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The End of Rural Society and the Future of Rural Sociology*

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Rural sociology as a professional "calling," to use Weber's expression, should be congratulated for its continuous and, indeed, relentless introspection. Those familiar with the snbdiscipline of rural sociology, particularly having followed its professional journal, Rural Sociology, can attest to this critical introspection.

But if self-examination and self-criticism are virtues and the subdiscipline is thus to be congratulated, its capacity to change and project a dynamic and vital probing of society does not deserve the same plaudits. The subdiscipline, rather, has established an unenviable location with respect to the social sciences generally, to sociology more specifically, and to the central institution of which it is a segment, the land grant complex [1] of institutions in the United States.

The statement about "uneviablility" should be qualified since rural sociology has always been envied by its larger sibling, sociology, for its substantial funding base even though this funding constitutes but a miniscule portion of publicly-funded

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[1] "Land grant complex" refers to the land grant colleges of agriculture in the United States created by the Morrill Act of 1862, the Agricultural Experiment Stations created by the Hatch Act of 1887, and the Extension network formed by the Smith-Lever Act of 1914.

agricultural research and development in the U.S. Unlike general sociology, whose practitioners must scratch for research support and summar salaries, the organizational relationship between departments of rural sociology, the experiment stations, and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) have always provided a lucrative source of research dollars. On the other hand, rural sociology has not played a significant role, concomitant with its resources, in the production of knowledge of use either to sociology, the social sciences more generally, or to the land grant institutions, and the subdiscipline has not been highly regarded in a symbolic way by general sociology [2].

The approach that will be taken here is that rural sociology made a primordial decision in its formative period to become associated with rural society rather than with agriculture. That decision accrued despite initial concerns about agriculture by the founding fathers [3] about the erosion of the agricultural population. As these concerns came into conflict with productionist orientations in the land grant complex, research on a number of agricultural issues was actively discouraged (Friedland 1979). Despite initial concerns, therefore, the subdiscipline was shaped in ways that left its interests in agriculture remote; U.S. rural sociology became focused instead on rural society.

The key issue that will be addressed in this paper centers on the question posed by Falk and Pinhey (1978: 556): "If there is no 'rural,' can there be a 'rural sociology'?" It will contended that there is little "rural" society left in the United States, although there are many high-, medium-, and low-density population locations and, hence, there is no longer any basis in the United States, if there ever was in the past, for a rural sociology.

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[2] Some rural sociologists will want empirical data to confirm this assertion. While empirical evidence is not dense on this subject, see Falk and Pinhey 1978 who confirm impressions developed over years of observing rural sociology. One indicator that might be tested empirically is the capacity of rural sociological departments to place their PhD "products" in general departments of sociology.

[3] The term is used deliberately. The early differentiation of Home Economics as a distinctive subject for investigation and teaching and the formation of departments and schools concerned with that topic probably contributed enormously to gender specialization between Home Economics and the other agricultural social sciences. In historical restrospect, Home Economics established "jurisdiction" over the home and family; Rural Sociology began with the farm and farmers but ended up with the community as its "jurisdiction."

Rural society represented an initially weak conceptual approach of some of the founders of sociology. This approach viewed the transition to capitalism in terms of polarities of societal types that distinguished small-scale, agriculturally-based societies from large-scale, complex, industrial, urban societies [4]. This distinction proved to be empirically weak as extensive research subsequently proved. Not only did this focus lead to conceptual blind alleys about the "rural-urban continuum" and "fringe," but the discovery that gemeinschaftliche relationships could be found in urban settings also proved dismaying (Whyte 1955; Gans 1962).

A dual demographic process developed as the United States made its transition through industrialism to the "post-industrial" era. At a very early stage and, indeed, contributing to the formation of the agricultural social sciences, the comparative disadvantage of living on the land led to a flight to urbanism giving rise to the Country Life Movement. By the 1930s, as the adoption of the tractor produced a fundamental transformation in agricultural production [5], it became clear that the rural basis of American society was disappearing. Subsequently, as urban population spread and encroached on surrounding rural locations, the phenomenon of suburbia became a concern -- primarily to non-rural sociologists. Although rural sociologists worried at the "rural-urban fringe," it was left largely to their urban colleagues in general sociology to study suburbia.

Most recently, and derivative of suburbanization, the phenomenon of "turnaround" was discovered when a number of rural counties which had been steadily losing population for many decades, began to increase in population (Hansen 1973; Beale 1975). "Turnaround" has given rise, in some rural sociology circles, to talk about a "rural renaissance" and other euphorics indicating a new lease on life for rural sociology. Far from this, the so-called rural renaissance is neither rural nor a renaissance. By focusing on turnaround, rural sociology continues to make itself peripheral to the institutional network of which it is a part, furthering its own marginalization.

