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**Review of *Farm Communities at the Crossroads: Challenge and Resistance* Edited by Harry P. Diaz, Joann Jaffe, and Robert Stirling**

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**Farm Communities at the Crossroads: Challenge and Resistance.** Edited by Harry P. Diaz, Joann Jaffe, and Robert Stirling. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 2003. vi + 353 pp. Tables, references, index. \$44.95 paper.

*Farm Communities at the Crossroads* is a collection of works by twenty-nine authors dealing with the “transformations in farming and farm communities.” The metaphor of a “crossroads” is aptly invoked to draw attention to the complex overlay of social, economic, political, and knowledge processes affecting rural society. The two themes of “challenge” and “resistance” are central to the conceptual organization of the book, which incorporates issues such as the changing nature of farm work, rural restructuring, community development, the farm crisis, technological change, and agricultural policy development. The volume contains twenty-six articles organized into seven sections, the first of which presents a preview of the main issues to follow. The papers included in section 2, “The Importance of Work,” address the de-skilling effects of mechanization (B. Russell), the “degradation of farm work” (H. P. Diaz and R. Stirling), and the dynamic interplay of the state, science, corporate interests, and consumer markets that occasioned the development of canola (L. Busch).

The book’s focus on community is sharpened in section 3 through contributions highlighting several of the factors or conditions that exert powerful influences on the lives and livelihoods of rural residents. The sustainability of agricultural communities is central to the lead article (M. E. Gertler),

which deals with a range of rural, community, and regional development issues (participation, collaboration, cooperation, and the multiple bottom line, for example). C. Lind addresses the community development theme in the context of globalization. W. Kubik discusses the aims and efforts of groups that grew up in response to the farm financial crisis, while Kubik and R. Moore analyze the utility of a transactional model of farm stress that incorporates personal and social factors.

Section 4, "Land and Transportation," revisits the overarching issues of rural restructuring, farm household livelihoods, the farm crisis, and institutional responses to the changing nature of rural existence. The first of five papers provides historical perspective on land tenure in Saskatchewan, the organization of farm households, and the evolution of the farm crisis in the 1980s (J. Jaffe). The section's remaining articles present cases of initiatives that evolved in conjunction with structural changes in agriculture and other related sectors, such as the Saskatchewan Land Bank program (1971-82), a "government-assisted intergenerational transfer of farmland and land reform" (L. Gidluck, 149). Further, the Land Link program in Nebraska (M. Strange, N. Thompson, A. Prosch, and J. Johnson) and a proposed (non-equity) co-operative farm model (B. Currie) are discussed as possible solutions to land transfer problems and to the barriers that young couples face entering farming.

The volume's fifth and sixth sections focus on technical advances in "Chemicals" and "Machinery," respectively, both of which have had profound impacts on the nature and structure of agriculture. In section 5, G. Argue, B. Stirling, and P. Diaz revisit the de-skilling debate in their examination of the relationship between the use of agricultural chemicals and the erosion of other weed-control practices and knowledge. The authors' references to "scientific farming" and the movement toward monocultures dovetail nicely with the concerns that I. Cushon raises about highly-mechanized, capital-intensive (conventional) agriculture. Organic farming is profiled as an alternative and potentially more sustainable approach to "maintaining productivity and economic returns for the short term." Section 6 begins with a historical overview of the legacy of Canadian Co-operative Implements Ltd. (CCIL) as a "populist response to the machinery industry through market intervention" (D. Faller). The remaining selections address various aspects of the dynamic interchange among science, technology, commerce, agribusiness, and farming practices.

The book's final section deals appropriately with the many and varied issues bound up in the ongoing debate over globalization, economic

development, state intervention, and agricultural policy. M. Knuttila situates the Canadian agricultural sector within the larger historical contexts of the national economy and global capitalism, arguing that the “rural crisis” and the restructuring of agriculture must be interpreted in light of this “new international order.” J. W. Warnock extends this discussion through an in-depth analysis of “industrial agriculture,” including aspects such as “increased capital and technology and vertical integration into the food processing industry,” “the accelerated trend to concentration of ownership in food processing,” and the introduction of biotechnology. Other topics of interest in this section include agrarian socialism, farm support payments, and workers’ health and safety issues (A. Paavo). R. Atkinson and J. N. McCrorie comment on the decline of agrarian socialism and the proclivity for collective action, which “for a considerable period of time enjoyed a measure of hegemony within the political and social culture of the [Prairie] region.” K. Jensen examines the impact of farm income support systems on farm depopulation, increased farm size, and dwindling rural communities.

*Farm Communities at the Crossroads* is a valuable collection of articles addressing the transformation of Prairie rural life. Given the variability of the topics and disciplinary foci, however, sectional introductions highlighting core concepts, research issues, and interpretive (or analytical) frameworks would have been useful. The overall impact and intent of the project could have been enhanced by an epilogue in the manner of J. Jaffe’s opening article. Further, although the future of farm communities is deemed central to the book’s purpose, its coverage is sometimes eclipsed by the discussion of structural changes in agriculture, farm production processes, and other related factors. That said, *Farm Communities at the Crossroads* represents a valuable contribution to the conjoint fields of rural studies and rural development, and students of various disciplines would be well served by carefully perusing its contents. **Kenneth C. Bessant**, *Department of Rural Development, Brandon University*.