Tilling New Soil: Coverage of Organic Agriculture in *Farm Journal*, *Successful Farming*, and *Progressive Farmer* from 1985 to 2005

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Master of Science

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This thesis titled
Tilling New Soil: Coverage of Organic Agriculture in *Farm Journal*,
*Successful Farming*, and *Progressive Farmer* from 1985 to 2005

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the coverage over time of organic farming in *Farm Journal, Successful Farming*, and *Progressive Farmer*, three magazines devoted to professional farming. The purpose is to better understand how industry-specific publications, such as farming magazines, adapt to industry issues that begin with controversy but eventually are adopted into culture as acceptable practices. The study first uses quantitative content analysis to determine what, if any, changes have occurred over time in how much the issue of “organic farming” has been covered in the mainstream agricultural press. Then, a qualitative textual analysis of selected articles from the sample was conducted to further consider the ways mainstream agriculture magazines may influence attitudes and understanding of changes within the industry.

This thesis concluded that over time the three magazines under study portrayed organic farming differently and also differed in the amount of coverage they devoted to the topic.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

Bill Reader

Associate Professor of Journalism
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my grandparents, Charles Edward Lawton Jr.,
Oleta Lawton, Marvin Wick, and Florence Wick.

Thank you for your encouragement, assistance, and love.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank my thesis advisor, Associate Professor Bill Reader, for encouraging me to explore new avenues with this project and pushing me to find new ways to think about the influence of culture on how we view the world. His assistance on this project and professional influence on me is immeasurable. I also want to thank Assistant Professor Cary Frith and Professor Joseph Bernt for assisting with the completion of this thesis and for their belief in me as a student.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The American Farmer and Organic Farming

The institution of American farming, as both a business and as a lifestyle, is undergoing substantial change at the start of the twenty-first century. Industrial agribusiness and corporate farm interests dominate the industry more than ever. However, large- and small-scale organic farming, the grassroots “foodshed” movement, and many other developments have all worked together to alter the agricultural landscape of America into something far removed from the small-scale, family-run operations that dominated the industry well into the mid-twentieth century (Pollan, 2006). Additionally, the U.S. farm crisis of the 1970s and 1980s — which stemmed from dwindling commodities prices, depreciation of the value of farmland, and farmers burdened with crippling amounts of debt — led to a large number of farms going into foreclosure, sold to large agribusiness concerns, or redeveloped into housing or commercial use (Barnett, 2003).

As a result, the U.S. government stepped in with assistance programs and subsidies to help protect farmland and to ensure that the nation’s food supply was not disrupted. However, those subsidies and programs have led to further industrialization and consolidation of the nation’s farms and overproduction of several commodities, especially corn (Lamb, 1999; Berry, 1982). The resulting colossal corporate farming operations hardly resembled the “traditional” family farms of the mid-twentieth century and have become businesses increasingly dependent upon government disbursements, chemical-based agricultural technology, and large-scale economies to maintain profitability (Pollan, 2006). Over the past several decades, those changes have shifted the
American farming landscape, both literally and figuratively, into something nearly unrecognizable from what existed even fifty years ago (Adams, 2003).

As a result of that growth and industrialization, nearly all facets of the agriculture industry — from suppliers of seeds and animal feed, to chemical and machinery manufacturers, to even the magazines and newspapers that cover the industry — have become more consolidated, with increasingly fewer corporations taking over larger sections of their respective markets (Stuhlfaut, 2005). Considering that only 2 percent of all farms produce half of America’s food and fiber (Sligh, 2002), that 2 percent of the nation’s workforce is employed in agriculture (Bertini & Thompson, 2006, p. 35), and that those producers are owned by an ever-dwindling number of owners, it becomes clear that American agriculture today is more a business dominated by large corporate interests than by independent farmers working land that had been in their families for generations (Drabenstott, 1999). That correlates closely with the dwindling number of individual farms in America, which fell from 3.1 million farms in 1964 to 2.1 million in 2002 (USDA, 2002; USDA, 1997).

