

IMPLEMENTING AND MAINTAINING NEOLIBERAL AGRICULTURE IN AUSTRALIA.

PART I

CONSTRUCTING NEOLIBERALISM AS A VISION FOR AGRICULTURAL POLICY

Bill Pritchard
School of Geosciences
University of Sydney

Introduction

Since the commencement of the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1986, Australia (along with New Zealand) has been the world's leading advocate for the liberalisation of agricultural trade. Via the Cairns Group of agricultural exporter countries, it successfully incorporated agriculture into the WTO system, and has argued consistently for the reduction of agricultural tariffs and subsidies in North America, the European Union (EU) and Japan. The economic ideologies and policies advanced by Australia envisage a future for world agriculture in which the market regulates production and trade, and the role of national governments is reduced to that of providing a supportive legislative framework for the private sector.

But how did the Australian Government become such an ardent convert to the liberalisation of agriculture, and how have these policy philosophies been sustained? Taking these questions as a cue, this article is the first instalment of a two-part analysis of the implementation and maintenance of neoliberal agricultural policies in Australia (its successor is Pritchard, forthcoming). The current article examines the construction of agricultural liberalisation as a policy vision. Its successor addresses the question of how this policy philosophy has been sustained. Taken together, their specific aims are to critically examine the interplay of policy development and legitimation that has accompanied the Australian Government's embrace of agricultural liberalisation, in order to uncover the connections and contexts that frame State actions in this policy field. This focus responds to Morgan's (2003:1) observation that the "crucial nexus of politics in its deepest sense—the 'art of the possible'—lies" in the bureaucracies of governance. In other words, these articles seek to expose and analyse the detail of the ideological and policy rationales that are used by proponents to validate the alleged 'inevitability', 'rationality' and 'superiority' of the Australian agricultural policy experience.

Situated in its broader context, the analysis provided by these articles asks whether Australia's pursuit of liberalisation on the domestic and international agricultural stage really provides a legitimate basis for the country's aspirations to remould global agriculture in its own image. There is a rich vein of thinking within the policy mainstream of Australia that suggests that the nation's 'brave' pursuit of agricultural liberalisation has established a universal set of policy prescriptions for global agriculture. To this end, the Australian case has relevance beyond its national significance. If world agriculture is progressing along a trajectory towards greater globalisation—in this sense referring to the construction of a single worldwide market for agri-food production and ownership—then developments in Australia would appear to offer guidance for debates on the future shape of world agriculture and food. As suggested in the introduction to a special issue of the journal *Rural Sociology* dedicated to Australia and New Zealand, "while there was much to be learned from intellectual developments in the US, the Australasian region also had a unique contribution to make" (Burch et al. 1999:180).

This article, then, tells the tale of how and why Australia has embraced agricultural liberalisation with such fervour. In the early twenty-first century, liberal market ideology is dominant and largely uncontested within key arenas of Australian agricultural policy formation. The halls of the bureaucracy and the corridors of the Parliament are each committed to the ideal of a freer global agricultural trading system, on the assumption that the emulation of vision domestically has been a proven success. To document how this has occurred, relevant conceptual issues are firstly addressed that contextualise the meaning of ‘agricultural liberalisation’. This is followed by an analysis of how these ideas gained currency in their intellectual and policy contexts. Reflecting on this evidence, the last major section of this article uses a statist model of government behaviour to argue that the Australian Government’s conversion to the liberalisation orthodoxy reflects the ability of a policy community to capture and then dominate the terms of debate over agricultural policy. Consistent with this dominance, discourses about the ‘inevitability’, ‘rationality’ and ‘national interest’ of these strategies have been inscribed within policy texts. But as followed up in this article’s successor, the construction of these narratives encloses inherent contradictions that raise questions about whether, indeed, Australian agricultural liberalisation is in the national interest.

Agricultural liberalisation or neo-liberal agriculture?

Between the 1970s and the 1990s there were fundamental changes to the role played by the Australian nation-state in the governance of agriculture. In the vernacular, these changes have been described as representing a process of ‘agricultural liberalisation’ which seeks to construct a mode of ‘neo-liberal agriculture’. Indeed, the very title of this article presumes that these terms provide an unproblematic descriptor of this quantum of change. Yet before proceeding further there is merit in investigate the meaning and implications of these terms, so that the ensuing analysis is grounded conceptually.

Firstly, the concept of liberalisation does not imply the diminution or abandonment of state’s presence. Recent scholarship has disputed narratives that assert a ‘hollowing out’ of the state. At one level, the size and institutional scope of state functions remains considerable, both in Australia and in other developed countries (O’Neill 2005: 63). At another, it is apparent that capital requires the existence of state functions (notably, upholding the rule of law) as a precondition for accumulation (Weiss 1999). Rather, what liberalisation implies is a restructuring of state apparatus that involves “a shift in rationalities and technologies of governing” (Higgins 2002: 164), and changes relating to who is favoured and under what circumstances (Egan 2001).

This is done in accordance with a meta-narrative (Morgan 2003) that argues the community’s interests are best served by creating space for capital. At times this may involve ‘rolling-back the state’ by way of privatisations and private contracting. On others it involves ‘roll-out’ policies that extend the visible hand of the state through measures to protect capital interests (for example, the strengthening of intellectual property laws). Either way, these programs transform but do not abrogate the state’s role in society. Indeed, recent analysis of the much-heralded ‘New Zealand neo-liberal experiment’ suggests that even this landmark exemplar was not a coherent set of programs and policies, but more of a disparate series of decisions that used the common discursive umbrella of neo-liberalism to respond in particular and different ways to a national economic crisis (Le Heron 2005).

Secondly, liberalisation and neo-liberalism need to be understood as contested and incomplete political projects. For O’Neill and Argent ‘neo-liberalism lurks’. It:

presents an agenda of possibilities for those with the power to enact change. But this agenda must be devised and played out in historical and geographical circumstances which may compete with the idea of neoliberalism to determine the scope of what is possible. (2005: 5)

This is an important point to emphasise because, as O'Neill suggests elsewhere (2005: 64), acceptance of neo-liberalism as *fait accompli* only serves to 'self-actualise' the project. The evident strength of the liberalisation juggernaut notwithstanding, its manifestations in state action are dependent upon socio-spatial contingencies. Applied to the case of Australian agricultural liberalisation, this suggests an obligation for researchers to investigate the 'on-the-ground' practices of liberalisation, rather than assume its condition. Good examples of such agendas are provided in work on the strategies and rationalities of governmentality in policy areas such as rural development, environmental management, and drought management (Herbert-Cheshire 2000, 2003; Herbert-Cheshire and Lawrence 2002; Higgins 2001, 2002).

The intellectual wellspring for agricultural liberalisation

Implementation of these policy ideologies over a period of a few decades has been a constituent element of a much broader turnaround in Australian economic philosophy, and this broader canvas needs to be painted in order to tell the story of agricultural policy. For much of the twentieth century, the Australian economy was amongst the most protected within developed capitalist countries. Closely following Federation in 1901, the 'Australian settlement' was sealed as a set of principles that accorded protection to the manufacturing sector combined with 'wage justice' through centralised wage fixation (Kelly 1992). This arrangement sought to maximise the number of people employed at high wages, within the context of a country with rich natural resource endowments (Anderson and Garnaut 1987). For agriculture, this policy paradigm raised the cost of manufacturing inputs (such as chemicals, machinery, etc) above international market prices, and thus impacted adversely against competitiveness. Correspondingly however, farmers' incomes were safeguarded by the supportive geopolitical environment of British Imperialism (providing privileged access for Australian agricultural exports into the UK) and an extensive set of administrative interventions that aimed to construct 'orderly markets' by facilitating 'fair' and equal prices for agricultural products amongst producers. Politically, this latter aspect of policy was secured by the Country Party (now the National Party), which for much of this period was a member of the successive Australian Coalition Governments. The Country Party espoused a philosophy referred to as 'country mindedness' (Aitken 1985), which morally equated the protection of the 'average farmer' with the wellbeing of the nation as a whole (Lockie 2000:17–19).

From the early 1960s, aspects of the Australian settlement came under ideological challenge from the so-called 'second-wave' Chicago School economic paradigm. This school of thought "adheres strictly to neoclassical price theory", advocates "'free market' libertarianism in much of its policy work" and is associated with "'economic imperialism' [namely] the application of economic reasoning to areas traditionally considered the prerogative of other fields such as political science, legal theory, history and sociology" (Department of Economics, New School University 2005). Although the genesis of the Chicago School can be dated from the 1920s, its influential 'second-wave' took root in the 1960s with the work of Milton Friedman and George J. Stigler. Under their tutelage, the Chicago School of the 1960s and 1970s "maintained itself dead against the concept of market failures, reinforcing the... stance against imperfect competition and Keynesian economics (Department of Economics, New School University 2005).

The rise in influence of the Chicago School within the community of Australian economics affected the intellectual practice and philosophical orientation of the sub-discipline of agricultural economics, with implications for the recruitment of graduates into the areas of the Canberra bureaucracy dealing with agricultural policy. The strengthening of these ideas can be illustrated by the Presidential Addresses to the Australian Agricultural Economics Society over the formative years of 1969–72. Through the

1960s the sub-discipline of agricultural economics grew steadily in terms of weight of numbers and influence, such that by 1969 the Presidential Address for the Society could claim:

The state of agricultural economics is in marked contrast to that of other fields of applied economics in Australia. No other group of applied economists is even remotely comparable to us in numbers, output or professional organisation (Parish 1969: 1).

Consistent with the Chicago School praxis of 'economic imperialism' however, these successes were interpreted as providing a strategic launching pad for the spread of conceptual tools and methods into new realms. Justifying the colonisation of public policy by agricultural economists as being 'in the national interest', the Presidential Address for 1969 went on to say:

However, it does seem to me that the growth of agricultural economics in this country has reached the stage where the more significant economies of scale and specialisation have been attained, and, in the future, one could hope to see members of our profession, including our newer graduates, applying their skills to problems of national importance, or of theoretical interest, be they agricultural or other fields... It would seem to me to be in the national interest if some of our more high-powered managerial scientists were to move from university departments of farm management into the Department of Defence; if cost-benefit experts were to scrutinise the decisions of the biggest irrigators of them all, the metropolitan water boards; if more attention were to be paid to the price of oil and gas, even at the expense of less being paid to the price of wheat; if a Bureau of Urban Economics were to poach some staff from the BAE [Bureau of Agricultural Economics]; and if those concerning themselves with problems of wheat- and meat- grading were to widen their interest to encompass the whole field of consumer protection and education. (Italics added) (Parish 1969: 5)

The call for agricultural economists to 'go forth and multiply' through the Canberra bureaucracy was accompanied by an increasing self-righteousness amongst the sub-discipline's academic leadership. The Presidential Address for 1970 was focused upon the discrepancy between the successes of the discipline in terms of its incipient power-bases within universities and the bureaucracy to reshape the agricultural policy debate, and the reluctance of the farm lobby (at that time) to go along with these new visions. Yet in explaining this discrepancy, fault was seen to lie in the attitudes of rural Australia, not the credentials of academic practitioners:

Many of the farm leaders are highly intelligent and dedicated men, who lack the educational background, supporting staff and time to brief themselves properly on complex economic issues. Most of them have the practical man's scorn for a rigorous analytical approach, particularly when it comes up with unpalatable answers. (Lloyd 1970: 106)

Viewed in hindsight, it was perhaps not surprising that Australia's farm leadership would embrace an approach to policy that generated 'unpalatable answers'. Taking up this theme in 1971, the Presidential Address suggested:

While agricultural economists have expressed their concern about the welfare of those hurt by the changes taking place in agriculture, as elsewhere, I think it is true that they have also assumed that such matters fall outside our strict disciplinary limits and would be dealt with adequately by those more directly concerned. I am not sure

that we can afford to, or should, make that assumption. Some of the research needs that this suggests will require the skills of sociologists or demographers in collaboration with economists. (Harris 1971: 128)

Yet a year later, such concerns were dealt with dismissively. Looking ahead into the latter part of the twentieth century, the 1972 Presidential Address invoked a vision of the demise of family farming and the broadening of the policy influence of agricultural economists as measures of success for the sub-discipline:

Over the middle term from 1978 to 1990, my hope is that we will see two developments. The first is that there will be a strong development of industrial or large-scale agriculture. This may or may not involve corporate farming but it does imply a sizeable swing away from family farming in the traditional sense... What I mean by industrialised agriculture is one where the approach to management and production is far more 'industrial' and profit oriented than it is today; and where the traditional values of rural living and ownership count for far less than they do among today's producers. My second hope is that by 1990 we will have had a significant widening in the interests of agricultural economics. (Dillon 1972: 79)

Translating concepts and ideologies into policy practice

These intellectual foundations were applied to the liberalisation of Australian agriculture through three major economic debates. The first of these related to manufacturing protection, upon which there was a paradigm shift during the 1960s and 1970s. Then in the 1980s, the Australian Government's trade policies shifted fundamentally towards the advocacy of multilateral liberalisation. Finally in the 1990s, largely through the enactment of competition policy laws, domestic agricultural marketing arrangements were deregulated in favour of market principles. Whereas each of these policy spheres involved separate administrative processes and trajectories, nonetheless they intersected in the sense of offering a similar policy vision, and therefore routinely involved the same institutions and personalities advocating ideologically consistent positions ranging across these various domains. Taken together, they broadly illustrate the process described by Kingdon (2003:165–83) that involves 'policy windows' being opened via the coupling of policies and politics by so-called 'policy entrepreneurs'. As discussed in this section, the oftentimes triumphal narrative of contemporary policy makers that Australia's adoption of these policies was both 'rational' and 'inevitable' obscures the more matter-of-fact observation that neoliberal agriculture was a policy choice driven by ideological insistence within influential policy communities.