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[4] Reference here is to the traditions developed in "grand theory" sociology, particularly as represented by Durkheim and Toennies and reinforced by Parsons in his pattern variables. This comment does not apply either to Marx or Weber who, also concerned with the transition to capitalism, did not reify social relationships in the same way.

[5] This was signaled in southern agriculture in one of the most dramatic -- because it was associated with race -- demographic transformations as the black population shifted from southern-rural-agricultural to northern-urban-industrial.

An analysis of the institutional location of rural sociology and the development of an agenda that might make it more central argues that the subdiscipline must begin a major reallocation of research priorities. Such a reallocation could place the subdiscipline in one of several untenable positions: either the subdiscipline will become an ideological exponent and justifier of the final destruction of family-based agriculture in the U.S. and supporter of corporate agribusiness or it will undertake a gadfly, critical role which could lead to its expulsion from the land grant complex.

The Demise of Rural Society

Details of population shifts in the United States since the middle of the last century when the urban population burgeoned and the rural population declined need not be set out here. This the process was, and continues to be, the subject of continuing concern. Beale (1975, 1978a,b) and Zuiches and Brown (1978) to cite only a few, have summarized these tendencies: farm population has declined since 1916; "rural population [remained] about the same size it had been for several decades, but with much internal distribution" (Beale 1978b: 43), and the nonmetropolitan sector "has experienced a considerable expansion in economic opportunity" (Zuiches and Brown 1978: 71) [6]. Within rural sociology, Beale is associated with the turnaround phenomenon and acknowledges this identification: "...I am identified with the demographic work that documented the population turnaround in nonmetro areas" (1978a: 11). Beale's encomia for turnaround [7] conflates two distinct phenomena: the continued decline in the agricultural population and the increase in the number of nonmetropolitan counties of population with an urbanized economic base. Beale attributes the turnaround phenomenon to four reasons: the reduction in displacement

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[6] The differences between generations of demographers as they examine population trends should be noted. Beale's discussion is put primarily in terms of "rural" and "urban" whereas Zuiches and Brown make the distinction between metropolitan and nonmetropolitan. The title of Beale's initial paper is The Revival of Population Growth in Nonmetropolitan America; he also uses the "nonmetropolitan" designation in other places.

[7] Although making suitable qualifiers and recognizing differences in interpretation, even though stating that "I am not predicting that either the United States or the Northeast is about to become Arcadia" (Beale 1978a: 11), the contextual reference indicates a leaning in that direction. This is reinforced symbolically by the cover of Beale's (1975) publication which shows church and cottages nestling in a geneischaftliche valley.

This process was noted recently in the Wall Street Journal (May 28, 1981): "With Many Cities Full Of Stores, Chains Open Outlets in Small Towns: Population Shift Is a Factor; New Competition Tends to Hurt Older Retailers." The article notes that "Big-time retailing is looking increasingly to small-town America for growth." Retailing giants such as Sears, K Mart, and Woolworth have developed "small-store prototypes to serve such areas." The results "hurt many local merchants," one of whom says, "The big chains are killing the market. It makes me sick." This contrasts with the comment by the manager of the new Sears outlet: "We know what it takes to make a buck...the small merchants of this town better get with it, or they'll be left behind." Some retailers contend that, whereas shoppers used to travel to bigger cities in the area for shopping, they are now staying "home" since a wider range of goods have become locally available. The manager of one of the new malls notes "We believe those dollars are staying home now." This is illusory since profitable dollars will hardly remain local when the new stores are subsidiaries of corporations far distant from this market; far from remaining local, those dollars will become part of the national and international flow of capital.

The "rural" population of the United States is characterized by increasingly homogeneity, consuming the same kinds of foods, commodities, and culture as the urban population. Although some regional differences continue to exist, race-ethnic and class differences have become more significant. Instead of differences that demarcate rural and urban, there is now an increased homogeneity even between metro and nonmetro locations. Far from producing a gemeinschaftliche "arcadia," the shift of populations with an urban economic base and life style reproduce the conditions of urban life in small communities. Price and Clay (1980), for example, note the rise of "structural disturbances," the product of migration to nonmetropolitan counties. These derive, they believe, from two forces, institutional overload and cultural clash. The former is similar to what has been referred to as the "fiscal crisis of the state" (O'Connor 1973) representing a demand for services that cannot be accommodated because of the discrepancy between the available tax base and the demands and expectations for services. This develops as a result of what Price and Clay refer to as the "clash" between urban and traditional orientations. Thus:

> As more and more urbanites have been attracted to the rural hinterland, their collective voice on many political and social concerns has become increasingly audible to the longer-term residents. Imparting urban values and expectations, often coupled with sophisticated tastes in the arts and dress and a preference for contemporary living, these newcomers are unit carriers of the urban culture, sometimes found to be irreconcilable with the local sociocultural system (Price and Clay 1980: 595; emphasis in the original).