Conventional industrial agriculture — with its use of chemical pesticides and herbicides, large-scale machines, and monoculture growing practices (i.e., farmers who produce a single commodity, such as corn or beef) — helps put affordable food into the homes of most Americans. But there has been backlash to that model of production as middle-class consumers increasingly place less trust in cheap, affordable (and often highly processed) foods and instead express with their wallets interests in food grown by independent farmers who use few or no artificial chemicals and minimal processing. The popularity of organically grown food (that is, food produced without the use of artificial
fertilizers, chemical pesticides and herbicides, growth hormones, genetically modified seeds, and similar products of the biochemistry industry) has increased steadily in recent decades from an activity on the margins of American agriculture into a profitable and growing sector of the mainstream agriculture economy (USDA, 2007a).

It should be noted that the use of the term “organic” here is highly generalized. There is considerable controversy about the use of the term “organic” in labeling foods, and many different standards by which foods are determined to be “organic” or not, with the total percentage of organically produced ingredients determining whether a product is labeled “100% Organic,” “Organic,” or “Made with Organic Ingredients” (Paulson, 2006). Those terms (which seem somewhat similar but are actually defined quite differently), along with the different certifying bodies’ standards for organic certification, have led to a great deal of confusion for farmers, food-manufacturers, and consumers (Tarnowski, 2003). In addition, certain goods such as eggs and meat can also be labeled as “free-range” or “natural,” even if they were produced using conventional agribusiness chemicals and techniques—yet the labeling commands premium prices much like those for legitimate "organic" products (Paulson, 2006).

Considering that total U.S. acreage devoted to organic production (including pasture/rangeland and cropland) had increased from 935,450 acres in 1992 to 4.05 million acres in 2005, it is evident that as U.S. consumers’ demands for organic food has increased, so has the means of production (USDA, 2007b). Additionally, Wal-Mart, a retail chain with nearly $378 billion in revenue in 2007, now sells organic food and products in its stores, which indicates the “organic revolution” is hardly a revolution any more and has instead been mostly co-opted into the mainstream (Fortune Magazine,
However, the boom in popularity of farmers’ markets and the “foodshed” and “locavore” movements (both of which advocate the consumption of food raised within geographical proximity to oneself, usually within 50 to 150 miles) have increased public awareness (and coverage in mainstream media) of such topics as regionally unique foods, interest in where food comes from, and how food is produced and processed (Burros, 2006; Huyghe, 2006; Dobbs, 1998). The “locavore” movement has spurred a new interest in food as something more than just nutrition and tastes, but something that has cultural and political significance imbued by where and how it was grown. Even in retail food advertisements, many grocers emphasize their selections of local foods, even if the local-food movement itself is still a small one within the overall food market (O’Donnel, 2006; Major, 2007).

It is also important to note that the organic movement, as one that embodies some of the agricultural traditions of the pre-Industrial Age, is not one that has come about only within the past several decades. There is a long history of organic farming, even after the Industrial Age and that period’s emphasis on efficiency (which translated into a demand for larger and larger crop yields achieved through chemistry and mechanization). Before the Industrial Age organic farming practices were the standard rather than part of a separate ideology. Successful farmers would pay special attention to the land and its needs and would tailor their crops, herds and flocks, and production cycles accordingly, with many farmers adopting more or less holistic and harmonious approaches to food production simply out of pragmatism (Howard, 1943). Many of those techniques were abandoned in the late nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries in lieu of industrialized techniques that made use of mechanized planting and harvesting and the ability of
farmers to focus on one or two commodities. By the middle of the twentieth century, many of the older, diversified techniques were relegated to folklore and the work of a few farmers operating on the fringe, such as those who prefer to use horses instead of tractors to work their fields, which reduces operating costs, improves soil tilth from lack of compaction from heavy equipment, and makes small-scale, diversified farming more profitable (Miller, 2003). In Britain in the 1940s, when resources were scarce due to World War II, a resurgent interest in the “old ways” spawned an organic-farming movement — an agricultural revolution of sorts, courtesy of the efforts of the likes of Sir Albert Howard (1943). Sir Howard advocated an all-organic soil fertility system, known as the “Indore Process,” that attracted farmers and gardeners interested in high-yield agriculture practiced without chemical soil amendments (Macwilwain, 2004; Berry, 1977; Howard, 1943). The efforts of Howard to publicize organic farming techniques in his master work, *An Agricultural Testament*, segued into the creation of the British Soil Association, which worked to promote organic farming, inform public opinion and policy regarding agricultural practices, and develop standards for organic agriculture (Soil Association, 2009).

