

LOCAL

FARMS

IN

LEWISBURG

Sociology 258

Mary, Catelyn, and Sam

Transcript

Mary: Hi everyone my name is Mary

Sam: My name is Sam

Catelyn: And I am Catelyn. Welcome to our podcast on the local farms in Pennsylvania, specifically those that are close to our school, Bucknell University.

Mary: The three of us are sociologists with the goal of understanding how local farms obtain their market, but also how they make a difference in the greater Lewisburg community.

Sam: To start off we are going to introduce our topic of discussion with some context, then we will move into the information we gathered from the farms themselves.

Catelyn: Our hope for you guys is to take away the importance of supporting local food systems, and how people are affected by this. With that, let's get into it!

Music

Sam: In this section of the podcast, we are going to be answering general questions about food systems, specifically farming, and opening up a broader discussion about specific farms that surround us.

Catelyn: Lets start off by speaking on the importance of supporting local food systems, specifically farms

Mary: There are multiple routes I could take to answer this question, but, first of all, smaller scaled and family-owned farms often face challenges in competing with larger, industrialized agriculture. Continuous support will help these smaller operations survive and thrive. Also, local farms often employ sustainable farming practices that can reduce the environmental impact of food production. This includes practices like crop rotation, reduced pesticide and fertilizer use, and the preservation of open space. Each farm has their own specific techniques when it comes to efficiency and sustainability, and we will get more into this later when we introduce the farms. The largest thing we want to emphasize here is the community that comes from the continuous support of local food systems. Having recognizable customers is definitely rewarding the farmers, and allows them to have the assurance of knowing people will continue to support their business.

Catelyn: Those were great points. Thanks for that information, Mary. And stemming off of that I think it is also important to address why farming on a local scale may have challenges for the workers. While small farms may offer certain advantages, such as a more intimate work environment, there are also unique difficulties that workers may encounter. Smaller-scale environments with a lack of resources may tie into the lower wages that farm workers typically receive, especially smaller farms. Along with this, due to the small scale of most local farms, it may be difficult for workers to find consistent work, especially during seasonal fluctuations.

Sam: Very true Catelyn, and also for larger scale agriculture organizations, there is often the opportunity of being a migrant worker, and moving when there are seasonal changes and work elsewhere. These workers get to make the choice of potentially higher wages, better working conditions or living conditions, and more. Those who are pursuing a small-scale family farm may be obligated to stay in one area, or may not have the resources to move work out of their given area. With that being said, I would say it is less likely for there to be migrant workers flowing in and out of the Lewisburg area.

Mary: And with there being less wiggle room for numerous resources, there is a greater importance for local people to support these small food systems. If no one was motivated to support these local farms, not only in Lewisburg, but anywhere, then there would be a significant amount of job loss, decreased income, and overall economic vulnerability.

Sam: It is important that we acknowledge these vulnerabilities knowing that some farmers do not have the option of other work.

Catelyn: This is especially true in the greater Lewisburg area considering the amount of Amish families that pass down their skills and traditions through every generation.

Mary: Ya definitely. Specifically in Pennsylvania, Amish families do not typically have individualized beliefs to ensure their traditional doctrines are not challenged. With this being said, they are less inclined to reach out to the outside world for beneficial, typically modernized technological resources. However, this also does not mean they do not use any modern technology on certain factors, such as communications and marketing, but definitely not as much as another farm system with no religious factors.

Catelyn: Very true, Amish families may be more inclined to continue these local food reproductions due to the skills that have been in their families for generations. However, the focus of this podcast is going to be on the impact local farms have on the greater community, but also the economic/social challenges they may face.

Music

Mary: Firstly, I want to thank all of the farmers who took the time to answer our questions, and gave us a better understanding of the ins and outs of these farming systems. So thank you Old Mill Creamery, and Dream Catcher Farm.

Catelyn: To start off, we are going to speak on behalf of Old Mill Creamery, specifically John Nolt who was kind enough to shed light on his farming experience. He opened by acknowledging that farming has been a multi-generation occupation in his family, so it was somewhat assumed without really saying so, that if the opportunity would arise, he would farm. He then says, “The term family business is a broad term that is often misunderstood and misused. Historically it meant that the farm was owned and managed by a single generation, so, the parents and their growing children. Today because it is deemed to be a marketing tool, many operations are run by multiple generations and/or extended family cousins, meaning they still want to be known as family farms.”

