Cultivating the Good Life

First-Generation, Millennial Farmers' Conceptual Influences of 'Back to the Land' as 'the Good Life'

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Abstract

Concern has been growing over the increasing average age of American farmers as well as the larger environmental impact of agriculture. This research is focused on a growing craze of going 'back to the land' as a sustainable farmer within the U.S. It centers on eleven first-generation, millennial farmers in North Carolina and how they perceive their agrarian lifestyles to be 'the good life'. Through ethnographic-inspired methods, the work displays attitudes, dreams, and motivations of the young farmers. Positive Psychology is utilized to assess 'the good life' through Paul T. P. Wong's (2011) model. Additionally, Bourdieu's tools of habitus, capital, and field aid in the analysis to help bring to light some of the influences of the conception of 'back to the land' as 'the good life'. Ultimately, the way in which personal backgrounds, economic conditions, the American Dream, and social interactions all contribute to this conception is revealed. This answers the central aim of this research: how and why millennial, first-generation farmers perceive 'back to the land' as 'the good life'.

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Table of Contents

List of figures

1 Introduction

The average age of the world's farming population has been steadily increasingly as have concerns around conventional methods of agriculture. However, in the past decade, a number of young people in the United States have gone 'back to the land' in pursuit of 'the good life', practicing self-defined 'sustainable agriculture'. This thesis will explore the influences of the perception of 'back to the land' as 'the good life' among millennial, first-generation, sustainable farmers in the triangle area of North Carolina, USA. In order to accomplish this task, the motivations, inspirations, worldviews, and attitudes of this group will be investigated along with their cultural and social contexts. This will help reveal some of the influences involved in the young farmers' perception of 'back to the land' as 'the good life'.

1.1 Motivation, Rationale & Key Questions

Many a time have I been met with surprise from other upon learning that I work with food. As a well-educated millennial, I was expected to become an engineer, lawyer or doctor. I have instead spent my professional career running farmers markets, growing food in urban areas, and teaching youth about healthy lifestyles. As a child, I recall traveling with my Pawpaw - my mother's father - to visit the farm on which he was raised. While my grandfather's siblings shared the narrative of family history around numerous meals of traditional foods, I became very aware of how ecology and agriculture have shaped my heritage. Looking back, this was the starting point in my development of ideas around the importance of agriculture, specifically, the way it contributes to the formation of cultural identity and through anchoring people to place.

I grew up alongside one of the most radical iterations of the American Dream - with individuality as my most powerful tool, I could do anything I wanted. As I entered the workforce with my peers in aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis, this dream had been destroyed alongside Occupy Wall Street encampments. The American Dream was far from attainable for many of my friends who were living paycheck to paycheck, drowning in student and credit card debt. The traditional dream of owning a house, two cars and having children was no longer possible for many. Alongside the diminished

possibility of one dream, though, another emerged. As Erin, an informant in this study reflected, 'altruism, stewardship and craftsmanship have become things to aspire to' in recent times. This cultural shift in perception of the good life provides a ripe opportunity for a new paradigm.

While working with various aspects of local food in Nashville, Tennessee, USA, I met many young farmers who thrived within their lifestyle, though it often be characterized by low, unstable income. Upon knowing them closer, I realized that at their core, they were not that different from other young people I knew. Most of these young farmers had college degrees (not in agriculture), grew up in the suburbs quite removed from agriculture, and had shied away from office jobs. Yet, these young farmers had a depth to them that stood in sharp contrast to the ephemeral shine of many urban millennials. Had these young farmers found a better life? What was it about this lifestyle that left millennial farmers glowing with fulfillment?

A look back into the history of the United States reveals that going 'back to the land' to create a better life is nothing new. The young farmers mentioned above have differing motivations and inspirations for going 'back to the land' than those before them. Through exploring concepts such as identity, attitudes, and community, this study will reveal the uniqueness of this current agrarian impulse. This will highlight the ways in which personal histories, cultural context, and social relations have all played a role in structuring the motivations, dreams and worldviews of the farmers within this study. This will address the central aim of this thesis: understanding how and why millennial farmers conceptualize 'back to the land' as 'the good life'.

1.2 Context of Study

1.2.1 The New Generation of Farmers

In looking at age demographics of farmers from the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Census of Agriculture, one finds an alarming trend. The average age of a farmer in the U.S. has increased steadily from 1982 to 2012[1] from 50.5 years to

[1] The USDA's Census of Agriculture is conducted every five years to summarize the state of agriculture in the U.S. The data from the 2017 Census of Agriculture is not expected until late 2018.

58.3 years of age (United States Department of Agriculture 2014a). The American farmer is aging - the demographic categories 55 to 64 years, 65 to 74 years, and 75 years & over all increased in number of farmers from 2007 to 2012 (ibid). A further alarming aspect of the data is that the categories 35 to 44 years and 45 to 54 years both decreased by over 20% from 2007 to 2012 (ibid). This trend is not unique to the United States – the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) notes that the average age of farmers in developed countries as well as Africa is almost 60 years of age (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations 2014, 2). The FAO cites this as one of the main challenges facing agriculture today (ibid). As such, the focus of this study, is the 25 to 34 years demographic in the USDA's Census of Agriculture, which increased by a little more than 2%, from 2007 to 2012 (United States Department of Agriculture 2014a). This growing group of farmers holds the key to the future of agriculture.

Local food consumption has been on the rise in the United States. $1.3 billion in agricultural sales were directly from producers to consumer in 2012 (United States Department of United States Department of Agriculture 2014b, 1). That number rose to $3 billion in 2015 (United States Department of United States Department of Agriculture 2016, 1). These statistics confirm the emersion of a localism movement that has 'create[d] markets for products that in most areas can be supplied only by rapidly increasing the number of farmers' (Brown 2011, 231). This opportunity for new farmers is being answered as part of an emerging trend.

Recent news headlines cite the growing number of young farmers. Some of these include: 'A Young Generation Sees Greener Pastures In Agriculture' (Mitchell 2015) and 'A growing number of young Americans are leaving desk jobs to farm' (Dewey 2017). While these articles provide feel-good stories, they tend to make generalizations based on a few case studies involved in the reporting. There is, however, one report that holds valuable information on these millennial farmers.

The National Young Farmers Coalition, an advocacy organization for young farmers within the United States, conducted a large survey of young farmers around the country, publishing their data in late 2017. 'Building a Future with Farmers II: Results and Recommendations from the National Young Farmer Survey' was produced to highlight some of main challenges for young farmers within the United States. To date, it is the only large-scale attempt to collect demographic information on this growing group. The

report is focused on '3,517 individuals aged 40 and younger living in the United States who either currently farm, once farmed in the past, or would like to farm in the future' (Ackokk, Bahrenburg, and Shute 2017, 20). Within this data set, 79% of the individuals were currently farming and 15% had farmed in the past (ibid).

The average age of this survey group was 29.6 years of age and 60% of them were female (Ackokk, Bahrenburg, and Shute 2017, 22). Three quarters of them were from families where the parents were not farmers (Ackokk, Bahrenburg, and Shute 2017, 23). Only 45% of them owned the land on which they farm and 81% of them grew two or more products (Ackokk, Bahrenburg, and Shute 2017, 25 - 26). 75% of these young farmers described their agricultural practices as 'sustainable' (Ackokk, Bahrenburg, and Shute 2017, 29). Additionally:

> They are operating smaller farms and growing more diverse crops. They are capitalizing on demand for local food by selling directly to their customers, and they are overwhelmingly committed to sustainable and conservation-minded farming practices. Our survey results indicate that they're highly educated, increasingly racially diverse, and, despite significant barriers and relatively low income, they are optimistic about the future. (Ackokk, Bahrenburg, and Shute 2017, 81)

Multiple barriers are laid out in the report that pose challenge to these young people engaging in farming. The top four are access to land, student loan debt, labor (both cost of hiring others and the labor-intensity of farming operations), and health insurance (Ackokk, Bahrenburg, and Shute 2017, 36). These hardships are helpful to keep in mind as the research of this thesis looks at how a group of millennial farmers are actualizing their idea of the good life.

1.2.2 Young Farmers Outside of the U.S.

This study is focused on young farmers within a specific geographic area of the United States, yet young people are going back to the land in other places as well. According to the government agency Statistics Canada, farmers under the age of 35 have increased between 2011 and 2016 in the northern neighbor of the U.S. (Statistics Canada 2017). The organization Young Agrarians, 'a network for new and young ecological and organic farmers' offers training and service to young farmers in Canada (Young Agrarians 2018a). While membership statistics of the group were unavailable, Young Agrarians

had 11,130 likes on their Facebook page at the time of this study (Young Agrarians 2018b). Similarly, an organization in Australia called the Northern Rivers Young Farmers Alliance had 665 members on their Facebook page, which appeared to be their primary communication network (Northern River Young Farmers Alliance 2018). This group's focus is on those 'under 40 with goals in sustainable land management and ecological agriculture' (Northern River Young Farmers Alliance 2018). While these millennials farming in other areas of the Global North are outside of the scope of this study, research into them would likely yield equally fascinating profiles. It could also potentially reveal globalized forces shaping young farmers' ideas of the good life in the Global North.

1.2.1 Central North Carolina

This study takes place within a 50-mile radius of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA. The area within question is known as 'the triangle' due to the triangular shape formed between the cities of Chapel Hill, Durham, and Raleigh. North Carolina is home to over 250 farmers markets, where producers sell agricultural products directly to consumers (United States Department of United States Department of Agriculture 2018). It has the 6th highest level of sales, in terms of dollars, of agricultural products direct from producers to consumers in the United States (United States Department of United States Department of Agriculture 2016, 2). The triangle area of North Carolina was chosen specifically due to the presence of the Carrboro Farmers' Market, which is one of the top farmers markets in the Southern U.S. and serves as a national model for community-run farmers markets (Southern Foodways Southern Foodways Alliance 2015). The strong infrastructure and support for local food creates an ideal condition in which to young farmers can be successful.

1.3 State of the Arts

1.3.1 The Good Life

The debate over what makes life good certainly goes back as far as the Greek philosophers [if not further] (Feldman 2004, 7). Perhaps it is the plague of consciousness; our species is still grappling with the large question of what gives life meaning. We see debate extend

through almost all levels of society: from politics to film, from economics to religion. The answers to this question affect how we decide to live out our lives – how we decide and pursue what is good.

The American tradition of exploration into the good life stretches through history from Benjamin Franklin to Oprah. Perhaps one of the most interesting forms of debate over the good life is encompassed within self-help literature, which is particularly popular in the United States.

> Imagine a self and then invent that self. Picture a life, then create that life. The ideal of self-invention has long infused American culture with a sense of endless possibility. Nowhere is this ideal more evident than in the burgeoning literatures of self-improvement - a sector of the publishing industry that expanded dramatically in the last quarter of the twentieth century, particularly in its final decade. (McGee 2005, 11)

These self-improvement books provide individuals with new conceptions of the good life and the roadmap to attain it. There shear amount of literature available in this field is overwhelming - a viewing of the self-help section on Amazon.com returns over 600,000 results (Amazon 2018). Top titles within the section include: *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck: A Counterintuitive Approach to Living a Good Life*, *You Are a Badass: How to Stop Doubting Your Greatness and Start Living an Awesome Life,* and *The TB12 Method: How to Achieve a Lifetime of Sustained Peak Performance* (Amazon 2018). Due to the popularity of these books, Dolby (2005) states that 'they figure into the mix of important influences in the formation and articulation of personal philosophies' (Dolby 2005, 1 - 2). The rising influence of these books provides evidence that '[l]ove of self, which historically has been viewed as pathological egoism or narcissism, is no longer discouraged' (Rimke 2000, 66). This good life of self-love has also sparked writing outside of the self-help section.

A more academic addition to the dialogue around the good life is that of Graham Music (2014) who mobilizes children to provide answers to the question of the good life. Music reminds us that current debate around the good life is heavily contextualized by our liberal mindsets. He writes, 'the idea of an opposition between selfishness and selflessness is a legacy of market-oriented societies in which individuality is uniquely valued' (Music 2014, 4). Additionally, Fred Feldman envisions a good life as one in pursuit of pleasure

in his 2004 work centered upon the defense of hedonism (Feldman 2004). This adds an extra layer to the debate around the role of human selfishness in the pursuit of a good life that harks back to the American Declaration of Independence and the writings of Darwin. This need to try to understand the concept of an individual-focused good life may be born out of the problems the idea has created.

The current idea of the good life defined by high levels of material consumption has been called into question as environmental crisis looms. 'We have 'progressed' to the point where the objectives of the good life must be considered threatening [...]' writes the Environmental Philosopher, Arne Næss (Næss 1983, 25). Næss goes on to lay out a platform for his philosophy, Deep Ecology, a radical roadmap for the good life for all living beings. Syse and Mueller (2015) take an interdisciplinary focus to the problem in their editing of a book of essays on the sustainable good life from a number of authors, including themselves. They write in their introduction:

> But are Western levels of consumption the necessary means to happiness? Discontent lingers even while growth accelerates, and this discontent expresses itself in the revitalisation of an ancient notion - namely that the good life is lived in proximity to nature, and is not dependent on material wealth above a certain level of necessity and comfort. Happiness is closely correlated with possibilities to reconnect the sphere of humans, somehow, with the larger living world. This sense to reconnect finds practical and creative expressions in a multitude of ways – from farmers' markets, transition towns, the slow food movement, to nature writing, urban gardening, the rural renaissance, décroissance, the growth of green movements, and a general focus on ecological issues throughout society. All of these can be interpreted as signs that many find the promises of modernity - the trinity of progress, growth, and happiness through material wealth - unfulfilling. Unlimited progress and growth have turned out to ravage the biosphere, but also to disrupt solidarity and cohesion within and between human groups, leaving either in various states of fragmentation and disruption. (Syse and Mueller 2015, 1 - 2)

The chapters that follow explore the origins of these ideas and the complexities of their actualization. The works of Næss (1982) and Syse and Mueller (2015) help to visualize if and how a new paradigm would function.

This thesis aims to contribute to this body of work on alternative ideas of the good life through investigating how a select group conceptualizes and actualizes a lifestyle of

sustainable food production. For as Buell (2015) writes, the humanities and the arts are the best hope for change within a gridlocked system as they are able to 'articulat[e] […] the qualitative factors that shape human motivations: affects, dreams, attitudes, values, [and] convictions' (Buell 2015, 22). Understanding these pieces of a new vision of the good life may be the best way towards 'a new renaissance' that Arne Næss hoped '[t]he environmental crisis could inspire' (Næss 1983, 26).

1.3.2 Back to the Land

The young farmers of this research are engaging in an American tradition of going 'back to the land' to pursue alternative well-being. Perhaps the best definition of the current usage of 'back to the land', as pointed out by Jacob (1997), is from Countryside Network, a publisher of magazines about self-sufficient living and animal husbandry.

> It's not a single idea, but many ideas and attitudes, including a reverence for nature and a preference for country life; a desire for maximum personal self-reliance and creative leisure; a concern for family nurture and community cohesion; a belief that the primary reward of work should be well-being rather than money; a certain nostalgia for the supposed simplicities of the past and an anxiety about the technological and bureaucratic complexities of the present and the future; and a taste for the plain and functional. (Countryside Countryside Network 2018)

This definition adequately encapsulates the varying motives of back-to-the-landers. The term itself, as pointed out by Jacob (1997) refers more to a metaphorical return to one's origins than an actual literal one (Jacob 1997, 3). As many modern back to the landers didn't grow up 'on the land', they are not going back to a lifestyle they themselves experienced in the past, but instead are returning to a place that mimics the idea of a time when things were more simple.

Existing research on back to the land spans various disciplines. Jeffery Jacob (1997) uses case studies, personal interviews, and a mail questionnaire to look at back-to-the-landers of the 1980s and 1990s. He analyzes their differing motivations, levels of self-sufficiency, and environmental ideals. Dona Brown (2011) takes a historical approach to the back to the land movement in American history. Through analyzing magazines, letters and other publications, Brown paints a picture of the key narratives of the movement as it progressed through history: from its start at the beginning of the twentieth

century to the hippies and their communes. My research aims to humbly pioneer the latest iteration of back to the land. Though it is not a full picture of the movement, it aims to serve as a sample of the current state of this historic impulse.

1.4 History of 'Back to the Land' in the U.S.

Jefferson and the Roots

Back to the land is a tradition rooted in ideals of the pastoral. Garrard writes extensively about the pastoral trope and its influence on Western thought in his book, *Ecocritisim* (2004). He cites the origins of literary pastoral to the Hellenistic period poets, particularly the *Idylls* by Theocritus (c. 316 – 260 B.C.) of Alexandria (Garrard 2004, 34). Garrard notes the important themes to come from the Hellenistic poets as 'the spatial distinction of town (frenetic, corrupt, impersonal) and country (peaceful, abundant), and the temporal distinction of past (idyllic) and present('fallen')' (Garrard 2004, 35). These themes have been extremely influential in American back to the land movements. Also worth noting is the poet Virgil who came almost two hundred and fifty years after the Hellenistic poets. His importance is in his 'allu[sion] to environmental problems associated with Roman civilisation' (Garrard 2004, 36). As such, Virgil serves as significant influence on Leo Marx and his work *The Machine in the Garden* (2000) (mentioned in more depth below) (Garrard 2004, 36 - 37).

A historical viewpoint of back to the land ideals within the United States reveals that they are nothing new. As Jeffrey Jacob (1997) writes:

> Back-to-the-land as an ideal […] is part of classic American agrarianism and has its philosophical roots in the rhetorical tradition that connects the thought of Thomas Jefferson to Henry David Thoreau and then to contemporary poet, novelist, and professor Wendell Berry. (Jacob 1997, 6)

Running back to the founding of the nation, Jefferson's ideas on agrarianism 'promoted a land-owning farming citizenry as a means of ensuring a healthy democracy' (Garrard 2004, 49). Jefferson envisioned a country built primarily of farmers, that only engaged in international commerce so that farmers could get manufactured goods from Europe – an attempt to keep manufacturing out of the United States (Malone 1993, 5). For Jefferson saw the act of farming as a moral one:

> Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue. It is the focus in which he keeps alive that sacred fire, which otherwise might escape from the face of the earth. Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phaenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example. (Jefferson 1784, 226)

Jefferson was concerned that the rise of manufacturing, which was taking shape in Europe, would ruin the American experiment by destroying this virtue that was so essential of individuals in a democracy. The progression of agriculture in the U.S., however, would be quite different from Jefferson's envisioning.

Pastoral versus Machine

> During the nineteenth century the nation chose the commercialism and large-scale industrialism of Jefferson's rival Alexander Hamilton, and the subsistence homestead became, as the century progressed, a cultural anomaly, and finally an extinct species. (Jacob 1997, 6)

Thus emerges the complex battle between the agrarian freedom that Jefferson held so dear, and the rise of industrialization. Within Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* (2000) one can begin to understand this complex piece of American history. The American desire to dominate new frontiers lay in direct opposition to the romantic desire for vast untouched nature. Marx's book is centered on the way in which American writers have attempted to wrestle with this contradiction of desires. As a summary of his thesis, he points out:

> When the Republic [the United States] was founded, nine out of ten Americans were husbandmen; today not one in ten lives on a farm. Ours is an intricately organized, urban, industrial, nuclear-armed society. For more than a century our most gifted writers have dwelt upon the contradiction between rural myth and technological fact. (Marx 2000, 354)

Marx highlights how in some of the most renowned works of literature to come out of the United States, such as *The Great Gatsby*, *Walden*, *Moby-Dick*, and *Huckleberry Finn*, the idea of the machine is 'working against the dream of pastoral fulfillment' (Marx 2000, 358). It would seem, according to Marx and these writers, that Americans have not found what they truly desire - the 'middle ground' between a untamed wilderness and civilization (Marx 2000, 22).

Leo Marx ends his work by reminding us of the increasing role of the machine in the modern world. He writes of how the American authors were unable to resolve this overarching conflict between pastoralism and the machine: 'in the end the American hero is either dead or totally alienated from society, alone and powerless, like the evicted shepherd of Virgil's eclogue' (Marx 2000, 364). Marx makes clear, however that this is no failure on behalf of the artist, but rather the exposing of a challenge for the country moving forward:

> To change the situation we require new symbols of possibility, and although the creation of those symbols is in some measure the responsibility of artists, it is in greater measure the responsibility of society. (Marx 2000, 365)

An inspiring narrative of a new relationship between the machine and the garden, the civilized and the wilderness, has not won over the country as a whole. However, many attempts have been made and yet another is currently underway.

Resisting the Machine

> Today some historians stress what the sixteenth-century voyager called 'incredible abundance' as perhaps the most important single distinguishing characteristic of American life. In our time, to be sure, the idea is less closely associated with the landscape than with science and technology (Marx 2000, 40).

Deborah Fitzgerald (2003) writes of how the rise of the machine in the nineteenth century brought with it the philosophy of standardization, mechanization and large-scale production (Fitzgerald 2003, 25-27). By the beginning of the twentieth century, almost all aspects of the economy fell into line adhering to these three principles. Agriculture, however, had not transformed and thus 'was beginning to look like the last great nest of chaos in American productive enterprise' (Fitzgerald 2003, 28). Despite this, or perhaps because of this, some saw agriculture as a means of escaping an American lifestyle that was becoming too factory-like.

Dona Brown (2011) cites the financial crises of 1893 and 1907 as the starting point of individuals going back to the land in the United States (Brown 2011, 3-4). Referencing one of the leaders of this first movement, she writes:

> Bolton Hall, a key figure in this first back-to-the-land generation, spoke for many back-to-the-land reformers when he urged city dwellers to find some way to protect themselves from these cyclical crashes, panics and depressions. (Brown 2011, 3 - 4)

The larger historical context of the time reveals the rise of industrialism and a highly capitalized economy that was changing the American way of life. Many of these first back-to-the-landers saw a lifestyle of subsistence agriculture as protected from economic instability that came with this capitalist expansion. Yet, economic protection was not the only motivator for these first American back to the landers.

Following similar movements in England, the Arts and Crafts movement emerged in the United States around the end of the nineteenth century. The movement was aimed at 'restoring the dignity and value of labor by recreating the preindustrial workshop of skilled craftsmen and the self-sufficiency of workers on small plots of land' (Brown 2011, 33). One of the leaders of this movement, Gustav Stickley, wrote extensively in his magazine, *Craftsman*, about going back to the land. Gustav cited uncomfortable furniture and clothing as well as unsafe food as evidence that factory owners were only interested in profit and not usable products (ibid). The magazine regularly included house plans for those wishing to restore craft and go back to the land. These plans allowed prospective farmers to envision this new life of freedom that valued skill and precision – something of little value in many of the factory jobs of the day (Brown 2011, 32 - 33). The desire for independence and value for work can easily be understood at a time of high industrialization and was a powerful force in this back to the land trend.