(i) Dismantling manufacturing protection

Sustained criticism of manufacturing protection began in the early 1960s and was led by the 'elite opinion' of economists (Garnaut 2002:139). Garnaut (himself one of the leading architects in this shift) recounts that 'the first breach of the protectionist line' occurred with the resignation in quiet protest of the Chairman of the Tariff Board, Sir Leslie Melville, in 1962 (Garnaut 2002:151).¹ Afterwards, a changed leadership of the Tariff Board advanced a more liberal line on protection. Prominent advocates of this position were the (new) Tariff Board Chairman (G. A. Rattigan) and the economist, Max Corden. Then, in further weight to the changed opinion within the Tariff Board, a commission of

¹ The Tariff Board was an independent agency of the Australian Government charged with making recommendations on tariff rates. It was restructured and renamed to become the Industries Assistance Commission in the 1970s; the Industry Commission in the 1980s, and the Productivity Commission in the 1990s.

inquiry into the Australian economy ('The Vernon Report') documented the impacts of tariffs on price and cost levels within the economy. As summarised by Garnaut:

By the late 1960s the economic professions was advocating import liberalisation with near unanimity and with increasing sophistication... [and] the financial press, led by the Australian Financial Review, was giving extensive coverage to the Tariff Board's heresy [in promoting liberalisation] (Garnaut 2002:151).

Agriculture played an important background context for the dramatic shift in professional 'elite' opinion in the 1960s and 1970s. Analysis by the Tariff Board and its successor, the Industries Assistance Commission, clearly identified agriculture as being the major economic beneficiary from tariff reform. Interestingly however, the Australian agricultural sector itself took a number of years to be swayed by this opinion. It was only in 1979 that the National Farmers Federation (NFF) was formed, and through this institution body and voice was given to champion liberalisation. Throughout the 1980s the NFF was an unapologetic advocate for a liberalised economy, with its journal *Reform* playing a leading role in putting issues into play within the public arena (Argy 1998:233). By the late 1980s, the free marketers had effectively 'won' the protection debate. Victory declarations were delivered in the 1988 and 1991 Industry Statements of the Hawke Government, which announced a timetable for the phased reduction and elimination of virtually all manufacturing tariffs.

(ii) The embrace of multilateralism in trade policy

If agriculture played a background role in the manufacturing tariff debate, it was front and centre in the evolving debate on Australian trade strategy of the mid-1980s. During much of the twentieth century, Australian trade policy was subsumed into the Imperial politics of the British Empire/Commonwealth. The Ottawa Agreement of 1932 accorded Australia (along with other Commonwealth countries) preferential access to the British market for key agricultural products, and this privileged status was maintained in varied forms until the UK's entry to the European Economic Community (the forerunner to the European Union), in the early 1970s. Britain's EEC membership presented a major challenge for Australian export agriculture, which ramified into the nation's trade strategies during the following decades.

Changes to Australia's relationship with the multilateral trading system bear witness to these challenges. Australia was a foundation member of the GATT in 1947 and historically has played an influential role in that organisation and its successor, the WTO (Capling 2001). Nevertheless, until the commencement of the Uruguay Round in the mid-1980s the GATT regime had little material affect on the Australian economy or trade policy, as Australia "did not always take its GATT tariff bindings seriously" (Garnaut 2002:159). Consequently:

Almost no Australian tariffs were reduced as a result of these [pre-Uruguay Round] GATT negotiations. Our Government saw Australia as essentially a developing country with an infant manufacturing industry. Furthermore—and this was the main reason for Australia not reducing its tariffs in the GATT process—given that Australia was an exporter of agricultural products (with no immediate prospects of significant exports of manufactures), it was perceived that we had nothing to gain from reciprocity when the rounds excluded agriculture (Corden 1996:145).

Upon the election of the Hawke Labour Government in 1983, Australian agricultural trade was in an invidious position. Privileged access to the UK was diminished, and agricultural trade was largely outside the ambit of the multilateral system. New export markets had been bilaterally opened in Japan (dairy and sugar), the Middle East (grains and live sheep) and the United State (beef), but these did not necessarily secure the prospects for the sector. During the first two years of the Hawke Government, the

new Trade Minister (Lionel Bowen) sought to progress this problematic position through a more assertive bilateralism. Nevertheless, this strategy came soon to be replaced by multilateralist strategies that sought the inclusion of agriculture within the GATT. The first significant manifestation of this was a speech by Prime Minister Hawke in Bangkok in December 1983 (Garnaut 2002:159). Subsequent diplomatic effort built momentum for this agenda, which culminated in the commencement of the Uruguay Round of the GATT in September 1986. One month prior to the commencement of the Round, Australia hosted a meeting of agricultural exporter nations with the aim of solidifying a common bargaining position. This meeting at Cairns (hence the alliance being called ‘the Cairns Group’) formed the basis for collective pressure being exerted on agricultural protectionist countries via the multilateral system. In Canberra meanwhile, the bilateralism of Minister Bowen was replaced by a stronger multilateralist ideology upon the appointment (in late 1984) of his successor, John Dawkins. The new Minister battled internal resistance—upon the fifteenth anniversary of the commencement of the Uruguay Round, he confided that his own department had warned that the multilateral agenda ‘would end in tears’ (Perrett 2001:50)—before launching a comprehensive transformation in the Government’s position. In his history of this period, Jones (1994:15) identifies a particular moment that signified this shift; a parliamentary speech by Dawkins on 13 May 1985 in which he “damned with faint praise” his own Department’s bilateral strategies. Approximately two years later, the erstwhile Department of Trade was merged with the Department of Foreign Affairs (to form the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, DFAT), and as Jones recounts:

The Department of Trade was not an equal partner in this merger, but was split up and spread to the four winds... Only the Multilateral Division [within the old Trade Department] went to DFAT unsevered, from which base in DFAT it flourished to generate the dominant trade culture... Thus [the merged DFAT] comprised the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Multilateral Division of Trade (Jones 1994:17) (italics added).

This bureaucratic architecture complemented and reinforced Australia’s leadership role in advocating multilateral agricultural reform within the Uruguay Round.² Capling (2001:112) suggests that without access to the financial and practical resources of DFAT, the old Department of Trade “would have found it impossible to maintain Australia’s diplomatic activism over the eight years of the Uruguay Round”. The Cairns Group was headquartered in the Australian mission in Geneva, and commencing in the late 1980s, DFAT undertook and sponsored extensive economic research that sought to quantify the potential national and global benefits from multilateral liberalisation (side-by-side with comparable research undertaken by economic units attached to the Department of Primary Industries).³ In addition to the Government’s internal economic research capabilities, there soon emerged an array of external economic consultants dependent upon the provision of such advice to the Government. As elaborated upon below, an appreciation of this “institutional capacity” (Capling 2001:110) is vital for an understanding of the dominance of the multilateral vision through the 1990s and into the twenty-first century.

² Australia’s leadership role in the Cairns Group was defended bodily, as illustrated in the following story from the Group’s second ever meeting, in Ottawa in 1987. The Group had not determined Chairmanship protocols and Australia’s asserted its right to Chair as founder, while Canada asserted it as host. As Capling (2001:120) relates, the issue “was resolved when Dawkins simply pushed Carney [Canada’s Trade Minister] out of the chair”.

³ The Bureau of Agricultural Economics (BAE), which in 1987 became the Australian Bureau of Agricultural Resource Economics (ABARE), and the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC).

(iii) Dismantling regulations in domestic agriculture

The dismantling of statutory marketing boards and collective agricultural bargaining was the third overlapping policy theme in this transition towards agricultural liberalisation in Australia. As with other like-minded policy agendas, the origins of these initiatives date from the rise of monetarist and neoclassical economics in reshaping policy thinking within the Canberra bureaucracy. At its core, the 'new thinking' on agriculture challenged the assumption that orderly market arrangements optimised national economic benefits. At the time, many of Australia's agricultural industries were comprehensively regulated by supply management regimes that aimed to stabilise prices and production volumes via direct market interventions. These systems had been established in the context of the Keynesian economic strategies that were put in place during and following the Great Depression and the Second World War. Influential think-tanks such as the Centre for Independent Studies began to publish neoclassical analyses of these regulations (for example, Sieper 1982), which inevitably concluded that they hobbled the efficiency of Australian agriculture, compared to what could be achieved allegedly through market-based alternatives. A series of public inquiries into specific agricultural sectors by the Industry Commission in the 1980s and early 1990s further elaborated the case for regulatory dismantling.

These reports provided a justification for domestic agricultural deregulation, but progress was slow and piecemeal. Then in the mid-1990s, a breakthrough in regulatory change occurred with the enactment of National Competition Policy (NCP) legislation. As Federal Treasurer, the former Trade Minister John Dawkins spearheaded a 1994 agreement between Australia's federal, state and territory governments for a coordinated review of all legislation that impacted upon competition. Under the terms of the agreement, legislation would be revoked unless a demonstrated net social benefit could be proven. For agriculture, this policy meant the timetabled review of 254 separate laws (Pritchard 1999:424). The administrative processes under which these reviews took place tended to define 'social benefits' in accordance with relatively narrow conceptions of economic efficiency. Interest groups had to shoulder the burden of proof explaining why regulatory arrangements should be retained, and prove this against a hostile dominant ideology. The implementation of NCP led to a rapid dismantling of economic regulations in the rural sector (Pritchard 1999).

These policies often have been described in terms of 'deregulating' agriculture, but more correctly are described as instituting a regime of 'market regulation'. Under the new arrangements farmers were still required to comply with an array of rules and procedures when selling their produce, but the key difference was that they were prevented from acting collectively towards these ends. As documented in Pritchard and Burch's (2003:95–129) analysis of these issues in the Australian processing tomato industry, they represented a form of 'enforced individualism'; effectively, the State intervened to force growers to negotiate with (much larger) buyers of their produce on individual terms. More extensively, Morgan (2003) conceives this process as the 'meta-regulation' of society in accordance with what she labels 'the shadow of competition'. She suggests that the kernel of this approach is that it:

institutionalises a presumption in favour of market governance, and this causes bureaucrats to reframe or 'translate' aspects of social welfare that previously may have been expressed in the language of need, vulnerability or harm into the language of market failures or market distortion. (Morgan 2003:3)

The embrace of multilateralism was the anchor for these bureaucratic transformations, because of its role in giving sustenance to the imaginaries of "bounteous wealth" (Jones 1994: i). From the commencement of the Uruguay Round, the Australian Government systemically 'talked up' the prospects of rural wealth arising from (an allegedly impending) global accord on free agricultural trade. Holding out this vision established a justification for allegedly 'necessary' reforms domestically; a

“two-edged sword” of the liberalisation agenda (Pritchard 2000). For advocates of multilateralism, a ‘clean’ domestic agricultural sector was vital for the process of proving Australia’s bona fides in proposing liberalised agriculture at a global level.

Conclusion: Assessing the emergence of market liberal policies for Australian agriculture

The arguments used to maintain these policies are investigated in Pritchard (forthcoming). In the last section of this article, I ask what general insights can be learned from the processes by which Australia embraced liberal agriculture.

Two contrasting approaches to explaining government behaviour provide an entry point for examining these issues in greater detail. First, approaches under the banner of private interest theory and public choice theory suggest that state action can be explained in terms of responsiveness to pressure groups. As summarised by Bell (1995:30), these approaches are essentially society-centred models, in that “overwhelmingly, the arrows of political causation flow from society to state and not the other way around”. On the other hand, ‘statist’ models of government give greater scope for the autonomy of bureaucratic institutions to shape government behaviour through their cultivation of ideological preferences.

Seen within the frames of this (relatively crude) dichotomy,⁴ ‘statist’ approaches would seem to offer greater scope for explaining the conversion of Australian agricultural policy towards neoliberal ideals, at least in its initial stages. As noted earlier, the formative impetus for breaching the Australian settlement came from the elite opinion of economists (Capling and Galligan 1992), which in the 1960s found favour within the Tariff Board. The ideological capture of this key government instrumentality provided a successful beachhead for the further distribution of neoliberalism within government.

For Corden (1996:146) and Garnaut (2002:153), this occurred because of the independence, professionalism and technical literacy of the Tariff Board economists, emulated afterwards by those of its successors and other like-minded institutions. Corden and Garnaut are not incorrect to identify these factors as being important ingredients to the spread of neoliberalism, but the triumphal and functionalist emphasis they give to this explanation is altogether too convenient and simplistic. It is not adequate just to say that neoliberal policies simply won a contest of ideas, based on objective assessment of national costs and benefits. To ascribe policy formulation to the rational metrics of evidence-based analysis is to give insufficient credence to the dynamic connectivity between institutions, interests and agency in the mobilisation of particular world views and their application to government action.

