that Tweed connects with religion as grounding humans in place, “[religions] situate the devout in the body, the home, the homeland, and the cosmos.”³⁸³ Being situated in the family is very different from being situated in the home. Being situated in the community or society is very different from being situated in the homeland. Being situated in relationship to humanity or nature as a whole—past, present and future—is different than being situated within the cosmos.

This is telling because these farmers are very much engaged in the physical world, and in the human, political, social and environmental realms. This apparent lack of strong connection to place is not from a transcendent focus away from the created material world. So often critics of Christianity as a transcendent-focused religion with a dualistic view of the world have accused Christian thinking of neglecting the material or present realities in favour of focus on the life and world to come. This criticism has been leveled at Christianity historically and at some expressions still in present day. One farmer in particular makes this distinction as he contrasts his Reformed worldview with the worldview of evangelicals:

Farmer: It's that outworking of what it means to be Christian in every day practical life beyond the theoretical Bible knowledge of just going to heaven. See the Reformed world-life-view is very different. The Reformed world-life-view looks at this world as spoiled by sin, but still part of God's creation, whereas the evangelical community looks at the world as the Devil's place,

³⁸³ Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 74.

and when we die we just go to heaven, to the glorious heaven. And the Reformed world-life-view has always been [thumps fist on table] the fact is, yes this creation has been scarred by sin, but it still belongs to God, not the Devil. And that comes again out of Peter where you read there will be a new heaven and a new earth, and I believe that with all my heart. And that's what that flows out of.³⁸⁴

However, these farmers are not clearly rooted in, or connected to, specific place in the way that one might expect. They may know their particular farm very well, but their connection is through active relationship with their farm and their soil, a relationship which could be fostered and developed on another farm, should the need arise to move, and which will be extended to new land, should the farm expand.

In getting farmers to more explicitly reflect on the connections they make between their faith and their agricultural work, both on their farms and through the CFFO as a policy organization, I have probed them into considering some questions in ways that they may not have considered on their own before. On the one hand, perhaps the questions asked in the interviews brought out the more serious meditations on farming and faith that may not be in their everyday conversation or awareness of their work. On the other hand, sometimes asking the questions gives an opportunity for interviewees to put in words what they do think about and experience but don't regularly discuss openly.

Perhaps I want to idealize in part what I found in my interview data, to emphasize the good and the deep sense of connection, responsibility, and engagement that I found

³⁸⁴ Personal Interview #11.

through my interviews and participant observation. On the other hand, I really can't help but be amazed by the high level of engagement with so many issues, and the tenacity of so many of these farmers in discussing and working towards agricultural policies that require a great deal of time and patience before results are clearly apparent. Demographic and economic trends can be depressing or devastating at times. Changes of all kinds are difficult to face or navigate. These are not farmers who are just watching their own bottom lines, following the letter of the law, unconcerned about the wider impacts of their work. They are striving and engaged in rural issues, and personally wrestling with the tools of their faith to direct and ground their approach to these issues.

5.3 Future Directions

Farmers themselves tend to be very practically minded. They like to see the real world application, or to be able to calculate the benefits or losses of any given aspect of their farms. They certainly are not alone in this emphasis on what is quantifiable. This thesis is primarily about worldviews, and the deeper and wider impact that the particular religious worldviews found within the CFFO as an organization have had in ways that are visible in Ontario today. However, it is also primarily about those aspects of farming, of personal relationships, and of personal faith that go unmeasured, and to some degree unacknowledged, in much of everyday life. This is true especially in the public sphere of government, and in the economic sphere as well. These include things like production on farms that is not sold in the market place, volunteer hours in charitable organizations, or the costs and benefits of stewardship practices on farms. These are not necessarily aspects that are themselves not economic, political, or practical in nature. They may be fully measurable, but they are not usually considered worth the bother of measuring.

This thesis attempts to point out the value and influence of these aspects of human life and work to a greater extent. It does not attempt to measure them more accurately, however. Further interdisciplinary research that ties together the best aspects of qualitative and quantitative research might better allow these measurable aspects to be better measured, and also to see that those aspects which remain largely unquantifiable, worldviews for example, are still vital and influential aspects of human life which should be given greater consideration in the political and economic spheres, as well as within the religious or social spheres of life.

Farming is such a vital expression of human relationship with nature, through our daily relationship to food. Eaters and farmers alike have much at stake in the debates about farming and food production, and about the value we place on farming work and methods and its products, including food and environmental and social benefits or hazards.