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This interesting discussion in rural sociology, in the meantime, has paid no attention to what has been going on "back at the ranch," that is, in agriculture. Because of the focus which rural sociology gave to the rural community rather than to agriculture as a production process, rural sociologists have avoided dealing with the very development that gave rise to their existence.

To briefly recapitulate the data on the destruction of small and medium sized farms and the annihilation of the "'dying very small town'" (Beale 1978b: 43; for discussions of hamlet mortality see Galliher and Padfield 1980) and the emergence of agribusiness, we can note that the number of farms in the United States (in millions) has dropped from 6.37 in 1910 to 2.31 in 1974. Land in farms has increased (in millions of acres) from 881 to 1017 and average acreage per farm has increased from 139 to 440 (Rodefeld, et al., 1978, Table 3: 43). Economic concentration in agriculture is even more notable. Schertz (1979) notes that the farms with $200,000 in sales almost tripled between 1960 and 1978. In 1960, these large units constituted 0.9% of all farms and commanded 19% of farm sales; by 1978, such units had increased to 2.4% of all farms and they commanded 39% of farm sales (p.18).

Future projections extrapolate these trends. McDonald and Coffman (1980) anticipate that by the year 2000, the numbers of farms will drop to approximately 1.8 million and average acreage will increase to almost 600 (p. 3):

> More farms will specialize in the commodities they produce. Some commodities will be produced only by a few large farms. Inheritance will be the chief means of acquiring a farm. Farmers will rent more farmland. Farmland and farm wealth will be concentrated among fewer and larger farms. New farmers will be fewer and will need more capital to get started. Many new farmers will be part-timers, supplementing their farm income with nonfarm jobs.

Moreover:

> One component of the projections might make some farmers wince -- the likelihood that more farms will be corporations. Corporate farms are often perceived as being inimical to the traditional family farm type of organization. Most of the incorporated farms in the future, however, will themselves by family-operated farms. The family farm organization is sound and will probably thrive, but with some changes (McDonald and Coffman 1980: 1-2).

With all of these trends: the economic concentration in agriculture, the increased marginalization of small family farms, continuous emphasis on monocultural specialization and corporatization, farming as known in song, story, and myth, has effectively

disappeared. The United States has moved toward the complete transformation of agriculture from a way of life to the new expression, "The message is clear... the basic consideration of the farming business is money" (Johnson 1981). Belatedly, rural sociologists should realize this and build their research and teaching on this fact. For agriculture is no longer a phenomenon based on rural society; it is a process of production, like all other processes of production, subject to the same rules as other processes, and comparable thereto. While there may be some differences by virtue of historical antecedents and the uncertainties remaining is some parts of the production process, the similarities to other production systems is what is significant. The continued focus on rural society makes rural sociology an anachronism in search of a nonexistent social reality. Discussion of "turnarounds," "rural renaissances," and "nonmetropolitan growth" will not bring back the social phenomenon out of which rural sociology was created.

The Institutional Dilemma of Rural Sociology

Rural sociology occupies an anomolous and fundamentally untenable institutional location. On the one hand, its relationship to the broader discipline of sociology is uneasy. Although, in its earliest institutional period, rural sociology had a close and influential relationship to sociology, in more recent times it has become insulated and isolated from the broader discipline (Falk and Pinhey 1978). Despite Sewell's (1965) injunctions to rigor and proximity to the general discipline, rural sociology has succeeded only in becoming methodologically rigorous about trivial issues (Picou, Wells, and Nyberg 1978).

Rural sociology is also irrelevant to its institutional network, the land grant complex. For obvious historical reasons, the land grant system emerged as productionist oriented and dominated by "hard" scientists. Although concern about the viability of the rural population was a factor contributing to its development, the land grant complex has never been significantly interested in the rural sector, being focused instead on production. Rural sociology, by defining its "jurisdiction" as rural rather than as being concerned with agriculture or farming, has isolated itself from the primary concerns of land grant science.

The irrelevance of rural sociology can be seen in that most fundamental of processes: budgeting. Although rural sociology is believed by general sociologists as being well endowed, it obtains less than 1% of the research budget of USDA and the experiment stations (Hathaway 1972: Table 1, p. 402).

Another indicator of its irrelevance can be found in its minor participation during the recent debate on the structure of agriculture. Newby's review of a key document, Structure Issues of

American Agriculture. (Economics, Statistics and Cooperative Service, 1979; reviewed in Rural Sociology, __, 1: 160-162) points out that this report produced, "only 18 pages out of 305" on "Rural America," less than appeared on the section on marketing. But the irrelevance of rural sociology in this document can also be demonstrated through the disciplinary backgrounds of the 42 authors, 37 of whom were economists, 2 being sociologists, and one each being historians, social scientists, and an information officer [9].