Partisan politics fanned the flames of these developments. As discussed by Capling (2001), the incoming Hawke Labor Government in 1983 was hostile to a perceived legacy of National Party interests in the Primary Industry and Trade portfolios, meaning that agendas of deregulation and multilateralism provided a rationalising vehicle to dislodge conservative influence from Australian rural policy making. As noted earlier, this agenda materialised to greatest effect when Dawkins was appointed Trade Minister in 1984. Prior to the advent of the neoliberal dominance, these areas of government could be characterised as institutional regimes—they administered programs and worked towards particular concrete objectives (for example, getting a better price for Australian sugar being sold into Japan). In the neoliberal period however, much of their rationality has been subsumed by a symbolic agenda—to facilitate the more abstract ideal of multilateral liberalisation. To this extent, much of their focus has become indistinguishable from the agendas of key advocacy coalitions in the private sector,

⁴ There is, of course, extensive elaboration of these ideas within the political science and economics literatures. For the purpose of this article however, only the bare bones of these approaches is referenced.

notably including the National Farmers' Federation and the Business Council of Australia. These areas of government and their private sector counterparts increasingly have become arenas for like-minded policy communities (Grant and MacNamara 1995:509) with shared intellectual views and regular interactions through conferences, joint initiatives and the like. Argy (1998:230) labels this entanglement the 'counter-coalition of free-market interests'. Through the 1980s, the notion of trade and agricultural portfolios being repositories for diverse skills, tacit knowledge bases and corporate memory became replaced gradually by a more monochromatic perspective on the centrality of economic literacy as a platform for recruitment and advancement. According to Corden (1996:149) the "boom in economics training in Australia" during the 1970s and 1980s led to the situation where "senior bureaucrats in key departments... have (almost all) been qualified economists". From a very different perspective, Pusey (1991) argued that these trends were implicated in an ideological capture of policy by neoliberal economic 'hardliners'. Shortly after the publication of Pusey's headline-grabbing book the then-President of the Economic Society in Australia (Fred Argy) strongly renounced Pusey's claims in the annual address to his professional organisation, but in a mea culpa some years later wrote:

However in some ways Pusey has proved quite prophetic: the dangers he saw in the 1980s were exaggerated and premature but they are now proving more real. (Argy 1998:234)

In conclusion, the conversion of Australian agricultural policy to the neoliberal ideal has involved far more than merely an allegedly 'correct' set of policy prescriptions being embraced. Australian agriculture policy has not undergone 'regulatory capture' akin to the US Department of Agriculture (USDA)—where there is ample evidence that policy and program administration is structured to accommodate vested private interests (Browne 1988; Mattera 2004)—but has been converted to a single ideological position through the ability of a policy community to dominate the terms of debate over agricultural policy. Consistent with this dominance, discourses about the 'inevitability' and 'rationality' of neoliberal strategies have flourished. But as argued in this article's successor, the construction of these narratives encloses inherent contradictions that are maintained only through systemic exaggeration of the benefits of these policies; and policy silences over its costs.

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SUPERMARKET OWN BRANDS, SUPPLY CHAINS AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE AGRI-FOOD SYSTEM

David Burch
School of Science
Griffith University
Brisbane

Geoff Lawrence
School of Social Science
The University of Queensland

Introduction¹

Until quite recently, the organization and management of the supply chain in the majority of commodity sectors was controlled by manufacturing industry, and whether the products being sold were socks or sausages, the role of the retail sector was to market the products made available by manufacturers (Reid 1995). This situation began to be transformed in the US and Europe from the 1960s. The fundamental social and economic changes occurring in post-war Europe and North America – in particular, the demand for, and the mass consumption of, a range of high quality products – led to a reconfiguration of the manufacturer-dominated supply chain. What emerged was a highly-competitive retail sector which was free of the post-war constraints of rationing, which was not subjected to resale price maintenance established by the manufacturing sector, and which was closer to the consumer and more responsive to changing patterns of consumer demand (Wilkinson 2002). Manufacturer ‘push’ gave way to retailer ‘pull’ as the retail sector came to displace the manufacturing sector in the organization and management of the agri-food supply chain of the ‘advanced’ industrialized countries.

Numerous researchers have commented on the causes and consequences of this transformation (see, for example, Burch and Goss 1999a; Hughes 1996; Hendrickson, Heffernan, Howard and Heffernan 2001; Marsden 1997; Marsden, Flynn and Harrison 2000; Harvey, Quilley and Beynon 2002; Wilkinson 2002; Winson 1993), and have tended to focus on two main explanatory factors to account for the shift in power; the first is the emergence of a monopsony in distribution, in which a relatively large number of food processing companies are forced to sell their products to a limited number of globally-focused retailers who exercise enormous purchasing power in an increasingly concentrated market; the second is the growing significance of supermarket ‘own brand’ products (referred to as ‘private labels’ in the US) and supermarket ‘generic’ brands (typically marketed under a ‘No Frills’ or ‘Savings’ label), which have in recent years come to compete with the branded products of the established food manufacturing companies.

In this paper, we draw mainly on material from the UK, to argue that there is a third factor that can be held to account for the shift in power relationships between the manufacturing and the retailing sectors, which emerges from the changing patterns of demand for food commodities and the new role that supermarket own brands are playing in this. When supermarket own brand and generic brands became more widespread in the 1970s, they were marketed as low-cost alternatives to the premium products of brand manufacturers, even though they were usually made by the same food manufacturing companies that sold goods under their own proprietary brand. To a significant extent, supermarket own brands were much the same as manufacturer’s proprietary brands (albeit, usually of a lower quality), and

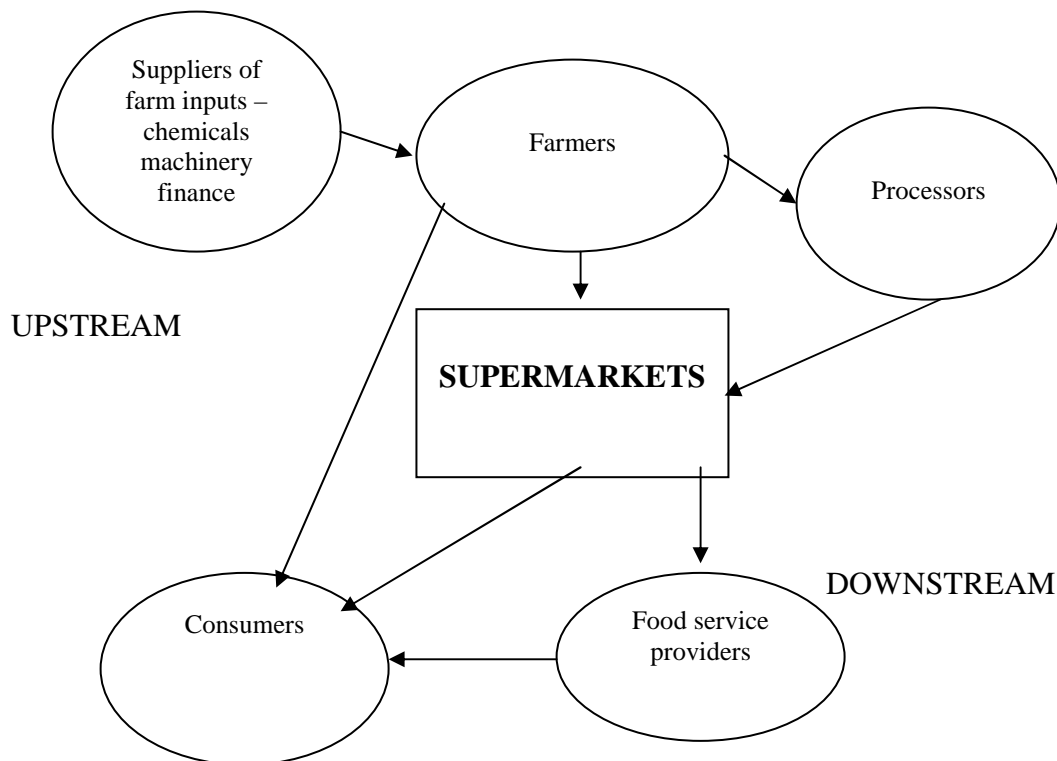
¹ Work on this paper was begun when David Burch was on research leave at the School of Social Sciences, University of Queensland. This School provided a very supportive environment for the collaboration which made this paper possible. An earlier version of this paper was first presented at the Eleventh Annual Meeting of the Australian and New Zealand Agri-Food Research Network, held at the Australian National University, Canberra, 9-11 June 2004. We are grateful for the comments made by participants at this meeting, and to Harriet Friedmann and Philip McMichael for their subsequent comments and observations. We would also like to thank the reviewers, who made several useful suggestions. Of course, we alone are responsible for the contents of this paper.

represented a source of competition to the branded products of the agri-food manufacturers. However, supermarket own brands have now moved beyond imitation, and are at the leading edge in terms of meeting consumer demands for a range of new food products - home meal replacements (and especially chilled ready meals), convenience foods, prepared fresh foods, snacks and other product lines for 'flexi-eating' – which the traditional brand manufacturers are not well-placed to satisfy. As a result, there have emerged a number of major food processing companies which are not only manufacturing new food products for marketing solely under supermarket own brands, but are also transforming the conditions under which the agri-food processing sector – and indeed the whole agri-food supply chain - operates. The emergence of these new companies not only poses a challenge to the established food manufacturing companies, but also highlights the on-going restructuring of the capitalist agri-food system. Such restructuring, in turn, relates to broader social changes, including widespread concern for food quality, food safety and environmental sustainability. More broadly though, we would argue that the changes which we identify in the UK context are symptomatic of developments in many other countries, and that these foreshadow the emergence of a new third food regime, characterized by flexible manufacturing and high levels of innovation, as supermarkets restructure the agri-food supply chain in order to satisfy highly-segmented niche markets for a range of new agri-food commodities.

Approaches to the study of retailer influence

Despite the acknowledgement of the scale and the nature of the changes occurring in the relationship between food manufacturers and the retail sector, there has been little systematic analysis of the ways in which this transformation impacts on the totality of the supply chain – that is, on the actors upstream of the supermarkets (input suppliers, farmers, processors) and the actors downstream from the supermarkets (food service providers and consumers) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: The Agri-food Supply Chain



With an eye to the upstream relationships, Hughes (1996: 112-3) characterizes the relationship between food manufacturers and retailers in the UK as a 'close, collaborative' one, in which the retailers have '...called the shots in shaping supply relationship cultures in order to accumulate capital'. But Hughes (1996) undertakes little analysis of the impact of retailer dominance on other actors in the supply chain. In contrast, Marsden (1997: 170) has tended to look downstream, and has focused on the retailer dominance in the context of the re-regulation of food markets 'around the demands of segments of consumers....and corporate retailers', highlighting the key role of the retail sector in the construction of quality, diet, health and environment. Marsden's (1997) characterization of newly-emerging power relationships focuses on the development of retailer-based regulatory systems. These power relations are legitimized for consumers through an exchange relationship with the retail sector, which generates a loyal and constant customer base in return for the provision of quality foods (Marsden 1997: 170-172). From this perspective, the power or influence that the retail sector exerts is derived from its position within a network of producers, processors and consumers which, among other things, allows it to set standards and establish criteria which add value to agri-food commodities:

Aspects of control, power and dependency in agro-food networks are not only based upon input-oriented corporate capital (i.e. agribusiness firms and their relationship to the farm-based sector). Increasingly, they are associated with the control and construction of *value* from the point of production. This serves to empower near-consumer agencies. This reflects the common point that 'value-adding' in food has tended to be associated downstream of the point where it is primarily produced (Marsden 1997: 170).

However, it could be argued that the representations of power based upon the location of actors within the network, and their relation to the control and construction of value, do not reflect the asymmetries of power that operate both upstream and downstream. An attempt to deal with such asymmetries in power relationships in the supply chain has been undertaken by Cox, Ireland, Lonsdale, Sanderson, and Watson (2002) who note that participants in a supply chain do not just add value, they also extract rents. Such rents are extracted by participants in a supply chain if they possess the 'critical supply chain assets' which enable a participant to exert 'leverage over customers and suppliers in the context of particular supply chain relationships' (Cox et al. 2002: 7).

Retailers, like most participants in a supply chain, have to deal with other participants up and down the chain – that is, in the case of retailers, with suppliers and customers. For retailers, as for other participants, the 'key requirement is for companies to understand operationally how to place their suppliers into highly contested or dependent relationships in which the buyer leverages value from the supplier' (Cox et al. 2002: xvi), while at the same time ensuring that the retail chain's buyers (that is, consumers of retail products) are not able to use *their* market power to leverage value from the retailer. Most of the participants in the supply chain want to exercise market and supply chain power to extract value from upstream suppliers, but deny their own downstream buyers from exercising the same market and supply chain power to extract value from themselves.

While Cox et al. (2002) avoid over-simplified *a priori* assumptions about 'where power lies', they nevertheless contend that in general, food and drink manufacturers are in a particularly weak position *vis-à-vis* their major customers (that is, the supermarkets and other significant retail outlets) and that the own label phenomenon plays a major role in this:

Broadly speaking, most food and drink manufacturers are at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to their relationship with the grocery multiples...even those products which are branded are being promoted with diminishing results. This is particularly

the case where there are many acceptable alternatives to the branded good – acceptable, that is, to the supermarket's consumers. The rapid expansion of own-labelling on the part of supermarkets in recent years has greatly expanded the range of products for which this is true...the successful establishment of own-labelling as a concept therefore, has given the grocery multiples greater choice when it comes to considering their sourcing strategy for a particular product ... (Cox et al. 2002, 116-7).

The contribution by Cox et al. (2002) does more than reaffirm that retailer power derives from the existence of a monopsony, on the one hand, and the impact of supermarket own labels, on the other. This approach is important because it can be extended and applied in ways that are relevant to our analysis of the new emerging food system. For example, Cox et al. (2002) suggest that retailers will seek to exercise control downstream (that is, to their customers), by exercising market power and utilizing strategic supply chain assets in order to enhance returns. There is a variety of ways in which retail chains seek to reduce the leverage which consumers may exert over retailers, including the use of loyalty cards (which are also useful tracking devices for determining consumer preferences and responses to products), special offers tying-in supermarket purchases to discounts over other products such as petrol, negotiating special long-term deals with suppliers which allow retailers to maintain low prices over a range of basic foodstuffs, and so on. In an important paper, Dixon (2003) has also argued that the retail sector exerts leverage by establishing itself as a 'pre-eminent food authority' which confers legitimacy on consumer acceptance of new foods and food forms. As will be seen later, this approach not only helps us to understand the limits of concepts such as 'consumer sovereignty' at a time when it appears that retailer control over the supply chain should lead to greater consumer power, but it also directs attention to the ways in which the supermarkets have been able to maximize their role in introducing new food forms through their own brands. They thereby challenge the remaining vestiges of manufacturer power as exemplified in the power of the brand.