5.3.1 Possibilities for Further Research

Stewardship on farms is important, especially as a potential counterweight to the inclination towards consumption of fertility and the externalization of costs that comes with the increasing influence of industrialization. This research, while attempting to better categorize and define CFFO farmers' particular view and definition of stewardship, does not compare their understanding or their practice of stewardship to other groups of Christian farmers, or farmers generally. Having now developed a spectrum of views on stewardship from within the CFFO, further research could take this spectrum and, using qualitative and quantitative research within other groups, determine the extent to which

this is similar to or different from the response of farmers more generally within Ontario, or elsewhere in North America.

Furthermore, this study has not in any way attempted to measure how successful these farmers are in their stewardship. It does, however, illustrate that stewardship is understood in different ways, which would be important to consider when attempting to measure the success of stewardship practices.³⁸⁵ Such measurement or comparison with farmers generally would add significant value to better understanding the effectiveness of particular worldviews in counteracting negative aspects of change in agriculture. This would also potentially add weight to the arguments in favour of the importance of family-run farms, for example.

Environmentalists of all stripes, but especially those in urban areas, have many issues that they commonly champion. This research has illustrated some of the ways in which farmers are concerned about different environmental issues. In particular former staff of the CFFO mentioned the corresponding responsibilities of society in general, and of non-rural people in particular, to the responsibilities that farmers take on.³⁸⁶ Farmers cannot be stewards alone. They act within a broader economic, social and environmental context. This research has made me much more aware of many aspects of how urbanites relate to and treat land. These are generally overlooked or ignored as insignificant in

³⁸⁵ It is important to measure the effectiveness of the stewardship that farmers are actually doing, for example, not necessarily the stewardship that urban environmentalists think they should be doing. My research points out the spectrum of interpretation of stewardship, and thus challenges some of the assumptions about measuring good stewardship, for example, from James and Hendrickson's study of farmers of the middle: Harvey S. James and Mary K. Hendrickson, "Are Farmers of the Middle Distinctively 'Good Stewards?' Evidence from the Missouri Farm Poll, 2006," *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 23 (2010): 571-590.

³⁸⁶ Personal Interview, Elbert van Donkersgoed.

comparison with the relationship and responsibility to land that farmers and other rural dwellers have. Research into the relationship and worldview of urban dwellers to land and environment, and in particular to the urban environment in which they live and work, would be an important correlate to the research done here. So too would more conversation between urban environmentalists, university researchers, and farm communities.

5.3.2 Future Considerations for the CFFO

Farms and farmers in Ontario are changing. Farms continue to grow in size, and the average age of farmers continues to be older. It was valuable for me to note that the leaders of the CFFO in the 1980s tended to be in their 20s and 30s, while now farmers in their 20s and 30s are less common at CFFO events. Although women have also been less common around the business discussion table, the gender dynamics of farming is also changing with time, and that is likely to change as well.

The trend of fewer and fewer farmers is likely to continue. While the costs and benefits of this trend are complex, certainly there will be fewer and fewer who will have the privilege of working as farmers, and thus understanding the complex nature of contemporary farming. This being the case, it is important that organizations like the CFFO not just fill a function on behalf of farmers with government, but keep the voice and needs of farmers before the broader public eye. This is not simply a matter of bowing to the whims of urban eaters and voters, but rather of finding ways to meaningfully translate between the concerns of farmers and the concerns of urbanites who will, of necessity, be increasingly unaware of the reality of farming.

Although family farms in the middle of agriculture will undoubtedly continue to feel significant economic pressures into the future, I am also hopeful about the economic prospects for many family farmers, especially in the context of rural Ontario. Although the relationship with urban eaters and voters can be fraught with the problems of indifference, interference, or ignorance, there is, I think, a great deal of potential for Ontario farmers to have a good relationship with their fellow Ontarians because of the proximity of urban and rural areas through so much of the farming regions of Ontario, north and south. Getting the wider public to value having stewardly farmers working Ontario farms, and to protect the agricultural land that surrounds Ontario cities, as well as to see the many aspects of value in the food that is produced, especially by family farm enterprises, should continue to ensure economic and social opportunities for farmers to thrive into the future. Because of this geographic proximity, there is potential for stronger economic and social relationships to exist between farmers and non-farmers. As the power and influence family farmers exercise economically, politically, and socially changes, farmers may have to consider themselves in a different light from what they had before.

CFFO farmers already have high levels of social engagement and strong value on relationships in their favour. However, work needs to be done on generating conversations between the concerns of farmers and the concerns of urban dwellers to allow for more meaningful dialogue between them. The articulation here of the perspectives on stewardship especially among Christian farmers, I hope, will foster first more meaningful dialogue between farmers themselves about their own concerns and solutions to the challenges they face. I hope also that illustrating some of the complexities

of meaning for terms such as Christian, stewardship, and family farm reveals that care and attention need to be paid to the many meanings these terms can carry along with their apparently simple use. Those such as CFFO staff and leaders, in positions of translating discourse between farmers and government as well as the general public, will need to listen carefully, and then translate the differing language, unspoken meanings, and broader concerns in ways that allow for dialogue rather than conflict. This work has the potential to illuminate new partnerships of shared overlapping concerns with farmers where alliances can be formed, and where cooperation can accomplish new goals in agriculture.