Sam: He then described the fact that there are two sides to the business. The dairy farm where they produce crops and feed for the dairy cows, which is strictly a single-family labor operation, and then the direct marketing side, Old Mill Creamery, which consists of 2 family employees, and about 9-13 hired full-time employees. Because this farm is a smaller-scaled, old-style farm, the owner generally runs the farm from start to finish, whereas larger family farms will have separate management positions within the farm.

Mary: John acknowledges that due to the fact they are a smaller-scaled family farm, his business is a “dying breed.” His daily life for the past 30 years includes being the cattle health manager, the reproduction specialist, the milking equipment maintenance guy, the farm equipment repair man, the crop planning guy, the nutrient management man, the crop harvest manager, the overseer of the calf and heifer raising portion of the farm, and the head of office work and farm maintenance. Clearly, this is a lot of work to take on, for 1-2 people, and like John told us, larger farms typically have these roles each covered by numerous people.

Catelyn: Now that we know a bit more about Old Mill Creamery, we are going to dive into the challenges that John primarily emphasizes for the farm. One of the primary challenges would be the extremely high cost of start-up. Along with this, the added cost of environmental-related paperwork, such as the time and expenses of engineering for new projects can make a lot of smaller projects cost prohibitive. Interestingly, John says “In the larger farming operations where everything is sold wholesale, marketing is not as competition driven at the farm level. However, smaller direct market ventures can have a huge effect if a neighbor starts retailing the same products you are doing. Also, the competition to rent or buy farm ground is a very real factor.”

Mary: Ya he definitely emphasized the fact that there are so many cost factors when implementing new farm grounds, or crops. In terms of efficiency, cost saving is always on a farmer's mind, from soil testing regularly for the most efficient nutrient use, to keeping feed rations balanced for the most efficient feed usage is done all the time. The change to no-till and minimum-till farming has been a big success for cost savings, and sustainability as well. As I mentioned earlier, each farm has different strategies when it comes to sustainable practices, some possibly making a farm more appealing than others.

Sam: Mary already touched on some of these practices, such as no-till farming which reduces sediment runoff, and soil testing which makes sure the right nutrients are put in the right place. Another practice they use is the implementation of cover crops and double crops over most of their acres. On another hand, all of farming is a gamble with the weather, they never know what kind of a crop year it will be. They know extremely dry or wet things won't grow, so there is a distinct balance that these farmers need to follow.

Catelyn: One final factor that we asked John about was any challenges in the off-season, or if there was less work for them during these times. He says, “Seasonality is a fact in farming that is so normal that most farmers don't even put any thought into it. If you have livestock you will not run out of work. Now, produce farmers and grain farmers would be a little different. But, we never run out of things to do, just money to get them done.”

Mary: Knowing all of this information, our biggest takeaway from this interview was the fact that there is always work to do within a small-scale, family-owned farm. Yes, workers take on numerous jobs, some of which may be stressful and difficult to manage at times, but ultimately, we see a large drive for the success of this business, in the present, and for years to come. It seems that their biggest challenge ties into the cost and office management on the marketing side of the business.

Sam: Ya, and it is clear that the creamery leaves a very meaningful impact on the community. From the hard-working employees to their delicious produce, they have a lot to offer in the greater Lewisburg area. The other farm we talked to, Dream Catcher Farm, had both similar and dissimilar information to Old Mill Creamery.

Break

Catelyn: We were lucky enough to speak with Joe, the owner of Dream Catcher Farm. He described the farm as small and diverse, having one full-time manager and numerous part-time summer workers. In contrast to John, Joe did not always know he would be in the farming industry, as this business is not the same style, family-owned business as Old Mill Creamery.

Mary: Also, as mentioned earlier, John and his wife alone are in charge of a significant portion of the labor in the behind-the-scenes work on the farm, and use their hired employees mostly for the marketing side of the business. Dream Catcher, however, uses their hired employees to maintain plants, harvest and distribute fruits and vegetables, and implement regenerative agricultural practices. While they may seem to have more hands on deck for the labor work within the farm, Joe also mentioned there is still a challenge of finding labor availability.

Sam: Going off of that, Joe also spoke on the fact that there are other many challenges for small farms. One of the larger challenges is marketing, however, Joe mentioned how lucky he felt to be in close proximity to Lewisburg. He says that a significant population that values the health and environmental benefits that farms produce is necessary for community-supported agriculture. It is extremely vital for smaller-scale farms to have loyal customers who value their organic products rather than continuous support towards larger name-brand companies we find in larger grocery stores.