Supermarket own-brands, new foods and the reconfiguration of supply chains

The shift in control over the organization and management of the agri-food supply chain has created new problems for the retail sector as it comes to assume responsibility for what is produced, where, in what quantities and to what standards. It has meant among other things, that the attention of the retailers is now directed both towards satisfying consumer demand, as well as to shaping such demand and generating customer loyalty in a highly competitive market. When retail outlets merely marketed the goods whose style and price were decided by the manufacturers, there was little basis for competition for customers. Now all of that has changed. In the UK, the four or five major supermarket chains find themselves in a situation of intense competition for consumer patronage, and being closer to the consumer than the manufacturer ever was, the retail sector is particularly sensitive to the changes in consumer demand and expectations. This intense competition means that each of the major supermarket chains seeks to buy high quality product lines at the lowest possible price, which is reflected further upstream in the supply chain as food manufacturers bear down on their suppliers (i.e. the farmers), and farmers attempt to bear down on *their* suppliers.

While margins in the retail sector are relatively low – in the UK, supermarkets estimate their return to constitute about 3-4 percent of sales – supermarkets are also able to utilise the power advantage that derives from a monopsony to extract rent from suppliers in a variety of ways. For example, the supermarkets chains are in the position of deciding which products and/or companies will have shelf space in their outlets, and are also able to determine the terms and conditions upon which shelf space is

made available.² These two major characteristics of monopsony – the power to generate profits from the acquisition of food products from suppliers on the best possible terms, and the power to extract rent as a consequence of the ownership of ‘critical supply chain assets’ (for example, supermarket shelf space) – are supplemented by an increasing capacity to generate extra revenue from the increasing share of the food and beverage market represented by supermarket own brands. But significantly, supermarket own brands are themselves increasingly coming to reflect monopsonistic power as they move from the position of merely competing with manufacturer’s brands, to the situation in which they dominate in the marketing of new food products that have been by-passed by the traditional brand manufacturers.

Supermarket own brands are essentially a product of the 1970s, and reflect the shift in the locus of control over the supply chain which accompanied the end of post-war rationing and resale price maintenance in the UK. Supermarket own brand goods met the needs of consumers for whom price was more important than quality. In the UK, supermarket brands accounted for 39 percent of the grocery market in 2002 (see Table 1), and are growing at a faster rate than proprietary labels (ACNielsen 2003).

Table 1: Private label share of grocery sales by country, 1997 and 2002

	1997	2002
UK	29.7	39.0
Belgium	25.8	26.9
Spain	16.2	17.6
France	16.8	20.8
Germany	11.3	24.0
USA	14.1	15.6

Source: Boston Consulting Group (2003:3)

This increasing share of the grocery market has coincided with planned improvements in the quality of supermarket own brands. Over time, supermarkets have required suppliers to improve the quality of own brand products, and to this extent the supermarkets have come to provide even more intense competition to the branded products made by the large processing companies. More recently, however, the growth in the sales of own label products has been dominated by increasing consumer demand for a range of new food products – for example, home meal replacements, chilled and fresh products and convenience foods, all of which rely on continuing innovation and flexibility in production - which the traditional brand manufacturers are not well-placed to meet. The established manufacturer’s

² The numerous practices adopted by supermarkets in order to extract payments and price concessions from suppliers have generated much conflict, and were in part responsible for the UK government establishing a Code of Practice in 2002, in order to redress what the UK Competition Commission identified as an imbalance between the supermarkets and their suppliers. There is insufficient space in this paper to analyse this issue further, but the UK Office of Fair Trading reviewed the workings of the Code in 2004 (Office of Fair Trading 2004). For further discussion of these issues, see also Blythman (2004) and Lawrence (2004).

investments in, and long term commitment to, their own brands and the value that these represent, diminishes their capacity to respond to the demands of the modern consumers who are increasingly demanding convenience, 'freshness' and novelty in the food products they purchase. As a consequence, and partly in order to control and manage a production and distribution system that is logistically increasingly sophisticated and complex, the supermarkets have reconfigured the supply chains for their own brand lines, by underwriting the establishment of new agri-food manufacturing companies which *are* flexible, adaptable and innovative, and which produce nothing but own brand products for the UK and overseas supermarkets. This process of transformation is discussed in the following section.

Transformations in the production and consumption of agri-food commodities

In recent years, there has been a significant shift towards convenience foods throughout most of the industrialized world. The reasons for this shift are numerous; the increased number of one-person households, the growth of flexible work patterns, and an unwillingness to prepare meals from 'scratch' (the average time spent in preparing the main meal of the day in most western households is now 15 minutes), have resulted in the marketing of a range of food commodities which are quick and easy to prepare, but are nevertheless healthy and represent value-for-money. The trend towards convenience foods began with products such as the frozen 'TV dinner' in the 1950s, but has taken on new forms in recent years, with a growing demand for fresh products. Chilled ready meals - supposedly retaining flavour and freshness - are viewed as being superior to their 'frozen' counterparts, and are emerging as the fastest-growing product line in the home meal replacement market. Chilled ready meals are typically represented by a complete, pre-cooked, meal that can be re-heated for home consumption. Importantly, the chilled ready meal is not only classed as 'fresh', but is usually a very high quality product which attempts to replicate a 'restaurant experience' in the home by providing gourmet dishes, ethnic cuisines and other non-standard products. Importantly, the product lines in this category are regularly reviewed and changed, in much the same way that a restaurant might revise its menu, and reflects the process of constant innovation that characterises these new food lines.³

Chilled ready meal products are now extremely popular in the UK and Europe, and have overtaken frozen meals and meals preserved at ambient temperatures (e.g. noodles to which are added hot water), as the most popular form of home meal replacement. Comparative data on the market for complete ready meals in the UK are documented in Table 2, but the growing demand for chilled ready meals in particular is a worldwide phenomenon.

³ A recent trade article on the UK Tesco chain's range of premium chilled ready meals demonstrates this: 'A large chunk of the Tesco Finest range was relaunched in the UK this autumn. The new Tesco Finest range comprises hundreds of new dishes, inspired by classic menus from the finest restaurants. There are over 350 new lines to choose from, including starters, main courses, vegetables and desserts - in addition to new specialty pizzas and breads' (Foster 2003).

Table 2: Retail sales of ready meals in the UK, by type, 2002-2006

	2002 (est)		2006 (proj)	
	£m	%	£m	%
Ambient	145	7	174	6
Chilled	1,121	55	1,714	61
Frozen	772	38	920	33

Source: Rashid (2003: 5)

As well as the growth of demand for new food forms such as chilled ready meals, another major manifestation of the growing importance of convenience foods is demonstrated in the reconfiguration of older food forms – in particular, sandwiches and pizzas – and their increasing consumption among populations demanding freshness and convenience. The growth of consumption of sandwiches in recent years is an example. The British Sandwich Association has reported that some 2,432 million sandwiches are sold every year. Annual sales of sandwiches, which stood at £1.2 billion in the early 1990s, grew to £3.2 billion by 2001. This makes the sandwich the number one fast food product, with 41 percent of the market compared to 18 percent for the next most popular fast food product, the hamburger. The largest single outlet for sandwiches in the UK is the Tesco supermarket chain, which sells some 2.2 million sandwiches per week (*Business Europe* 2001; *News Telegraph* 17 December 2004). And, of course, the demand for sandwiches is – as was the case with the chilled ready meals discussed earlier – also driven by ‘freshness’, novelty and constant innovation. For example, Harvey et al. (2002: 189) report on a UK sandwich manufacturer who routinely launches 10-20 new varieties of sandwich every week.

The significance of such a development is demonstrated by the fact that traditional brand manufacturers hardly figure in the production of any of these new food lines. As Doel (1996: 55) notes, the market for chilled ready meals, which hardly existed in the late 1980s, was opened up by the UK retailer Marks and Spencer rather than a food manufacturer, and continues to be dominated by the retail sector. Supermarket own brand products currently account for some 95 percent (KPMG 2000: 6) of chilled ready meals sold in the UK – a market that in 2002 was worth £1.1 billion (see Table 2). In other words, it is the supermarket brands that now dominate in the fastest growing food lines:

...own-label manufacture has opened up new areas of food, convenience ready-made chilled meals, and chill-fresh foods, many of which are novelty or fashion-driven. They are characterized by a short product life that would be terminal to the brand manufacturer. *It is more than coincidence that branded manufacturers have been frozen out of the chill-chain, squeezed out of the sandwich business, and are peripheral to pizzas; it is an alien environment for their type of food. They were never seriously there.* (Harvey et al. 2002: 179). (Our emphasis).

The traditional brand manufacturers have been by-passed in the production of these key commodity lines, production of which has been undertaken instead by new or re-organized food companies which produce nothing but supermarket own brand products. Little-known companies such as Northern Foods, Hazelwood, Geest and the Grampian Country Food Group have emerged as major players in the UK food industry in recent years, and have come to meet the demands of a new market that the brand manufacturers have been unable or unwilling to satisfy. Hazelwood Foods, for example, has an annual turnover of £1.7 billion and employs some 7000 people at 20 plants in the UK and Europe. It has factories that produce similar products for different retailers' own brands (for example, Hazelwood makes chilled lasagne for every retailer in the UK except Marks and Spencer, giving it a virtual monopoly of product across nearly all the retail chains [see Harvey et al. 2003: 181]). At the same time, Hazelwood Foods has factories that are totally dedicated to the production of own brand products for particular retailers (it has, for example, a facility that produces food lines exclusively for Sainsbury). This exclusivity works the other way around, too, with Sainsbury supermarkets sourcing all their 50 million own label pizzas exclusively from Hazelwood.

New companies such as Hazelwood clearly differ from the traditional branded manufacturers by virtue of the facts that they produce few, if any, products sold under their own brand name, and that they have a guaranteed access to the supermarket shelves. But there are other, more significant, differences that set these companies apart from the traditional food processing companies. They are highly innovative and demonstrate a flexibility and a capacity for innovation in satisfying demands in niche markets which cannot be matched by the established brand manufacturers. Harvey et al. (2002: 177, 189) have noted that because of the high costs of research and development, traditional manufacturers of branded products may take two years or more to develop, test and market a new product line. As a consequence of this level of investment, new lines are expected to sustain demand over the many years it takes to generate a return on the investment. However, own brand manufacturers, driven by novelty and innovation, accept that new lines will quickly become obsolete and will give way to another line within a short period. Under these circumstances, the supermarket own brand manufacturer, with much lower research and development costs, will introduce not four or five new product lines every year, but between one and two thousand.

The example of the pizza typifies this commitment by own brand manufacturers to innovation and novelty in meeting the demands of niche markets. In the UK, the Tesco chain markets several of its own brand pizza lines for different classes of consumer. There is a definite pizza hierarchy – a top-of-the-range product (hand-crafted, low volume pizzadellas, piccadellas and strombolas); there is a middle range or mainstream product (thin and crusty, or deep pan); and there is a bottom-of-the-range economy product (made with basic ingredients) (Harvey et al. 2002:192). These products will not only be produced in a wide variety of toppings, but also in a range of sizes to suit families, or teenagers, or children, and a range of situations (main meals, snacks, TV dinners, 'grazing' and eating-on-the-go). The new food manufacturing companies which necessarily produce large numbers and varieties of pizza for niche markets on the same 'assembly line' are required to adopt highly flexible systems of production which allow them to reconfigure their production schedules at short notice.

In such circumstances, the failure of a new product line is unlikely to be a problem for the own brand manufacturer: if a product fails to meet a sales target it can be withdrawn quickly and replaced by another product with little cost to the company. This flexibility in production practices on the part of own brand manufacturers impacts, in turn, on labour processes and practice. Own-brand food manufacturers normally operate twenty-four hours a day, with a non-permanent and flexible labour force whose daily working hours can be altered in order to meet the demands of a company utilizing fresh, perishable, products or to respond to a change in the volumes required by a supermarket for delivery

next day. The adoption of 'just-in-time' processes ensure continuing utilisation of raw materials and an unbroken supply of fresh food inputs to the supermarkets, 24 hours per day, seven days per week (Lawrence 2004). The flexibility and complexity of such production processes involves a high level of coordination that is dependent upon computer-assisted logistics. For example, the delivery vehicles moving in and out of a manufacturing plant are tracked by GPS technology. In order to ensure smooth operations and avoid congestion, delivery vehicles are given a 'window' (usually about 30 minutes) in which raw materials can be delivered and finished products despatched.⁴

The role of the supermarkets in constructing and maintaining agri-food supply chains is not only evident in the spheres of production and distribution, but also in the area of consumption. This has been a focus of Dixon's (2002; 2003; 2004) recent groundbreaking work in the cultural analysis of food systems, and the role of the supermarkets in mediating the relationship between the producer and the consumer. Of particular relevance to this paper is the ability of the supermarket to represent itself as an authority on food issues, which becomes of critical importance in generating consumer loyalty and influencing consumer preferences. For example, the supermarkets gain much legitimacy and authority from their ability to deliver fresh, safe and varied convenience foods to consumers, in a manner that fosters belief in supermarkets as the gatekeepers of food nutrition and quality. Such a belief is not only generated through advertising and the invocation of government-sanctioned dietary guidelines, but also through the mobilisation of authority figures such as celebrity chefs, food writers and others (Dixon 2003)

In other words, in order to establish their pre-eminent status in the minds of consumers, it is necessary for the supermarkets to demonstrate their ability to dictate the conditions of agri-food production. This becomes even more critical as supermarkets are seen as not simply trading in commodity lines called 'foods', but as key sites in which production and consumption intersect. Dixon (2002; 2004) clearly demonstrates this in her research into the chicken supply chain. The supermarkets hold a powerful position in this market because chicken-meat producers sell much of their produce to the supermarkets, rather than to an array of small butchers or fast food outlets. In providing chicken meat in the convenient manner that they do, the supermarkets have not only gained legitimacy as endorsing/supporting the busy lifestyles of modern consumers (Dixon, 2004: 106), but now undertake tasks – such as dismembering the chickens, cutting the chicken meat, adding spices, and packaging – which puts them in direct competition with the processors from whom chicken meat is purchased. Supermarkets have also been instrumental in extending the cool chain approach to meat procurement. Chicken meat now arrives at stores, to be placed on shelves in a chilled (but not frozen) state, thereby capturing flavour and convenience (see Dixon 2002; 2004).⁵

Discussion: Contours of a Changing Agri-food System

It is our contention that the changes discussed so far, centred upon the emergence of supermarket own brands and the dominance of these lines in a range of new food products, not only signal a profound

⁴ The system is based on the management of aircraft movements at major airports, where flight landings and departures are carefully timed to maximise efficiencies. In a food system that increasingly utilises fresh raw materials for fresh products, clearly such timing is critical, and if a delivery vehicle fails to arrive at its allotted time, penalties may be imposed by the food processing company.