Another way of assessing rural sociology is to examine its research output with respect to agriculture, the topic central to the land grant complex. In an earlier paper (Friedland 1979), I showed, through an analysis of the subject themes provided to the Index of Rural Sociology, that agriculture has been declining as a research topic in the journal of the Society. A summary of this analysis is shown in Table 1. A study of the last three volumes (43-45, 1978-80) of Rural Sociology shows that, while more attention is being given to agriculture and agricultural issues, this topic remains fairly obscure for most rural sociologists. In these three volumes there were a total of 124 articles, research notes, and commentaries [10]. Of these, by the broadest interpretation, a total of 30 or 24.4%, had something to do with agriculture. Examination of these contributions indicates that many are concerned with agriculture outside of the United States, with issues relating to adoption and diffusion of innovations, or rural community development. A more refined but still broad definition of agriculture that is more subjective indicates a maximum of only 20 contributions or 16.3% of the total. Were a personal definition to be used about agriculture, less than a handful of contributions could be found. To provide access to others as to how this material was derived, see the appendix [11].

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[9] Some rural sociologists could have contributed to the debate. Richard Rodefeld, for example, could have made a major contribution to the analysis of land ownership and Isao Fujimoto to discussions of public policy. Perhaps rural sociology is less represented within the social science agencies of USDA than in the colleges of agriculture and the experiment stations. All of the authors of the papers in the volume, except two, were drawn from USDA agencies.

[10] A book review symposium of Perelman's Farming For Profit in a Hungry World that appeared in Vol. 44, No. 1 has been characterized as an article since it involves a lengthy interchange about agriculture.

[11] It might be argued, of course, that Rural Sociology is not a satisfactory source for judging research output of rural sociologists with respect to agriculture since many do not publish through the journal but through bulletins. It should be noted that the "Bulletin Index," which has been published since Vol. 31, June

Basically rural sociology is not a "free" subdiscipline; rather it should be characterized as "tied" [12]. The "tying" of rural sociology can be seen in the way in which the profession has dealt, in the past, with agricultural issues or with issues defined as socially controversial. In such cases, rural social scientists have found themselves in difficulty. Walter Goldschmidt's problems with the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, the demise of the BAE, the burning of the farm population estimates in 1958, and the Bureau of Agricultural economics study of Coahoma County, Mississippi in 1944 are all relevant examples [13]. Because the agricultural sciences are "tied", they experience significant internal tensions. These tensions have been resolved historically in different ways (for a historical treatment see Rosenberg 1973, part 2; relevant discussions will also be found in Busch 1980, Rossiter 1979, and Nicholson 1977).

In one respect, however, rural sociology is <u>different</u> from all of the other agricultural sciences: whereas all of the other sciences have taken agriculture as their domain, rural sociology has not. The result is that rural sociology, as a body of knowledge, knows comparatively little about agriculture [14]. Unlike its cousin, agricultural economics, which has placed great emphasis on the analysis of a wide range of agricultural problems [15], rural sociology essentially has eschewed research on agriculture,

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1966, does not even contain a category for "agriculture."

[12] The literature on professions makes a distinction between "free" and "bureaucratic" professions; i.e., the former being made up of professionals who sell their services (physicians, lawyers) in contrast to the latter who are employees of large formal organizations such as government. See Hughes 1960; Moore 1970: 62-65; and Larson 1977: 190-199.

[13] All of these have been summarized in Friedland 1979. For details on each see, respectively, Kirkendall 1964; 1966: Chapters 12, 13; and Goldschmidt 1980, Part 3; Rosenbaum, n.d.; and Hardin 1946: 652-655.

[14] A concomitant phenomenon is that sociology as a discipline knows nothing about the sociology of agriculture. Those specialized areas within sociology that deal with production have paid no attention to agricultural processes since these have been defined as being within the jurisdiction of rural sociology. See Friedland, Barton, and Thomas 1981: 1-5.

[15] Lest anyone worry about crediting agricultural economics too much, it should be emphasized that the economics subdiscipline has its blind spots and limitations in its focus on trivia. There can be little doubt, however, that agricultural economics has been centrally focused on agricultural production and has thereby served the productionist interests of the land grant system.

approximately since the 1950s (Friedland 1979).

Given the institutional location of rural sociology in the land grant complex, the subdiscipline has become an anomaly. This does not mean that rural sociology departments have not played useful roles in land grant institutions, providing free or low-cost instruction in sociology to students from urban backgrounds.

One major arena which had drawn the attention of rural sociologists relevant to agriculture is adoption-diffusion research. Yet even here, research has concentrated exclusively on the singular aspect of adoption in the agricultural enterprise; many other aspects of the process have been ignored. As for other components of agriculture, particularly those dealing with production, production organization, political organization with respect to agricultural production, etc., most rural sociologists have eschewed these topics with vigor [16].