During the 1920s while there were around 1.3 million people a year migrating from cities to farms (Brown 2011, 79 - 80). Those expressing interest in going back to the land (via writing to David Grayson's popular *The American Magazine*, a prominent back to the land publication at the time) were 'teachers and journalists, clerks and traveling salesmen' (Brown 2011, 84). Brown (2011) theorizes that these individuals would naturally be attracted back to the land as their jobs came with low professional mobility, extreme work conditions, tough competition from eager young people, and constant fear of being fired (Brown 2011, 85 - 87). It is not hard to understand why these individuals would desire to have the skills and infrastructure to provide for themselves. 'Back-to-the-land advocates frequently argued that insecurity was intrinsic to the very nature of modern

occupations. Everyone who worked for wages, they asserted, was fundamentally insecure' (Brown 2011, 89).

Ultimately, there is very little data on how successful this first batch of back-to-the-landers were. Brown's study is limited in its reach here as it is based primarily on publications and correspondence, which she admits are likely to favor success stories over failure (Brown 2011, 103). 'Judging from the number of books and magazine articles appearing in print, the back-to-the-land movement might reasonably be declared to have been over by the end of World War I' (Brown 2011, 106). The economic prosperity and cultural upheaval of the 1920s would slow the desire to go back to the land, but the movement would reemerge as this decade of pleasure came to a screeching economic halt.

The Crash & Government Intervention

The economic crash and depression beginning in the late 1920s in the U.S. brought renewed interest in back to land ideas (Brown 2011, 141). The economic jolt to the American way of life was accompanied by questions around the path in which the country was going.

> Depression-era back-to-the-land stories reflected a perception, common to many Americans, that the system was truly broken – that the country had gone too far down the path of industrialism, urbanism, and specialization and that a sharp and perhaps permanent change was inevitable. The Depression had unmasked something fundamentally wrong with the American economy, perhaps even with the nation's polity and culture. (Brown 2011,145)

The crash was so catastrophic it left many questioning all aspects of the American way of life. Thus, new ways of thinking, or rather old ones, were utilized when a recovery package was imagined to rectify this economic catastrophe.

Jacob (1997) argues that as the U.S. Government began to craft a response to the Great Depression, 'neo-Jeffersonian ideals influenced much of the early social policy considerations in Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal' (Jacob 1997, 10). With both housing and food cheaper in rural areas, it seemed a natural fit to encourage people unemployed due to the depression to leave the city and seek out these lower-cost areas (Brown 2011,

148 - 150). Leading experts agreed that large, increasingly technologically-heavy farms did not need extra labor and thus these individuals could not be expected to take jobs on existing farms (Brown 2011, 148 - 150). As such, in 1933 the U.S. Government established 'the Division of Subsistence Homesteads [which] attempted to place low-income urban workers on small acreages so that they could supplement their wages with gardens and small stock animals' (Jacob 1997, 10). Back to the land had now become an attempt by the government to combat economic catastrophe.

Ultimately, the federal government's programs put in place to encourage migrations from urban to rural areas were underfunded and 'poorly planned and managed' (Brown 2011, 162). Despite this, the turnover rate of people leaving these government-established communities was only 18% by 1942 (Brown 2011, 163). However, most homestead programs lost support as the U.S. entered WWII (Brown 2011, 202). Even though these programs were somewhat successful, many of the back to the land advocates had taken issue with these government-run attempts to implement their ideas. They worried that the beneficiaries 'would simply be dependent on government instead of on corporations' (Brown 2011, 171). Thus, the end of these government-run programs provided space for ideologues to try other ways forward for their ideas of the good life.

Vermont and Decentralization of Back to the Land

In light of the failed government homestead projects during the depression, the idea of decentralization began to gain traction in back to the land circles in the late 1930s. In line with Jeffersonian ideas and in opposition to the new managerial-structured farm, the leaders of this back to the land movement saw centralized power as an obstacle to a life of freedom. The puritanical roots of New England had created a culture of austerity, much in line with the ideas of Jefferson – providing an ideal location for these decentralist, back-to-the-landers. (Brown 2011, 178).

Vermont, known for its emerging third-way of politics and living, surfaced as the 'promised land' for the movement (Brown 2011, 180). 'By the mid-1930s, a decision to move to a farm in Vermont was becoming something like a political statement in itself' (Brown 2011, 188). The most known back to the landers to move to Vermont, Helen and Scott Nearing, wrote that they 'disapproved of a social order activated by greed and functioning through exploitation, acquisition and accumulation' (Nearing and Nearing

1989, 13). They wrote of how they considered leaving the U.S. entirely due to their political views, but ultimately decided that as citizens they had a responsibility to 'help, improve and rebuild' (ibid). The Nearings, however, were a bit outside of the norm of the average Vermont back to the lander. They would become critical about the 'complete failure to establish cooperative or collective enterprises in their Vermont community' (Brown 2011, 200). Perhaps the decentralists tendencies of this group of back-to-the-landers had resulted in an overvaluation of independence.

Hippies Turn to Farming

Brown (2011) is careful to frame the most well-known back to the land movement, that of the early 1970s, not as an 'apparent triumph for the counterculture' but instead within the context of 'political disillusionment and of apparent economic crisis' (Brown 2011, 206). Similar to the Vermont back-to-the-landers, the act of going back to the land was, for this group, extremely political. '[They] saw the act of homesteading not simply as a means of protecting their independence but as a political act in itself – perhaps the last viable political act left to them' (Brown 2011, 213). Events such as the Vietnam War, the Kent State shootings, Watergate, and others, sparked protests and political disillusionment. Helen and Scott Nearing, visited by many of these back to landers looking for wisdom, described them as, 'turning their backs on a world community that has tolerated war and is preparing for the contingency of one in the future' (Nearing and Nearing 1989, 358). Understandably, the movement was quite decentralist, as it was driven by opposition to the status quo of the time (Brown 2011, 216). These back-to-the-landers were even described to contain a 'moral absolutism' – with some even 'avoid[ing] contact with modern life' (Brown 2011, 223 - 224). This strong idealism would lead to environmentalism being incorporated with the idea of going back to the land, linking 'the new urgency of protecting the earth to the old goal of self-sufficiency' (Brown 2011, 213). Perhaps the most radical back-to-the-landers yet, this group would face challenges in their quest for independence in the countryside.

The Nearings described the visitors they took in from this group as 'daughters and sons galore of merchants, of doctors, teachers, lawyers, bankers and public officials' who had been 'raised in comfort if not pampered in luxury' (Nearing and Nearing 1989, 361). Young people in the 1970s who were going back to the land had grown up without

education in bread baking, food preservation or chicken rearing as had previous back-to-the-landers (Brown 2011, 208). Brown (2011) even describes a young couple chopping down trees in waist deep snow due to poor firewood preparations before winter (Brown 2011, 223). This lack of knowledge with which to go back to the land put the group at severe disadvantage, but larger problems existed in the structure of their movement.

This back to the land movement ultimately did not lead to large structural shifts within the rest of society. Perhaps this was due to the fact that 'in the 1970s, a return to the land was sometimes perceived as an effort to send a message by *not* consuming – like a general boycott of everything at once' (Brown 2011, 226). While most of the previous back-to-the-landers in the U.S. had been attempting to make life better for themselves through increased consumption through production, this group's idealism led to bleak lifestyles of little comfort (Brown 2011, 224 - 225). Some of these back-to-the-landers were plagued by their own inability to live a life completely in line with all of their beliefs (Brown 2011, 224). On a larger level, the focus on the individual likely caused issues.

> If there was any real fault here, it may have been the notion – common enough in the last quarter of the century – that individual consumer choices, no matter how self-denying, could substitute for political action. (Brown 2011, 225)

The flow of young people into the countryside would begin to decrease as the decade came to an end, but the deeply ingrained American ideals of agrarian independence would live on.

Back to the Land – 1980s to Present

Jacob (1997) studied those living back to the land lifestyles during the 1980s and 1990s, finding fewer individuals, but an increased diversity of motivations than was present in the 1970s. It is worth noting that the individuals Jacob studied had not all gone back to the land during this time, but were merely living there, with some of them being remnants of other waves of the back to the land movement. He found that for many of his subjects 'survival in the countryside has depended on a generous pragmatism' (Jacob 1997, 43). Of his survey respondents (readers of *Countryside* magazine) he found that 44% of self-identified back to the landers during this time were working full time jobs away from their homesteads with others relying on part-time off-homestead work, pensions, small

businesses that were not farm-related, and cash crops (Jacob 1997, 53). This group was not as unified in ideology or practices as previous back-to-the-landers and were fairly isolationist – not attempting to interact much with those in whose proximity they lived (Jacob 1997, 232). This was by no means a significant wave of the back to the land movement, but these individuals helped the dream of self-sufficient lifestyles move forward through these decades of economic growth.

From this time period would come resources that would help those in the future find their way back to the land. Books about 'wind power and solar heat, straw bale houses and composting toilets, permaculture and community gardens' were coming off the presses during the 1990s (Brown 2011, 228). Elliot Coleman's *New Organic Grower* (1989) and *Four-Season Harvest* (1992) [books that would inspire and educate the author of this thesis] were also part of this resource sharing. These resources would help others dream of what it could mean to live a more self-sufficient life and would later become helpful in the next phase of back to the land (Brown 2011, 228).

'Judging from history, only one thing more was needed to trigger another full-scale back-to-the-land movement: a depression, perhaps, or some other kind of social crisis' (Brown 2011, 228). Brown (2011) cites the crises of the beginning of the 21st century as contributing to the rise of interest in back to the land projects: 9/11 terrorist attacks, costly wars for the U.S. in the Middle East, catastrophic climate events, and finally the housing bubble collapse of 2007 (Brown 2011, 228). She notes that these encapsulated 'nearly every kind of crisis that had threatened and inspired back-to-the-landers over the previous hundred years' (Brown 2011, 229). Perhaps the kinds of crises of the past decade were similar to those of the past century, but this new phase of back to the land would be unique in its own manner with the rise of technology and easy access to the wisdom of previous back-to-the-landers.

Background Conclusion

The back to the land ideal is a sentiment that runs back to the founding of the United States. The rise of action around it was spurred by the changes in lifestyle and mindset that came with industrialization. The idea has evolved over time, being utilized for economic independence from financial crashes, a means of escaping a depressed economy, a way to rethink centralization of power, and an antiwar / anti-corporate protest.

Various extremities of self-sufficiency have been balanced with differing levels pragmatism. However, running throughout has been the idea that a life of self-sufficiency in a rural setting, close to nature and centered around agriculture can help one achieve the good life. As this idea moved into the 21st century, it would change again with its motives and its aims, but the ideal of a Jeffersonian agrarianism would remain.

1.5 Theoretical Inspiration

1.5.1 The Good Life: Conceptual Landscape

This study will utilize the emerging psychological school of thought known as Positive Psychology. 'At its core, positive psychology is concerned with human flourishing and its sources. Positive psychologists identify many contributors to the best kind of life, and character strength or virtue is one of the most frequently and prominently cited' (Fowers 2008, 629). As many of the farmers with which I spoke framed their 'back to the land' experience as 'community building' or 'social justice', I found it necessary to utilize a theory that incorporated a sense of moralism in the discussion of the good life. Positive Psychology 'has effectively changed the language and landscape of mainstream psychology' (Wong 2011, 69). Born out of an 'imbalance in the literature' of psychological research, Positive Psychology 'emphasizes what is good about people to counteract psychology's preoccupation with psychopathology' (Wong 2011, 69). According to Wong (2011), 'the overarching mission of PP [Positive Psychology] is to answer the fundamental questions of what makes life worth living and how to improve life for all people' (69). As motivations of 'social justice' came up repeatedly in my interviews, a theoretical frame that incorporated increasing quality of life for all humans was appropriate.

Within this school of thought, this study will specifically utilize a paper entitled 'Positive Psychology 2.0: Towards a Balanced Interactive Model of the Good Life' as authored by Paul. T. P. Wong in 2011. The paper aims to address the common critique of Positive Psychology: 'that it has ignored the reality and benefits of negative emotions and experiences' (Wong 2011, 69). In answer, Wong creates an 'interactive model' that 'conceptualise[s] how the positives and negatives interact with each other to achieve the good life' (Wong 2011, 77). He lays out four pillars of Positive Psychology, also being

his four key part of the concept of the good life. Wong suggests ways in which negative aspects of life such as emotions or fears can actually push us towards pursuing these pillars at times. Thus, he establishes a response to the lack of negative within Positive Psychology through showing how they can be utilized to motivate humans towards the good life.

The definition of 'the good life' as set out in this paper provides a rubric through which to analyze the interviewed farmers. As Wong (2011) points out, '[i]t is not possible to understand the good life apart from various contextual factors' (Wong 2011, 77). He points to cultural and personality traits as some of these factors citing (Sheldon 2009) and (Delle Fave 2009) who also argue that social and cultural factors should be considered in Positive Psychology. This was an important piece of selecting this theoretical frame as during the fieldwork of this research I began to see many contextual influences on the interviewed farmers' conception of 'the good life'.

Wong (2011) lays out four 'pillars' of Positive Psychology and thus, the good life as 'meaning, virtue, resilience, and well-being', noting that 'it is difficult for people to survive and flourish lacking any of these four ingredients' (Wong 2011, 72). Wong arrived at these four through extensive literature review in his 2011 work as well as 'the broadest possible psychological understanding of what is essential to make life better for individuals and society in good times and bad' (Wong 2011, 72). These four categories will serve as rubric for analysis of the interviewed farmers' interpretation of their lifestyle as 'the good life'. Through assessing the 'moral imperative, the centrality of meaning, the intrinsic human capacity for resilience, and the universal human yearning for happiness and a better future' (Wong 2011, 72), some of the social and cultural influences that help conceptualize 'back to the land' as 'the good life' will be exposed.

Due to the fact that [...] 'in the vernacular, happiness and the good life have many surplus meanings' (Wong 2011, 70), it is essential to establish a clear rubric for defining 'the good life' in order to avoid misinterpretations within this research. This will require a clear establishment of terms and concepts. As such, the following terms are defined and discussed with the intention of providing clarity for analysis.

Meaning

'Meaning serves a vital function in integrating various aspects of human needs and functions' (Wong 2011, 74). The good life, by definition, would need to provide space to meet our basic needs. Utilizing meaning as an essential component of the good life helps insure that these needs are included in the assessment. Wong (2011) lays out four functions of meaning, noting how they connect to some of our needs as humans. 'Functionally, these four components cover for many psychological processes for the good life: motivational (purpose), cognitive (understanding), moral/spiritual (responsibility), and evaluative/affective (enjoyment)' (Wong 2011, 73-74). As such, assessing the presence of meaning in this study will be done through the presence of these four components: purpose, understanding, responsibility and enjoyment.

For the sake of clarity, these four concepts need some definition to aid in their use. Purpose 'provides the framework of daily deliberations and navigating troubled waters' it 'has to do with overall direction, life goals, and core values' (Wong 2011, 74). Thus, purpose will be utilized to examine the motivations of the interviewed farmers in their decision to go back to the land. The more cognitive concept of understanding helps create a 'clear sense of self-identity' as well as enabling 'enlightenment about life and death and one's place in the larger scheme of things' (Wong 2011, 74). This concept will help analyze the thought processes that got the young farmers of this study back to the land. A moral aspect is also needed within the overarching goal of obtaining meaning in life. Responsibility will be defined as a practical wisdom which is 'not simply about maximizing one's own or someone else's self-interest, but about balancing of various self-interests (intrapersonal) with the interests of others (interpersonal) and of other aspects of the context in which one lives (extrapersonal)' (Sternberg 2001, 231). Finally, enjoyment is deemed a function of meaning as '[f]eeling good is the inevitable outcome from doing good in light of one's highest purpose and best understanding' (Wong 2011, 74). Enjoyment will show that these individuals have traversed challenges and directed their lives towards their purpose by using their understanding to make responsible choices.

Ultimately, '[m]eanings are subjectively constructed based on one's personal history and idiographic way of experiencing the world, but the ways we understand our world and ourselves are also shaped by culture, language, and ongoing relationships' (Wong 2011,

74). During the analysis below, this will become apparent as the array of influences on the interviewed farmers' ideas of meaning come to light. This diversity of external and internal factors can be understood through Bourdieu's theory of practice which will be discussed below.

Virtue

Virtue as part of the good life is certainly one of the more complex terms to define in a scientific study. 'One problem with virtue is that it is, in a manner of speaking, too easy. Virtue is a colloquial term and authors often seem to rely on their everyday understanding of the term rather than carefully studying the concept and its applications' (Fowers 2008, 630). Part of this struggle comes from the moral aspect of virtue, which can be mistaken as a subjective pursuit in Western societies. 'Virtue, not science, provides a moral map for how we ought to live our lives and how we ought to develop just and compassionate societies' (Wong 2011, 73). This map of virtue acts as a compass to help one reach the good life. 'Virtues are conceptually dependent on a concept of what is good because virtues are defined as the character strengths that make it possible to seek particular goods' (Fowers 2008, 630). As such, in order to obtain goodness in our lives, we need virtuous characteristics. Additionally, '[v]irtue is concerned with what kind of person we want to be and the kind of values and character strengths we want to possess' (Wong 2011, 72). Thus, the qualities an individual views as virtuous and pursues can help reveal what they think is good in life. Virtue will prove a helpful concept within this study of helping understand what the interviewed farmers are pursuing as the 'good' of their good life 'back to the land'.

Resilience

Resilience as a component of the good life can be understood by the desire to move forward through hardship due to the 'will to live' (Wong 2011, 75). For '[i]t is inevitable that we will experience setbacks, obstacles, failures, losses, sickness, and death. It makes a great difference how we respond to adversities' (Wong 2011, 74). This way in which individuals respond to these hardships affects whether they ultimately further their trajectory towards a good life. Thus, this study will utilize the following definition of resilience set out by Wong (2011). 'The broadest way to view resilience is in terms of

adaptation—the process of adjusting and overcoming setbacks, resulting not only in bouncing back but also in becoming stronger' (Wong 2011, 74). This is an important piece of the good life for the farmers of this study, who face a multitude of hardships as they engage in agriculture: a practice built entirely out of a constant altering of trajectory based on success and failures.

Well-Being

Well-being is the ultimate goal of the pursuit of the good life and the reason that humans chase after change. 'Well-being denotes the desirable condition of our existence and the end state of our pursuit' (Wong 2011, 75). As such, within this study, well-being is the culmination of meaning, virtue and resilience. 'A high level of well-being, both subjective and objective, flows from living by our best light (virtue), purs[u]ing our most cherished dreams (meaning), and overcoming life's difficulties (resilience)' (Wong 2011, 75). Yet there is also need for a capacity to recognize the presence of the above-mentioned three concepts. One needs to develop 'the attitudes and skills to appreciate life, savour the moments, and enhance happiness' (Wong 2011, 75). Thus, well-being, within this study, will be utilized to denote an awareness and appreciation of the attainment of meaning, resilience, and virtue in one's life.

The Good Life: A Synthesis

Within this study, the good life is defined as the flourishing that results from the presence of meaning, virtue, resilience, and well-being within one's life. All four pieces are needed in order to achieve the flourishing that is the good life. As such, these four components will serve as a rubric for analysis in order to reveal how the interviewed farmers of this study perceive back to the land as the good life.

1.5.2 Bourdieu's Habitus and The Good Life

As Wong (2011) points out, '[i]t is not possible to understand the good life apart from various contextual factors' (Wong 2011, 77). Thus, inspiration has been drawn from Pierre Bourdieu and his theory of practice. This approach will help to understand the interviewed farmers conceptions of the good life as 'fundamentally cultural and […] motivated by a dynamic reenactment of past learning that is *constitutive* of as well as

adaptive to external structures'(Swartz 2002, 625). This will provide a balance of the role of the individual alongside the role that society has played. 'The idea of habitus holds that society shapes individuals through socialization but that the very continuity and existence of society depend on the ongoing actions of individuals' (Swartz 2002, 635). The social world is thus produced from the dialectic between these two actions.

The foundation of Bourdieu's theory of practice is his attempt to move past several dichotomies that had plagued social science. 'Of all the oppositions that artificially divide social science, the most fundamental, and the most ruinous, is the one that is set up between subjectivism and objectivism' (Bourdieu 1990, 25). His theory also attempts to move past the dichotomies of structure-agency and theory-practice (Costa and Murphy 2015, 3). In doing so, he has created a theory that gives agency to the individual while also being careful to acknowledge the power that external structures have over that individual's thinking and actions. It is the '*internalization of externality and the externalization of internality*' (Bourdieu 1977, 72) concept that is needed to understand how the farmers of this study have come to view agriculture as the good life.

In order to achieve this bold endeavor, Bourdieu 'created a set of thinking tools that allowed him to explore different sociological phenomena' (Costa and Murphy 2015, 3). While his tools are many, three will be utilized within this study. 'For Bourdieu, habitus, capital and field are necessarily interrelated, both conceptually and empirically' (Maton 2008, 61). This is due to the 'relational structure' of habitus, where it is shaped by, while also shaping, both capital and field. My understanding of these interrelated concepts, as presented below, will help makes sense of how the interviewed farmers have come to view 'back to the land' as the good life.

Habitus

Habitus is 'probably the most widely cited of Bourdieu's concepts' while 'also one of the most misunderstood, misused and hotly contested' (Maton 2008, 49). This is because habitus is not easy to define. As such, Bourdieu himself will be utilized as a springboard into habitus:

> The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment (e.g. the material conditions of existence characteristic of a class condition) produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures

> predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively "regulated" and "regular" without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor. (Bourdieu 1977, 72)

The habitus is thus the way in which an individual carries with them pieces of the social spaces, experiences, and 'material conditions of existence'. These pieces ultimately shape that individual's ability to see and relate within the world. The structures that are formed through previous social engagement end up structuring and individual's thoughts and worldviews and acting, as Bourdieu put it, as structuring structures.

In order to uncover a habitus, a researcher needs 'to analyse practices so that the underlying structuring principles of the habitus are revealed. However, empirically, one does not "see" a habitus but rather the *effects* of a habitus in the practices and beliefs to which it gives rise' (Maton 2008, 62). Thus, looking for 'sets of dispositions' which can be 'a useful gateway to habitus and its effects' (Costa and Murphy 2015, 15). Finding these dispositions, however, can be accomplished in many ways as is evident in the differing methods utilized in Costa and Murphy (2015). They declare that no approach is better than the next, but that 'the method should fit the purpose of the investigation' and that 'the questions asked have major implications for the answers provided'(Costa and Murphy 2015, 16).

Due to the impact social spaces have on the habitus, the concept is useful in studying groups of individuals who have engaged in similar social contexts. 'Habitus links the social and the individual because the experiences of one's life course may be unique in their particular *contents*, but are shared in terms of their *structure* with others of the same social class, gender, ethnicity,' etc. (Maton 2008, 53). Thus, this concept will be helpful in looking at the shared structures that are structuring the interviewed farmers' view of back to the land as the good life.