⁵ Moreover, it is likely that the supermarkets are also coming to exert control over the chicken supply chain as a result of their dominance of the market for chilled ready meals, in which chicken-based products feature strongly. In overall terms, 'ethnic' dishes account for 40 percent of the UK ready meals market, with the ubiquitous Chicken Tikka Marsala, an 'Indian' dish concocted in Britain and now exported to India, being the most popular (Food Standards Agency 2003). See also Burch (2005) for a recent discussion of other issues associated with supermarket organisation and management of the chicken supply chain.

shift in the relationships between processors, retailers and consumers, but are symptomatic of a wider transformation in the supply chain as a whole. Supermarket own brands are a manifestation of the tendency of the retail sector to move back into the production process and represent the means whereby the retail sector is coming to assert and extend its control over the production sector (Hughes 1996). We argue that what we are seeing in these changing contours of the agri-food system is the profile of a new third food regime, which stands in marked contrast to the second food regime characteristics associated with the commitment of brand manufacturers to the mass production of long-running lines with 'classic' appeal in mass markets.

We acknowledge that our arguments concerning the emergence of a third food regime will be strongly contested both theoretically and empirically. At the empirical level, for example, it might be argued that we are over-generalizing from data largely drawn from a single case, i.e. the United Kingdom. However, we would argue that developments in this area are always uneven, and that what is important are the overall trends that can be observed from the wider data. On this view, the UK is seen to be the leading example of a wider trend that is occurring in most of the 'developed' industrial countries. For example, despite the existence of strong local culinary cultures, most countries in Europe, and North and Latin American show consistent growth in the share of supermarket own brands in a wide range of food and grocery items, and in the expansion of convenience and other foods such as chilled ready meals, snack foods, breakfast substitutes and liquid meals. In France, where supermarkets account for over 60 percent of food purchases, own brands account for 21 percent of retail sales, and are growing at a rate of 5 percent per annum. Moreover, chilled ready meals are the fastest growing component of the large French market for ready meals, and grew at some 94 percent per annum between 1996 and 2000 (Department of Transport 2003; Leatherhead Food RA 2005). Significantly, in the global market, the leading product in terms of supermarket own label share of the total is chilled ready meals, with supermarket brands accounting for 51 percent of all global sales (ACNielsen 2003: 14).⁶

It is clear from the foregoing discussion, that the issues we have raised and the changes we have foreshadowed will need to be further theorized and problematized. It remains our contention, however, that the major transformation that we are witnessing can best be explained by an extension of the food regime theory first proposed by Friedmann and McMichael (1989). We have summarized the transformation in Appendix 1.⁷

⁶ In terms of empirical refutation of our arguments, it might also be suggested that the expansion of supermarket own brands into new product categories such as chilled ready meals is merely expanding the range of choice available to consumers, rather than threatening the standing of the established food companies. However, the evidence suggests that in most food categories, sales of supermarket own brands are growing at a faster rate than the equivalent branded product (where it exists). Moreover, it is clear from Table 2 that sales of frozen products, in which the traditional food manufacturers have been strongest, are declining relative to the fresh food products (ACNielsen 2003). This suggests that the introduction of own brand ready meals is having a direct impact which goes beyond a simple expansion of consumer choice, and that in many instances, supermarket brands are replacing proprietary brands. Under the impact of supermarket own brands, many established manufacturers have been forced to rationalise the range of products they manufacture and to reduce the number of branded goods they market. In 1999 for example, Unilever, the world's third largest food group, adopted its 'Path to Growth' strategy which saw it reduce the number of brands on offer from 1600 to a core 400. Among other things, this resulted in a loss of 8000 jobs and the closure of 30 factories worldwide. Not all of the deleted brands were food products, although in recent years the company has closed numerous food manufacturing plants, including its BirdsEye factory in Grimsby producing frozen meals for the UK market (*Dow Jones Newswires* 2001; *Financial Times* 2001; *Dutch News Digest* 2004).

⁷ The periodisation in this table is indicative only (see Le Heron 1993; Bonanno 1994 for discussions of regime time-frames), and we are aware of a number omissions. For example, a lack of space has precluded any discussion of the increasing tendency to eat out, nor have we referred to the important role of fast food outlets in this analysis. However, we believe that consideration of these issues would tend to support the propositions we are advancing in this paper. In the case of fast food chains, for example, it is clear that in the industrialised centres, companies like McDonalds have been significantly affected by competition from the Subway chain, which not only emphasises freshness, convenience and health in their product, but also allows consumers the choice and flexibility to select their own fillings and construct their own meal (as opposed to the purchase of the standardised hamburger which largely precludes any possibility of individual choice). By 2002, there were more Subway restaurants in the US than McDonalds (Boston Globe 2004) that – along with messages about

It will be recalled that under the first (British-centred) food regime – prior to the industrialisation of agriculture that was to occur after the Second World War – consumers were the recipients of agricultural commodities that were largely unprocessed and undifferentiated. The colonial ties between, for example, Australia and Britain allowed the former to export products such as wool, wheat, lamb, beef, and sugar as bulk commodities that were delivered to consumers in un-processed form and used to fuel the growing industrialism of the latter. Colonial specialisation gave way to a broader international specialisation during the 1800s based upon expansion of the settler family farm (see Friedmann and McMichael 1989: 100). The attitude of the day was that the environment was something to be ‘conquered’ (often by ‘noble pioneers’) to bring new lands into production. The state enacted a number of measures (subsidies, tax incentives and so forth) to encourage farmers to apply new technologies in the pursuit of greater output and profits (Bonanno 1994). Protectionist policies (the use of tariffs, for example) helped to ensure that agriculture was controlled within, and supported by, the nation state.

Processed and manufactured foods were, of course, common consumption items in most pre-World War Two diets in the industrialized countries but, following the war, agriculture became increasingly industrialized, with foods being processed and packaged in ways that improved their durability (Friedmann and McMichael 1989). Intensification and specialisation were but two of the processes that were well underway at the farm level, with large numbers of producers leaving the land as productivity and efficiency ‘drivers’ increased both the scale of production and the volumes of food and fibre that were available on the marketplace. Fuelled by increasing cost-price pressures, farming took on a productivist form, with a reliance upon high technology inputs (Ward 1993; Wilson 2001). The capitalist state provided a host of incentives and put into place policy settings, that would fuse both agribusiness input-manufacturing firms (those providing the latest equipment, fertilisers and pesticides) and agribusiness output-processing firms (those taking products and storing, packaging and selling farm products) to farming (Lawrence 1987). This enhanced the role of corporate capital in the sourcing and in the delivery of foods to consumers – often in highly processed (durable) form.

Advances in farming technologies went largely unquestioned until the 1960s because of the apparent benefits to society associated with increased food supply (McMichael 2004). In terms of family budgets, food costs were becoming a smaller proportion of total expenditure, and there were a greater variety of products on the supermarket shelves. As urbanisation continued apace, consumers in nations such as the US and Australia were receiving relatively cheaper, durable, foods supplied via a corporate-dominated agri-food complex (Friedmann and McMichael 1989; McMichael 2004). But productivist agriculture in combination with a burgeoning manufacturing food industry, was to generate a number of contradictions. For example, increasing real incomes (and a subsequent desire to spend) was constrained by resale price maintenance as well as the lack of competition amongst retailers. Another contradiction was associated with restricted choices in consumption that derived from a food system dominated by a proliferation of mass, standardized, products at a time when changing consumer tastes were leading to demands for choice, variety and innovation in foodstuffs.

diet, health, the threat of litigation and declining profits – has led the McDonalds chain to reconfigure itself (at least in the developed countries) by selling a wider range of products which in part, emulate the Subway menu. However, this transformation does not appear to have been extended to McDonalds outlets in those Third World countries to which the hamburger chain increasingly looks for its income (Burch and Goss 1999b). In these countries, the model of a standardised product and limited menu which served McDonalds so well for so long in the West, is still the norm. In this context, it is perhaps worth making the point that the proliferation of types of food products and culinary experiences that we have referred to in this paper – ranging from organic products to ready meals to frozen pizzas and McDonalds hamburgers - is not necessarily a problem in terms of our theoretical position, and we do not see such variety and complexity as undermining our ability to generalise about the emergence of a third food regime. Our approach is not based on a construction of oppositions; we do not, for example, see organic produce as the *opposite* of, or necessarily in *conflict* with, conventionally produced or ‘industrialised’ food, or fast food as the *opposite* of, or in *conflict* with, slow food. Rather, we conceive of the whole gamut of varieties and types of food that are commercially available as a reflection of a central tenet of the third food regime, namely the notions of choice, flexibility, innovation and internationalism as expressions of market choices and consumer incomes in post-industrial societies.

The transformation which resulted from the resolution of these contradictions, which we have discussed in this paper and which we argue foreshadows the emergence of a third food regime, has also been characterized by some researchers as a new 'post-productivist' ethos which is coming to challenge the 'productivist' norms of the second food regime (Holmes 2002; Holmes 2005 forthcoming). Lawrence (1998) has referred to this as 'sustainable regional development' while Marsden (2003) has referred to the concept of the 'rural development dynamic' (Marsden 2003). The basic insight is that productivism is being challenged as consumers are becoming increasingly concerned with the negative consequences of industrialisation (including the continued industrialisation of agriculture) (see Beck 1992). Consumers are seen to be 'greening' – adopting attitudes and behaviours that, at one and the same time, question the health and environmental benefits of technology-intensive and 'factory' farming, and support the development of 'alternative' (especially organic) and other purportedly more sustainable food production systems (see Burch, Lyons and Lawrence 1998). Supermarkets are increasingly conscious of the need to provide consumers with food security via guarantees of freshness and quality. Indeed, as was noted earlier, supermarkets are emerging as part of a new regulatory framework governing standards and quality. This trend is becoming institutionalized, for example, in the establishment of EUREP-GAP as a mechanism of retail (private) governance that aims to enhance food safety for consumers (see Busch and Bain 2004; Campbell 2004).

We acknowledge the possibility of a trajectory of development for an emerging global agri-food system in which a dominant retail sector demonstrates a capacity for a 'greening' of consumption which is consistent with the demands of consumers as well as conforming to a post-productivist sustainability ethos. Such an ethos, it may be argued, is already evident in the demand by supermarkets that 'best practice' standards of production and handling be applied by their suppliers, in the improvement of the traceability of products on the supermarket shelves, and in the increasing availability of organic products. Marsden (2003: 197) has also suggested that the supermarkets' commitment to industrial chain modes is qualified by what he terms 'short' food production chains. There are now, he suggests, identifiable attempts to 'engender some form of connection between food consumer and food producer', as part of a relocalization process (Marsden and Sonnino forthcoming 2005). Products now reach consumers with information about their source and the ways they were produced. Authenticity and trust are enhanced, the 'local' nature of food production is highlighted, and consumers are told that – because of the nature of sourcing – regional farming systems will benefit and local producers will be empowered (Marsden 2003: 200).

While not disputing the significance of the developments discussed above, a key issue for us is whether or not the shift in the control and management of the agri-food supply chain from the manufacturing to the retailing sector will ultimately result in the more beneficial outcomes implied by Marsden's 'rural development dynamic'. For example, there appears to be a major contradiction between the suggestion that the retail sector is driving a 're-localisation' of food production and consumption, and the observation that the retail sector is undergoing a process of globalisation which is likely to increase its capacity and tendency to global sourcing of a wide range of food and non-food commodities. In short, will the global retailers – operating under even more competitive conditions than the manufacturing sector ever did – behave any differently from those same manufacturing companies in terms of environmental outcomes and corporate social responsibility? Even at this early stage in the transformation of the agri-food supply chain, it seems clear that the retail sector is operating under the same impulses to accumulation that has driven manufacturing capital in the past. For example, as globalisation proceeded, corporate capital in the agri-manufacturing sector proved to be highly mobile, moving around the world to source the cheapest inputs to the food manufacturing industry (Bonanno et al. 1994), with farmers usually having little option but to conform to the profit-making demands of these firms (Burch and Rickson 2001). However, the globalising retail sector is increasingly sourcing its own

brand products from overseas, and it is possible to detect the emergence of a situation in which an overseas subsidiary of a global retail chain comes to operate as the agent for the global sourcing of food products that may be sold in other branches of the same chain throughout the world. In other words, in our view, the retail sector is coming to match – and will eventually outstrip – the global sourcing capabilities of the manufacturing sector. In doing so, the global retail sector will exert an even wider span of control over the global agri-food system, and will be in an even stronger position to decide the conditions under which agri-food commodities are produced.

We do not argue that the developments discussed so far will lead to the disappearance of brand manufacturers or the products they supply. Instead, we predict that many now-popular and common brands will be increasingly challenged by supermarket own label products.⁸ While some agri-food companies – particularly those owning iconic ‘mega-brands’ such as Coca-Cola – will continue to trade on brand recognition, they will, in our view, operate under very different conditions which encourage greater flexibility in sourcing, innovation in production, and efficiency in logistics. They may, like the Sara Lee Company, adopt the ‘Nike’ model of sub-contracting production while generating income from marketing food products under a recognized brand name. Alternatively, more companies might adopt a ‘Coca-Cola’ model, under which a brand manufacturer may license the production of a premium product, and undertake processes of accumulation by supplying essential intermediate inputs. Whatever the case, such an approach would be consistent with the recognition of that value to be found not just in actual manufacture and marketing of physical products, but in the ownership of brands, the revenues that can be generated through licensing, royalties, and the high rates of return that can be generated through processes of transfer pricing (Pritchard 1999). To this extent, branded food manufacturers would increasingly come to resemble the supermarkets, insofar as they would generate greater income from rents deriving from their ownership of ‘strategic supply chain assets’ rather than the manufacture and sale of agri-food products.