Appendices

Appendix A – Interview Questions

The interview questions I presented to CFFO farmers, with some variation, are listed below:

1. Are you currently a member of the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario (CFFO), and how long have you been a member?
2. What motivated you to become a member?
3. In what ways do you currently participate in CFFO activities?
4. What participation have you undertaken in the past?
5. Which, if any, of the issues that the CFFO addresses are most important to you? Why?
6. What do you think are one or two important things I should know in order to better understand the CFFO and its work?
7. What does stewardship mean to you?
8. What do food security, food safety and/or food sovereignty mean to you? Which of these, if any, would you say is most important? Why?
9. Do you consider yourself a Christian? What does that mean to you?
10. Is it important to you that the CFFO is a Christian organization? Why, or why not?
11. Are you currently a member of a congregation or parish? If so, are you also active in this congregation?
12. How long have you been a member there? Is this also the same tradition or denomination in which you grew up?
13. Has your understanding of what it means to be Christian changed in any way through your work in the CFFO?
14. From what I understand, members in the CFFO come from various Christian denominations. Has this been your experience?
15. Have you ever experienced any conflicts or tension between different ideas of what it means to be Christian within the CFFO? Has this come up especially in relation to the work of the organization?
16. Have there been any striking instances of cooperation between Christians within the CFFO that you have observed or participated in?
17. How would you describe your experience of participating in an organization with a multitude of Christian denominations?
18. Are you currently farming? How long have you been farming?
19. What words or adjectives, in your estimation, would best describe your farming operation or methods? (That is to say, what crops or animals do you raise, and what farming methods or techniques do you use?)
20. Have your farming methods changed in the course of your farming work? If so, why?

21. Have you personally been affected by any particular environmental issues, or concerns, especially in your farming practices?
22. In your practices as a farmer, are/were there ways in which you attempt(ed) to address environmental issues or concerns?
23. Does Christianity play any role in what you do or how you see yourself as a farmer? If so, in what ways?
24. Does farming play any role in how you see yourself as a Christian?
25. Are there any questions I have not asked or is there anything you wish to add on any of these topics we have been discussing?

Appendix B – CFFO District Associations

Current District Name	Earlier/Other Names	Year Founded	Year Joined CFFO	2014 Local Executives (and Provincial Council Members by District)
Chatham-Kent-Essex	Kent, Kent County (N.B.- Essex joined C-K in 2013).	November 12, 1978.	November 12, 1978.	4 Local Executive Members, CFFO Vice-President
Dufferin-Wellington	Orangeville	March 15, 1973.	March 15, 1973.	5 Local Executive Members
East-Central	Bowmanville, Cobourg, Lindsay, Peterborough	March 22, 1965.	March 22, 1965.	6 Local Executive Members, CFFO Director
Elgin	Aylmer	November 25, 1971.	November 25, 1971.	6 Local Executive Members
Grey-Bruce	Owen Sound, Lucknow	May, 1967.	May, 1967.	5 Local Executive Members
Haldimond-Norfolk	Jarvis, Dunnville	Jarvis – 1953. Dunnville – 1967.	March 6, 1954.	2 Local Executive Members, CFFO Director
Huron	Clinton, Blyth, Huron, Exeter	April, 1965.	April 1965.	5 Local Executive Members, CFFO Director
Lambton	Lambton County, Lambton North, Wyoming, Forest		March 6, 1954. Lambton North – April 11, 1979.	2 Local Executive Members
Middlesex	Strathroy		March 6, 1954/ February 12, 1972.	3 Local Executive Members
Niagara	Niagara South, Wellandport	March 16, 1967.	1973.	5 Local Executive Members
Northeastern Ontario				2 Local Executive Members
Oxford	Woodstock, Oxford County	July 19, 1953.	March 6, 1954.	6 Local Executive Members