The topics that get generated within agriculture, from a sociological point of view, will potentially create problems since sociologists will have to address the processes of production. In so doing, they will confront a dilemma. On the one hand, they can either take the direction of agricultural economics or, on the other, they can formulate a stance that sets out the social realities and outcomes of capitalist agricultural development.

If the first approach is taken, rural sociologists will have to develop ways and means, as has agricultural economics, to become useful to productionist land grant science. Such an approach requires the development of a research equivalent that examines comparative costs of packing lettuce or establishing a vineyard in the San Joaquin Valley or in western Pennsylvania. This type of approach justifies existing institutional arrangements and reinforces the land grant institution. A comparable example from agricultural economics can be found in the "returns to research" literature. Agricultural economists have demonstrated, at least to the satisfaction of the scientists who dominate land grant knowledge production, that investment in such research is economically and socially rational. This research has been useful to land grant scientists who have provided ample funding for it.

Following this approach, several types of studies could be suggested by which rural sociology could become "useful" to the productionist scientists of the land grant complex:

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[16] Attempts since 1978 of a number of rural sociologists to grapple with agriculture as a focus for research must be noted and will be discussed below. The emphasis given to agricultural topics at annual meetings in 1980 and 1981 represent a significant change.

1. Studies relating to the recruitment and management of wage labor. Although labor represents a declining problematic in agriculture, it remains a serious affair in sunbelt agriculture. While the long term prospects are for continuous substitution of labor by capital (i.e., machinery), labor supply and control will continue to be a problematic [17].

2. Studies of social movements and social control. While the population base for social movements in agriculture is vastly diminished, the experience of the American Agricultural Movement (Flinn and Kohl 1979) in the past few years indicates that protest tendencies remain against policies that erode the viability of "smaller" production units. Political control of such movements represents a problematic for land grant scientists since their scientific production has contributed to the process of economic concentration and will probably continue to do so.

3. Studies dealing with interorganizational analysis and articulation. With the criticism of land grant science (Hightower 1973) and the fiscal crisis, there are indications that more agricultural research will get done increasingly in the private sector. Such a development will lead to even closer articulation between land grant and private sector science. The private sector will seek, as in the past, to put the burden of long range, basic research on the taxpayer while itself conducting developmental research capturable for profit. Some of the ways in which this process has been accomplished have been studied by a few rural sociologists (see especially Fujimoto and Kopper 1978) but, on the whole, the analysis of interorganizational articulation remains to be accomplished.

These are only a few subjects that might be undertaken by a redirected rural sociology concerned with finding a place in a productionist-oriented agricultural science network. At the same time, there are dangers involved in taking this approach.

[17] In California, for example, there has been controversy over the past decade about the failure of the University of California's Agricultural Division to provide services relating to agricultural labor. A recent suit by California Rural Legal Assistance against the University is one manifestation. The way the University operates in response can be seen in a recent instance in which the Legislature provided support for Extension activities on agricultural labor. The University's Agricultural Division has implemented the approach by recruiting specialists in personnel management. Thus new jobs are being created for which rural sociologists, with some training, could be employed; it should also be noted, however, that these jobs will serve the interests of agricultural employers and not those of workers.

Consider, for example, the hazards implicit in conducting interorganizational analyses. This research can be useful to experiment station directors interested in getting as "big a bang for the buck" in agricultural sciences as possible. As state legislatures and the federal government become more difficult with funding, experiment station directors will be looking for ways to bring established public sector research into closer conjunction with the private sector. As Merton pointed out in setting out his defense of functionalism, (Merton 1957, Chapter 1: 37-46), research can be either conservative or radical. If used to facilitate articulation, experiment station directors will probably welcome it. However, if such research is viewed as "muckraking," as "exposure" of the use of public resources for private gain, such research will probably not be refunded after initial experiments.

Althouse the topics indicated above represent legimate sociological research foci, other equally legitimate sociological topics could create tension with the productionist agricultural scientists.

First is systematic and comparative research on agricultural production and how human social organization shapes these processes and is shaped by them. Comparative analysis of wheat, cottou, dairying, and lettuce, etc., reveals different loci of economic concentration, reverse and forward integration, and many other economic and social processes (Friedland 1981).

Another topic that cries for examination is the current trend toward farm incorporation and its social consequences. Although some work done in this area, most is concerned with setting out the advantages and conditions of incorporation [18]. At least two basic research problems exist. First, there is a need for descriptive demography on rates of incorporation, who incorporates (types of farms and farmers), and regional and commodity differences. Second, the incorporation of a family enterprise probably has consequences for family and community organization, an obvious "natural" subject for rural sociological inquiry.