Whatever the case, the whole transformative process which we have argued is symptomatic a third food regime, is underwritten by a mode of regulation based on neo-liberal, free market, principles which are manifest in the prevalence of non-permanent and flexible working conditions in the own label manufacturing companies, in the growth of non-contractual ‘partnerships’ between supermarkets and their suppliers, and in the elimination of barriers to global sourcing (in this case, through removal of protectionist measures and the proliferation of free trade agreements).

Summary and Conclusion

Recent transformations in the agri-food distribution system, and the changes in the relationships between all actors in the supply chain (but especially between agri-food processing companies and the retail outlets they supplied), have occurred at the same time as new consumption patterns have begun to emerge, and as food security issues have gained prominence with the questioning of productivist agriculture. The mass consumption of fresh convenience foods of all kinds – chilled ready meals, snacks, fast foods, pre-prepared dietary products – has become widespread *at the same time* as there has been a broadening of cuisines to include ‘ethnic’ and ‘regional’ cuisines, functional foods, organic foodstuffs, and so on. The concurrence between these developments, and the ‘own brand’ revolution described in this paper, has provided the basis for a significant restructuring of the agri-food production system, and a strengthening of the retailers’ dominance of the supply chain. The phenomenon of the supermarket own brand – the success of which was originally due to considerations of price – has

⁸ Harvey, et al. 2002: 174. There seems to be little doubt that brand loyalty is diminishing and that this due in no small part to the strength of supermarket own brands. Indeed, it is the supermarkets, rather than food manufacturers, which are becoming the source of brand recognition and loyalty – in fact, the supermarket is becoming the brand.

shifted to another level. Own brand products not only compete on the bases of both price and quality, but also now dominate in the production of a number of new foods products characterized by convenience, freshness, and novelty. As a consequence, there have emerged in recent years a number of large agri-food manufacturing companies which produce nothing but 'own brand' products for supermarkets. In contrast to the established brand-based agri-food manufacturing companies, these 'own brand' specialists have proven to be highly innovative and flexible, and have been able to adapt more quickly to the demands of the supermarkets chains and, in turn, the consumers who patronize these retail outlets. As a consequence of this flexibility and adaptability, these new companies are in a better position than established agri-food manufacturers to lead the way in the next round of innovation in the food system, involving a wide range of products for niche markets, convenience foods, and home meal replacements. To this extent, it has been argued here that these companies are coming to challenge one of the remaining vestiges of manufacturer power in the supply chain - their ownership of brands and all that they represent.

We argue that the changes we have described thus far – in concert with broader changes in the political and cultural geography of agri-food production and consumption – represent a shift to the (hitherto elusive) third food regime. There seems to us to be clear evidence that a retailer-dominated food production system has a different 'profile' and trajectory from the two earlier regimes where power rested first, with the settler capitalist state/farm lobby and, second with the mass producers of branded food products. There is a difficulty in seeking to redraw the elements of food regime theory to account for the shift in power to the supermarkets - that of tempering the accumulationist bias in regime theory with a thorough understanding of regulation. Furthermore, Dixon's (2002) research draws our attention to the ways supermarkets have sought to position themselves as the moral guardians of consumer sovereignty and have done so by purporting to provide ever-higher standards for food provision and sale. It is also clear from the discussion above that the issue of private regulation – particularly as it relates to the supermarket sector - will become increasingly important in any re-formulation of food regime dynamics. The task remaining, then, is to delineate the contours of the emerging regime and to explore, further, the power relations of actors in that system.

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Appendix 1: Food Regimes

	1st Food Regime	2nd Food Regime	Emerging Third Food Regime
Approximate commencement	1870-	1950-	2000-
Main Driver or Decision Maker	Nation (especially settler) states, and farmers	Processing Company	Retailer
Mode of Regulation	State control	Managed Keynesianism	Neo-liberal deregulation
Output	Basic foodstuffs for home preparation	Basic and processed foodstuffs for home preparation and 'out-of-home' dining	Basic, processed and manufactured foodstuffs for home preparation; convenience and 'flexi-eating'
Identifier	Unbranded and/or undifferentiated products	Branded products	Branded products, supermarket own brands, generic labels
Food Production	Seasonal	Continuous production of standardized products marketed on long-standing brand loyalty	Flexible batch production of differentiated products marketed on price, novelty, retail loyalty, convenience
Consumers	Have minimal influence re quality and presentation of marketed products	Accept durable foods as desirable	Are increasingly discerning about food quality and food safety
Environment	Exploited but with little concern for effects of extensive farming	To be controlled and managed to maximise profits from farming	To be farmed in a sustainable manner
Role of the state	Encouragement for family farming	Support for productivist agriculture, food manufacturing	Encourage global free trade and private regulation by agri-food firms
Underlying dynamic	Availability of products, application of technologies	Availability and price of products, technological dominance	'Greening' of consumers, risk society

Sources: Derived from Friedmann and McMichael 1989; Le Heron 1993; Burch et al. 1998; Lawrence and Gray 2001; Marsden 2003; and Friedmann 2004, pers comm; and McMichael 2004, pers comm.).

FARM WOMEN: DRIVING TRACTORS AND NEGOTIATING GENDER

Barbara Pini
School of Management
Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane

Background

A social constructionist approach to gender identity formation, derived from a feminist post-structural perspective, invites explorations of the many and varied contexts in which masculinities and femininities are constituted. One such context is the workplace. Because work has been found to be a key site for the enactment and affirmation of gender (e.g. Pringle 1988; Hopton 1999), sociologists have been particularly interested in what occurs when men and women undertake work that is considered atypical for their gender.

Of particular importance in this regard has been Williams' (1989) seminal study of male nurses and female military officers. In observing these employees Williams (1989:6) noted a gender redefinition occurring in work roles, tasks and identities. That is, male nurses asserted their masculine identities as workers by giving emphasis to aspects of the occupational role traditionally associated with masculinities while minimizing aspects of the role traditionally associated with femininities. The opposite occurred with the female officers. Subsequent work on men and women involved in non-traditional labour has demonstrated the veracity of Williams' (1989) findings. Yodanis (2000), for example, examined the way in which fishing women justify their involvement in work typically undertaken by men by emphasizing that this is an extension of their roles as wives and mothers. They rely on highlighting their traditional domestic role to legitimize their participation in work which has been typically reserved for men. Alternatively, Rouston and Mills (2000) note the masculinizing strategies of male music teachers. These involve distancing themselves from feminized aspects of the role and emphasizing in their teaching style, dress and involvement in extra-curricula activities, aspects of hegemonic masculinity. They therefore retain their sense of masculine identity while working in what is numerically a female dominated profession. Similar masculinizing strategies are utilized by male temporary clerical workers (Henson and Krasas-Rogers 2001) and males working in creative industries (Alvesson 1998).

While scholars have focused on a wide range of work-contexts in investigating men and women's involvement in non-traditional labour, of interest to this paper is the constitution of gendered identities on the family farm and the occupational role of farmer. The particular focus is the question of how women construct feminine subject positions when engaging in an on-farm physical work role which is traditionally defined as masculine.

Typically, farm women engage in a multiple array of tasks including domestic work, go-fering, financial management and information gathering (Sachs 1996). However, on-farm physical work is typically viewed as the domain of men (Alston 1995). In undertaking on-farm physical work then, women have crossed the traditional gender division of labor. These women have seemingly further disrupted the gender order in that they are not just involved in on-farm physical labor, but physical labor involving the use of large machinery. This is critical because, as Strategaki (1988:256) comments, within the farming enterprise machines are "the main criterion" for differentiating work that is designated male and female. Examples from a range of agricultural sectors such as poultry farming and dairy farming have demonstrated that as aspects of work on a farm become mechanized, they shift from

being “women's work” to “men's work” (Shortall 2000). Thus, those women who undertake on-farm physical roles deemed to be men's work and engage in those tasks associated with the occupational role of farmer represent a significant deviation from the norm. They are the metaphorical “travelers” (Marshall 1984) in the “foreign country” (Follo 2002), in ways similar to their female counterparts also engaging in male-dominated work places and in work associated with the construction of masculinities. Therefore, how gendered identities are constituted, and furthermore, how they are negotiated in this work environment, is of particular sociological interest.

In embarking on such an investigation I am seeking to make particular comparisons with a Norwegian study undertaken by Brandth (1994). While the author's focus in this case was on seven women who farmed in their own right, rather than women who farmed alongside their partners, her research question resonates strongly with my own. That is: “How do they (women who use heavy agricultural machinery) create themselves as women, when they are breaking the gendered division of labor by doing the same work as male farmers?” (Brandth 1994:128). In setting the theoretical context, Brandth (1994) highlights that the gender system rests on the accentuation of differences between masculinity and femininity and the subordination of femininity to masculinity. She thus asks what might happen to these tenets of gender when women enter arenas of work traditionally done by men. What is revealed from the focus group data with the women participants is that the negotiation of gender for women farmers is complex, contradictory and complex. Important to the women legitimately asserting their identity as farmer is associating themselves with men who farm and distancing themselves from women who do not. Brandth (1994) notes the way in which the women articulate this position by identifying closely with their farmer fathers and distancing themselves from their mothers and their mothers' focus on housework. The formation of the women farmers' gendered identities is, however, not straightforward, because while they seek to demonstrate their competence in farming they risk exclusion and derision if their femininity is seen to be overly compromised. This necessitates enacting the types of gender management strategies noted in other studies of women and men involved in non-traditional work. These strategies operate to reaffirm the women's feminine identities as well as protect and enhance their husbands' masculine identities. In concluding her study, Brandth (1994) acknowledges the emergence of a “new” feminine subjectivity in the agricultural arena, as a “woman farmer”. However, it is constructed in a way which maintains not just a separation between masculinity and femininity, but a gendered hierarchy between them.

Given the significant and ongoing shifts that have occurred in societal gender discourses over the past decade Brandth's (1994) examination of women's on-farm subjectivities requires revisiting. My concern in this paper is to explore whether, in this different historical period and cultural context, the gender order remains intact, or, in contrast, has been disrupted by the constitution of new discourses of femininity which unconditionally validate a woman's competent use of agricultural machinery. While my focus is on the Australian sugar industry the paper's discussion of gendered identities is not situated within a national context. Instead, the discussion of the formation and articulation of masculinities and femininities is grounded in the literature on gender and farming in western nations. This broader contextual focus is in keeping with past studies of gender and agriculture (e.g. Brandth 1994; Liepins 1996; 1998). It also reflects the fact that remarkable similarities have been found in the gendered discourses of agriculture across western nations (e.g. see Brandth, and Haugen 2000 and Liepins 2000).

Theoretical Framework

As stated, this paper engages a feminist post-structural framework to examine what West and Zimmerman (1987) called, in their much-cited paper, “doing gender”. As such, it relies on three theoretical concepts which are outlined below.

The first concerns the fact that, as Judith Butler (1990:24) succinctly states, “gender is not a noun”. Gender is distinct from biological sex in that there is nothing pre-determined, natural or essential about one's gender identity. Rather, gender identity is produced or constituted through discourse, which is defined by Alvesson and Due Billing (1997:40) as “a set of statements, beliefs and vocabularies that is historically and socially specific and that tends to produce truth effects”. This is exemplified in the literature on women and farming in research undertaken by Liepins (1996;1998). In this work, the author studied the agricultural media as a discourse and identified the ways in which it shapes the construction of farming as requiring masculine strength, control and action. Within this discourse men and masculinities are privileged and women and femininities are marginalized, thus creating the belief that it is men who are farmers and the perception that women contribute little, if anything, to agriculture. An understanding of gender as discursively constituted is not meant to deny the importance of the material or the practical for as Probyn (1996, p. 146) reminds us, in drawing on Foucault, there is a need to “wake up to the heavy materiality of discourse”. The gender discourses connecting men and farming, have, for example, afforded men a range of greater material opportunities including an increased ability to access agricultural training, obtain credit to farm, achieve positions of agricultural leadership and inherit land (Leckie 1993; Sachs 1996; Shortall 1999; Pini 2004c).

The second point of theoretical significance to this paper is that gender identities are not singular, but multiple and varied. Thus, there is no homogeneous femininity (McRobbie 1996; Liladhar 2000). At the same time there are particular constructions of femininity within certain contexts that are dominant or normative (Bartky 1990). For example, feminist rural sociologists have argued that within rural communities, feminine identities focused on a domestic role are particularly valorized (Little and Austin 1996; Hughes 1997). This is not to suggest that “farm women” or “rural women” are fixed subjects conforming to a universal gendered identity, but within the discursive fields which make up the rural and farming sectors there is a hegemonic notion of femininity which emphasizes women's appropriate place as being within the home (Little 1997a; 1997b). This assists in explaining why the women involved in tractor work described in this study seek strategies to “manage their feminine identities”. This is because they experience potential dissonance in constituting their gendered identities as feminine while undertaking work outside their traditional sphere.

The final theoretical construct relevant to this paper is that of agency. That is, feminist post-structuralists emphasize that while discourses may be limited to them, women have the capacity to position themselves within discourses, choose from discursive positionings or indeed resist and create new discourses (Weedon 1987). The capacity of rural women to do just this has been well articulated by Mackenzie (1992; 1994) in examining documents from the Ontario Farm Women's Network (OFWN). In this work, the author demonstrates that through new rural women's groups, farm women are reconstructing notions of “farmer” and “farming”. The so-called reverse discourses being produced by these women's groups represent a considerable challenge to the masculinized notion of farmer dominant in mainstream agricultural discourse. In a different study, Oldrup (1999:356) also emphasizes the importance of the concept of agency arguing that the Danish farm women in her study are “actively and creatively” engaged in identity construction as they undertake new roles off-farm.