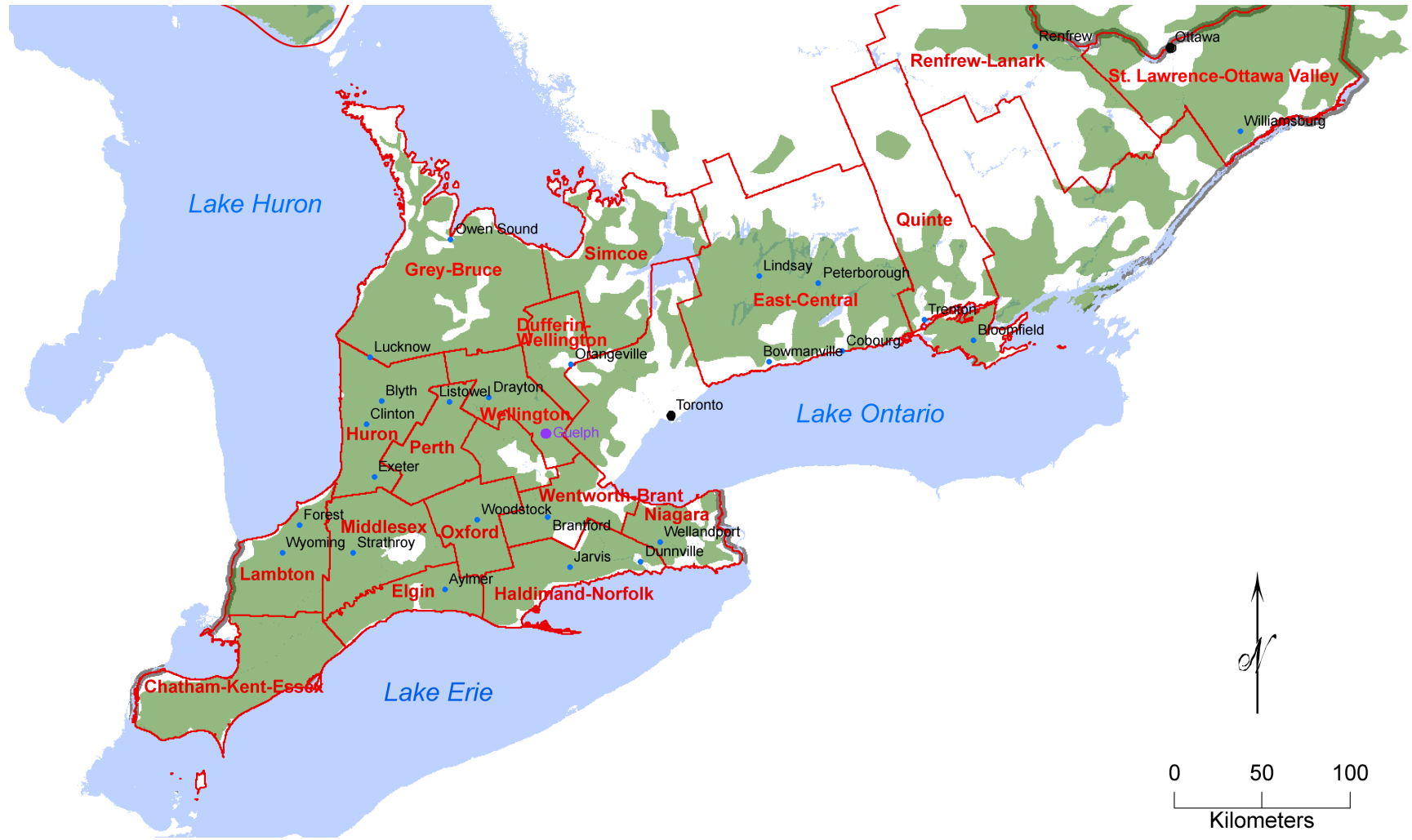
Perth	Listowel, South Perth	Listowel – December 10, 1965.	Listowel – April 6, 1973. South Perth – 1983	3 Local Executive Members
Quinte	Trenton, Bloomfield	March 6, 1969.	1973.	5 Local Executive Members
Rainy River	Emo	March 12, 1983.	March 12, 1983.	5 Local Executive Members
Renfrew-Lanark	Renfrew	November 10, 1994.	November 10, 1994.	5 Local Executive Members
Simcoe County	Simcoe North, Simcoe South	January 10, 2000.	2000.	6 Local Executive Members, CFFO Vice-President
St. Lawrence-Ottawa Valley	Dundas County, Williamsburg	Williamsburg - 1965	July 16, 1971.	4 Local Executive Members
Thunder Bay	Lakehead	March, 1973.	March, 1973.	4 Local Executive Members
Wellington	Wellington North, Centre Wellington (Drayton?)	February 10, 1982.	February 10, 1982.	6 Local Executive Members, CFFO President
Wentworth-Brant	(Brantford, Wentworth County)	April 1983.	April, 1983.	4 Local Executive Members, CFFO Director

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³⁸⁷ Based on CFFO documents: “Record of District Development to 1996” (Guelph: CFFO, 1996); “CFFO Application for Re-Accreditation 2011” (Guelph: CFFO, 2011); “CFFO District Boards & Board Members” (Guelph: CFFO, 2014); “Executive Board,” CFFO website http://www.christianfarmers.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=76&Itemid=27, accessed June 2014.

Appendix C – CFFO District Associations Maps





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