A third research area might focus on the analysis of labor supply and control. The labor process in agricultural production has been taken only as a problematic in cases where workers are employed by growers. This subject could stand closer investigation over a broad range of commodities and regions including studies of

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[18] The literature dealing with incorporation, its advantages, disadvantages, and complexities, is considerable. See for example Levi 1971, Chapter Ten; Boehlje and Krause forthcoming; Harl, O'Byrne, and Krausz 1977; Davis 1976; and Singer 1981. These are but a few of the papers, bulletins, articles, and publications recently encountered dealing with farm incorporation.

work and workers in grain, milk, beef, poultry production to mention only a few. Beyond hired labor, there is the issue of family labor, still the most significant labor input in production in the United States. How is family labor mobilized and organized? Is it the same as was the case 30-40 years ago when this topic was closely examined? How are family workers remunerated? What ever happened to the so-called "job ladder," does it still exist in aspirations and reality? Although studies occasionally appear on some of these topics, they have not been systematically explored by rural sociologists.

The topics suggested represent significant possibilities for agricultural research. At the same time, it should be expected that the productionist scientists who dominate land grant research will prefer not to fund such research or, if funded, would rather not have the results become too public: the effects on family life of corporatization will probably be somewhat less than "arcadian;" the transmogrification of diffuse, affective social relations into legally-constrained, specific, limited, and "rational" relations will probably prove to be unpropitious for maintaining beliefs about the importance of the family in rural American society.

Rural sociology confronts, therefore, a significant institutional dilemma. It can maintain its present course and continue to convince itself (and others) that urban decentralization constitutes a fitting subject for land grant research which has become, itself, focused almost exclusively on expanding agricultural production. Rural sociology can turn, alternatively, to agricultural production and define a narrow, productionist orientation similar to the economists thereby satisfying the criterion of "utility" of the productionist scientists. In a third, and probably least viable alternative, rural sociology could set itself free institutionally from the land grant system to develop a critical analytic stance with respect to agriculture. Such a separation would be necessary since most experiment station directors or USDA administrators can hardly be expected to accept a critical, analytic stance that lends itself to muckraking and political reaction in Congress, as past experience indicates.

The Development of A Constituency for Rural Sociology

One way to think about new research approaches is to define potential constituencies for a revised rural sociology. The problem of constituency development is, perhaps, unique to rural sociology since, unlike most other agricultural sciences, there is no clear constituency for its research. Busch (1980) and Rossiter (1979) have shown how various agricultural sciences have close or remote constituencies. These constituencies, often organized within commodity organizations, play crucial roles in providing support to sustain certain kinds of agricultural research.

Rural sociology seems to be the one land grant discipline -- possibly unique except for agricultural history -- in not having such a constituency. One result has been that rural sociology has been among the least supported groups in the land grant system. This is not surprising since rural sociology has addressed neither specific constituencies within agriculture nor specific problems of agriculture. Despite contentions that rural sociology should play a role in agricultural policy analysis (Stokes and Miller 1975), the irrelevance of rural sociology became clear during the debate over the structure of agriculture at the end of the Carter administration.

One way of thinking about constituency development is in terms of who is involved in agricultural production; another is to consider who uses agriculture's products. On the whole, the central focus of the agricultural sciences has concentrated on who is involved in agriculture although this focus, over the past century, has become narrowed to those segments of agriculture that are large, profit-producing, and "efficient." (This has become the basis for much of the criticism of the land grant system in the past decade and some experiment station directors have begun to worry about expanding the constituent base for publicly funded research.)

Efficiency, however, is a slippery phenomenon. An approach that rural sociologists might take to the analysis of agricultural production and constituency development is to examine the social and economic effects of current institutional arrangements in agriculture. One example of this could involve a specific research problem: What are the social, economic, and other costs of USDA grading procedures that are concerned exclusively with cosmetic qualities of foods?

This problem is emergent in the maintenance of the complex administrative apparatus concerned with definition of standards, inspection, and enforcement. Because oranges, for example, obtain a better price if their skins have no blemishes, growers apply a variety of chemicals to control biological forces that affect skin condition. The fact that growers may realize a 5% price advantage because of inspection for cosmetic quality has effects on the pesticides and chemicals that are applied. Most chemicals are petroleum-derived and/or require petroleum-based energy applications to convert them for agricultural application. These chemicals may leave residues whose immediate and long-range effects are imperfectly understood. What are the costs to society of cosmetic codes? Similarly, is it better or worse to find a worm in a frozen brussels sprout than some chemical residue that cannot be seen by the consumer? [19]

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[19] David Schieber, a former student at Santa Cruz, framed this question for me out of his research on pesticides. Most people ob-

Questions such as these raise all sorts of problems; indeed their very formulation represents a sharp break with the approach of the agricultural sciences in the United States. This formulation does not address the traditional constituency of production agriculturists; rather it turns to consumers, a group with which most experiment station directors have not been overly concerned. Another problem derives because of jurisdiction: the type of research that has been suggested falls, traditionally, within the "domain" of agricultural economics rather than rural sociology. The agricultural economists, who have real constituencies within agriculture, are unlikely to define the problems that have been suggested as legitimate; most would find it a subject outside their realm of conceivability.