In summary, farm women are presented in this paper as agentic subjects actively constructing their gendered identities from a range of discursive positions available to them. How knowledge about these farm women was obtained and produced is outlined below.

Methodology

This paper is based on a doctoral study which examined women's contributions to the Australian sugar industry. The study was undertaken in partnership with the agri-political group, CANEGROWERS,

which represents the interests of the 6000 cane farming families in the Australian state of Queensland. The organization was established over seventy-five years' ago as a representative group for sugar cane farmers. Its current structure, established under the original 1926 legislation which formalised the agri-political group's existence, involves a three level structure of elected leadership. The elected membership of the organization is supported by a staff of one hundred located in nineteen district offices throughout the state of Queensland as well as a head office in the state capital of Brisbane.

CANEGROWERS' interest in the research was motivated by the concern that women held none of the 181 positions of elected leadership in the organization. Thus, the research examined why women were not represented in industry leadership as well as potential strategies for change. To address this question it was necessary to examine firstly women's on-farm roles and identities. It is this, specifically in relation to on-farm physical work, which is reported in the following sections of the paper.

In total, eighty women participated in sixteen initial and follow-up focus groups of two hours' duration in two different cane growing case study sites. These case study sites were purposively chosen (Miles and Hubermann 1994) as women's industry networks had been established in both districts. This was not the case in any other cane growing districts. The existence of these women's groups therefore marked these districts as unique. As the research focused on examining potential strategies to facilitate equity the networks were important to examine in detail. The case study sites were thus selected on the basis that they could potentially contribute to theory development (Mason 2002).

Participants were selected according to the principles of theoretical sampling described in the qualitative methodological literature (Gray 2004:324-236). Given the large number of women who could be involved in the focus groups, it was decided to select participants who had demonstrated some willingness to participate in industry forums and politics. CANEGROWERS' staff provided assistance with this process. Over half of the eighty participants involved in the focus groups (n=43) had grown up on a cane farm, but just two had inherited farms. Instead, the majority farmed (n=53) in partnership with their husband's extended family. Most were married (n=69) and a small number widowed (n= 10). Given that the women were all involved in the same industry there was a degree of homogeneity in social class amongst the women involved in the focus group. There was as well a degree of sameness in the age profile of the women involved in the research. While I did not specifically ask women their ages in the focus groups it was apparent that most were over forty. Six women identified themselves as being under forty. A further commonality amongst the women was the fact that almost all took full responsibility for domestic labour (n=74) and the financial management of the farm (n=70). A small group was also involved in off-farm paid work (n=10).

Focus groups began with women introducing themselves. Participants described their backgrounds and how they came to be involved in the sugar industry before moving on to outline the types of roles they undertake on the farm. In the second half of the focus groups discussion moved to women's involvement in the agri-political group, CANEGROWERS. Participants were asked to reflect on women's low level of participation in the producer group as well as to recount their experiences as members of the women's network. Elsewhere I have described the focus group methodology engaged in this study in more detail, and in particular, explained the rich data that emerged from these encounters as women questioned, confirmed and debated the issues (Pini 2002).

Further informing focus group findings was data obtained through descriptive, analytical and reflective journal comments I made as a participant observer during three visits to each of the case study locations (see Pini 2003a; 2004b). Participant observation was undertaken at the local CANEGROWERS' offices, at local CANEGROWERS' meetings and at meetings of the women's networks. I recorded all my observations as a participant observer in a research journal using, firstly, the

questions from the survey instrument as a preliminary guideline for categories of recording data, but extending the categories as the research progressed. In recording observations I was both ‘descriptive and analytical’ (Glesne and Peshkin 1992, p.47) and included my ‘own feelings and reactions’ to events and situations (Patton 1990, p.239). All of this data – focus groups and participant observations were analyzed thematically using the qualitative software package Nvivo (Qualitative Solutions and Research 1999).

Cane farming women’s involvement in tractor work

Women on Australian cane farms are not typically involved in the highly mechanized on-farm work that is characteristic of the industry. Of the eighty women who participated in focus groups, thirty-nine undertook no on-farm physical work involving tractors and heavy machinery. A further thirty were engaged in a limited amount of on-farm physical work involving tractors and heavy machinery. Only eleven women undertook almost all on-farm physical work involving tractors and heavy machinery. This paper is consequently focused on a small sample, and the findings should be read with this in mind. At the same time, the sample is sociologically significant for women who undertake on-farm tractor work are different and deviant from the norm and they consequently may provide new insights into gender relations and farming (see for example, Pini 2003b).

It could be assumed that the capital intensive nature of sugar cane would facilitate women’s involvement as physical strength is not an issue. However, this view fails to acknowledge the close connection between men, masculinities and technologies (see Mellstrom 2004; Faulkner 2001; Wajcman 1991; 2004), or the more specific connection between masculinities and machines that has been documented in the literature on gender and farming (e.g. Brandth 1995; Saugers 2002). The vast majority of women in this study were not involved in tractor work or involved in only a limited amount of tractor work. Through excluding themselves from this work they protect and reinforce the masculine subjectivities of their farmer husbands as well as their own feminine subjectivities. Men can construct themselves as physically active, robust, instrumental and technologically competent as they have a monopoly on tractor work. Because women do not typically do this work, men’s claim to a masculine identity and the traits and characteristics associated with this identity are legitimised and strengthened. Further, women who do no tractor work are, by definition, not masculine. They are soft, illogical and mechanically and technologically unskilled.

What though of the women who did engage in this work? Like the women described by Brandth (1994) the cane farming women who did engage in tractor work engaged a range of “gender management” strategies by which they sought to both undertake a masculine role and retain their femininity. Five different strategies have been identified from the data. Of these, two are equivalent to those described by Brandth (1994) while two are variants of those described by Brandth (1994). One final strategy that appears to be the most widely used by cane farming women is distinctly different. Each of the strategies is discussed below.

Common gender management strategies

The first strategy used by women involved in tractor work as a means of negotiating their gendered identity was simply to minimize or even hide their on-farm contributions. For example, in one group two women explained that while they had been engaged in tractor work since the early years of their marriages over twenty years ago, they needed to keep it hidden from the public. One said that when she first started she was “allowed to work on the farm, but only out the back” so that she would not be seen. The women said that opposition came from their brothers-in-law and fathers-in-law with whom they were then working in partnership. Remembering the initial interaction with her in-laws about her on-

farm involvement, the second woman reflected that her offer of “giving a hand” was met with the comment, “I don’t bloody think so”. In engaging this practice these two cane farming women acted in a way consistent with the Norwegian women in Brandth’s (1994) study. The fact that these cane farming participants use an equivalent explanation for such a strategy reveals that there may be little transformation in the way in which masculine identities are constructed in farming communities. Both groups the Australian and Norwegian women farmers sought to minimize or hide their involvement as a means of ensuring husbands would not be labeled lazy or inefficient for relying on female labor. For the cane farming women what is apparent is that masculinity is policed and monitored as strongly today as it was a decade previously, and further, that there has been little unsettling of the strong connection between tractor work and hegemonic discourses of masculinity.

The second strategy engaged by the cane farming women involved in tractor work to assert their gendered subject positions was to emphasize the importance of their domestic and household role. This too was a commonly used strategy of the women in Brandth’s (1994) study. Domestic work is a role which almost all of the eighty women in the focus groups said they were primarily responsible for undertaking. It is clearly then a role which is considered to be exclusively female. When describing their on-farm tractor work-roles, it was typical for women to return to the issue of domestic duties to remind participants as well as myself that this was their first priority. One explained that neither she nor her husband bothered what people thought about her involvement on-farm as “long as I get all the housework done”. Others told stories of how they managed to “keep the house clean” and “get the jobs done” while undertaking their on-farm tractor labor. This was, for one participant a matter of “getting sent home from the paddock at six, half an hour early” to prepare the evening meal, while for another it was a matter of washing clothes before she went to the paddock in the morning, taking them off the line at lunchtime and folding them at night. Given the inextricable connection between domestic duties and hegemonic femininity, it is not surprising that these women emphasized the importance of a household role to emphasize their gendered identity. While these women may have trespassed into a domain of masculinity by undertaking tractor work, they could define a clear boundary between themselves and men through their focus on domestic duties.

A third strategy used by the eleven women to negotiate their identity as feminine while undertaking work deemed masculine involved distancing themselves from men who also worked on the farm or other male farmers, as well as from the men’s performance of masculinities. In Brandth’s (1994) study women achieved this by leaving the task of repairing and maintaining equipment for men. In this study, women reported other ways of creating a gendered boundary marker. For example, one woman described consciously and deliberately setting herself apart physically and conversationally from the men to accomplish this objective. Commenting on how she conducted herself when working on the farm with a group made up solely of men, she said, “I never tried to be part of them. In lunch times I never sit with them. I never try to be one of the boys. I keep my place.” This participant may have been considered by some to be “less” feminine because she did the same tractor work as men, but because she separated herself in this way, she was still “different” from them. This strategy of separating oneself from the masculinities pervading the on-farm context was also evident in the stories two women told about swearing in the paddock. These women said they insisted on no swearing when they were working on the tractors with the men. One explained, “If men do swear, I would say to them that’s \$10 a swear word and add it up and say that they owe me \$60 or whatever. They would get the message and you never had no more hassles.” A further way in which women distanced themselves from the masculinized space of on-farm tractor work was by minimizing the degree of strength and expertise required to use large machinery. One commented that “the new six tonne bins are a lot easier to fill” and another said that driving the harvester was the “best job”, as the cabin was air-conditioned and so

she ended the day “cool and clean”, unlike the men driving the tractors which are used to take the cane to the mills.

The fourth way in which women involved in tractor work negotiated their femininity concerned how they presented themselves when they entered the public domain. This differs in a slight but interesting way from the strategy engaged by Brandth's (1994) women, who emphasized their femininity through focusing on how they, as wives, presented the male bodies of their husbands. For the Norwegian farm women, the public display of their husband's well clothed, washed and ironed appearance affirms the feminine subjectivities as “good” wives. The cane farming women, in contrast, gave emphasis to their own embodiment in terms of normative definitions of femininity. They described always being “lady-like in what they said” or “acting like a lady” in their dealings with people. Further to this were descriptions of the use of dress to emphasize feminine identities. It is a sentiment expressed by one of the participants who said that women like her who were involved in on-farm physical work “always go out dressed up and we look as good as any other women so it doesn't really degrade us doing physical work”. Another participant, Janet, commented that she too always “got dressed up to go to town”. She felt the other women in the area “were funny about” her on-farm physical work but was unable to say “Why or how or put my finger on it. Just that you knew you'd crossed the boundary.” While Janet may have been viewed as crossing this unseen but powerful gender boundary in terms of her work as a harvester driver, her attention to dress and speech when “in town” provided another boundary for her to mark herself as feminine. Like the other women, she engaged “ladylike” dress and speech as important symbolic indicators to reinforce a feminine identity which had been otherwise compromised through involvement in on-farm physical work.

A ‘new’ strategy for managing gender

Gender management strategies engaged by men and women in non-traditional occupations are not static. They are historically, culturally and socially specific and changing (Kvande 1999; Lupton 2000; Pini 2005). This is evident in that the strategies outlined above appear to be far less important to the cane farming women than a “new” strategy they described. This is a strategy that is quite distinct from any of those identified by Brandth (1994). For example, women who volunteered that they had attempted to hide their tractor work when first married said this was no longer the case. Instead, they said this “no longer mattered”. Similarly, those like Janet who explained the importance of emphasizing their femininity when interacting outside the farm-gate also stated that this was not really “that important”. This shift is related to the adoption of a new strategy to negotiate on-farm physical work and one's feminine identities. This strategy is the adoption of a farm as business discourse. Women had been exposed to this discourse through government and agri-political leaders who, as one said, “Are always telling us we're business people not farmers”. It is a discourse clearly articulated by one participant in explaining why she was not bothered about people questioning her femininity because of her involvement in tractor work. She said: “I know some women have a problem with doing farm work because they think it's unfeminine, but those I know don't. They see it (engaging in farm work) as the survival of the family farm and they put it (femininity) in second place.”

Those women who drew on the farm as business discourse emphasized the farm as being a partnership between husband and wife. This partnership requires both members to contribute if it is to be successful. Again, however, the emphasis was on partnership in terms of a business enterprise. Thus, one stated, “I have a great husband who's very supportive and we're working together. I'm working with him in the industry, the business, and we look at it that I'm doing my bit for our business. It's a joint effort.”

The women involved in tractor work provided evidence of invoking this discursive construction of their work and occupational role to counter a range of negative comments. One participant, Louise, for example, told the story of being visited on her farm by the local Australian Workers' Union (AWU) representative who castigated her for carting cane when she was, in his view, "taking a man's job". She replied to him, as she said she has to others who have made negative comments to her about "the work being unfeminine", that this was of lesser importance compared to "the need to make the business work". In another case, a participant reflected on criticisms of her tractor work saying, "I've heard funny things, but that goes over my head. This is your business and you look after it." Two others in this focus group also involved in on-farm physical work agreed saying, "We're just women looking after our businesses."

The farm as business discourse has become the favored means by which women involved in on-farm physical work negotiate involvement in a role deemed masculine and retain a feminine identity. Engaging this discourse is quite distinct from the other strategies used by women involved in tractor work because it does not rely on enhancing aspects of one's feminine identity. It also actually renames the gender specific roles of "farmer" and "farm wife" as either "managers", "partners", or "business owners". This is significant because while rural sociologists have described different shifts in agricultural identities throughout the latter part of the twentieth century, the construction of farming as a masculine endeavor has proved highly resilient (e.g. Liepins 1996; 1998; Teather 1998).