Field

As established above, social spaces influence the habitus. As such, understanding a habitus without understanding, at least parts of these structuring influences is futile. This is where Bourdieu's concept of field comes into play.

> Bourdieu argued that in order to understand interactions between people, or to explain an event or social phenomenon, it was insufficient to look at what was said, or what happened. It was necessary to examine the *social space* in which interactions, transactions and events occurred. (Thomson 2008, 67)

The need for inclusion of the concept of field comes from the way in which the field structures and dictates the actions of the agents who engage within it.

> Bourdieu suggested that in a situation of equilibrium in a field, the space of positions tends to command the space of position-takings, that is the field *mediates* what social agents do in specific social, economic and cultural contexts. In other words, *field* and *habitus* constitute a dialectic through which specific practices produce and reproduce the social world that at the same time is making them. (Thomson 2008, 75)

Thus, the field provides a set of rules and structures to which social agents adhere. The concept of field can be 'understood as a scholastic device – an epistemological and methodological heuristic – which helps researchers to devise methods to make sense of the world' (Thomson 2008, 74). As the field creates rules and parameters for social interaction, it is an important piece of understanding practices.

Social Capital

The final of Bourdieu's tools to be used in this study is that of social capital. In order to understand the interactions between agents within the social world as more than 'a discontinuous series of instantaneous mechanical equilbria' we need 'the notion of capital' (Bourdieu 1986, 241). 'Capital is accumulated labor' and 'takes time to accumulate' (Bourdieu 1986, 241). There are various forms of capital, but in this study, only social capital will be utilized. Social capital can be understood as 'the network of relationships [which] is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the sort or long term' (Bourdieu 1986, 248). Within this study, the relations young farmers establish between themselves and customers, as well as

themselves and other farmers will come into analysis. Capital ultimately helps an agent establish a position within the field. Within this study, that position can be understood as 'the good life', that is, being in a position where one has meaning, resilience, well-being and virtue.

Due to the fact that capital and formed and utilized within a field, it 'express[es] the (outer) *habitus* of the inculcating agency and its field' while also 'bring[ing] value to a social agent to the degree that his or her personal (inner) *habitus* is more or less "well formed" relative to that of the field of inculcation'. Thus, the acquiring and utilization of capital within a field is shaped by the field itself. Additionally, the potential success of that capital helping an agent establish a desired position within the field is dependent on that agent's inner habitus. Thus, interdependent relations exist between field, capital, and habitus.

Working Together

'[P]ractice results from relations between one's dispositions (habitus) and one's position in a field (capital), within the current state of play of that social arena (field)' (Maton 2008, 51). Thus to fully understand a practice, we need each of these tools. Within this study, the aim is to understand the practice of going 'back to the land' and the way in which young farmers perceive their position in the field as the good life.

1.6 Methodological Remarks

This research centers on eleven millennial, first-generation farmers who engage in agriculture as their primary means of employment. They all lived and worked within a hundred mile radius of the Triangle area of central North Carolina, USA. Within this group, five of the individuals were male and six female. Two had not gone to college and one had attended some college, but not finished. Five possessed bachelor's degrees and three have master's degrees, with one having even worked on a PhD before quitting to pursue agriculture. Two of the informants were people of color – both female. Five of the eleven farmers own their land while the other six rent land on which to farm. Finally, they all describe their agricultural practices as sustainable, practicing at or above the United States Department of Agriculture's [USDA] organic agriculture standards (see

United States Department of Agriculture 2015), though none were certified to utilize the USDA's organic label.

These eleven individuals will serve as the informants of this study. This thesis will explore their journeys back to the land as well as how they are actualizing the concept. This will help reveal some of the influences that have contributed to these individuals' perceptions of back to the land as the good life.

1.6.1 Approach

My research is centered on subjective perceptions of one's lifestyle as well as motivations and aspirations. A qualitative approach is ideal for measuring such concepts as personal background and social influences are important in the deconstruction of these questions. As such, a constructivist approach has been undertaken. As Moses and Knutsen point out, '[c]onstructivists recognize that we do not just 'experience' the world objectively or directly: our perceptions are channeled through the human mind - in often elusive ways' (Moses and Knutsen 2012, 10).

1.6.2 Data Collection

Informant Selection

As I was studying a specific age group of farmers, I knew I would need insiders with deep knowledge to direct me to proper informants. I had a friend in Central North Carolina who, through an educational program, knew a person that worked at a farm supply store and was involved in the local food scene. This person was able to suggest potential informants based off a list she had of farmers who had bought seed potatoes that year. Additionally, my friend also knew a farmer's market manager in the area. I utilized the manager's knowledge and reached out to other farmer's market managers for suggested informants. Ultimately, I ended up speaking with seven individuals and two couples who were farming as their primary employment. This consisted of five men and six women all of whom were first-generation farmers. More details on the demographic make-up of these informants is included in the next chapter, where some of these individuals are analyzed through thick descriptions.

Semi-Structured Interviews

I chose the semi-structured interview structure for my interviews with farmers for two reasons. Frist, as Berry (2002) points out, 'excellent interviewers are excellent conversationalists. They make interviews seem like a good talk among old friends' (Berry 2002, 679). As each of my informants had different backgrounds and farming conditions, it seemed more reasonable for us to approach topics naturally with the conversation. At the same time, having similar data to compare the group as a whole was essential to my study and thus addressing preplanned topics was required. A copy of the interview guide was kept on my phone so I could easily check it to insure these topics were adequately covered while also making sure the informant did not feel as if it was a structured setting.

Participant Observation & Ethnographic Approach

I decided to take a somewhat grounded approach in my fieldwork. As Stewart (1998) notes, 'ethnographers prioritize trying to think through observations in the terms of their immanent context, before trying to construe the data in the light of existing theories' (Stewart 1998, 9). Agriculture is, at its core, an act shaped by geography, climate, and culture. As the farmers I studied sold all of their products within a fifty-mile radius, an unbiased understanding of the local context and conditions was all the more important. Working alongside farmers in the field while conducting interviews helped me acquire a bit of a participant feel. My personal experience in agriculture allowed me to gain a level of insider status rather quickly with the informants, which progressed conversation to deeper topics at a faster pace. I also attended the farmers markets at which the interviewed farmers sold their products. I was typically at markets around the area three days a week so as to better understand how the farmers of this study interact with their customers and the stories they tell to create value for their product. I made voice recording of what I saw and experienced on the farms and at the markets after leaving each arena in order to help me remember the context upon leaving the field.

1.6.3 Data Analysis

Interview recording were transcribed upon fieldwork completion. Goffman's *Frame Analysis* (1974) was utilized to loosely code and analyze my data. This helped me draw connections between what my informants said through 'form[ing] an image of a group's

framework of frameworks - its belief system' (Goffman 1974, 27). This was completed by looking at the primary frameworks of each individual which Goffman describes as follows:

> When the individual in our Western society recognizes a particular event, he tends, whatever else he does, to imply in this response (and in effect employ) one or more frameworks or schemata of interpretation of a kind that can be called primary. I say primary because application of such a framework or perspective is seen by those who apply it as not depending on or harking back to some prior or "original" interpretation; indeed a primary framework is one that is seen as rendering what would otherwise be a meaningless aspect of the scene into something that is meaningful. (Goffman 1974, 21)

This interpretation requires the researcher to assess the language and storytelling of the informant and question why certain parts were included and others omitted. When these individuals frames are compared against one another, a collective frame can be formed. 'Taken all together, the primary frameworks of a particular social group constitute a central element of its culture […]' (Goffman 1974, 27). This was essential as my study aimed to look at the conception of the good life for the entire group, not only the individuals within it.

1.6.4 Ethical Considerations

My previous work in the field of local food gave me advantage in my research, though it also ran the risk of failure of objectivity. During interviews with millennial farmers, I openly spoke of my previous work helping farmers establish distribution methods, managing farmers markets, and farming in urban areas. This allowed me quickly gain a level of insider status with my informants. Due to an understanding of many of the methods and practices in which the interviewed farmers were engaged, I was able to spend less time speaking with them about context and more time discussing motivations, challenges, and belief systems. This was possible due to the way that my informants assumed shared values due to my work in the same area. This is reflected in the depth of data I was able to obtain over only five weeks in the field. I did, however, build into my project considerations for objectivity and reliability.

In order to decrease bias, I chose a location to which I had no personal ties other than two friends with which I stayed. These two were not involved in the scene of local food

outside of weekly trips to the farmers market. Additionally, during interviews, I made sure not to make any moral or value-based statements when speaking of my past experience within the field of local food. This allowed the assumption of a shared belief system by the interviewee without me guiding their responses directly. Finally, writing this thesis in Norway under the supervision of an advisor who does not engage in food studies helped challenge me to take an even further distanced position when analyzing my data.

The purpose of the interviews was made clear to each individual I spoke with and informed consent was verbally gained before recording began. Informants were told they would be made anonymous in order to provide space for them to feel more comfortable sharing such personal information. The interviewed farmers' names have been changed and identifying details have been removed from presented data in order to anonymize these individuals to readers.

1.7 Thesis Structure

This introduction explained my personal motivation and rationale for the project. The primary themes guiding this research project were presented. I then provided a brief summary of the state of thought around 'the good life' and 'back to the land'. Relevant background material on the back to the land movement within the United States was covered. The theoretical inspirations guiding my frames of 'the good life' and 'back to the land' were established to create a rubric for analysis. Finally, the methodological pieces of the research were discussed.

From here, this thesis will focus on four of the eleven farmers of this study through thick description. This will show how the interviewed farmers brought to agriculture different motivations and goals that reflected their individual backgrounds. It will also reveal how their personalities influenced how they actualized their own 'back to land' as well as the way they each practice agriculture. Through this, the second chapter of this thesis will reveal how the interviewed farmers found meaning in their journey 'back to the land'.

The third chapter of this study will assess the American Dream, a dominant, cultural narrative about the good life. Exploration into the current viability of the American Dream will be assessed. The American Dream will provide a rubric for analysis of the

eleven young farmers through three key concepts: upward mobility, frontiers, and self-made man. Through this analysis, the way in which the external becomes internalized will become apparent. This will help reveal how the young farmers of this study find resiliency, the second of four pieces of the good life, within their back to the land lifestyle.

In the fourth chapter of this thesis, the ways in which the interviewed millennial farmers actualize back to the land will be investigated. The context of the localism movement will be assessed, as this movement is the 'field of play' in which the interviewed farmers engage with customers and other farmers. The way in which they work within this field to build social capital will be analyzed. Through this analysis, the influences on thse young farmers' perception of back to the land as containing well-being and virtue will become apparent. These being the last two pieces of the previously established analytical rubric, the chapter will finalize the argument that the interviewed millennial farmers perceive their lifestyle to be the good life.

Finally, this thesis will conclude with additional remarks for consideration as well as potential, future research that emerged from this study. A brief summary of the research will be provided and the main argument reiterated.

2 Millennials on the Farm

A bourgeoning global concern has emerged over the increasing average age of farmers. With the future of the food supply at stake, this chapter will introduce a growing 'back to the land' trend among a group of young people in the Global North. Through providing thick description of four of the young farmers researched in this study, the attraction of 'back to the land' will be seen through the personalities and histories of these individuals. This will help explain how 'back to the land' provides the interviewed farmers with meaning, one of four key pieces of the good life.

2.1 Virginia the Creative Mother

Though the sun had only just peaked its light through the trees, the air was thick, as if the heat didn't bother to notice the night. A historic house sat to my left, but I heard a call of welcome coming from the corner of a trailer-house that was just ahead of me. A short woman with a big straw hat and a smile of near matching size was there to greet me. This woman in her early-thirties wore thick boots, worn blue jeans, and a plaid button-up shirt – with the sleeves rolled up. Virginia had a contagious happiness to her – one couldn't help but smile around her. Her Southern accent disarmed me with warmth as soon as she opened her mouth. The sun was barely up but the dirt on Virginia's clothes had me thinking she had already been busy this morning.

Virginia's farm was on this piece of land that she rented. She lived in a trailer with her husband and daughter. Some friends of hers had been renting and farming this piece of land before her. It was these friends who constructed and left behind a makeshift greenhouse built of chain-link fence pipe and clear plastic used by painters. A massive pile of straw lied in the middle of her fields of vegetables - she obtained it for free from a farm that doesn't utilize herbicides, about which she excitedly spoke. Virginia aimed to use this product to try to keep weeds from growing so rapidly as well as reduce the required amount of irrigation on her farm. An old, blue tractor sat near the barn, this 1958 Nancy Ferguson was still running and Virginia used it to help with some of her fieldwork. As I looked out across the farm I couldn't help but notice the blank fields that mark the border on two sides. Virginia's farm was a blanket of green diversity, giving it a wild

feel amongst the blank fields of her neighbor that are waiting to be planted entirely in sweet potatoes.

Bill - one of the farm's CSA (community supported agriculture) customers - had arrived and was there to help with the morning's work. Bill invested in Virginia's CSA for the season after the two had connected over a podcast about farmers to which they both regularly listened. Though he worked an office job, he hoped to one day, himself, be a farmer. Bill told me that the highlight of his week was his visit to the farm. While the farm work of the day began, he chatted with Virginia about a Tennessee farmer recently interviewed on the podcast they both enjoy. They fed off one another's excitement over the methods utilized by this farmer to grow lettuce straight through the summer.

Virginia grew up not far from where she was living and farming. To study photography, she went away for college, though only a couple of hours distance. Virginia ended up out of the United States for a couple of years, for love. During this time, she worked in a commercial field that utilized her artistic talent within the marketing sector. 'And I wasn't really happy with that anyways. I kind of felt like we were selling a bunch of crap to people that they didn't need. It was kind of a lie. It wasn't really where my heart was.' She was unhappy with work and the birth of her daughter sparked a turning point. 'I had my daughter and then it became really important for me for her to have a good, healthy place to grow up - that became something that I felt was really important.' Virginia began studying agriculture after her daughter was born and her daughter has spent near the entirety of her life in an agricultural setting. With the recent move to this piece of land, Virginia is living closer to her mother and brother, which she greatly valued as her daughter was able to have a close relationship with them both.

Bill and Virginia worked to get a row of soil ready to plant cauliflower. Virginia had a tool to loosen the soil that was developed by Elliot Coleman (trained by Helen and Scott Nearing – two of the most influential Vermont back to the landers mentioned in the background section of this thesis). The broadfork required her whole body to operate and by the end of the row, her body was sore. Bill pulled the weeds out of the row by hand behind her, making sure to leave behind as much soil as possible. They both had an almost religious reverence for the soil they had worked – making sure to stay at the periphery of the row so as not to compress the fluffy texture they had toiled for over an hour to achieve.

About the time Bill and Virginia began to finish their work, Virginia's puffy-eyed, seven year old daughter showed up – barefoot and having just gotten out of bed looking for breakfast. Virginia, without stopping her fieldwork, told the girl to use the blender to make a smoothie. She then reminisced on her own childhood:

> Well, in my mind, I remember as a kid really running around and playing in the creek and being in the woods and things like that and I guess those are my best memories from being a kid so I want to give that opportunity to her [Virginia's daughter] to be able to just be outside, explore, have that expansiveness of childhood.

This desire to create a healthy environment for her daughter came up repeatedly while talking with Virginia. When describing her organically-inspired growing practices, she reasoned, 'if my daughter can't go and just pull something off a tomato plant and just eat it, I don't want to grow it.' Virginia's daughter even had some of her own projects around the farm including new baby chicks that were an opportunity for her to learn responsibility.

Virginia attended only the rural farmers market down the street from her farm as she saw it as a way to engage within the community. She could easily have been admitted to a larger, more affluent market in the city and sold much more produce, but she felt good about being able to give back through providing access to organically grown food in an area without the food options of city-dwellers. She also cited the decreased amount of stress this market caused in her life due to the proximity to her farm. Virginia's daughter really seemed to come to life at market. She could be seen running around barefoot from vendor to vendor, chatting about what they had brought to market for the week and inquiring as to their wellbeing. At times, her excitement about the products her mother had grown spilled over as she prophetically directed market customers to her mother's stand.

Virginia's past as a creative individual shined through on her farm. She grew over fifty different products and is quite concerned with color and variety.

> [A] podcast I was listening to - they were equating farmers to artists because every farm is different. It's all individualized to the person that is there [the farmer] and this guy was just saying that farmers are like artists - and in a way you are, because you're creative. I was talking to a chef one time and he goes, 'yeah, we're just creative people' and I was like, 'yeah I guess we

> are, I haven't really thought about it like that'. I'm always thinking about different varieties and different color combinations to put my stuff out, right now I have a lot of different color combinations with my produce.

Virginia's creativity showed through in her makeshift tools and infrastructure including a wagon made from parts of various older farm equipment her brother helped her put together and her drill-operated soil mixed mentioned above. When she took me to see her greenhouse, she had over fifteen types of lettuce growing and was growing many of abnormal color and variety. There was certainly much of Virginia's personality around the farm.

Bill shoveled compost into a wheelbarrow to add it to the soil for the cauliflower while Virginia sprinkled soil amendments (all natural) over the row. Virginia told about how the area had changed since she was a child – a new suburban-like development of houses can been seen across the neighbor's field. Virginia emerged with a homemade tool - a small paddle wheel that attaches to a hand-held battery-operated drill. She used this to mix the compost and amendments into the soil. During this process, her daughter remerged on her bike, still barefoot, to announce her venture to see if her friend was awake yet – a friend that lived over in those new houses. Bill and Virginia packed up their tools right as the sun's heat began to set in. Bill headed home to clean up for his desk job. Virginia would spend her day moving the chickens, attending to young plants in the greenhouse, and battling weeds – all with her daughter nearby.

2.2 Patrick's Aesthetic

Patrick's farm sat right off the road, on a small patch of treeless space on a forested street. A thin line of trees separated the road from the farm. Nestled in the woods, not far from the vegetable patch was a large, quite modern-looking home. The little toolshed was painted in stripes to mimic a rainbow, and a handful of small, wooden buildings, at least a hundred years old, surrounded it.

A year before fieldwork for this project I began following Patrick's farm on Instagram due to the sharp eye he had for aesthetics. His posts were full of bright colors, sunshine and orderly rows of plants. One could see through the medium that Patrick worked meticulously as a farmer in order to obtain this effect. The smiles and bounties he posted left one with the feeling that Patrick's life as a farmer was straight out of a fairytale.

Despite the fact that I had seen many photos of the farm over that year, I was still amazed when I arrived to visit him.

The fog was clinging to the ground in a desperate act of survival as the sun had just broken over the trees. Everything was bathed in gold which contrasted with the deep blue sky. As I walked into the field of vegetables, Patrick emerged from a tunnel like structure he had built over some of his crops. His attire matched the crisp aesthetic of his farm - he was dressed in earth tones with a button up shirt and a straw hat. His shirt was tucked in and his belt had tools attached to it in leather harnesses. If I had seen him in town, I would have guessed he was a farmer.

His farm was made up of seventy-two rows of vegetables. Each row was outlined with large pieces of black plastic, about a meter in width, so that one could walk completely around the row of vegetables and remain on the plastic. The effect was something like a surgical operating room - each row of soil was protected from surrounding weeds and given precise, specialized attention. In place of pesticides, Patrick was utilizing a fine netting to keep certain bugs off of some of his crops. He had also built large tunnels of metal pipe and painting plastic under which four or five cars could fit. These served as both greenhouses in cooler seasons and, with the addition of a dark, mesh material, as a shade structure in the summer. Each row of vegetables looked as if it was out of an architect's dream. The straight lines and almost perfectly uniform spacing of crops reminded me of a geometric puzzle. This mathematical precision extended beyond just crop spacing as Patrick revealed to me the high yield standards he had for his farm. 'We seek to have every single bed generate $250 in gross revenue every three months so each bed should generate $1000 in revenue every year - this is the goal.' This meant that Patrick didn't grow crops such as strawberries and melons, despite their appeal by the customer, due to their low productivity per square foot. He kept extremely detailed records on yields of his crops so that he could decide if certain crops hit his profitability threshold. Additionally, vegetable rows were not allowed to be empty, if a crop was harvested in the morning, Patrick's goal was to have that row planted with a new crop by the afternoon.

Patrick claimed to have always remembered being a 'bit OCD' [possessing traits of, but not diagnosed with, obsessive compulsive disorder]. He cited his relationship with food as beginning when his high school track coach educated the team on the relationship

between diet and performance. Through this, Patrick realized that if he paid close attention to what he put into his body, he could achieve the performance he desired from it. He remembered feeling more energized with a clearness of mind and it was here that food gained a level of respect within Patrick. He even organized cooking competitions between friends as his interest in food deepened. Patrick went on to an Ivy League university where he started a tea club in order to gain pretentious status and become noticed by women. The popularity of the club encouraged him to learn more about tea, and it was here that he developed a joy for high-quality food. On a whim, he visited the campus farm at his university and became enthralled with agriculture. After a summer of interning at the farm, he said he had found his true self, he knew he wanted to be a farmer. Patrick would go on to work for a food-oriented NGO in New York City. He described his desk job as one that left him 'really stressed out all the time'. He and his wife had talked of farming together for a long time and after three and half years in New York City they decided it was time to pursue that lifestyle.

Patrick and his wife sold the majority of their vegetables through their large CSA program in which they had over fifty members enrolled. They also grew specialty crops for high-end restaurants which accounted for the other twenty percent of their farm income. His wife worked a part time job at an NGO in the town nearby for the stability of income it brought, though they both wanted her to be working on the farm full time. They rented the piece of land on which they were farming, and they did not live in the large, modern house that sat on the same property, but instead in a small house down the street that they also rented. Patrick was not sure they would ever be able to purchase land due to the high cost of building a house. He had very high financial goals that his farm needed to reach first before they began exploring land purchasing. Yet, he seemed to be completely at ease about this as one could see the contentment that working the land had brought to him. Patrick described his mindset as follows:

> I mean, at times, our vision of a good life has been very specific and specifically tied to the future farm we might have and the land we might be on. And, a sort of like, ideal agrarian picture of what our life might be like on that land. But, as we've gone on and as we've realized just the financial stress of trying to make a farm work, we've really come to the conclusion that our quality of life, like this year, or even on a daily basis, is way more important than the perfect dream of the farm we would like to have someday. And if we had to rent land for our whole lives - it wouldn't matter if it meant

> we would have a good life on a daily basis. And that, I think that was hard decision for us to come to. Because, you know, you have this picture of the perfect farm and you're living out there with your kids and it's gorgeous and beautiful sunsets and a nice little house and you got a nice pizza oven - something out of Wendell Berry's novels. And you think, oh well I have to work my butt off to get to that. And you know, every other farm we know has sort of showed that as the model path. You have to work almost to the point of killing yourself in your early years and then you'll have a farm 20 years later. And then you'll be farmer. Yeah and we've just realized that your life is made up of your days. Your life is not achieved after 30 years, your life is what happens today and tomorrow and so on. [...] No one is on their deathbed and says 'man I really wish I had worked harder' and we recognize that now. And want to try to live reflecting that. So we've just decided that its most important that we live in a good community of people that we find fulfilling.