Catelyn: That's very true, he also surprisingly mentioned that "competition is a myth," which we found to be surprising due to the fact that large agricultural companies and grocery stores in the area have the money for higher-end marketing. Nonetheless, he also discussed the fact that price and expectations are heavily influenced by a handful of large corporations. Some of the other challenges he mentioned were similar to Old Mill Creamery's. For example, climate change, and distribution. Joe also mentioned the fact that they have small-scale technology which is labor intensive, an asset that John mentioned they do not have the costs for.

Mary: Some of the farming methods specific to Dream Catcher Farm include diverse mineral applications through compost, bio-char, manure, cover crops, rotations, green manures, and over all natural farming practices. Between both of the farms, both Joe and John emphasized the fact that there is always work to

do as the season and weather guide the attention of work. In all, there were many similarities between the two farms, with the exception of some surprising factors.

Sam: We are so happy we had the chance to speak with both of these farms, and learn more about the challenges on smaller scaled farms in the Lewisburg area, and uncover some misconceptions that we had going into this project.

Catelyn: We hope that you all are able to take away the fact that while every farm has something special to offer, the importance of supporting these small scaled businesses builds a valuable foundation for the small numbered, hard-working farmers who want to continue their work legacies.

Mary: Thank you all for taking the time to listen to this podcast all the way through, and we hope this information will leave a lasting impression on you all.

Music

Artist Statement:

The beginning portion of our project draft introduces the importance of supporting local food systems, and the challenges that workers face within local farms. At first, we have a broader discussion surrounding the economic challenges of smaller businesses due to competition with big industrial agriculture. We get into different sustainable tactics that small farms may use in comparison to big corporations. This includes practices like crop rotation, reduced pesticide and fertilizer use, and the preservation of open space. We then move into the sense of community that family-owned and smaller-scale farms enhance. Much of the time there are regular customers, which is definitely rewarding to the farmers, and allows them to have the assurance of knowing people will continue to support their business. Finally, we move into a brief discussion of Amish families, and how their way of life may contribute to differences that we see in farming markets and efficiencies. We acknowledge how they are typically less inclined to reach out to the outside world for beneficial, modernized technological resources. After this, we moved into our interviews with specific farms. The farms that we got the opportunity to speak to were the Old Mill Creamery and Dream Catcher Farm. They gave us specific details about their farm and their experiences working on a farm. We discuss challenges and traditions that are important to both owners of the farm. We ended our podcast by describing how much we learned about Lewisburg food systems, and hope that others who listened to our podcast will get a better understanding as well.

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Signed consent forms and community partners review forms:

Signed Consent Form #1

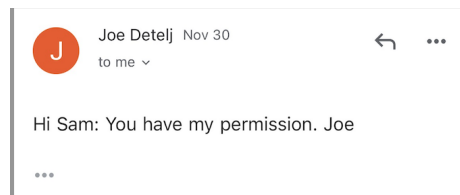
SOCI 258: Gender, Race, and Poverty in the United States Instructor: Marya T. Mtshali, PhD
Fall 2023

Community Partner Student Project Review Form

I certify that I have reviewed Catelyn Peters, Mary Page and Sam Heff final project for SOCI 258, and I understand that The interview recording, my name (Joe) and Dream Catcher Farm will be used for this final project. I also understand that this project will be displayed on a website affiliated with Bucknell University and will be made available to the public. I understand that if I want a copy of this form for my records, I can request one from Catelyn Peters, Mary Page and Sam Heff .

Name: Joe Detelj

Signature: Joe Detelj



Date: November 30, 2023

Signed Consent Form #2

SOCI 258: Gender, Race, and Poverty in the United States Instructor: Marya T. Mtshali, PhD
Fall 2023

Community Partner Student Project Review Form

I certify that I have reviewed Catelyn Peters, Mary Page, and Sam Heff final project for SOCI 258, and I understand that The interview recording, my name (John), and Old Mill Creamery will be used for this final project. I also understand that this project will be displayed on a website

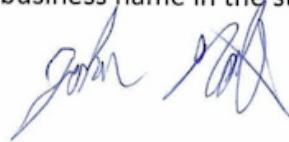
affiliated with Bucknell University and will be made available to the public. I understand that if I want a copy of this form for my records, I can request one from Catelyn Peters, Mary Page and Sam Heff .

Name: John Nolt

Signature:

Too; Bucknell Sociology Project

Just a note to let you know that, I, John Nolt/ Old Mill Creamery is here by giving the project permission to use the information I gave and the business name in the study project.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John Nolt", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Date: 12/5/2023