By undertaking such research, it might be possible, however, to develop a new constituency for rural sociology.

Portents of Change or Blind Alleys? New Developments in Rural Sociology

What future for rural sociology?

It is likely, despite the extended critical commentary over 25 years, that the subdiscipline can probably continue as it has in the past. It can remain dependent on the land grant system, inviting critiques at annual meetings, occasional presidential addresses, and once-in-a-while critical studies, but paying little attention to this critique in the day-to-day work that goes on in home departments.

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ject, of course, to finding worms in their brussels sprouts and prefer their oranges with few or no skin blemishes. Consumer orientations depend, to a considerable degree however, on how people learn about foods, the process by which they are "educated," as well as economic factors such as price. We are educated or conditioned to expect "perfect" brussels sprouts -- although they may, in fact, be less than perfect if there are unseen chemical residues. The agricultural institutions have created a network of systems to "educate" us; we call them [promotional] marketing orders. Thus, the California Iceberg Lettuce Commission, created only a few years ago, has as its purpose the "education" of the consumer to eat more lettuce. And, according to the Wall Street Journal (July 20, 1984, pp. 1, 11), the dairy industry is about to educate us to eat "real" rather than "fake" cheese by putting a logo, the "Real Seal," on cheese made from milk rather than from casein and corn oil. At the same time, the manufacturers of "fake" cheese (who will deny that it is fake) will be "educating" us about the nutritional value of their product.

Rural sociology remains in an unenviable location as it confronts the remainder of the century. Because of its institutional location, research and teaching on agriculture constitute a "natural" domain yet rural sociology has largely been irrelevant to this domain. However, it is precisely within this domain that possibilities lie rather than with a focus on a no-longer-existent rural society. While rural sociology as a whole has not given serious attention to agriculture, there have been some developments in the sociology of agriculture to which some rural sociologists and a few others have begun to make contributions.

These are exemplified in recent years in two major publications. Both take as their focus agriculture but each reflects a very different paradigm. Change in Rural America (Rodefeld, et al. 1978), derives from the classical American tradition that gave rise to rural sociology: concern for the family farm, the issue of bigness, the problems of economic concentration. This volume follows the populist tradition in American agriculture. Despite concerns for the maintenance of the jeffersonian myth that are now outmoded and its insistence on mixing "rural" with "agricultural", the volume represents an important grouping within U.S. rural sociology that remains concerned with agriculture. This group has been especially concerned with the one-day sessions dedicated to agriculture that have preceeded Rural Sociological Society meetings since 1978.

A second volume, The Rural Sociology of Advanced Societies: Critical Perspectives (Buttel and Newby 1980) reflects a very different perspective although it also conflates "rural" and "agricultural." Two features distinguish this book as a new departure in the analysis of agriculture.

First, the editors take, as their explicit perspective, "advanced societies," by which they mean complex capitalist societies. This distinguishes their approach since it argues the commonality of agricultural production systems in complex capitalism rather than emphasizing unique or special features of agriculture in a particular country. Although most contributions to this volume examine a specific problem in single society, the volume as a whole takes the agricultural systems of complex capitalism as its problematic; despite its title which retains the words "rural sociology," four of the five areas set out by the editors in their "Introduction" are concerned with agriculture:

> The principal research foci of this "new rural sociology" include the structure of agriculture in advanced capitalism, state agricultural policy, agricultural labor, regional inequality, and agricultural ecology (Newby and Buttel 1980: 15).

A second feature, particularly striking in comparison to the Rodefeld reader, is the influence of its marxist paradigm. Not all chapters are by marxists; some contributors are explicitly marxist, some are closet marxists, and others might be called eclectic

neomarxists. What should be underlined, however, is the sharp contrast its approach presents to the hermetic and monist paradigm which Picou, Wells, and Nyberg (1978) have criticised.

The potentialities of the neomarxist paradigm in the formulation of a sociology of agriculture should be emphasized. The significance of this approach derives from its understanding that present forms of social and economic organization are "normal." In this perspective, large-scale capitalist agriculture -- agriculture for profit -- does not represent an aberration; rather, it represents the organic development, within the agricultural sector, of capitalist social relations. The logic of this perspective is that the appropriate role of a sociology of agriculture is not simply with the elucidation of specialized agricultural processes and forms of social organization, no matter how unique these may be. Rather, the purposes of a sociology of agriculture is to contribute to an understanding of the comparative social organization of production systems (Friedland, Barton, and Thomas 1981: Preface, Chapter 1).