Patrick's ability to find contentment as a farmer came from a change of focus. He shifted his idea of a good life away from a long-term goal, and instead focused it upon the details of his daily life. It was in these details that Patrick found beauty and happiness. This likely contributed to his success on Instagram, as his good life shined through his pictures.

I asked Patrick if he felt like his work as a farmer was more impactful than his work at the NGO in New York. He said the following:

> At the end of the day I think over the last few years and in the process of becoming a farmer I've become less concerned about what exact impact I'm having on the world because I think I've realized that so long as what you're doing is responsible and good, if you can just focus on the thing you're doing and do it really well, that's gonna [going to] be the most impact you can have. I felt like part of the disease at [the NGO he worked at] that was leading to the inefficiency was this sense of 'we got to change the world' and becoming so attached to the idea - and burning yourself out - that you lose all heart and then your work has no heart in it - your work is never gonna succeed without heart in it.

One could certainly see the 'heart' that Patrick was putting into his work by simply looking around his farm. The perfectly manicured farm had an aesthetic of order and abundance. Patrick's focus on the details of both is farm and his daily life had allowed him to find a fullness of life back on the land.

2.3 Rebecca and David – the Adventurous Idealists

The little house that Rebecca and David lived in looked straight out of a Flannery O'Connor story. It was wooden, with white paint flaking off of it and a little porch on the front with boots at the entrance. Through the screened in door I heard a baby crying and dogs making mischief. My knock on the door was answered by a 'come on in' to which I proceeded to enter, though my path was blockaded by two large dogs jumping to greet me. After taking off my boots I wondered around the corner where I found Rebecca with a baby on her hip and a spoon in her other hand, cooking breakfast in an iron skillet. The kitchen looked as if it hadn't been touched since the sixties but was filled with high end health food products. I sat down as I was offered some alkaline water [with an altered pH for better health effect] that David had gotten from their mailman. Rebecca then tells me that David is out doing morning chores and will be back in for breakfast soon.

In front of the house sat a small house on wheels, or tiny house. Rebecca and David had built this microhouse on the back of a trailer while they were training on a farm. This allowed them to easily take their housing with them wherever they decided to go. They told of many places they had been in the past five years - almost all over the U.S. it seemed. In their most recent journey, they had traveled from the West Coast of the U.S. to set-up their current farm, a journey that had taken a week of driving. Rebecca was eight months pregnant as they took this cross-country trip with two horses and two dogs, picking up a tractor in the Midwestern U.S. along the way. They both told this story with smiles across their faces, laughing at the wildness of what they had done with no regret.

Rebecca described herself 'very academic' in our conversation. She said that she read voraciously as child, always finding her sense of adventure in a book. She began studying anthropology at a prestigious school, but had to change colleges due to financial difficulties. Her desire for adventure led her to pursue entrepreneurship at this new school, but an experience at a university campus farm compelled her to intern on a production farm the summer she was nineteen years old. It was here that she claimed all the pieces fell into place. 'Once I started I was like, this answers all of my desires that haven't been fulfilled in my life.' Some of these desires included a healthy place to raise a family, being in nature, interacting with people and working with her hands. She

dropped out of school and spent the next five years interning on farms, where she eventually met David. Rebecca expressed unhappiness with the fact that no one had ever offered farming as a viable career option to her interests in environmental sciences, entrepreneurship, and people. She was now, as a farmer, exploring all of these interests in much depth.

David's journey into agriculture started in high school when he was working at a restaurant. In response to David's boredom in the kitchen, his boss jokingly suggested that he should go help grow the vegetables the kitchen was using instead. The next day David went out to the countryside in search of the farm from which his restaurant bought their food and, upon finding it, started helping out. With a background in skateboarding, David understood the importance of precise bodily movements. This led to him becoming exceptionally efficient in the vegetable fields. As Rebecca put it, 'He's the fastest we've ever seen at harvesting and with hoeing - unmatchable. He's a legend at least among our friends.' David said he simply loved the autonomy that came with farming. 'You're not following anybody's book. Anybody's guide. You kind of have to - you can do whatever you want. You just have to keep getting better at it.' Though David went on to do five years of college, he always ended up back at a farm every summer. Once school was complete, he knew exactly what was next.

Rebecca and David's piece of land was right off of a highway in a rural area. They had made their cross-country move specifically to rent this land, which they had found online. They had distant family connections in the area, but their move was much more about faith. The two of them believed that they were needed in this rural community. 'There needs to be a lot of education around nutrition' was a statement Rebecca made regarding local health conditions. These two had decided not to drive the hour into the city to go to farmer's markets in popular, urban areas. Instead, they had focused their efforts on the local market in a smaller town nearby. Rebecca described some of their challenges that came from this decision. 'It's a bit of culture shock coming down here and we're just trying to make it work this year without driving into Raleigh for markets. [...] We believe in - we want to be a community farm. We want people around here to buy from us, but it takes so long to get the word out without spending thousands of dollars in marketing so that's one of our big challenges. How do we get the word out?'

Rebecca and David grew their crops on the other side of a hill from their house. Rows of tomatoes, flowers, peppers, and herbs shined in the midday sun as I helped in their harvest. Among some of the strange crops in the herb section I saw tobacco being grown and was informed it was for personal use. Rebecca and David had an abundance of food in their fields - they told me that they simply could not keep up with picking it all. I laughed when I noticed a baby crib in the vegetable field (see Figure 1, crib on the right side of the photo). Rebecca told me it was the best way for them both to be able to work - to let the baby sleep within earshot.

Figure 1: David stands in the field speaking with two neighbors about his tomato crop and his sick goat. Photo credit: Adam Curtis

Their vegetable field was surrounded by hills of grass being grown partly for sale and partly to reduce fossil fuel use. Their primary means of nonhuman labor was not a metal tractor, but rather two horses. The two of them had specifically sought out training in horse-powered agricultural systems in order to decrease their dependence on oil. This was partly due to power systems surrounding oil, but they also cited their desire to keep the land pure from pollution. Due to limited money, they had built some of their own tools to be pulled behind the horses, including a somewhat wide, wooden surfboard that

is used to flatten and fold over cover crops. As David showed me with his body how the tool was used as connections between his skateboarding past and agriculture emerged.

These two farmers had quite an uphill challenge ahead of them. Without much of a social network in their new community, they were fighting hard to create a customer base to keep themselves financially afloat. David had worked multiple jobs during the winter previous to this research in order to make ends meet. He told me, 'I mean I don't mind working a second job during the slow months'. However, he followed up with, 'but - its tough when you have to make money somewhere else to invest in your own operation that you're still working full-time.' Yet, when I remembered how far David and Rebecca had come in order to start this farm and the benefits it provided to them, I was sure they would keep fighting for their back to the land dream.

2.4 The Meaning in Back to the Land

Bourdieu's concept of habitus is helpful in making sense of how the individuals within this study arrived at viewing agriculture as part of their 'good life'. 'Simply put, habitus focuses on our ways of acting, feeling, thinking and being. It captures how we carry within us our history, how we bring this history into our present circumstances, and how we then make choices to act in certain ways and not others' (Maton 2008, 52). Thus, I focused interviews not only on the present beliefs and practices of the young farmers of the study, but also provided space for self-narration of the informant's journey 'back to the land'. The goal was to obtain a deeper understanding of each informant's history that they carried with them. 'Practices within a given situation are, Bourdieu argues, conditioned by expectation of the outcome of a given course of action, which is in turn based, thanks to the habitus, on experience of past outcomes' (Maton 2008, 58). The habitus of these individuals helped each of them to expect to find fulfillment through the practice of going back to the land based on their carried history. For most of them, the lack of fulfillment they had received from past attempts at finding well-being in a career contributed to the idea that farming would be fulfilling. Understanding pieces of these individuals' histories allowed consideration of their personal agency in their decision to pursue agriculture.

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice shows how the dispositions influencing the past behavior of these individuals came to play a role in their later decision to pursue agriculture. While certainly limited in breadth due to the scope of this study, the researcher aims to display that each of these four farmers brought with them a set of structuring structures through which farming provided them with meaning. 'The habitus is the universalizing mediation which causes an individual agent's practices, without either explicit reason or signifying intent, to be none the less "sensible" and "reasonable"' (Bourdieu 1977, 79). The structuring structures that these individuals have carried with them through life allowed them to see the practice of going back to the land as meaningful due to their past dispositions.

Clear in each of the descriptions above is the way in which the dispositions of these individuals as displayed in their past, came to fit in their current practice of farming. Virginia found joy in her work due to her ability to have close connection with her family, something historically important to her. Her creativity showed through on her farm and the way she conducted her business. Patrick's infatuation with control and details was well utilized in his intensive growing practices. The way in which he had chosen to focus his gauge for happiness on the moments of his day reflected how his attention to detail had helped him see this lifestyle as good. Finally, David and Rebecca had made past choices in the pursuit of autonomy, ideology and adventure. These ideals were brought into the present through the way in which they were farming utilizing horses and working within a community where they needed to create value for themselves.

The descriptions of four farmers of this study reveal that they have achieved meaning through going back to the land, ultimately contributing to their perception of this lifestyle as the good life. In order to detect meaning within these individuals' lives, Wong (2011) will be utilized. 'Functionally, these four components cover for many psychological processes for the good life: motivational (purpose), cognitive (understanding), moral/spiritual (responsibility), and evaluative/affective (enjoyment)' (Wong 2011, 73-74). As '[t]he working definition of meaning according to meaning–management theory is that meaning is consisted of [these] four main components' (Wong 2010, 89), the presence of them will constitute the presence of meaning in these individuals.

The motivational piece of meaningful life can be seen through the purpose the young farmers speak of when discussing their journey back to the land. Purpose helps establish

'overall direction, life goals, and core values' (Wong 2011, 74). For Virginia, this purpose was very much wrapped up in the raising her daughter. With Patrick, purpose was seen in his ability to create order and pleasing aesthetic in each moment of his life. Rebecca and David saw their purpose within their rural setting, creating a healthy community for themselves and their new child. These motivations helped direct the interviewed farmers through a sense of devotion to 'something larger and higher than oneself' (Wong 2011, 74).

The millennial farmers understood their work in a cognitive way as well. Understanding helps an individual create coherence, a 'sense of order and understanding of how the world works' as well as clear identity (Wong 2011, 74). Virginia spoke about the highlights of her own childhood centering around 'expansiveness'. This was connected to the benefits her daughter was receiving through the back to the land lifestyle. Patrick understood the world through order as could be seen in the strict financial standards and careful care of his farm. David and Rebecca spoke of the physical lack of access to healthy, clean food in their area and the people who deserved access to it. It was through these understandings that the young farmers we able to consciously justify their work, providing them with that 'sense of order' to make sense of the world.

The purpose and understanding the interviewed first-generation farmers had through their work helped direct their action. Responsible action is 'doing what is right and what is good' (Wong 2011, 74). We could see responsible action in Virginia's rationale for utilizing organic practices and the way she connected this to her daughter's health. Patrick cited the advantage of knowing the scope of his impact and the advantages of not being stuck in the complexities of office NGO work that was intended to 'change the world'. David and Rebecca's use of tractors and focus on a rural farmers market instead of an urban one were moral decisions directed by their purpose and understandings. 'To decide on the right course of action demands that we have the right purpose in life, the correct understanding of the situation, and careful consideration of its consequences on other people'. The meaning the interviewed farmers had found in back to the land helped guide this responsible action.

Finally, meaningful life helps individuals find enjoyment and evaluation in their lives. 'Feeling good is the inevitable outcome from doing good in light of one's highest purpose and best understanding' (Wong 2011, 74). Virginia found enjoyment in her creative

expression on her farm and the way she had created a positive environment for her daughter. In reflecting on his lifestyle, Patrick found enjoyment by focusing on what was before him – the moments of his life, realizing that what he had created was worthy of celebration. This after reflection on longer-term dreams and recognition of his own contentment in the moment. David and Rebecca had space to reflect when David had to take a second job in the winter to pay the bills. Yet, they found enjoyment in their work despite this due to their beliefs about needs in their community and for their family. The culmination of purpose, understanding and responsible action allowed the young farmers to reflect and find enjoyment in their lifestyles.

'Meaning serves a vital function in integrating various aspects of human needs and functions' (Wong 2011, 74). As established above, meaning-management theory defines meaning as having four pieces: 'purpose, understanding, responsible action, and evaluation' (Wong 2010, 89). The four farmers detailed in this chapter have all four of the components in their back to the land lifestyle. The components ultimately work together to help create a sense of meaning in these individuals' lives. This meaning is one of four key pieces of Wong's (2011) rubric for the good life.

The characteristics and dispositions of the individuals as laid out above should not be mistaken for a habitus in and of themselves. For 'empirically, one does not "see" a habitus but rather the *effects* of a habitus in the practices and beliefs to which it gives rise' (Maton 2008, 62). As such, the perceptions and decisions of these individuals are not habitus, but rather, the effects of their habitus. Of interest is the way in which these individuals, with vastly different backgrounds and personalities, all came to view going 'back to the land' as a good life. 'Habitus allows for the study of individual and collective dispositions and also shows how individuals' perspectives, values, actions, conceptions of hierarchies and social positions are formed' (Stahl 2015, 24). Thus, habitus is effective for both studying individuals and groups. As such, to better understand how these individuals came to view the same act as part of their good life, a look at the habitus of the group need be established.

Bourdieu developed the concept of habitus out of Marxist ideas of class and as such utilized it to effectively understand groups of people and the structures which influenced their decision making. Therefore, this thesis will below look at the young farmers of this study no longer as individuals, but as part of a social group with similar characteristics.

This will prove helpful in identifying the larger social structures and shifts that have contributed to their viewing of the sustainable practice of agriculture as part of a good life.

3 Millennial Farmers and the Alternative Dream of the 'Good Life'

The American Dream holds cultural significance as one of the strongest good life narratives today. Yet, some have theorized that the concept is no longer a possibility for the masses due to increasing inequality within the United States. This chapter will analyze the 'practices, beliefs, perceptions, [and] feelings' (Maton 2008, 51) of the eleven young farmers of this study through the structure of the American Dream. This will reveal social and cultural influences of this group's conception of their back to the land lifestyle. Ultimately, it will further the central claim that these millennials view going back to the land as the project of the good life through showing how resilience, one of four essential components of the good life, is present in their habitus.

3.1 The American Dream

For the millions who have immigrated to the United States, the idea of a better life has served as motivation to make this leap of faith. The U.S. was built upon a narrative of freedom and independence where one was free to pursue their own happiness. As times have changed, though, so has the American Dream and its viability for all Americans. 'Is the American Dream Really Dead?' poses a recent headline from the Guardian, utilizing shock-tactics to raise a serious question about the consequences of rising income inequality with the U.S. (Graham 2017b). This chapter will examine the concept of the American Dream and assess its influence in the lifestyle that the young farmers of this study have pursued. As a known cultural influence in regards to the idea of the good life, the American Dream will provide a rubric through which analysis of the interviewed farmers' opinions and actions can be assessed. Bourdieu's theory of habitus will be utilized to draw connection between the current state of the American Dream, generational attitudes of millennials, and the way in which the farmers of this study conceive and live out their idea of the good life.

3.1.1 Birth of the American Dream

The Consideration of Happiness in Governance

Before Thomas Jefferson penned the phrase 'pursuit of happiness', ideas had been building about well-being of the citizenry. Carol Graham traces the idea of happiness back to Aristotle. '[Aristotle's] concept—eudemonia—is not about contentment, but about having sufficient means to be able to seek purpose or meaning in life' (Graham 2017a). During the 1700s, this idea of 'sufficient means' was being debated among political scientists as ideas of democracy were in formation. '[A]mong a host of writers in Scotland, France, and England in the mid-eighteenth century "happiness"—human, measurable happiness, not divine happiness—became a revolutionary tool for the comprehension and assessment of actions and governments' (Goodman 2015, 110). This new idea would be a way to keep power in check – an important concept in the turn away from monarchies, which had, at times, utilized their absolute power in tyrannical ways. The term 'happiness' appeared in 1765 in a resolution by the New York General Assembly and then again in 1776 in the 'Declaration of Rights of Virginia' (Cullen 2003, 46). The latter used language quite close to that penned by Jefferson in the summer of 1776.

The Declaration of Independence and the Pursuit of Happiness

The Declaration of Independence was not only one of the first big steps in establishing independence from Britain, but also a monumental moment for the idea of democracy globally. Thomas Jefferson, who authored the document, is considered one of the founding fathers of the United States and his words are still utilized in political debate today. The Declaration states:

> We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to

> them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. (National National Archives 2017)

Of note is Jefferson's use of the term 'pursuit' for it bestows upon government 'not that [responsibility] of producing happiness, but of securing the conditions that make it possible' (Goodman 2015, 111). Yet while Jefferson believed individuals were equal in regards to pursuing their own happiness, he did not believe that just anyone should be able to lead the new country.

Jim Cullen, in his book 'The American Dream' (2003), uses an example of a plowman and a professor to highlight Jefferson's views on governance within the new nation.

> For Jefferson and for others, the ploughman and the professor were equal in their ability to grasp the difference between right and wrong and to apprehend what can be done in a given situation. They were not equal in terms of their talents or achievements. The professor-who, in the purest of republican worlds, was a child of ploughmen (perhaps even a former ploughman himself)-was the best equipped to advise, organize, and execute policies. But professors were not to single-handedly decide what those policies should be. Professors should guide and represent the ploughmen, but it was they, no the professors, who would have final say in the voting booth, and if absolutely necessary, in revolution. (Cullen 2003, 52)

Jefferson was wary of mob rule, and thus desired hierarchies within society in terms of governance. 'In many respects, colonial American society was still structured along traditional English lines of deference and noblesse oblige' (Cullen 2003, 61). In the decades after Jefferson's presidency, though, populism would begin to gain popularity in the nation. 'As barriers to political participation for white men dropped and opportunities for economic advancement beckoned, American ploughmen were paying less and less attention to professors' (Cullen 2003, 55). Towards the end of his life, Jefferson would lament these changes within society in his personal correspondence, fearing the consequences to the young nation (Cullen 2003, 53 - 55). These shifts in the populations' thinking, however, would generate an idea that has inspired millions to cross oceans, start businesses, and even run for political office.

Andrew Jackson & the Dream of Upward Mobility

Raised by a single mother and serving as a messenger boy during the American Revolution, Andrew Jackson would become an iconic military figure, fighting many

duels and battles (Cullen 2003, 67 - 68). When Jackson ran for the Presidency of the United States in 1824, he won the most votes, but the electoral college, 'set up precisely to function as a circuit-breaker to slow a surge of popular will' (Cullen 2003, 68), prevented him from obtaining the White House. Jackson would run again, four years later, and win with ease. 'His 1829 inauguration, with its mob of cheese-eating, beer-drinking country bumpkins trampling the White House carpet, chilled the old order' (Cullen 2003, 69). His election made clear that '[m]odest beginnings were no longer a somewhat embarrassing obstacle to be overcome but rather the indispensable bedrock of distinction' (Cullen 2003, 68). For within Andrew Jackson, the common man could see themselves. 'The Founding Fathers had been republicans; here, it seemed, was a model democrat (slaveholding and ruthlessness toward Indians notwithstanding)' (Cullen 2003, 68). While just one example of changing views of power and class within American society, Andrew Jackson helped solidify what Cullen calls the 'dream of upward mobility' that 'lay in a sense of collective ownership: anyone can get ahead' (Cullen 2003, 59 - 60). This dream served to motivate the country for nearly the next two centuries.

Naming and Defining the Dream

The term 'American Dream' is attributed to James Truslow Adams, an American writer who took it upon himself to write a one-volume history of the United States (Cullen 2003, 3 - 4). Originally published in 1931, Adams wanted to entitle the book 'The American Dream' but received pushback from his publisher and ultimately called the book 'The Epic of America' (Cullen 2003, 4). Within the book, Adams nicely lays out a definition of the concept: 'that American dream of a better, richer, and happier life for all our citizens of every rank, which is the greatest contribution we have made to the thought and welfare of the world' (Adams 2012, xx). Yet, it was understood that obtaining this dream would not come without work. As Benjamin Franklin laid out in 'Poor Richard's Almanac', 'success comes from applying oneself, being resourceful, and becoming self-reliant' (Rifkin 2004, 26). Self-reliance as a goal is an important piece of the dream born of a nation of frontiersman. Rifkin (2004) writes as himself an American:

> For us, freedom has long been associated with autonomy. If one is autonomous, he or she is not dependent on others or vulnerable to circumstances outside of his or her control. To be autonomous, one needs to be propertied. The more wealth one amasses, the more independent one

> is in the world. One is free by becoming self-reliant and an island unto oneself. (Rifkin 2004, 13)

The roadmap to Jacksonian upward mobility is to find a way to control one's own destiny. In other words, one need become a 'self-made man', a term made popular by U.S. Senator Henry Clay in a 1832 speech (Cullen 2013, 11). This dominant cultural trope has led Americans to view successes and failures as the responsibility of the individual.

Rifkin (2004) writes of how this idea of the self-made man, fueled by personal willpower, made sense in the context of his parents, American Westerners who grew up in the spirit of the frontier mentality (Rifkin 2004, 12). He argues, though, that when this same dream was introduced to him 'in a more structured if not artificial way, in the form of "self-esteem" seminars and instruction' it 'seem[ed] a bit too desperate, perhaps because it lack[ed] any kind of historical context or mission' (Rifkin 2004, 12). Rifkin touches upon a key issue with this idea of the self-made man: a goal of self-autonomy made sense on the American frontier when one could control most of their own destiny with their actions. However, as frontiers have diminished and society has become more interconnected, this idea of controlling one's destiny now has little validity. Yet the idea still holds strong: 'In America, we have come to believe that everyone is truly responsible for his or her own destiny. It's the frontier motif, and it is firmly embedded in our national consciousness' (Rifkin 2004, 40).

The American Dream can be understood as a roadmap to 'the good life' in a once frontier nation. All one needs to do is take hold of their own destiny and utilize that agency to dominate new frontiers, working towards more and more autonomy. This frontier-journey of becoming a self-made man in order to achieve upward mobility has come to be viewed as the 'pursuit of happiness'. In recent times, however, this journey has become more complex to traverse.