Conclusions

This paper has described the gender management strategies engaged by farm women who undertake the masculine practice of tractor work. As Brandth (1994) found, what is important about these strategies is that they offer little or no significant challenge to the gendered construction of farming as a male enterprise. In fact, they reinforce and sustain such a construction. This apparent anomaly can be explained by examining other studies which have considered the construction of gendered identities by men and women engaged in work which is considered atypical for their gender.

That is, the women involved in tractor work in the sugar industry, like the fishing women (Yodanis 2000), male music teachers (Rouston and Mills 2000), clerical assistants (Henson and Krasas-Rogers 2001) and creative workers (Alvesson 1998) have fashioned a new gendered identity. They are not the recognizable and traditional "farm wives" whose definition of femininity is linked to non-involvement in on-farm physical work. They have reshaped this identity to include some engagement with on-farm physical labor. At the same time, and importantly, like their counterparts cited above, they have not done so by abandoning the more stereotypical assumptions about gendered identities. In contrast, they have emphasized some of these assumptions. They have crossed some boundaries, by involving themselves in on-farm physical work, but like the fishing women studied by Yodanis (2000:282) they have created new "gender boundaries" to mark their identity. These boundaries are marked by what one does (or does not do) when in the paddock working as well as how one dresses and acts when one is in the public domain. They are also marked by ascribing all domestic duties to women and naming women's tractor work as secondary to this domestic responsibility. Women involved in tractor work may be different from more traditional farming wives. However, they also clearly position themselves to ensure that they are viewed as distinctly different from farming men. Thus, despite women's involvement in on-farm physical work, the conflation of men, masculinity and farming remains unchallenged.

It is arguable that this may not continue to be the case if the farm as business discourse is more widely adopted. The likelihood that this discourse may offer the potential for reconstituting notions of farming and farmer as gender neutral is, however, limited. Even if the discourse is more widely adopted by farming families there is no likelihood that this would be in a gender neutral way. This is because

notions of business, entrepreneurship and management are themselves gendered (Collinson and Hearn 1994; Baines and Wheelock 2000). Bryant (1999), who has used interviews with forty-four male and female respondents to examine shifts in occupational identities amongst contemporary farmers, has provided evidence of this phenomenon. That is, while she notes the emergence of new occupational identities in agriculture such as “manager” and “entrepreneur”, which she says are “chipping away” at more traditional occupational identities in agriculture, there is little evidence that this has led to any significant shifts in rural gender relations (Bryant 1999:254). For example, while the “farm” has been replaced as a “business” or “enterprise”, work is still divided according to stereotypical assumptions about gendered work identities. Overall then, while naming themselves as “business partners” may appear to offer farming women the discursive space to reconstitute gendered on-farm roles and identities, such as space, if ever truly available, is likely to be re-colonized and re-gendered along traditional lines.

What the adoption of the “farm as business” discourse is illustrative of is the profound change that has taken place in agriculture in recent years. It is a change which has witnessed the decline of family farming (Lobao and Meyer 2001), the movement of farming women into off-farm work (Leckie 1993), the increased emphasis on knowledge and information for success in farming (Pini 2004a) and the restructuring and deregulation of agricultural industries (Gray and Lawrence 2000). As these and other changes continue to occur in agricultural production, it is likely that further shifts will be evident in how farm men and women position themselves as masculine/feminine subjects. In turn, these changes may further unsettle constructions of the occupational role of “farmer”. Thus, we may thus see, in another ten years, far greater shifts in gendered agricultural discourses than this paper has been able to report in comparing findings from a current study with those of Brandth’s (1994). Currently, however, in the Australian sugar industry, while the identity of “farm wife” of old may be in the process of being replaced by a “newer” version which incorporates women’s involvement in tractor work, the construction of “farmer” as a male identity remains intact.

The findings reported in this paper are limited by the fact that they are produced from a data set obtained from a single industry in a single country. Further, as previously stated, there was a degree of homogeneity amongst the focus group participants. In this respect, the paper points to the need for further comparative work on how on-farm gendered identities may be mediated by differences between women (for example, according to age and class etc) as well as differences between agricultural industries (level of mechanisation and level of corporatisation etc). Such work is important for illuminating further how gender is produced, shaped and resisted in the daily lives and interactions of farming people.

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Book Review

Agrarian Dreams: The Paradox of Organic Farming in California. Julie Guthman. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004. 250 pp.

Reviewer: Stephen Horton
CSAFE
University of Otago
New Zealand

Walter Benjamin heads his text 'On the Theory of Knowledge; Theory of Progress' with a citation from Marx. "The reformation of consciousness lies *solely* in . . . the awakening of the world from its dream about itself." [Marx's emphasis]

For Freud wishes dream. Guthman examines the California dreaming of 'the organic farm'. Its manifest wish she ascribes to the agrarian populism of the 'new-left'. The young (and middle aged) radicals of the 1960s and 70s replaced class politics with personal morality. The search for an alternative lifestyle led back - to the land. The journey was to be more than spatial. In the new age individuals would live with, rather than on, the land. Organic farming was the natural medium of this visionary relationship. Communal organisation of new age farming proved contradictory; its management impossible. In the end, the radical dream-wish is of a self-sufficient family farm disposing of a modest surplus (to meet the exigencies of co-existence with non-organic society).

This image of agriculture is new to California. "Let me repeat: *California never had an agrarian tradition*" (p. 174, original emphasis). From its origins in the 19th Century gold rush, California agriculture has long been crop intensive, reliant on cheap (racialised) labour and predisposed to capital consolidation at the level of production and/or distribution. Progressive market forces are deeply embedded in California soil. These forces are embodied in land value(s). The continual re-evaluation of land at its most profitable (agricultural or urban) opportunity, defines a level of (commercial) sustainability irrespective of personal wish. In this competitive context - 'where the devil drives, needs must' - California agriculture has, since its inception, been swept by waves of intensification (more product) and innovation (higher value product substitution).

In this context Guthman examines, in detail, the intersection of organic and conventional farming. She traces a growing niche market for high value organic food and the increasing consolidation of its production and marketing. A few large producers have emerged from the organic sector itself. Most big producers are, however, conventional growers attracted by high(er) value opportunity. At the other pole of organic production are the part-timers. Most are land speculators maximising tax benefits and/or lifestyle residents with urban incomes. The true dreamer, employing little or no wage labour, on a small working farm, striving to improve organic practice, is the exception.

The contradictions between the different forms of organic production are reflected in the history of its codification. In the beginning organic farmers organised to develop and spread practices of working with the living land. Over time emphasis shifted to protecting the commercial value of the organics brand by licensing compliant producers. Finally, as the locus of regulation progressed from private organisation(s) to State and then Federal legislation, the nexus of codification regressed, as it were, to narrow definitional debate over the *meaning* of 'organic farming' (i.e., from action to representation). The initial program articulated by organic farmers was of: "an ecological production management system that promotes and enhances biodiversity, biological cycles and soil biological activity. It is based

on minimum use of off-farm inputs and on management practices that restore, maintain and enhance ecological harmony” (p. 117 - California Certified Organic Farmers). In the end, however, it was the Federal Government that defined organic production - as: “a production system managed in accordance with the Act and regulations ...” (p. 118). For Guthman “the act itself simply proscribes the use of synthetic chemicals ... (with certain exceptions) ...” (ibid). Organic production came to be defined not by the positive virtues of process but by the mere absence of known noxious inputs. Whatever else the effects of this regression, beyond dispute it makes the production of organic food cheaper.

Guthman's elaboration of organic farming in California is densely ramified – defying tidy summation. Nevertheless, against one suspects her sympathies, she is forced to conclude “an unexpected complementarity between organic regulation and industrial agriculture” (p. 175); that “the 2002 implementation of the new federal rule for organic production [] generated a palpable sense of loss within the organic farming movement” (p. 174). At the turn of the millennium organic farming had become the latest wave in the Californian history of higher value agricultural production. Like citrus, kiwifruit, strawberries and the others before it, organic farming had ripened into an opportunity for corporate capitalism.

One activist protested: “This isn’t what we meant” (p. 172). Up and down the State true believers called for a recommitment to the original dream. Guthman has her doubts. She suspects a less savoury, (latent) desire in the wish of organic farming. She finds “the small-scale family farm ideal ... while highly critical of mainstream agriculture ... is equally bound up with a sort of cultural conservatism...” (p.174). She links “small-scale property with family values and tradition” and charges the agrarian dream with “failing to question [] race and gender relations”; “unproblematic patriarchal exploitation of women’s and children’s labor”; and “ultimately uphold[ing] white privilege by ignoring the racial history of U.S. land policy”. (ibid)

The fading of a revolutionary dream famously provoked Lenin to write: ‘What *is* to be done’. Guthman wonders: “What can be done?” Caught between her suspicion of both actually existing organic farming and the latent desire of dreamers, yet “not willing to write off the transformative potential of organic – or, better said, alternative – agriculture” (p. 179) she proposes more technical support, stronger regulation, selected subsidies. She concludes with the question: “Wither social justice?” Guthman’s analysis of the (increasingly corporate) practice and (secretly reactionary) dream of organic farming is disturbing. Her conclusion, however, soothes social sleep. The ills are painful, requiring treatment, but not yet fatal. Yet, between the lines of her analysis may be read, beyond all individual intention and personal alternative, a structural alliance between large capital organisation and petty bourgeois ideology. This structural convergence is widely manifest in the contemporary world and in the 1930s had radical dreams for a new Germany.

BOOK REVIEW:

Nature's Perfect Food: How Milk Became America's Drink. E. Melanie DuPuis. New York: New York University Press, 2002. 309 pp.

D. Wynne Wright

University of Northern Iowa

Nature's Perfect Food is a book about perfection. What a lofty topic! Who would undertake such an ambitious program of study? Melanie DuPuis has done just that, and while she may not have achieved perfection, the product of her labor, and clearly her passion, is superb. Agricultural sociology is much improved with what will prove to be essential reading for those in the discipline. Rather than gush over what I believe to be one of the most rigorous and highly readable scholarly contributions to agro-food studies in a number of years, let me give you a hint of her accomplishments.

The story of perfection, as DuPuis sees it, is essentially the telling of how milk came to be nature's perfect food. DuPuis is interested in how milk came to be America's drink. How did the United States come to be the number one milk producing and consuming nation on the face of the earth, even though many lack the lactase production enzyme to digest milk? Because milk was socially and politically constructed to be the perfect food for sustaining perfect middle-class (white) bodies. An astute student of history, DuPuis attempts the telling of a "less perfect" story by asking "Why milk?" Primarily through an impressive body of archival research over the past two centuries and her own spatial analysis of fluid milk, cheese, and butter production sites, the author chronicles the process by which milk moved from bacteria-ridden swill milk production (milk from cows fed grain mush runoff from distilleries) to white 'pure' pasteurized 'perfection-in-a-bottle' sure to promote child health to the impish white mustaches sported by celebrities we see in American milk advertisements.

DuPuis begins in Part I by deconstructing the rise of consumption as it emerged along side the industrialization and urbanization of New York City. This section of the book is her strongest. One of DuPuis' primary goals here is to debunk the myth that capitalist interests or advertisers who stood to personally profit from commercial milk created the demand for an industrial milk production system. Instead, ideas and religion take center stage. This story begins in the mid 19th century, when poor milk quality began to be linked with infant mortality and agitators started calling for reform of urban-based swill dairies, privileging "country milk" as a superior product to urban milk. At the same time, new 'research' and rhetoric posited milk as the "perfect food" universally consumed and nutritionally complete as "designed by God" (p. 37). DuPuis, then, artfully demonstrates how "women's bodies were removed from food production" (p. 47) to make way for a bargain to be struck between producers, consumers, and milk processors to forge an industrial (perfect) model of milk production and distribution that would be rational, orderly, sanitized, and regulated by 'experts' in white coats espousing the latest dairy science produced in land grant colleges. Part II focuses on the changes required of this industrial bargain for dairy farmers. Milking parlor modernization, dairy regulation, transportation, and ensuing agrarian insurgency are dealt with in later chapters that lay out the restructuring of the industry as political power gave way from agrarian interests to urban constituencies who demanded quality milk to fuel perfect young bodies.

This is as complete a commodity analysis as I have seen. DuPuis has engaged agricultural sociology literatures with food studies, nutrition, religion, and cultural studies. For those of you looking for her to make a definitive claim on whether milk is good for you – you will be disappointed; she is not interested in this question. For those interested in the recombinant bovine growth hormone controversy – only part of the final chapter is devoted to this topic and she limits her engagement with this subject by examining only rBGH's social context. When reviewing a new book, we all have our preferences that no author can fully cover. I would have liked to have seen the power struggle between consumers, producers, and the state analyzed in more detail. From time to time, I was unclear of DuPuis' conception of the role of the state in dairy governance. She draws on a corporatist framework, but most definitions of corporatism include some degree of organizational power-sharing. Her depiction of consumer authority in New York state implies that, by far, the primary power brokers were urban constituencies who had the influence to promote their consumerist agenda, signaling more of an elite model of power wherein the state is 'captured' by interest groups. I suspect what may account for this seeming contradiction is an example of the evolving dairy state experiencing historical change. To my surprise, there was no link between the long history of dairy farmers insurgency to the social movement's literature. I think the social movement scholarship of Charles Tilly and Doug McAdams' (political process model) could have helped

advance a clearer understanding of this geopolitical transition between consumers and producers as well as given us a clearer picture of the state's role.

For all the recent buzz in the literature about a production/consumption synthesis, DuPuis has done a commendable job of integrating diverse literatures and a mind-boggling amount of historical data that is intricately researched and well written. I suspect that this book will become a watershed volume in much the same way as Friedland's *Manufacturing Green Gold* did more than two decades ago. Not only is this a good read, but it is a pleasure to recommend a book that will be easily assessable to advanced undergraduates and non-academics alike. I feel sure the anti-milk and vegan communities will want to have a look as should others who feel the value of agro-food sociology lies in its ability to understand the interconnectedness of our food relationships.