The marxian paradigm need not insist that "big is beautiful" or that the function of capitalism is solely to establish large-scale production systems necessary to sustain a socialist mode of production. This hermetic and monist view of socialism is derivative from the leninist experience in marxism. Far from having established socialism, all that this approach has succeeded in creating has been a socio-economic system characterized by the legal fiction of public ownership accompanied by a highly stratified and exploitative class system as unpalatable as that found in advanced capitalist societies.

The approach suggested here may seem to be out of keeping with the times, with Reaganomics and the reaction against liberal welfarism. They may also seem to have little relevance to daily life in home universities and departments or the "realities" of experiment station directors. The formulation of new research trajectories, however, are not things which occur rapidly.

Professional bodies such as the Rural Sociological Society are not, despite vulgar economistic and unsophisticated marxist analysis, decision making bodies. The "jurisdiction" of the Society does not lie in substantive matters. While it might be a good idea that a resolution be adopted suggesting that rural sociologists pay more attention to agriculture, this approach would both be beyond the Society's legal scope and a waste of time: it is

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[20] On a personal note, I should emphasize that I am not unsympathetic to the populist approach represented by Rodefeld and others; I find their approach personally attractive but historically untenable.

not such formal decisions that provide direction to knowledge production and research priorities but material and institutional relationships. These material relationships may be mediated by values; certainly socialization has some influence on the way in which institutional relations are played out.

What is being suggested, finally, is not formal action but individual decisions explicitly concerned to counter the domination of institutional arrangements. The development of strategies for change will not be simple. One suggested strategy might involve the setting of social goals for publicly-funded agricultural science that stress reductions in chemical- and energy-intensive agriculture, encourage small farm continuation and more self-production of food, and produce more equitable income distribution in the agricultural sector (Friedland and Kappel 1979).

Until rural sociologists, like sociologists and social scientists more generally, can work individually, collectively, and systematically not simply to interpret the world but to change it, to paraphrase Marx' 11th thesis on Feuerbach, rural sociology will remain essentially irrelevant to what is going on in the world.

Appendix

Publications on Agriculture in Rural Sociology, 1978-1980

To determine all publications (including articles, commentaries, and research notes but not including book reviews except as noted below), the abstract or the publication was read to determine if there was any bearing on agricultural matters. The following publications were included as appropriate:

1978, Vol. 43

Carlson and McLeod; Dotson and Dotson; Goldschmidt; Heffernan and Lasley; Ryan; Yetley and Hoy.

1979, Vol. 44*

Bluhm; Brown and Larson; Buttel and Larson; Garza; LeVeen; Lyson; Olson; Pearson; Salamon and O'Reilly; Steeves.

1980, Vol. 45

Ashby and Coward; Busch; Coughenour; Flinn and Kohl; Gartrell and Gartrell; Gilles; Harper, Fliegel and van Es; Heatony Lacy, Pigg, and Busch; Lancelle and Rodefeld; Larson and Buttel; Lockeretz and Wernick; Mason and Halter; Salamon.

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*In this volume, Michael Perelman's Farming for Profit in a Hungry World was reviewed by Coughenour, LeVeen, Newby, and Stockdale with introductory and final comments by Perelman. This review symposium was treated as a single article on agriculture.

Table 1
Subject Categories in Rural Sociology

Subject	Vols. 1-20 1936-1955	Vols. 21-30 1956-1965	Vols. 31-40 1066-1975
Adoption/diffusion	22	51	47
Agrarianism [1]	16	2	4
Aspirations [2]	No entry	24	46
Community [3]	93	33	49
Family	49	16	19
Family Farm	10	No entry	No entry
Farm Labor	27	2	3
Farm Organizations [4]	9	4	15
Farmers	7	No entry	14
Farming part-time	No entry	5	3
Land Settlement (US/non-US)	11	2	2
Land Tenure [5]	25	9	7
Modernization/Social Change	37	28	45
Stratification	19	6	13

1. During 1936-55, the subject category was "Agrarian Reform".

2. In 1956-65, three categories of aspirations were utilized; they have been consolidated here as a single category. In 1966-75, five categories were used.

3. Includes two categories in 1936-55 and 1956-65 and four categories in 1966-75.

4. In 1936-55 the entry was called "Social groups-formal." In 1966-75 I have incorporated an entry under "National Farmers Organization."

5. Incorporates two categories, including four for U.S. and three for non-U.S.

Source: Rural Sociology, Cumulative Index 1936-1955, 1956-1965, 1966-1975.

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Boehlje, Michael and Kenneth Krause

forthcoming
Economic and Federal Tax Factors Affecting the Choice of a Legal Farm Business Organization. Washington, D.C.: National Economics Division, Economics and Statistics Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Brown, Minnie M. and Olaf F. Larson

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