3.1.2 The American Dream Exhausted?

> Up until the 1960s, upward mobility was at the core of the American Dream. Then, the dream began to unravel, slowly at first, but picking up momentum in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Today, the U.S. can no longer claim to be the model of upward mobility for the world. […] the kind of unfettered upward mobility that made America the envy of the world no longer exists. (Rifkin 2004, 38)

In their 2017 paper, Chetty et al. establish through quantitative research two key findings regarding the dream of upward mobility. The first is that '[t]he fraction of children earning [wages] more than their parents fell from approximately 90% for children born in 1940 to around 50% for children entering the labor market today' (Chetty et al. 2017, 405). Additionally, the group found that 'most of the decline in absolute mobility is driven by the more unequal distribution of economic growth in recent decades, rather than by the slowdown in GDP growth rates' (Chetty et al. 2017, 405). This unequal distribution of wealth has serious consequences for the American Dream, for as Alesina et al. (2004) report 'individuals tend to declare lower happiness levels when inequality happens to be high' (Alesina, Di Tella, and MacCulloch 2004, 2035). Thus, the pursuit of happiness is rather difficult when inequality is high. Unfortunately, the recent economic turndown has only made things worse.

> Income inequality was momentarily reduced by the immediate impact of the Great Recession in the 2008-2009, but in the ensuing years the trend toward increasing affluence at the very top, coupled with stagnation or worse for the rest of the society, resumed and even accelerated. From 2009 to 2012, the real incomes of the top 1 percent of American families rose 31 percent, while the real incomes of the bottom 99 percent barely budged (up less than half a percentage point). (Putnam 2015, 35)

This rising income equality in the second decade of the 21st century has caused some observers (Putnam 2015, Rifkin 2004, Graham 2017b) to declare the American Dream dead or at risk of diminishing.

A dream born out of populist democratic movements, the American Dream has recently been deemed under threat due to a growing gap between rich and poor in the U.S. As income inequality has increased, the ability for those with less economic means to get ahead has diminished. This is due to the fact that some of the wealthiest American are increasing their wealth exponentially. Senator Bernie Sanders characterized a recent report on Americans' income from the Congressional Budget Office as, 'the rich keep getting richer and virtually everyone else gets poorer' (Sanders 2016). As such, the opportunity to achieve the American Dream has diminished or disappeared for many. The American Dream is premised on the idea that anyone, from any background, can obtain happiness and success. Yet, that is no longer possible, and thus, the primary

premise of the dream is now not based in reality. As such, the American Dream can be understood as at risk of exhaustion.

The American Dream 'has functioned as shared ground for a very long time, binding together people who may have otherwise little in common and may even be hostile to one another' (Cullen 2003, 189). Without a shared dream there becomes room for hostility and disconnect. James Adams, the writer to whom the term 'American Dream' is attributed, notes that, 'Ever since we [the U.S.] became an independent nation, each generation has seen an uprising of ordinary Americans to save that dream from the forces which appeared to be overwhelming it' (Adams 2012, xx). This concept of an American Dream under threat is a helpful lens with which to view the actions of the interviewed farmers who have chosen a radically different rendition of a good life than mainstream American society. The difficulties or impossibilities in achievement of the traditional American Dream has allowed alternative conceptions to move from fringe theories to pragmatic necessities in the quest for satisfaction in life in America.

3.1.3 The Ingrained American Dream

Despite the fact that the American Dream may no longer be possible for many Americans, it still structures much thinking within the United States. Rifkin (2004) notes how the dream of upward mobility, still very alive today, has shifted from hard work towards high levels of gambling and reality television shows that boost common people into stardom (Rifkin 2004, 28-30). Credit card debt in the U.S. totaled $834 billion at the end of 2017, evidence that those who do not even have the physical means to do so are trying to advance themselves economically (Morath 2018). Americans are also still infatuated with frontiers today as evidenced by President Donald Trump's announcement to send astronauts to the moon and the planet Mars (Sampathkumar 2017). Additionally, some of the most popular figures in the U.S. today are people who are pushing boundaries and chasing innovation into new frontiers - Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg, and Jeff Bezos. Finally, the idea of the self-made man is still very alive in the United States as evidenced by the near obsession with self-help literature discussed above. During the 2016 Presidential Elections in the United States, Hillary Clinton repeatedly discussed how Donald Trump received large loans from his father in order to achieve economic success (Kessler 2016). Clinton was trying to convince the public that Trump was not a self-

made man, implying that the concept holds a level of virtue in the U.S. With these three aspects of the American Dream still holding prominence in American society, we can only deduce that the American Dream, though perhaps not attainable, still has heavy influence on the thoughts and choices of Americans.

The pervasiveness of the American Dream in the U.S. today can be understood through Bourdieu's theory of habitus. Bourdieu writes:

> The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment […] produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively "regulated" and "regular" without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor. (Bourdieu 1977, 72)

Social structures within the United States produce a habitus within individuals immersed in the principles of the American Dream. This 'American Dream habitus' structures the way in which Americans see the world and themselves. There are no written rules that require one to pursue upward mobility, explore frontiers, or attempt to become a self-made man. Yet, Americans are still very much in pursuance of this idea of a good life. Thus, the American Dream can be understood as a habitus ingrained in the consciousness of most Americans and characteristic of the nation. 'The habitus is thus both structured by conditions of existence and generates practices, beliefs, perceptions, feelings and so forth in accordance with its own structure' (Maton 2008, 51). This generation of practices is what allows us to be able to identify and discuss the concept of the American Dream. For, 'one does not "see" a habitus but rather the effects of a habitus in the practices and beliefs to which it gives rise' (Maton 2008, 62).

While this structure is present in most Americans, it does not necessarily produce happiness for all of them. As all Americans do not engage in the same social fields, the way in which the habitus of the American Dream manifests itself is different for each individual. 'Practices are thus not simply the result of one's habitus but rather of *relations between* one's habitus and one's current circumstances' (Maton 2008, 52), or

the field in which one is engaged. While Americans are engaged in different social fields, the way in which this structure of the American Dream shows through in their practices is also different. As such, the way in which the American Dream habitus produces practices within a Wall Street executive is quite different from the practices it produces for a child of color growing up in government housing. Yet the pervasiveness of the concept of the American Dream is salient, giving both of these individuals similar structures through which to interact within their fields.

Due to this pervasiveness, the concept of the American Dream and the habitus structured by it create a helpful rubric through which to view the practice of young Americans going 'back to the land'. For 'practice is not reducible to habitus but rather a phenomenon emergent from relations between social agents' habituses and their contextual social fields' (Maton 2008, 61). Thus, to understand the practice of going back to the land we need to understand the farmers' habituses and social field. The scope of this study is far too small to fully examine the habitus of each of the interviewed farmers. Thus, the American Dream will be utilized as a known habitus, a known structure that is structuring the young farmers' relations within their social fields. This will help shed light on the ways in which the social field of the interviewed farmers is interacting with their habitus. This is due to 'the dialectical confrontation between habitus and field - other than the field of origin – [which] results in a degree of accommodation, where the habitus accepts the legitimacy of the new field's structure and is, in turn, structured by it, thus enabling a modified habitus' (Stahl 2015, 23). Through exploring the differences between the known structure of the American Dream and the current beliefs of the young farmers, we can see how the social field of farming has modified their habituses. Ultimately, this will allow an analysis of their practice of going back to the land as we can see a relation between the habitus of the farmer and the social field in which they are engaged. It will also further clarify why these young farmers perceive going back to the land as the good life.

3.2 Millennials

Within the context of an American Dream in crisis, a huge segment of the population of the U.S. has come of age. The limited research on this generation is helpful in understanding how changing economic and social forces have influenced the thinking of

the subjects of this study. As such, the millennial generation will be briefly introduced and research around them presented.

3.2.1 Who are the millennials?

The term, 'millennial' comes from Howe and Strauss (2000) who write they 'coined the name Millennials in 1987, around the time [19]'82-born children were entering kindergarten and the media were first identifying their prospective link to the millennial year 2000' [as this would be their high school graduation year] (Howe and Strauss 2000, 370). Pew Research, a large American think tank, defines millennials as those born between 1981 and 1997 (making them between the ages of 21 and 37 as of 2018) (Fry 2016). Fry (2016) notes that, as of August 2016, millennials are the largest living generation in the United States (Fry 2016).

This generation is the least racially white of living generations in the United States with 57% reported as Caucasian, 21% reported as Hispanic, and 13% Black (Pew Research Pew Research Center 2015, 9). Only 28% of millennials were married by 33 years old, whereas 38% of Gen Xers [one generation older than millennials] and 49% of Baby Boomers [two generations older than millennials] were married by that age (Pew Research Pew Research Center 2015, 10). The group is also the most religiously and politically unaffiliated of living American generations (Pew Research Pew Research Center 2015, 11 - 15). Clearly there are cultural and generational shifts occurring within the United States. These shifts, along with diminishing possibilities of economic advancement, are affecting the way millennials envision the good life.

What does the millennial want from life?

While research on the blatant desires of millennials is not available, there is an abundance of research regarding millennials in the workplace. Private research groups have constructed much of this data and while some is not as rigorous as academic research, it holds significance due to the fact that large corporate employers are utilizing it to attract and retain millennials in the workplace.

Wecker (2017) describes the millennial existence as such: '[w]hile daily life is increasingly convenient, the future is more uncertain than ever' (Wecker 2017, 2). This

convenience and uncertainly could be why millennials are very focused on 'here and now'. 'U.S. Millennials are all about instant gratification. They put a premium on speed, ease, efficiency, and convenience in all their transactions' (Barton, Fromm, and Egan 2012, 6). This need for 'now' has led to trouble for employers trying to keep millennials around: 'because millennials plan for the short-term, staying in a role for longer than a year or two feels daunting' (Wecker 2017, 2). Further evidence shows '[t]wenty-one percent of millennials have changed jobs within the past year, six in 10 are open to different job opportunities and only 50% plan to be with their company one year from now' (Rigoni and Nelson 2016). Certainly, millennials are viewing time differently than those before them.

'Millennials have been conditioned to require external factors to spur their motivation; they need to see that they're making a tangible impact' (Wecker 2017, 2). This issue is present in most all of the reports on millennials in the workplace. 'Roughly 75 percent agreed that finding a sense of purpose in their work is more important than salary' and '[o]ver 60 percent said that social responsibility plays a significant role in choosing where to work' (Frank 2017). It would seem the conscious consumer has become the conscious employee. As Gallup (2016) lays out, one of the key attitudes of millennials towards work is '[i]t's not just my job — it's my life' (Gallup 2016, 3). This may be a pragmatic approach to deal with the increasing competition of a globalized workplace in which more is demanded of employees leaving less time for personal pursuits.

Millennials also seem to have a strong desire to control their own destinies. 'Ask a millennial what they value most, and you're sure to hear "freedom" in some form' (Wecker 2017, 13). As such, 61% of millennials claim that 'there is more job security in owning your own business than working for someone else' (America's Small Business Development Centers 2017, 7). This is favorable opinion of autonomy within the workplace has led to 62% of millennials professing a dream of starting their own business in the future (America's Small Business Development Centers 2017, 8). This would seem understandable given the instability of the economic context in which millennials have come of age. This need for control, though, may be leading to serious consequences for these young people.

Too much pressure?

One might note that the above-mentioned desires are extremely self-centered. This focus on the individual has come with consequences characterized by Twenge's (2006) description of millennials as 'Generation Stressed' (Twenge 2006, 104). Recent research from Curran and Hill (2017) reveals that 'self-oriented perfectionism, socially prescribed perfectionism, and other-oriented perfectionism have increased over the last 27 years [1989 – 2006]' within the U.S., U.K., and Canada (Curran and Hill 2017, 12). They speculate that this is due to the fact that:

> American, Canadian, and British cultures have become more individualistic, materialistic, and socially antagonistic over this period [1989 to 2016], with young people now facing more competitive environments, more unrealistic expectations, and more anxious and controlling parents than generations before. (Curran and Hill 2017, 12)

These contributing factors of individualism, materialism and 'higher vindictiveness, hostility, and the tendency to blame others' (Curran and Hill 2017, 2) can all be linked the frontier philosophy of becoming 'islands unto themselves''. The authors note that in reflection on their findings, 'one issue of especial relevance is the harm and psychological difficulties that might accompany an increase in perfectionism' (Curran and Hill 2017, 11). They then cite multiple reports of increasing eating disorders, loneliness, depression, suicidal thoughts, and anxiety among youth in the U.S., Canada, and the U.K (Curran and Hill 2017, 11). It would seem that the increase in personal agency among the millennial generation has come with high standards of success and personal blame for failure. The concept of the 'self-made man' is surely at play here.

3.3 The Millennial Farmer in Search of an Alternative Good Life

3.3.1 Millennial Farmers and Upward Mobility

As established above, upward mobility is not widely accessible for many within the millennial generation due to increasing inequaility. The lifestyle the interviewed farmers decided to pursue does not typically come with the possibility of upward mobility, especially for young-middle class individuals from non-farming backgrounds. As I will

show, while disengaging from conventional jobs and social trajectories, the young farmers possess high levels of satisfaction in their alternative lifestyles.

Different Quality of Life

During my interview with Jennifer, a millennial farmer, she spoke directly about the American Dream of upward mobility:

> Uh - like my stepdad is always my example of that. He worked in a factory, he has retirement, so this man has a pension, he has insurance, he has - he's financially stable. He has social security. We'll [millennials] have none of that. He's got a 401K - he makes more money now in retirement now than he did while he was working. And I think that - I don't think that people realize how much financial security really weighs on you in your day to day life like when you don't have that you know. And then things like owning a home. I would say me and [her husband] are like a rare group - like I said, we had a hundred thousand dollar income and still were struggling to buy a place [to live] - so maybe those types of things will happen later in life for our generation. Or happen at all. (Jennifer)

Clearly, Jennifer did not believe she could attain upward mobility and get to a better economic position in life than her stepdad. Both Jennifer and her husband had successful careers before she quit to farm, and yet they were still having trouble achieving the level of economic prosperity of her parents. Jennifer's experience attempting to achieve upward mobility through her career had influenced her ideas of what was possible within her future. In a similar way, other farmers of this study cited lack of well-paying jobs as a contributing factor to their choice to become a farmer. As upward mobility was simply not an option for some of these individuals, one can begin to imagine how other factors came to play a role in their choice of career. Of interest, though, is the way in which they chose a lifestyle that most would characterize as downwardly mobile.

The interviewed farmers speak often about the undervaluing of agriculture in American society. 'Yeah, it's incredibly hard work, you don't get - it's really hard to get paid a living wage, let alone, get like paid for your own labor' (Luke). This difficulty in making a living wage was expressed by all of the farmers of this study. Some suggested that when one divides their total farm profits by the number of hours that they personally put in, they do not earn much more than the minimum wage ($7.25/hour) with some claiming to actual making less than that. This exposes one of the biggest issues with agriculture –

the undervaluing of labor. Virginia alludes to this undervaluing through the lens of race and class:

> The guy that farms all this [land around her to which she is pointing that is farmed in a large-scale, industrial way], at some point he'll hire all these migrant workers to come through, and, they see me out here and they're like, 'What the hell is that lady doing?' they're like, 'What is that white woman doing in the field?' and I'm like 'Hey guys, how's it going?' (Virginia)

The reaction of these migrant workers that Virginia has described is not unique to those in the conventional agriculture sector.

The parents of the interviewed farmers have expressed concern for their lifestyle choices at times. When asked what their parents think of their decision to farm, many young farmers said their parents often have economic questions (ie, 'Can you actually make money doing that?'). Of course, a parental concern for necessities of life is to be expected, but a framing of concern in economic terms instead of terms of well-being reveals much about their parents' view of a good life and the alternative idea that these young farmers possess.

In addition to the undervaluing of labor within the food system, the interviewed farmers have set goals or standards for themselves that have also made financial success more difficult. One of the biggest ones would be the method in which they grow their food. 'I understand why some people grow conventionally - organic farming is hard as shit - and the costs are so much' (Virginia). Organic or ecologically friendly pesticides and fertilizers are generally more expensive than those used in conventional agriculture and the practice itself requires far more labor. Additionally, the small-scale farming in which the young farmers are engaged makes economies of scale more difficult – most use smaller machines that do not have the same precision or efficiency that comes with large, industrial agricultural equipment. Finally, a number of the interviewed farmers have refused to go into debt for their dream. This has resulted in slower growth and inefficiency marked by lack of tools or infrastructure. One might say that these young farmers are working against themselves if their goal was upward-mobility. However, as they are quite aware of the economic limitations of their work and their choices, something quite different from a dream of upward mobility is driving them.

Seeking Other Forms of Wellbeing: Challenges of the Farm-life

'I'm not getting any younger. [...] I want to be able to farm and not kill myself. Have a comfortable life. I guess that's why I'm farming - you want to live a lifestyle, right, you want to live a certain life' (Virginia). The lifestyle that the farmers interviewed for this research are pursuing is, in many ways, their response to the idea of upward mobility – they are creating an alternative place in which they see better well-being. They also seem to be finding a sense of purpose within the work. Patrick puts it well:

> 'No matter what is the specific thing that brings you to farming there's a sense of - 'this is important work' - the value of this work extends far beyond its monetary value - in fact its monetary value pretty much never the reason someone gets into farming. We're all trying to figure out how to be profitable just so we can do the things [pauses] how do we figure out how to keep following our mission. And so I think because so many people are in it for reasons beyond a paycheck, no one is farming so that they can get off work and at the end of the day do the things they actually like to do - it's insane to be farming, especially in the South [of the U.S.]. And so you're only doing it if you - it's because for a variety of reasons you really want to be doing it. And then I guess because most of those reasons are maybe something about some innate thing about working in soil that makes farmers crazy - people feel like, oh yeah, this is bigger than just me.' (Patrick)

This alternative good life which the interviewed farmers are chasing is how they justify the fact that they will not achieve upward mobility on their current trajectory. The goodness of this lifestyle seems to outweigh the financial insecurity that comes with it for the young farmers.

Yet there is a paradox here as this post-material pursuit of the good life is characterized by a materialist preoccupation with money. The interviewed farmers talked about money constantly during interviews. It is likely that this comes from the insecurity of the lack of economic resources. 'I'm like obsessed with money - when you don't have money, you're obsessed with it' suggested Jennifer. Perhaps this is simply a rationalizing of life choices as there are significant difficulties for the interviewed farmers that come from lack of money.

Certainly, this pursuance of goals that ignore or are in defiance to the concept of upward mobility have created challenges for the interviewed farmers. One of the top four challenges mentioned by the National Young Farmers Coalition in the report on

beginning farmers (referenced above) is access to health insurance (Ackokk, Bahrenburg, and Shute 2017, 8). As most people in the United States receive health insurance through their employers, self-employment as a farmer creates challenges. Speaking of the difficulties of her work, Josephine declared, 'you have to wear multiple bandanas so you don't get sweat in your eyes and you're getting eaten up by chiggers and the reality is that you're poor - the kids are on medicad [government health insurance program for high risk populations in poverty] - but I still love it more' [than her previous life pursuing a PhD]. We can see that Josephine includes her mention of the challenge of health insurance along with other physical challenges – heat, pests, money. She defends her choice by affirming her new quality of life, despite these physical challenges. Several farmers within this study are utilizing subsidized or free health insurance through the HealthCare.gov program also known as Obamacare. Still others have decided with their spouse that one of them should work a full or part time job off the farm in order for the couple to have better access to health insurance and more stable income.

Another large challenge with this lack of financial security is the instability it brings to farming operations that are typically run by one or two people. Luke offers a prime example of this complexity of small-scale farming:

> And it feels good a lot of the time, but there are struggles because its such hard work. And it isn't, its not like I'm trying to make a lot of money, its that I want to not worry about the farm shutting down and that's kind of, its year to year and it feels like it can keep on going as long as I'm, as long as I don't get in an accident or get hurt or have too many natural disasters happen at once. And I don't even know what would happen. (Luke)

Being self-employed and dependent upon one's own body for income certainly means that accidents or health issues can be game-over. One farmer had a friend who had started a farm only to injure her back during the peak season and ultimately had to shut down the farm because of this. The issue here is the fact that the interviewed farmers have subsidized their operations with their own labor, thus they have created a system that cannot be profitable without them as it would not be viable if they hired workers to run their enterprises entirely. Yet the competition from a larger food system that utilizes migrant workers, fossil fuels and government subsidizes makes it incredibly difficult for the young farmers not to subsidize something – otherwise their prices would have to be significantly higher than they already were.

Despite these challenges which many would find reason enough to not adopt this lifestyle, the young farmers of this study seem generally unworried. In Josephine's quote above, we see an insistence that despite these challenges, she still views this lifestyle as one of better wellbeing than her previous life that possessed more stability. The social field in which the interviewed farmers are engaged, explored in the next chapter, will help make sense of this seeming lack of concern for these challenges.

Within the context of an American Dream broken by high rates of inequality, the individuals of this study have chosen a lifestyle furthering their inability to get ahead economically. The inherent financial instability within running a small farm along with the additional restrictions the interviewed farmers have placed upon themselves make upward mobility nearly impossible. Yet, their response to this topic of financial hardship is often framed as simply a tradeoff for better wellbeing. Clearly, the structure of the pursuit of upward mobility has been altered within them as they pursue an alternative mobility. This alternative mobility is a move away from the desire for economic prosperity and towards a prosperity of self, family, and spirit as displayed in the previous chapter.

3.3.2 Millennial Farmers and Frontiers

The majority of the interviewed farmers possess the innovative spirit characteristic of a nation of frontiersmen. Their act of going 'back to the land' is in and of itself a frontier-like endeavor. Of interest is the way that going back to the land was viewed as a move forward towards a good life. An analysis of how these young farmers view the idea of frontiers can be helpful in untangling this seeming complexity.

The Next Big Thing

The area of study in central North Carolina is quite known for the strength of its support for local food. This has created an abundance of farmers and as such, every farmer I spoke with stressed the over-saturation of the market for their products. And yet, these limits, though challenging at times, seemed to be creating resilience.

The interviewed farmers were extremely focused on growing crops that would distinguish them from the next farmer. As such, they spoke much about food trends they followed

(ie, growing ginger and turmeric) as well as growing certain crops during times of scarcity. Lettuce was a big focus during the summer when I was conducting field work. Lettuce grows best in cooler temperatures and thus is in high production during the spring and fall in North Carolina as the summers are hot. One farmer had actually received a grant to test some alternative ways of growing lettuce in the summer utilizing shading and irrigation systems to help decrease temperatures for the crop. When asked about the reasons he was focusing so much attention on lettuce Patrick argued the following:

> Almost no one else does [grow lettuce in the summer] that's the main one. There's so many good local farms around here that for us to start a farm and try to find our place in the market especially with growing for chefs, we just had to find the things that no one else grows or is willing to grow or everyone else already gave up on. We try to figure it out. And for CSA [community supported agriculture program] the demand for lettuce is probably highest in the summer time among CSA members so like [the customers think], 'I don't want to cook, I just want to make a salad, its hot out' - and its the time of year when its hardest to have salad - so it makes for a higher quality CSA and then it gives us something to sell to the chefs and it keeps our beds productive. (Patrick)

Patrick frames his efforts to grow lettuce as fueled by supply and demand – his customers want lettuce in the summer and it is not readily available on the local market. Additionally, his comment about needing to distinguish himself from others within the market is important. The farmers of this study beamed with excitement when they would show me something unique they were growing – it was as if everyone was looking to start the next food fad at the farmers market. Constant innovation seemed essential – some farmers had only been accepted to a prominent farmers market due to the uniqueness of the products they would bring. This searching for something new seemed to keep the young farmers engaged and yet instead of creating an environment of secrecy and aggressive competition, I found cooperation as the focus.

Intentional Limits

Though the spirit of innovation and exploration was highly evident among the interviewed farmers, they had created systems to counter the dominating, expansive mentality that has become characteristic of the American way of life. These intentional limits were born out of belief systems and desires to retain autonomy. While the limits

created some restriction for the millennial farmers, they had all found ways to thrive within these self-created confines.

All of the farmers within this study had set their own limits for the size of their farms. Patrick reasoned: 'I don't think we ever see ourselves having a big ole [very large] crew of twenty workers cuz [because] we're never gonna [going to] be that size farm' (Patrick). Patrick envisioned a limit to the growth of his farm enterprise in the future. Virginia provided some evidence as to why the millennial farmers may be thinking about limits to growth. 'My potential for expansion out here is almost unlimited - [as her neighbor would willingly lease more land to her] I could be as big as I wanted to be, but I think five acres would be really nice amount to grow for' (Virginia). There is a limit to how much high quality food the young farmers can produce with such physically intensive practices. Virginia stated that five acres is a nice amount of space, as it would allow her to continue to keep her ideals and produce the type of product she desires. Hannah provided further insight into this mentality: 'I mean if we really feel the need to do more land I'm sure we could find it - there's farmland around here to rent. But we really are focusing on this area and refining - a lot of refining - product, you know, space'. For Hannah, as well as the rest of the farmers of this study, the existing space in use can always be worked more intensively. More effort or better techniques can increase the profitability and nutrient value of the food that they are growing. Thus, the young farmers were not interested in spatial frontiers – they know where they want to be and have limited the space into which they envision their farms growing. Instead, they seem to see room for expansion in efficiency and intentionality in their existing context.

The farmers of this study have positioned themselves within the localism movement. As such, all of the interviewed farmers sell the entirety of their products within 50-miles of their farms. Some of the farmers were focused on extremely local distribution models. Virginia ran a CSA program out of her husband's place of work and attended only one farmers market for direct sells to customers. This rural farmers market was about a fifteen-minute drive from her farm (as opposed to the more popular markets in urban areas, at least a half-hour drive from her). Her reasoning for this was as follows:

> Its a small market, its local. And uh, yeah, its nice. Its not the biggest market I could have gone to, but at the same time, I'm still on my first year and I dunno [do not know], I decided that it was a low-stress option for me to do

> that and they needed a produce vendor - they didn't really have someone who was like - they have a produce vendor who's like, conventional [growing food in conventional ways, i.e. with pesticides and chemical fertilizers]. […] And I also want to support my community around here, you know. I feel like there are a lot of people who want organic food and there's really not a lot of options in this area to buy organic. I mean we're not certified but we use organic methods, you know. So you know, that was another part of my, I felt like that market needed support [...] farmers and you know I wanted to be that person at least for now, you know. (Virginia)

Of interest here is the way that Virginia seemed to accept market limitations and frame them positively. She could easily have been accepted into a larger, urban market and had better sales, but she had chosen to attend the rural farmers market in her own community citing the common good of doing so. She also seemed to find benefit to herself in attending this smaller market – less stress and feeling as if she is supporting something in which she believes.

Finally, the environmental attitudes of the interviewed farmers have created further restraints around their lifestyles. Luke characterized the style of farming as:

> […] the food system has changed over time and that we're going back - not to the same way people were farming before, because we're doing it every differently, but more aligned with farming in the past than the present - this sort of, aberration that is industrial farming of the past seventy, hundred years and that way of farming is so bad for the environment and the workers […]

Luke touched on one of the primary reasons the interviewed farmers are practicing agriculture in a distinctly different way than the majority of farmers in the United States. The environmental and social degradation of industrial farming has sparked a distinctly different approach by the young farmers. Yet, of interest, was the way in which the interviewed farmers spoke very little about the environment when speaking of their motivations in becoming sustainable farmers. This could be due to the way that the practice of agriculture has encouraged a pragmatic view of environmentalism. Patrick characterized the changing views of the environment that agriculture had produced within him:

> We're organic farmers, not certified, and believe in farming in a way that environmentally responsible but at the end of the day that land doesn't want to be in carrots and tomatoes. That land wants to be in oak trees and beech

> trees and sweat gums. So it's inherent at least in this area that farming is a battle with nature.

I heard this from a number of the millennial farmers when I pressed them on environmental issues after they offered very little on the topic when speaking of their motivations and goals.

Luke spoke about the complexity of the decision around utilizing plastic for weed suppression, which drastically reduces prices by decreasing labor costs. 'I've definitely, come to compromise on a lot of the things that if I was just a urban environmentalist I would not compromise on' (Luke). When pressed on environmental attitudes, all of the interviewed farmers were interested in less destruction and more harmony with natural systems. Yet, these attitudes were creating conflicts such as those Luke speaks of with the use of large amounts of plastic. It would seem that this constraint was handled on a case by case basis.

Challenges of Limited Frontiers

There are challenges with the limited frontiers of local distribution. Patrick characterized one of them as a 'worry that demand is finite'. There was an idea among the interviewed farmers that perhaps everyone who wanted to eat locally already was doing it, and thus there was not room for expecting more customers. Additionally, there was a very high percentage of small, sustainable farmers attempting to distribute their products locally. This has led to an opinion, expressed here by William, that 'the [local food] market in general is somewhat oversaturated'. This would likely be a challenge moving forward for the young farmers, though Patrick cited the large number of people moving to the area, particularly from the West Coast of the U.S., as potential new customers. Many of the interviewed farmers thought the limitations of the market could be corrected through educating more people in order to create value for their products.

The Frontiers of the Millennial Farmer Good Life

The frontier mentality of the American Dream is certainly a present structure of consciousness typifying the interviewed farmers. They are innovative beings who are quite excited by their achievements beyond conventions, but at the same time engage within a social field full of cooperation, which will be discussed in detail in the next

chapter. They also play within a field of constraints as defined by their ideals of environmental responsibility. These structures have shaped not only the actions of the young farmers, but also the way in which they envision their own futures.

3.3.3 Millennial Farmers as Self-Made [Wo]Men

'I think there is a desire in our generation to be more self-reliant in a lot of ways because we think it's all shit. I mean we don't - we're not gonna [going to] live the American Dream like our parents did, that's for damn sure' (Jennifer). Jennifer has touched on one of the key reasons the millennial farmers of this study chose this lifestyle of agriculture – the desire for autonomy. Certainly, autonomy is a piece of the self-made man concept that is central in the idea of the American Dream. Yet, the young farmers have no desire to become the 'island onto oneself' (Rifkin 2004, 13) that insulates them from the instability of community.

Autonomy

As discussed above, global market forces have prevented some within the millennial generation from obtaining what was promised to them – 'you can be anything you want when you grow up'. It is not surprising then that every farmer interviewed in this study alluded to some form of autonomy when describing how they viewed their work as part of a good life. Two interconnected ideas emerged in these conversations: autonomy to produce what one needs and freedom to control one's own life.

When Virginia was asked why young people may be interested in farming she, with a hint of seriousness replied, 'it's for the zombie apocalypse'. She laughed but then went on to describe how she perceived increasing instability within the world. Virginia was not the only farmer to speak of apocalyptic scenarios as motivation for growing food. When asked why farming is a better life than her previous one, Jennifer argued the following:

> I love nature - like when I stop freaking out about it - I love growing food, like I like the resilience of it, or the resilience of my household in terms of when the Apocalypse comes - that's really - I feel like that's the main reason my crew works for me is they're training for the Apocalypse. (Jennifer)

This idea of self-reliance seems of obvious appeal to a generation that has been bombarded with threats of ecological collapse. The fact that Jennifer brought up

apocalypse after talking of her love for nature is likely evidence that these ideas were connected for her. The interviewed farmers were attempting to close loops in regards to agricultural inputs by utilizing local, and at times, waste products on their farms. This was part of their pursuit of their self-label as 'sustainable' farmers. The goal of sustainability was certainly a piece of this pursuit for autonomy perhaps fueled in some parts by fear of these apocalyptic ideas.

A related piece of the pursuit of autonomy cited by the interviewed farmers is the way in which modern society leaves very little power with the individual. The majority of the young farmers in this study cited corporate power as one of the reasons they were farming and working to change the food system. 'It just seems like a lot of things in our society are not, really thinking about people and what's best for people' was the way that Virginia put this conflict. This resistance to forms of power was expressed in many ways, against old employers, corporations, and government. Josephine even expressed freedom from financial institutions as part of her pursuit of autonomy:

> I've never in my life gotten a loan because I don't like that - it makes me feel very dependent. That's part of the appeal of peasantry too is not having debt in that regard. People don't understand how much it [debt] ties them to a job they hate, living a life they hate. (Josephine)

The interviewed farmers believed that a good life in a better world is one in which there is increased freedom. This connected well with the goal of self-sustenance, where being able to provide for oneself and their family can lead to freedom from these the systems of power to which the young farmers alluded.

The Common Good

While the act of pursuing a lifestyle of agriculture is motivated by the pursuit of autonomy for the interviewed farmers, there are also strong motivations rooted in community betterment. Perhaps the idea is best summed up by what David wanted to name his farm: Common Good Farm. (He ultimately chose another name because he was worried of the socialist implications in a conservative, rural area.) These motivations emerged often when the young farmers talked about their transition from their previous lives and modes of work into agriculture. Virginia covered the idea well in talking about her career before farming:

> I didn't feel like I was helping people, and I really wanted to help people. You know, listening to the news and hearing all these things that are happening over the world and just, I dunno [do not know], it made me feel really helpless like I couldn't do anything about that - but I decided the way that I could, like reconcile myself with that is that I could do something here, for my community and the people around me, my family, just focus on that - me as a single individual. (Virginia)

This desire to be part of some aspect of social reform within society was a repeated motivation by the interviewed farmers. This stands in contrast to the idea of an 'island unto oneself', the goal of the self-made man mentioned by Rifkin (2004) above. Patrick described this motivation well as he discussed how some have misunderstood his goals.

> [T]he last generation of non-farmers to get on the land were the back-to-the-landers and for them it was about dropping out - that's what they were trying to do. […] But for, I can speak for myself and [my wife], but I feel like even beyond us, for this generation of farmers its not that at all, its very much I would like to engage with the world and I'm gonna [going to] do it through farming cuz [because] that's what feels right to me and also cuz like maybe I see farming as a potential solution for many of the problems in society. No, its definitely like, no I want to run a business, I want to be outward facing, I want to engage in my community, I want to be outside. […] [W]e want to bring the farming back into the community rather than step outside of the community so that we can farm. (Patrick)

Patrick refers to the complexity of the previous, large 'back to the land' movement during the 1970s. This movement had some goals of social exclusion and attempts to build artificial communities cut off from the world (see Brown 2011, Daloz 2016). The way in which the millennial farmers within this study have included social justice elements in their motivation stands in contrast to the flower-power, hippies who went back to the land four decades before.

The Good Life Is Not an Island

Unlike the idea of achieving success without the instability of relying on others, the farmers of this study very much view success as a communal act. They certainly are attracted to ideals of freedom and independence from systems of power within society and see their lifestyle as a way of achieving this. Yet, they have tied their ability to achieve these things to community support and ideals of social justice. As will be

displayed in the coming chapter, the structures surrounding these beliefs are very much entangled in the social field in which they are engaged.

3.4 The Resilience of Back to the Land

In analyzing the lifestyles, opinions and goals of the millennial farmers of this study through the lens of the American Dream, the rationale of back to the land begins to become apparent. The traditional American Dream and its key promise of upward mobility is not a universal given for millennials: a generation plagued by economic uncertainty. The farmers of this study have instead pursued a lifestyle within agriculture – a field known to yield very little, if any economic gain. Their environmental ideals have constrained their potential for growing their small businesses, yet they thrive within these confines. Finally, their ultimate goal is not 'island unto oneself' where they have full agency over their destiny, but rather, the health and wellbeing of their community. The context of these individuals as millennials within the stagnated idea of the American Dream sheds light on how they have come to view this lifestyle as one of resiliency.

The young farmers of this study have accepted the limited possibility of upward mobility for themselves. As was evident above, they have instead framed their pursuance of agriculture as an attempt to increase their well-being. Economic instability and the lack of possibility of the American Dream has allowed these individuals to actualize life outside of the confines of a well-being defined by economic affluence. In conversations with the interviewed farmers, there seemed to be an air of freedom that was perceived by this lack of possibility for higher economic status than their parents. Instead, they had space to assess alternative forms of goodness from life and thus had decided that farming possessed the aspects of well-being they desired. In a similar way, the confines of parameters of the localism movement and the young farmers' environmental ideals have removed certain possibilities from their lives. These limitations, however, have provided ripe space for the innovative spirits of these individuals to shine. They have thrived in a system of self-created restrictions. When assessing this in regards to the limitations of upward mobility, we can begin to see connections between these two topics.

Resiliency is a component of the good life as laid out in the rubric utilized in this study. '[R]esilience is a complex and multifaceted adaptation process with cognitive, behavioral,

social, and cultural components' (Wong 2011, 75). At the core of resilience is the desire to keep pressing forward. Wong (2011) calls it the 'will to live' stating that it 'consists of having meaning and purpose and the capacity to transform negatives to positives' (Wong 2011, 75). As established above, the interviewed farmers have found meaning and purpose in back to the land through their personal backgrounds and histories. Their transformation of negatives into positives has many external factors. These have been laid out in the framing of these individuals as 'millennials' within the context of a broken American Dream. These external factors helps these individuals see agriculture as part of the good life.

The attitudes and actions of the interviewed farmers regarding upward mobility show a strong desire to press on, turning challenges into strength. This is seen through the way in which the young farmers have dealt with the lack of ability to gain upward mobility. They have taken this lack of possibility and turned it into a strength. Due to the fact that they have not tied their well-being to economic gain, they have been able to seek a lifestyle with inherent economic instability. Yet, the find considerable enjoyment and well-being from this lifestyle. This turning of a negative into a positive is resiliency in action.

Regarding frontiers, the farmers of this study have also turned negatives into positives. 'The broadest way to view resilience is in terms of adaptation—the process of adjusting and overcoming setbacks, resulting not only in bouncing back but also in becoming stronger' (Wong 2011, 74). This can be seen in the way the interviewed farmers respond to an oversaturated market by finding innovative ways to grow new crops in different seasons. Not only does this enhance the availability of diverse local food, but likely produces growing practices that will prove useful for agriculture in the context of climate change. In a similar way, the local boundaries of distribution the millennial farmers have restricted themselves to have allowed them to focus on the well-being of others and build customers bases geographically close to themselves resulting in less driving time and potential for social engaged (which will be seen more in the next chapter).

Bourdieu's concept of habitus can help explain the attitudes and actions of the interviewed farmers by providing space for the significance of the external factors these individuals have encountered and internalized. This will be helpful in understanding the actions and opinions of the young farmers of this study in regards to the above discussed topics of

upward mobility and frontiers. One way to identify a habitus is to 'trace out connections between patterns of preferences, expressions and social strategies within and across realms of activity so as to infer their shared matrix' (Wacquant 2013, 3). Thus, the attitudes and actions of the young farmers regarding upward mobility and frontiers can be cross analyzed for connections. Through this process, 'the entwined relationship between aspiration, context, and how these […] [in our case, young farmers,] construct their identities' (Stahl 2015, 26) will become apparent.

Habitus is helpful in understanding the driving structures of some of this resilience. As has been seen, the restraint of economic instability has created a structure through which freedom to pursue alternative well-beings is possible. Yet the concept of habitus is limited in being able to explain the attitudes and actions of the interviewed farmers in regards to the idea of the self-made man. Their insistence on defining their own success as the success of their community makes little sense within the context of a broken American Dream, a place where logic would bring us to believe competition would be even more lethal. As such, a deeper look at the way in which the young farmers interact within their social spaces needs to be established and analyzed utilizing additional tools from Bourdieu. This will help explain why individuals from this globalized generation would opt for focusing their life on local impact. The process will also help reveal not only how the farmers of this study see wellbeing as the main objective of their work. They also see virtue as one of its components as the next chapter will show.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has utilized the traditional American Dream as a structure through which to see the 'beliefs, perceptions, [and] feelings' (Maton 2008, 51) of my selected millennial farmers. The young farmers possess a roadmap to a good life that stands in contrast with the structure of the American Dream. In the place of the pursuance of an upwardly economic mobility, the farmers of this research are pursuing a change in pace and form of life. Rather than exhibiting the unbridled spirit of expansive conquest, the focus on rural innovation and a good life here and now. Finally, instead of seeking autonomy from others in order to achieve stable success, the interviewed farmers define success by their place within a community.

4 Actualizing ‘Back to the Land’

The growing focus on local food has come about alongside a decrease in consumer trust in the conventional, industrialized food system. As such, I argue that one of the key aims of the local food movement is the creation of transparency and trust between the farmer and the consumer. The millennial farmers of this study, situating themselves within the demand for more local food, have brought with them little financial capital in their journeys ‘back to the land’. The success of their farms can therefore be understood through the social connections that the young farmers are quite focused on building around themselves. This chapter will analyze the way that the farmers of this study work to build social capital, as well as the rationale behind it. Through utilizing Bourdieu’s tools of habitus, capital and field, the relationships that make ‘back to the land’ possible will be explored. Ultimately, this will highlight how the young farmers find virtue and well-being through their agrarian lifestyle.

4.1 Born of Mistrust

The increasingly popular focus on local food and food politics has made possible the actualization of the ‘back to the land’ impulse that is the subject of this study. ‘The “locavore” movement is not quite a back-to-the-land movement in itself. But it may prove to be a major promoter of the old back-to-the-land goals’ wrote Dona Brown in 2011 (Brown 2011, 231). Brown cites multiple influences that brought about the shift in consumer behavior that she refers to as the ‘locavore movement’. Perhaps the most widely known of these influences was Michael Pollan’s (Pollan 2006) book *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* in which he, among other things, revealed the consequences of industrialized food production (Brown 2011, 230). Brown also notes the health focus of some of the influencers of this movement, such as *Food, Inc.* (2008), *Supersize Me* (2004) and *King Corn* (2007) (ibid). Through highlighting important societal issues related to food, these books and documentaries, as well as others, managed to catch the attention of a large number of consumers. The ‘locavore movement’ helped turn complex challenges into concrete solutions through encouraging consumers to seek out food produced independent from industrialized systems.

Brown frames the origins of this locavore movement within the idea of peak oil, citing the 'vulnerability of systems based on cheap energy' (Brown 2011, 230). While this may have been a motivator for some, it is worth also considering growing mistrust of the industrialized food system. Books and documentaries, such as those mentioned above, revealed to consumers not only the negative effects food production was having on the planet, but also the detriment it was causing to farmers and the bodies of those eating it. Additionally, food scares such as the 'pink slime' meat scandal of 2012 within the United States left consumers unsure of what exactly was in the food they were eating (Dow Jones Newswires 2017). Growing distrust was not only situated in the U.S., for in Europe, '[c]onsumer distrust in food has emerged as a pressing issue on the political agenda over the last decade or so' (Kjærnes, Harvey, and Warde 2013, 1). This distrust is recognized by large food corporations in the U.S. as a challenge and is cited as having caused decreased sales (Wahba 2015). This attitude of mistrust of industrialized food has been harnessed by the localism movement as is particularly evident in the widely used catch phrase, 'know your farmer, know your food'. It is this desire to create relationship between producer and consumer that is a key aspect of the localism movement.

4.2 Limited Economic Capital

Hugh Gardner's book *Children of Prosperity* (Gardner 1978) is a study of thirteen communes that emerged during the back to the land movement of the 1970s. The title alludes to the work's premise: that economic affluence of the time made possible communal life and back to the land experiments (Brown 2011, 206). In describing the hardships of life for this group of young people who 'sought total freedom from work and discipline', Brown noted that 'when their trust funds dried up or their allowances were cut off (and "everyone knows" they had them), they found themselves completely unprepared for rural life' (Brown 2011, 207). As seen in the previous chapter, the young people within this study who have gone back to the land are quite different. They certainly are not seeking a lifestyle devoid of work or discipline. Additionally, while they all come from middle class backgrounds, they do not have 'trust funds' or 'allowances' helping subsidize their lifestyles. Instead, they have worked within the confines of limited economic capital in order to actualize their idea of a good life. Understanding how they have made this possible will shed light on why they perceive this lifestyle a good one.

4.2.1 Starting and Farming with Little

Conventional, industrial agriculture requires massive capital inputs to start and maintain a farm. The form of agriculture the interviewed farmers were practicing, however, was, for the most part, being actualized with little start-up costs. In addition, there was a general attitude of slow-growth among the young farmers of this study. The success of their farms lay instead in their innovative spirits and ability to create and utilize social networks for support.

Personal savings were the primary way the interviewed farmers had started their farms. Patrick described a frugal lifestyle living and working in a city while dreaming of farming. These savings were used as he and his wife gained agricultural education through apprenticeships and ultimately, helped cushion Patrick's lack of income when starting the farm. Patrick's wife kept off-farm work in order to fulfill a careful business plan for the farm:

> And that [her work] pays our bills. We've structured our life and the first few years of the farm such that that covers our personal living expenses. We don't save money off of that but it means that the farm doesn't have to generate any income for us in these first few years while we're investing in the business. So all the money we make goes right back into the business. (Patrick)

Patrick and his wife were having good success with this model of Spartan life as they had an overabundance of income they needed to reinvest that year to keep their taxes low. Other farmers interviewed for this study repeated this story of careful financial planning and pragmatic lifestyle choices.

Jennifer started her farm through an incubator program, where she gained access to workshops and a small amount of land and infrastructure. She utilized two thousand dollars of her personal savings to begin her business through this program. 'But since then, the farm has been pretty self contained. [My husband] doesn't pay for any of this - I pay for all of this, except our mortgage. He does pay for our mortgage' (Jennifer). Her husband has a well-paid, professional job away from the farm, but Jennifer has grown her farm business on her own through the reinvestment of profits.

This attitude of slow-growth was present in all of the interviewed farmers. Virginia described it well: 'because like we've started our farm really slowly like we haven't taken any loans out or gone into debt or anything so I've been like buying equipment like as I have the money for it.' This slow growth meant many of the young farmers had found alternative ways of building infrastructure of completing tasks. As mentioned in chapter two, Virginia was utilizing homemade power tools made from a drill in order to cultivate her soil. I found similar practices on other farms. Almost all of the farmers of this study had built some variation of a high tunnel - an unheated greenhouse that allowed them to grow crops when temperatures outside were too cold for most plants. These high tunnels were typically constructed out of low-cost materials as can be seen in Figure 2. Here, David had used metal fencing pipes for his frame along with painter's plastic to cover it and recycled windows and doors. Such practices allowed the millennial farmers to expand the capacity of their businesses without large amounts of money which was essential with anti-loan attitudes and relatively small profits. As one of the key ways of actualizing 'back to the land', careful financial behavior defined the approach of these millennial farmers.

Figure 2: William's high tunnel for extending his growing season. Photo credit: Adam Curtis

This sort of careful financial behavior can be understood when one considers the way these individuals connect their well-being with agriculture. A preservation mindset came from generally modest beginnings and a desire to sustain a business long-term. As such, high-risk scenarios were not of appeal to the interviewed farmers. Yet, there were times and instances in which the young farmers needed outside money, beyond their profits, in order to make their farm work. Thus, a number of the farmers interviewed for this study were utilizing alternative ways of obtaining financial capital in order to actualize their dream.

4.2.2 Alternative Ways of Obtaining Financial Capital

Due to the limit of traditional, financial resources available to the interviewed farmers, alternative ways of gaining economic capital were being employed. Though there was a general culture of 'slow growth' amongst the young farmers, there were times when they needed capital for their farming businesses. From upgrading machinery to building infrastructure that lengthened the growing season, occasional financial investment was essential to stay competitive and keep farms functioning. Yet, traditional lines of credit from banks were not always available to the young farmers due to student loan indebtedness or ideological views in opposition to debt. Thus, a number of the farmers within this study were utilizing alternative forms of obtaining financial capital in order to make up for their lack of access to traditional methods of acquisition.

CSA Model

Five of the eleven farmers of this study were utilizing the CSA, or community supported agriculture, model in order to distribute some portion of their produce. This practice is defined as follows:

> To participate in a CSA program, a consumer buys a share in a specific farm, with the share price generally ranging between $200 to $600 [USD], or becomes a worker member, where labor is substituted for some portion of the share cost. In return for these investments, a CSA member receives a weekly box of organically grown produce for five to seven months (depending on the region) that is delivered to a centralized pick-up point. (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007, 276)

For the farmer this system provides investment at the beginning of the growing season via the 'share price' mentioned above. This investment helps cover the expense of seeds, infrastructure, and fertilizer at the beginning of the season, rather than the farmer having to make that investment without the assurance their crops will sell. In a situation where CSA is utilized as the exclusive distribution method, a farmer would simply calculate their total expected expenses for the year, along with an addition of labor expenses, and then split that sum among the total number of CSA shares (Kelley, Kime, and Harper 2013, 2). While none of the interviewed farmers were solely utilizing the CSA model for distribution, some were allocating up to 80% of their crops into this system.

The system of community supported agriculture provides significant benefit to the farmer, who has the money in hand at the beginning of the season and knows that their livelihood can be sustained despite uncertainties about weather, pests or crop failure. The system transfers the uncertainly of agricultural production onto the consumer, who is not guaranteed a product, but rather a share of whatever is available from the farm each given week of the program. Ultimately, this transaction requires trust on behalf of the consumer as they are investing in an uncertain outcome and relying on the farmer's skills and hard work in order to create a variety and abundance of food. Due to this, farmers who were utilizing this mode of distribution were especially focused on creating social connections with their CSA program members.

Alternative Loans

Two of the farmers of this study had obtained alternative loans during times of need. When Josephine and her husband were looking to buy a tractor in order to increase the size of the farm, two of their CSA customers offered their own money as a loan. 'We had two large non-interest loans when we first started. They're not super large, but five thousand, six thousand dollars that people just gave us and were like, you can pay us back whenever.' This sort of support came from the personal connection that Josephine had created between herself and these customers.

Erin also needed infrastructure investment during the early days of her farm and utilized a crowdfunding website in order to obtain it. Crowdfunding can be understood as the raising of capital from a large group of people, each of them making small investments. This online platform required her to fund a specific amount of her project with her existing

social network before the project would go public to obtain funding. Ultimately, this funding was not a grant, but a loan. Those who contributed were being paid back over two years completely based on trust. Both of these instances of alternative loans were made possible based on social connections and trust.

Understanding the Success of Alternative Monetary Practices

While most of the farmers of this study have started their farms with little more than their own personal savings, they have been able to grow their farming operations and create varying levels of financial stability. As can be seen through the alternative ways of obtaining financial capital, social connections are extremely important in the realization of life 'back to the land'. Beyond the practice of CSA and alternative loans, the young farmers all survive due to their success in the market. As one of the motivating factors of the localism movement was loss of trust within the conventional food system, part of engaging within the market for local food is repairing this trust. Additionally, as many of the interviewed farmers have limited economic capital, they need to build social networks for themselves to create stable markets and support systems. As such, the way in which the studied farmers speak with significance about building social connections comes from the legitimate need for them. While economic return was important for sustaining the farming business, it was neither the only nor the primary reason behind the need for social capital.

4.3 Increasing Social Capital

All of the farmers within this study were engaged in expanding their social networks in order to rally support and resources around their farms. This was achieved in a variety of ways, and can be understood through Bourdieu's concept of social capital:

> Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition […]. (Bourdieu 1986, 247)

As such, social capital as used within this study refers to the social connections and networks that the interviewed farmers formed and were working to form around

themselves and their farms. Social capital works through its ability to hide its primary function - the transferability to economic capital:

> [E]conomic capital is at the root of all the other types of capital and that these transformed, disguised forms of economic capital, never entirely reducible to that definition, produce their most specific effects only to the extent that they conceal (not least form their possessors) the fact that economic capital is at their root, in other words—but only in the last analysis—at the root of their effects. (Bourdieu 1986, 250)

According to Bourdieu's theory, social capital is, at its core, convertible to economic capital. This will be seen below, as the expansion of social capital by the millennial farmers created committed, engaged customers while also allowing the farmers to become better at growing food through knowledge sharing. Yet, this social capital also has larger impact in helping the interviewed farmers realize that their lifestyle is the good life.

4.3.1 A Community Around the Farm

All eleven farmers within the study were actively working to build a 'community' around their farms. As Patrick put it, 'we want to bring the farming back into the community rather than step outside of the community so that we can farm.' The young farmers repeatedly framed their attempts to increase their social capital as community building. This framing was partially possible due to the way in which the localism movement has focused on the building of trust, and thus relationships, between producers and consumers. It was also due to the complex motivations the farmers had for expanding the social capital of their farms.

The farmer with the most social capital and had built the strongest community around herself was Patricia. Patricia had the advantage of time on her side, as her farm business had been running for eight years. Certainly, though, another part of her success in building social capital came from her clear vision:

> We ideally want to go tractor free and have draft animals. Our sort of retirement plan is to be as self-sufficient as possible and as independent from gas and oil and electricity as possible but its, we're not just gonna [going to] jump into it. We're working towards it. Yeah that's definitely, I think, our primary goal, is to be independent... and [tone changes to upbeat] interdependent - like independent from mainstream. But to be able to do

> that you have to have interdependence with other people in your community - you know a welder, you know somebody has time to ferment stuff. (Patricia)

Patricia recognized that in order to obtain her long-term goal of self-sufficiency, she needed a community of people with skills and time surrounding her. This is evidence of the rejection of the idea of the self-made man, or the 'island unto oneself' (Rifkin 2004, 13) mentality discussed in the preceding chapter. In place of this, Patricia recognized that the success of her dream depended on her ability to surround herself with support and others who shared her beliefs.

Patricia had been quite intentional with who she had allowed into the support network around her farm. 'We don't have to answer to anybody. We have to make sure our customers are happy but, for the most part, I try not to cultivate customers. I try to cultivate a community who is supporting us.' This framing of the building of social capital as cultivating community exposes the way in which Patricia sees this work and herself within it. Patricia seemed to have balanced the conflict between the desire for autonomy and the need for community through her years of building social capital.

Other interviewed farmers had visions of what community would look like around their farms as well. Rebecca suggested:

> [We] want to help the people close to us - be a place for the community to come together and talk about those things [health and politics of food] and make it work and connect. That's happened through other people's businesses and communities but we want to be a part of that in our own space. Cuz its a lifestyle, of, this is our family, we want to be involved in our community. Its not just like 'oh we want to grow stuff for people' - we want to be a part of where we live. And not feel like we have to drive an hour to have people appreciate us. And maybe that sounds selfish, but its part of farming, like, I want to connect with the people in my area. I don't want to feel like no one really cares about their neighbors. (Rebecca)

For Rebecca, the desire for community was very much about her work being recognized as valuable as well as providing a healthy place for her to raise her family. A number of other interviewed farmers also referred to family when describing their ideal community.

One of the more tangible reasons for the desire for community, not always said as blatantly as Rebecca, was that life outside of the city was lonely at times. Patrick

emphasized that due to living in a rural area ‘it’s not like on Wednesday night we're like “hey, I feel like going and getting a drink” and we can just like hop on our bikes and go to a bar.’ The same sort of social spaces and activities that existed in urban life for the farmers of this study pre their ‘return to the land’ were not as possible in their new lifestyle. Bill talked about this lack of social possibilities: ‘It can be lonely in the country. So it’s nice to have people nearby that you can relate to.’ This desire to relate to others was further complicated by the way farming had changed the young farmers ability to connect with others.

In a similar way that social spaces and activities were not as assessable to the interviewed farmers, the ability to connect with the non-farming population had also been altered by their lifestyle choice. Jennifer spoke about going out for drinks with her husband and another, non-farming couple they knew:

> We went out with this couple - they're our age. And they went on like a three week honeymoon to New Zealand - you know what I'm saying? So I'm like, oh that could have been me. But like, they are totally so disconnected from agriculture - like they try to ask you about it but they just don't understand and its almost - its insulting almost but they don't mean to be. (Jennifer)

This disconnect between the farmers of this research and their non-farming peers had limited the social connections that were possible for them. Jennifer spoke later about how this disconnect worked both ways. ‘I feel like a freak […] when I go out into public; I am so disconnected from public’ (Jennifer). This disconnect came not only from agriculture, but also simply the time spent in solitude. Patrick, when asked about what other millennials thought of his choice to farm, responded, ‘I don't talk to many millennials anymore. Cuz I'm out farming. I don't talk to too many people.’ As such, it is easy to understand why the young farmers were working to create a community of more like-minded people around themselves.

The desire of the interviewed farmers to create community or social networks around their farms had multiple motivations. Some of the farmers of this study realized they needed social supports in order to actualize radical ideals such as eventually becoming petroleum-free. Others desired social networks where they could feel valued and create healthy environments for their children. The decreased opportunity for social interaction along with the external misunderstanding of agrarian lifestyles also contributed to a desire

for expanded social connections among the young farmers. Ultimately, each farmer had different motivating factors and ways of describing their ideals, but they all spoke with magnitude about their need for social connections in order to actualize the goals of their farming enterprises.

4.3.2 Customers Connected to Farms

As mentioned above, the farmers within this study spoke of the goals of community around themselves and their farms. Different methods were employed in attempts to 'build community' around farms. Social connections with customers were a primary focus for the farmers of this research. The social support the young farmers sought and obtained from these customers helped actualize their dreams.

Customers on the Farm

One of the most common practices for increasing social capital with customers was inviting them out to the farm to participate in fieldwork. When I visited Virginia's farm there was a CSA member present who came weekly for a couple hours of work. Virginia and this customer had connected at the farmers market through the realization that they both listened to the same podcast about small-scale, sustainable farmers. In addition to voluntary work, Virginia had created a work-trade program where individuals could join her CSA in return for weekly work on the farm. Patrick had hosted fermentation workshops on his farm, providing his CSA customers with knowledge on how to utilize the produce they were receiving in their weekly share. These practices created transparency between the customer and farmer, where the customer could see first-hand the practices and methods utilized to produce the food they were buying. Additionally, the practices helped create an appreciation for the work and skill involved in producing food. Erin spoke about a customer who had come to help on the farm afterwards reporting that she was sore from the fieldwork. She told Erin that the experience left her amazed at the level of 'knowledge and planning' required in order to produce food. As such, these activities helped create value for products as well as a personal connection to them.

There were also some farmers distributing produce from the farm itself. Rebecca and David had created an on-farm produce stand that was open all the time. This was a way for customers to stop by and buy produce right on the farm. The goal was to keep a

feeling of openness between the customer and the farmer, allowing the customer to see the farm in action and have access to its products anytime. In a similar way, Virginia had designated an on-farm CSA pick-up where customers would come get their weekly share of vegetables at the farm. These actions helped further create transparency and intimacy between farmers and customers.

Newsletters

Another attempt at building connections with customers was through weekly newsletters that were sent out to customers via email. David described the practice:

> And you know, we write a newsletter each week to the CSA. And we try and occasionally talk about 'this week has been a really hard week because of such and such' - so we just try to give some people the insight on when things are really hard and also when things are really exciting and stuff like that - we try to keep people clued in on how all that's going. (David)

This practice allowed David to keep his customers connected to the farm through its happenings. Newsletters typically contained information on which crops were in season that given week, recipe ideas on how to utilize those crops, and the type of work was happening on the farm. Patrick also wrote newsletters for his CSA and said, 'people are signing up for the CSA not just for fresh vegetables but because they get a newsletter that has photos and they are closer to the farm than they would be if they were just going to the farmers market'. Patrick had found that his customers wanted to feel connected to his farm, which he attributed to a desire for vicarious living on behalf of the customer. The desire of customers to be connected to these farms certainly made this endeavor to build social capital much easier as both parties had the desire for the connection. The farmers of this study were aware of this and utilized it to their advantage through their newsletters as well as having customers come to the farm as discussed above.

Effects of Connecting Customers to the Farm

The methods of connecting with customers discussed above allowed the interviewed farmers to establish a sense of trust with their customers.

> One of the most fundamental needs of human beings is development of the sense of trust—the belief that you can rely on and believe in others to do

> what is expected. Trust is the foundation of moral behavior on which social capital is built. (Bubolz 2001, 129)

Within this vein, Virginia talked about this foundation of trust when speaking about her lack of formalized certification for the organic practices she was utilizing. She pointed out: 'No one is asking me to be certified organic. I've actually talked to some of my [CSA] members about that and they're just like, "we know, we come out to your farm, we see what you do, we trust you"' (Virginia). Due to the personal connections these customers have with Virginia, they do not feel the need to have a third party certify her growing practices. These customers have entrusted Virginia with their health and they have full faith that she will live up to the standards upon which she founded her farm. This establishment of trust served to help further the production of social capital and its positive effects.

Social capital manifests in practical support from customers that allowed the young farmers to see the value in the work in which they were engaged. When Josephine began to move from rented land to purchased land, her CSA customers felt a sense of responsibility to help in the endeavor:

> Our CSA members also helped us move the farm - their idea. They were like, 'Why don't you have us help?' and I was like, 'Well I thought that would be tacky because it's our stuff' but they were like, 'But its important to us that you guys are successful so let us just help you'. So on a Saturday and Sunday we moved a whole farm with the help of like thirty people and caravans. People were putting stuff in their cars. They're amazing. (Josephine)

This practical support for Josephine and her family was nearly essential as they moved the farm with two children under four years old. Of interest was the way in which the CSA customers offered the help without being asked. More interesting, though, was rationale of the CSA customers – that the success of the farm was important enough to them that they would spend their weekend helping move the farm. The time and energy spent by customers helping Josephine move along with this shared goal of the success of her farm allowed her to see that her work farming had value to others. This value served to reaffirm her choice of lifestyle.

Patrick also spoke of the way customers expressed appreciation as an affirmation of his lifestyle. When asked if he thought his work farming was creating more of an impact than his previous job at a large, food-focused NGO, he replied:

> I mean not necessarily. It feels more impactful to me. I don't know if it is in the scheme of things. It does feel more impactful to me because I think I see it. I mean I know the impact I'm having on a small piece of land. We get so much positive feedback from our CSA members - talking about how they're loving the produce and cooking more and things like that. This weekend, we were at the grocery store and we ran into someone who was in a workshop [we] gave three weeks ago on fermentation. And she was like 'oh my god, you should see my koombocha - you have changed my life' […] she went on and on and on about these things. Okay sure, one woman in Hillsboro, NC is fermenting and stuff now, big deal. But no, I think we see our impact. Its more tangible when we talk to people we know. (Patrick)

The way in which Patrick's customer expressed gratitude for the knowledge he had passed on to her helped him see the impact and value he was having through his work. Additionally, the 'positive feedback' he referenced coming from his CSA customers is also framed as part of realizing the impact of his work. Thus, these interactions between Patrick and his customers reaffirmed his decision to become a farmer.

As the interviewed farmers expressed, the need for community around their farms was one of the primary goals of their work. Entering into agriculture with little financial capital, building social capital was an essential for feeling safe and secure in the new endeavor. The way in which the interviewed farmers worked to connect with customers through both newsletter communication and inviting customers to their farms allowed them to build transparency and trust. This served to help deepen connections between producers and consumers that ultimately manifested in practical, physical support for the farms as was seen above with Josephine. The desire for this type of support can be understood in the context of the challenges the young farmers face, both economic and physical, as they begin a new profession and lifestyle.

4.3.3 Millennial Means of Communication

Social media has changed the way humans interact and share information. Its boom has been realized through web-based platforms that allow users, through a profile, to distribute information to a group of followers, providing space for those followers to then

interact around the shared information. All of the farmers within this study were utilizing social media as a means creating and deepening their connections with customers. One of the primary ways social media was of benefit to the young farmers was in its ability to allow the telling of a story. The repeated engagement of social media creates a space where a sense of connection can occur over time. This long-term connection, across space and time, provides an ideal platform from which each of the farmers of this study could connect with customers, potential and existing. This practice, I will argue, ultimately helped create additional value for the work and produce of the interviewed farmers, contributing further to their success. It also helped deepen a sense of romanticism among customers for agrarian lifestyles. This helped reaffirm the millennial farmers' lifestyle choice and helped further their conception of it as the good life.

The Power of Pictures

The primary use of social media by the farmers of this study was as a story-telling device. This method allowed the young farmers to communicate not only the goals and status of their farms, but also to give their farms a personal side, with faces and names. The effective telling of a story seemed to be one the most important methods of building social capital for them. Jennifer described the rationale:

> I try to be as productive as I can but I'm never gonna [going to] be as efficient as some of these farms - you know these big industries. So I'm not gonna out compete on efficiency - ever. My cost of production is always gonna be high. I don't want to have migrant labor - I'm kind of rethinking that in some ways [says jokingly]. My labor cost is always gonna be high. So my product has to be high[er in price]. And all I have is my story. (Jennifer)

Jennifer stated that she could not compete on price with industrially produced food – it will always be cheaper due to the externalities and efficiency associated with it[2]. Instead, she believed the value of her food was in the story behind it. As such, one of the primary reasons for external communication from the young farmers was to communicate the value of their product through telling a story.

[2] While this is an issue far too complex to cover in the scope of this thesis, additional information on the subject is available from (Fitzgerald 2003) and (Pollan 2006)

The interviewed farmers were telling their story through the social media platform Instagram. This online space is ‘a community of more than 800 million who capture and share the world's moments’ through pictures and, according to the company, ‘has become the home for visual storytelling’ (Instagram 2018). The majority of the farmers within this study were quite careful about how they framed the story they told on Instagram. Patrick said:

> We are intentional about trying not to complain too much to our CSA members because we know they hold this idea of what farming is - this beautiful thing and they like the idea that they have personal farmers who are young people doing this beautiful thing and they deliver these pretty vegetables. And we don't want to pop that bubble exactly because it serves our business purpose. So we don't want them out there just, 'oh these angry farmers growing our angry vegetables and all their angry mojos' - I wouldn't describe us as angry farmers, but still we're mindful enough to not complain too much. (Patrick)

This careful framing of a public image that adheres to the perceived vision of outsiders was actualized through not sharing too many of the hardships of agriculture on social media. All of the farmers within this study spoke of this restraint in their social media activities.

On a very practical level, social media, including Instagram, allowed the farmers to communicate basic information with their customers as well. When Erin discovered that a row of carrots she thought lost to weeds could be harvested, she posted on social media a celebratory picture presenting the ‘surprise carrots’ as a part of the CSA share that week. Virginia also engaged in this story telling of her products. When an escaped chicken came back after three days, she told the story on Instagram and then rebranded the eggs she sells with the title ‘Wandering Chicken Eggs’: an reference to the escaped chicken but also to her practice of allowing her chickens to roam free outdoors. Practices such as these allowed the interviewed farmers to communicate basic information to their customers such as availability of produce or humorous instances of farm life. As interactions at farmers markets and CSA pickups could be limited by time constraints of both farmer and customer, this method was helpful in deepening relations with customers.

The Pastoral Filter

This idea of the act of farming being one of value was realized through the social interactions the farmers of this study had with their customers online. All of them spoke about their non-farming relations over-romanticizing their lifestyle. Patrick pointed out, however, that:

> I don't think the romantic vision of farming is a new thing. It seems to be particularly powerful right now and that's why farming is so hip but no, I think that that romantic idea has persisted probably for millennia and that's why it's still there. (Patrick)

Patrick went on to argue that American culture as a whole romanticizes farming and, when asked why, he said the following:

> I think its because we all kind of want to do it [be farmers]. That, it must just come out of how disconnected people are from being outside and nature and their senses really. That they see farmers and they're like 'those are people who are outside using their senses all day, that must be so amazing' and I mean there's this, this like, cultural idea of the farm that hasn't been true since the 1950s - but like the 'Old McDonald' [a song about a farmer that children sing regularly in the U.S.] still runs so true. Or at least is still such a powerful image. Why are farmers so popular on Instagram? You can post a photo of a sunset or something and people freak out and they're like 'oh my god, dream life' and things like that. Because we've had this idea embedded in us and then because more people wish they could see a beautiful sunset over a field of something and don't get the opportunity to do so. And then, I mean, there's also the doing good work - out there doing, feeding the cows, doing virtuous farm work and things like that that feels really different than I imagine most people in their stressful jobs. (Patrick)

This infatuation from outsiders helped further affirm that the decision to go 'back to the land' was one that has desirable aesthetic connected to it. The infatuation could be seen through interactions on Instagram, such as the ones Patrick described. As Patrick alluded to above, there is an idea that farmers are engaged in 'good work' and as such, that the act of farming has a level of virtue engrained within it. Of particular interest in Patrick's above quote is the way in which he connected the idea the public has of farming being virtuous to the aesthetic of the lifestyle. Helpful in understanding this is the American context of Jeffersonian agrarianism [discussed in the first chapter of this thesis] and the

way in which the idea of independence and democracy has become enveloped in the idea of a free farmer.

This connection of virtue within agriculture through aesthetics as fueled by strategic story telling helps reaffirm life 'back to the land'. The idea of agriculture as a field of value can be seen through interactions between customers and farmers on Instagram as well as through the way in which customers connect to these farms through voluntary work or newsletters as discussed above.

4.3.4 Connecting with Other Farmers

Instagram was also serving another important role for the interviewed farmers: communication with other farmers. This practice was observed during preliminary research of young farmers' Instagram profiles before beginning fieldwork. Through the interviews of this study, I found that this act was part of a larger culture of information sharing among the young farmers that helped them all towards success.

Clustering via Instagram

Once again in this study, Instagram was found to be an important tool for the first-generation, millennial farmers. In my observation, farmers would post challenges they had encountered in the form of pictures such as evidence of pest problems or nutrient deficiencies. In almost all cases of this that I found, other farmers would comment with remedies or additional questions. Pictures of successful weatherproofing techniques or DIY infrastructure we also observed with other farmers commenting with questions of method or tips for improvement. In this way, Instagram served as a space for education and exchange of knowledge for the millennial farmers of this study.

Erin had found a special mix of soils for her starts [baby plants] through asking successful farmers she followed on Instagram. The practice of utilizing this platform to gain and share knowledge was spoken about with great importance by the young farmers:

> I mean, it's one of the big reasons why we really love Instagram - people, especially beginning farmers, are so open about the different things they're trying and what's working for them and what isn't and stuff like that. I feel

> like I've learned as much from Instagram and chatting with other young farmers around here as I have from the apprenticeships that we did. (Patrick)

This free-flow of knowledge created a wealth of education to new farmers and allowed the community of young farmers as a whole to discuss how to deal with localized growing challenges. Though outside the scope of this study, research into the use of this model as an effective strategy for climate change adaptation within agriculture would likely provide exciting results based on evidence I found in the field.

The platform not only allowed the sharing of knowledge, but also provided a roadmap to success for some beginning farmers. Erin followed a successful, established, neighboring farm on Instagram and said that 'whatever they're getting in [the field or greenhouse] and seeding - I'll be like, okay, I've got to get in on this'. In order to have crops to market as quickly as possible, Erin was using Instagram as a reminder of when to engage in different stages of the growing process. Other farmers of this research were utilizing the platform to follow trends within the local food market in an attempt to have a competitive edge at market. Thus, the use of Instagram was a helpful contribution to the success of the farmers within this study.

Figure 3 shows example of the knowledge sharing between farmers through the platform Instagram. Due to the anonymity of the informants of this study, the selected post in Figure 3 is by farmers outside the geographic scope this study. The selected farmers of @sugarcampfarm are, though, both first-generation, millennial farmers. Of note in this post is the way in which @pink.elephant.farm asked about the 'secret' of growing the pictured crop, radicchio. @sugarcampfarm relied to the question with a reflection on their experience growing the crop and theories on how they could improve the quality of it. This type of interaction is quite typical on the Instagram profiles of the interviewed farmers within this study.

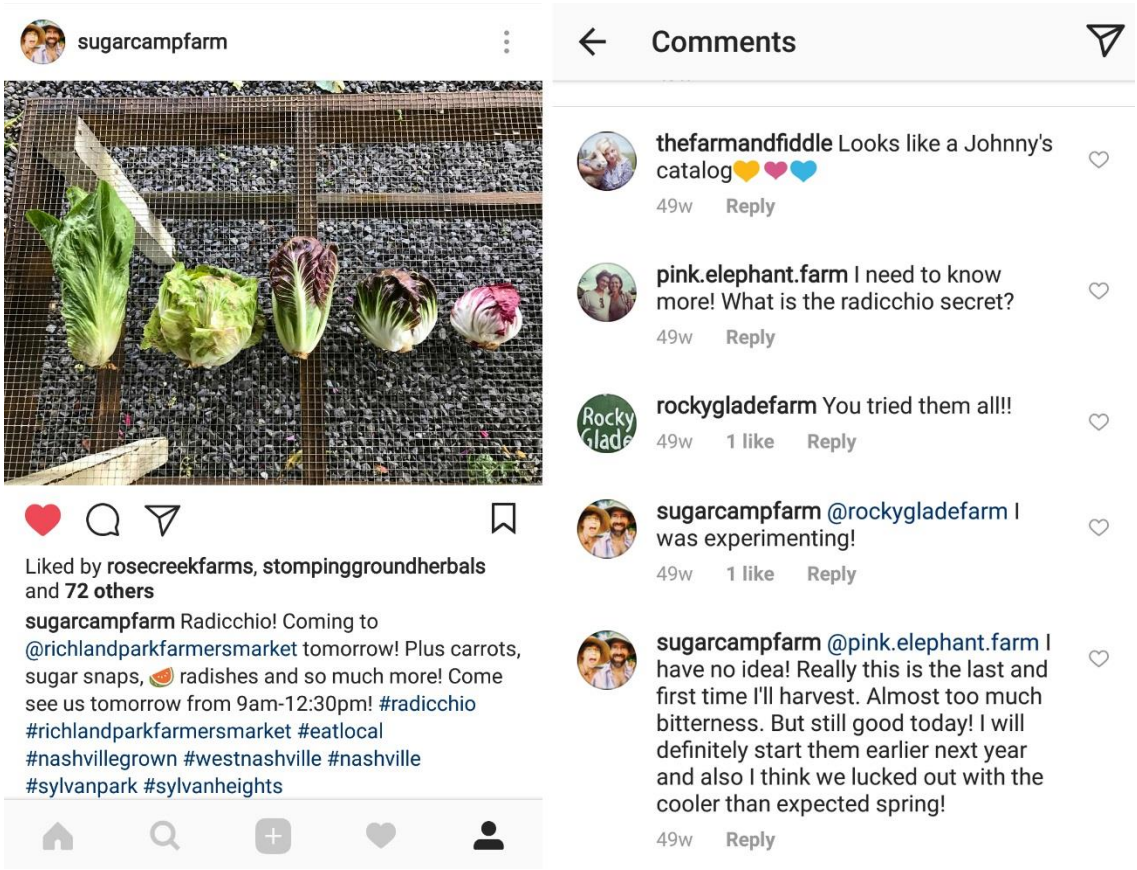

Figure 3 An example of knowledge sharing via the social network, Instagram. Screenshot from the public profile of @sugarcampfarm.

A Culture of Collaboration

In addition to this sharing of knowledge on Instagram, the farmers of this study were also sharing knowledge in person. Patrick had received a grant for experimenting with different ways to grow lettuce during the summer heat. Part of his requirement for the grant was to host a workshop with interested farmers on his farm in order to share the results of his research. Despite the competitive nature of markets, he explained his lack of fear in sharing his knowledge:

> I mean we got this […] grant and one of the conditions of the grant is that we have to organize and event to share [our knowledge and experience]. We don't have a problem with that because its what's we always do - its what we do on Instagram - we had a bunch of farmers out for a farm tour last year as part of a conference [and shared knowledge with them]. It's kind of crazy and any other industry would say you're insane. […] Something that seems to be really unique about farmers is their utter willingness to share all of their business secrets with their direct competition. (Patrick)

Patrick later clarified to say that this behavior was present in the farmers he knew – mostly young, sustainable farmers. His willingness to share his knowledge about his lettuce is evidence of a culture of collaboration between young farmers. Jennifer said that in her experience, the older sustainable farmers, who had been at it for much longer, were not so willing to share knowledge for the most part. This culture of collaboration was something that these young farmers had created.

This culture of sharing was possible due to the way that the young farmers viewed one another within the context of the market. Bill suggested:

> I don't feel a lot of like, competition pressure [at the market he attends]. Just kind of the way people are [at another market in town] - some of these older farmers - just kind of reinforces that competitive nature. I might think at our market like, oh Richard [another farmer] has got a lot of tomatoes this week - damn I got a lot of tomatoes [too]. But it's not like I'm trying to beat him or anything. […] And honestly I'm like sometimes thank god Richard is there because I don't have a good crop this week. So its like, there is resiliency in having that. (Bill)

After this statement, Bill's wife and co-farmer, Hannah added, 'if someone comes to the market they want to have a good experience whether or not we've got a good crop'. The two of them felt like the strength of farmers markets depended on the success of not one, but all of the farmers who attended. For it was in the context of abundance that customers were most engaged and eager to return each week. As such, a general collective attitude was present among the interviewed farmers.

The culture of collaboration the farmers of this study had built, of which knowledge sharing was a part, was possible due to the idea of a shared goal that they sensed. While none of the young farmers were able to articulate it with much clarity, they all spoke of sensing the presence of it. The statements from the young farmers about this common goal contained words such as 'social justice' and 'community building', contributing to the idea that their work was unique from other fields and part of a larger project. This shared vision, along with the transparency and romanticism the young farmers were creating through interaction with customers, all worked to enable the farmers to conceptualize well-being and virtue in their lifestyles.

4.3.5 Challenges of Building Social Capital

While all farmers within this study were working in some capacity to build social capital, very few felt satisfied with the amount of attention they devoted to this task. Most of the farmers cited that the constraint of time was keeping them from their goals around expansion of social capital. Jennifer commented:

> I think that is something we can do as small farmers is really create community around our farms. Its tremendous when you see somebody come work on the farm and start sweating and you can tell their heart is actually beating and its huge how happy they are, like how that makes them, it just awakens something in people that I think is there so I mean we would love to do more stuff like that, but we're just so bogged down in the minutiae of running the business right now - its hard for us to make those sort of things happen. Like this year we wanted to have like volunteer Sundays once a month so people could come out and... .but again we haven't found the right way to make that happen. (Jennifer)

These farmers were so focused on completing their day-to-day tasks that they were simply running out of time or energy to devote to building social capital.

Additionally, not all of the farmers of this study had well adapted personalities for building social capital. Luke, who appeared quite introverted during my interview, had recently shut down his CSA program and was selling solely at market due to his inability to rally enough customer support for the program. He reasoned, 'I've seen some people like that that are able to overcome some of the lack of capital investment by just their sheer personality […] I don't feel like that's, that's not me'. Bill, who is 'not really very social by nature' was relying much more heavily on innovation in machinery and crops than other farmers in order to be successful. Thus, the building of social capital was not a game in which all farmers had equal abilities. Despite this, the role of social capital carried importance for all of these farmers of this study. Their pursuance of it can be understood not only by its transferability to economic capital, but also by the way in which it helped them conceptualize both virtue and well-being in their lifestyle.

4.4 The Well-Being and Virtue of Back to the Land

As the farmers of this study were primarily engaged in direct distribution of their products to customers, part of achieving success included having a strong customer base. Yet, the methods of building social capital discussed above were framed by the young farmers not as attempts to gain economic capital, but rather as attempts at creating and maintaining community. With the help of some of Bourdieu's sociological tools, the rationale of this framing can be unpacked. Through this process, the way in which the millennial, first-generation farmers obtain well-being and view their practices as virtuous will become apparent. These two components will add to the meaning and resilience of back to the land that the farmers had obtained through processes previously discussed in this thesis. The four components together ultimately provide the farmers of this study with a comprehensive conception of back to the land as the good life.

4.4.1 Habitus, Field, Social Capital

The framing of their own behavior as 'community building' and 'social justice' helped the farmers of this study create the idea that their work had virtue engrained within it. These loaded terms established that the young farmers were engaged in far more than simply growing food. To begin to unpack this complexity, we first need to explore the role of the individual within social spaces through Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, and social capital.

The relational structure of habitus, field, and capital allow us to understand the relationship between the interviewed farmers, their customers, and how they perceive a back-to-the-land-lifestyle to be the good life. '[P]ractice results from relations between one's dispositions (habitus) and one's position in a field (capital), within the current state of play of that social arena (field)' (Maton 2008, 51). As such, we can understand the way in which the millennial farmers engaged in the field as the engagement with their customers and with other farmers. This behavior was structured by their dispositions, or habitus. Additionally:

> According to Bourdieu, the game that occurs in social spaces or fields is competitive, with various social agents using differing strategies to maintain or improve their position. At stake in the field is the accumulation of *capitals*: they are both the process within, and the product of, a field. (Thomson 2008, 69)

As such, the social capital discussed in this chapter can be understood as a way 'to maintain or improve' one's position within the field. Ultimately, this position is the reason for engagement within the field, or in this case, obtaining the good life through agriculture. As has been seen in this chapter, the interviewed farmers would be unable to find success without the building of social capital. The connection to customers provides the young farmers with physical support as well as helping reaffirm their lifestyle choice. Additionally, the culture of collaboration they have built with other young farmers allows them to engage in a field that requires vast amounts of knowledge through sharing. Ultimately, this relational structure helps produce within the young farmers a conception of virtue and well-being.

4.4.1 Virtue

In the above analysis, we saw that the interviewed farmers experience the perception of virtue from outsiders as part of an American tradition of Jeffersonian agrarianism. Virtue can be understood as 'conceptually dependent on a concept of what is good because virtues are defined as the character strengths that make it possible to seek particular goods' (Fowers 2008, 630). The young farmers of this study see goodness in 'community building' and 'social justice' as evidenced through their ideas about the common goal that creates their culture of collaboration. As such, the way in which they build transparency and trustworthiness with their customers and with one another allows them to exercise the character strengths necessary to produce community and social justice. As presented above, trustworthiness is an extremely important character strength necessary in the interactions between farmers and customers. With this understanding, we can begin to see how the interviewed farmers can see themselves as virtuous.

The social field in which the young farmers are engaged requires the building of social capital in order for them to be successful. This is understood through Bourdieu's tools as discussed above where capital is necessary to maintain or advance one's position within a field. As such, if social capital is necessary in order to succeed as a first-generation,

millennial farmer with few financial resources and the character strength necessary to build social capital is trustworthiness, then virtue becomes a necessary component of the 'back to the land' project. Of interest is the way in which the building of social capital has come to be seen as goodness by the interviewed farmers. The act has personal gain associated with it as this social capital is transferable to economic capital. More research is needed to examine the effect these relations have on the customer's side in order to assess this perception of virtue ethically.

It is worth considering the effect of habitus in this equation as well. The interaction between habitus and field is always changing:

> Crucially, they [field and habitus] are both evolving, so relations between habitus and field are ongoing, dynamic and partial: they do not match perfectly, for each has its own internal logic and history. This allows for the relationship between the structure of a field and the habituses of its members to be one of varying degrees of fit or mismatch […].' (Maton 2008, 57)

Thus, not all of the farmers engaged in this building of social capital in the same ways or abilities due to their dispositions that they carried with them from the past. Certainly, some farmers of this study were better able to build social capital due to their personalities and abilities to easily connect with others. As such, habitus played a role in the success of building social capital and thus, in the depth of virtue these farmers perceived in their lives.

4.4.2 Well-Being

Within this study, well-being is defined as a result of recognizing the presence of virtue, meaning and resilience in one's life. 'A high level of well-being, both subjective and objective, flows from living by our best light (virtue), purs[u]ing our most cherished dreams (meaning), and overcoming life's difficulties (resilience)' (Wong 2011, 75). As such, the interviewed farmers need 'the attitudes and skills to appreciate life, savour the moments, and enhance happiness' (Wong 2011, 75). Patrick's journey towards this ability to appreciate each movement was laid out in the second chapter of this thesis. Other farmers of this study seemed to find this awareness from their interactions with the non-farming public.

Physical interactions with the non-agricultural world reminded them of the resilience, meaning and virtue in their own lifestyles. Jennifer argued:

> When I go out into public, I am so disconnected from public because, you know like if you go into Wal-Mart, I'm just like, all I can think about is 'you know how much corn they had to grow and harvest to make those Lucky Charms' and then the dye to make the packaging and the dye to make the label on there and the metal to make the cart, I'm just like insane when I go out into public and I dunno [do not know] I just feel like, people... its all a house of cards, like, I really sound like a crazy person, but you know when you step back and when we don't depend on communities and small-scale and we depend on corporations and the big guy to take care of us, we aren't resilient when something bad happens and we loose touch with each other and we are, like we are now, we're so divided. And its like if we were communities again, it would be so much different.

It is within Wal-Mart, that Jennifer was reminded of the resilience, meaning and virtue within her own life. In fact, the experience was so overwhelming, and her lifestyle in such contrast, that she ended up feeling 'crazy' due to the disparity. Ultimately, though, the situation reminded Jennifer of her role as a producer (her meaning), her ability to provide for her family (resilience), and her work to build community (virtue). As interaction with the non-farming world was part of life for the young farmers studied here their market interactions, it was quite easy for them to have the well-being of their lifestyle regularly reaffirmed.

Virtual interactions also reaffirmed the lifestyle choices of the interviewed farmers by reminding them of the well-being ingrained in their lifestyle. Through the process of storytelling on Instagram, the young farmers were able to narratively conceptualize their lives. This process provided space for reflection as well as external affirmation. On Instagram, non-farming individuals were found to express romanticism towards agrarian lifestyles through the young farmers' posted pictures. Thus, through both in-person and virtual interactions with the non-farming public, the young farmers of this study were able to recognize the virtue, meaning and resilience within their back to the land lifestyles.

4.4.3 The Good Life

With the presence of meaning and resilience (as discussed in chapters two and three respectively) along with the ideas of virtue and well-being (as shown above in this chapter) the millennial farmers have all the pieces necessary for 'the good life'. Their perception of each of these pieces come from various influences. Ultimately, though, they all work together to help the first-generation, millennial farmers to understand 'back to the land' as 'the good life'.

4.5 Conclusion

The local food movement has origins of mistrust of a globalized, conventional food system where detrimental impacts are far reaching. As such, part of the local food movement is a creation of relationship between producer and consumer. The farmers of this research had entered into agriculture with few financial resources and thus had found alternative ways of obtaining economic capital during times of need. The interviewed farmers were able to obtain this economic capital due to the social capital they had built with their customers. This helped them actualize the good life with limited resources.

The young farmers of this study built social capital in various ways. Through bringing customers to their farms and writing newsletters, the millennial farmers were able to increase transparency and build trust with their customers. They utilized social media in order to create connection between themselves and their customers, ultimately helping reinforce the aesthetics of their lifestyle through external affirmation. Finally, the young farmers of this study built a culture of collaboration, primary through Instagram, where they shared information with other farmers. Within the competitive context of the market, this was possible due to the idea of a shared goal among them. The social capital that the interviewed farmers built ultimately helped them see the lifestyle as 'the good life'.

The relationship between habitus, field and capital is helpful in understanding the way in which the building of social capital by the millennial farmers functioned. Through employing social capital to maintain or advance a position within the field, the young farmers were able to work towards success by utilizing the support of those around them. The way in which trustworthiness was essential in this process helped shape the idea that virtue was present not only in the individual farmers, but also in the act of going 'back to

the land' itself. This virtue, along with meaning and resilience (as previously discussed in this thesis) were able to come together in order to create well-being for the first-generation farmers. The realization of the presence of these three concepts was made possible through external stimuli. Ultimately, the young farmers were able to perceive 'back to the land' as 'the good life' through the presence of the meaning, resilience, virtue and well-being they had found through various influences.

5 Conclusion

Within this thesis I addressed how and why millennial, first-generation farmers perceive going 'back to the land' as 'the good life'. This question holds significance due to the rising age of farmers within the United States as well as worldwide. As all of the interviewed farmers within this study were practicing self-defined 'sustainable agriculture', study of this group also holds importance due to rising environmental concerns in relation to agriculture. The study was conducted within theoretical inspiration of Bourdieu's tools of habitus, field and capital as well as with Wong's (2011) rubric for the good life. As such, the good life was defined as the presence and awareness of meaning, resilience, virtue and well-being within one's life. With these frames, the thesis analyzed the backgrounds, attitudes, and actions of eleven young farmers living and farming within 50 miles of Chapel Hill, NC, USA. Through this, the influences of their conception of 'back to the land' as 'the good life' emerged.

Externalizing the Internal: The Journey Back to the Land

The second chapter of this thesis looked at four of the eleven farmers of this study in depth through thick description. This process revealed the way in which each of these four individuals decided to pursue agriculture. Here Bourdieu's theory of habitus was helpful in understanding how the histories of these individuals were carried with them. These histories created a structure that structured the young farmers' conception of 'back to the land' so that they could find purpose, understanding, responsible action, and enjoyment within the act (Wong 2011, 73-74). This, as defined by Wong (2011), constitutes evidence of possessing meaning within life. Habitus also helped show how these farmers' personalities came out within their act of agriculture as seen through their diverse farms. Thus, through the different backgrounds of these individuals, 'back to the land' became a lifestyle of meaning.

Internalizing the External: The American Dream Revised

The American Dream was introduced and discussed in the third chapter of this thesis. The concept was explored as a cultural habitus of the U.S. through the ideas of upward mobility, frontiers, and the self-made man. Growing impossibility of achieving the

dream was discussed and connected to rising income inequality in the U.S. Additionally, the millennial generation, who has come of age during this crisis, was introduced to provide context for the millennial farmers of this study.

A rubric for analysis based off of the American Dream was employed to assess the attitudes and actions of the farmers of this study. Differences emerged between the young farmers and the traditional roadmap for the good life, the American Dream. In regards to upward mobility, frontiers, and the self-made man, the millennial farmers had formulated new ideas and practices. Ultimately, this analysis revealed how the young farmers find resilience, a key piece of the good life, within their back to the land lifestyle.

The Millennial Farmer in the Field: Social Capital and its Role

The local food movement has created a demand for more local products to which a group of millennials have answered through going 'back to the land'. The demand for local food was partially born out of mistrust of the industrialized food system. As such, building trust between producers and consumers is a big part of the localism craze.

The young farmers of this research have gone back to the land with very little economic capital. The fourth chapter of this thesis explores the details of how they started their farms despite this challenge. It also points out the ways in which some of the young farmers have obtained financial resources during times of need. Part of their success in these endeavors is due to the large amounts of social capital they have with their customers.

The building of social capital was an important part of actualizing 'back to the land' for the millennial farmers of this study. They engaged in this process through three primary ways. First, they created connections between customers and their own farms through workdays, events, and newsletters. Second, they worked online to build connection to their customers through Instagram, playing in to a romantic notion their followers had of them. Finally, the further utilized Instagram in order to connect with other farmers in order to share knowledge and technical skills. These three processes increased the social capital of the young farmers, helping actualize 'back to the land'.

Bourdieu's tools of habitus, capital, and field were helpful in understanding the way in which this building of social capital functioned. This thesis showed that this capital and the act of building it, allowed the young farmers to find virtue and well-being within the lifestyle of 'back to the land'. These two concepts, along with the meaning from chapter two and the resilience from chapter three, complete the rubric for the good life as defined in this thesis. As such, how and why first-generation, millennial farmers conceptualize 'back to the land' as 'the good life' has been presented.

Final Comments

History does not bode well for goals of creating significant social change through 'back to the land' projects. Yet, the way in which the millennial farmers of this study have situated themselves within the localism movement may help expand their reach. Additional research on this movement is needed to assess the larger social impact of the young farmers studied here. However, the millennial farmers of this study were quite content with the tangible, local impact they had built. For it is through this process that they had found 'back to the land' to be 'the good life'.

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