At the same time, J.I. Rodale took on similar work in the United States. Rodale ran a publishing house that produced such magazines as *Organic Farming and Gardening* and *Health Bulletin*. As an offshoot of his publishing company, Rodale developed the Soil and Health Foundation in 1947, which through the efforts of his son Robert, eventually became the Rodale Institute (which remains a leading source of research and advocacy for “sustainable” agriculture). While not necessarily a strict advocate of organic agriculture, Rodale promoted sustainable agricultural techniques that
emphasized soil conservation, promoted soil fertility, and production efficiency. Today, the Rodale Institute serves as a clearinghouse for information on alternative farming practices with the production of books and magazines, training programs for farmers and consumers, and independent scientific research (Rodale Institute, 2009).

The organic movement has also been promoted in the late twentieth century by such farmer-philosophers as Wendell Berry and Lynn R. Miller, and more recently by authors such as Barbara Kingsolver, who in their respective works made claims that small-scale farming operations, usually following organic or “natural” practices, allowed for the farmer to be a better steward of the land (Berry, 1982; Kingsolver 2007; Miller, 1997). In such books as The Unsettling of America and The Gift of Good Land, Kentucky-based poet and writer Wendell Berry made his case for a return to the agrarian ideals of the pre-industrialized age: “Until the industrial revolution occurred in the minds of most people in the so-called 'developed' countries, the dominant images were organic: they had to do with living things; they were biological, pastoral, agricultural, or familiar” (Berry, 1982, p. 113). Berry’s argument against the industrial-agriculture paradigm stands atop two major “failures.” The first failure argued by Berry is that industrial agriculture with its singular emphasis on productivity is reductionist: that it considers all problems solvable with an extra dose of fertilizer, a stronger concentration of chemical herbicide, or another round of antibiotics in steers’ feed. The second is focused on industrial agriculture’s inherent wastefulness, which is borne out of that system’s engineering of the life cycle of nature to accommodate the needs of uniform production; therefore, an unusually large or small animal or plant, though perfectly fine as food, is something incompatible with the industrial mode of production. Modern agriculture discards
irregular samples and attempts to force those organic bodies to fit (literally) to the current system, which breeds errors of excess such as pollution, erosion of topsoil, soil depleted of tilth and nutrients, increased health problems and disease in crops and livestock populations, reduced biodiversity, etc. (Berry, 1982).

The resurgence of traditional small-scale or organic agriculture also received a helping hand in the form of the “hippies,” “flower children,” and others who grew dissatisfied with the status quo of the post-World War II era and launched the back-to-the-land movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The movement had its genesis in the early parts of the twentieth century with Louis Bromfield’s Malabar Farm, an experimental farm in Richland County, Ohio (Kupfer, 2001). “Back-to-the-landers,” mostly unified by a generalized feeling of estrangement from society, sold off most of their earthly belongings, purchased patches of land or abandoned small farms, and headed off to the country, with the ideal that one’s own hands would provide sustenance and bartering within the community would take care of the rest (Agnew, 2004). One estimate of the number of back-to-the-landers, at the height of the movement’s popularity in the early 1970s, has it at more than one million people, arguably the largest urban-to-rural migration in American history (Jacob, 1997, p. 3). New publications started to serve and reflect the movement, such as Mother Earth News, The Whole Earth Catalog, and The Small Farmer’s Journal, made the back-to-the-land life seem idyllic and workable as well and provided connections between back-to-the-landers who may have been isolated from one another by geography (Reader & Moist, 2008). Motivational essays and how-to articles in those publications described how a sustainable lifestyle could be derived from the output of a well-tended patch of land. Those publications also provided examples of
families and communes “living the dream” by producing and selling such things as nut butters, bushels of apples, organic free-range eggs, and so on, at roadside stands or farmer’s markets, often using homemade tools and refurbished old equipment (Agnew, 2004).

Unfortunately, for many of those back-to-the-landers, the inherent difficulties of self-sufficiency intruded upon the ideals and dreams upon which they built their farms and communes. Crops would fail from insufficient soil fertility, disease, or bad weather, wiping out potential income. Often, the income alone from the goods produced on the small farm would not be enough to pay monthly bills, necessitating many back-to-the-landers to “work out” in the nearest town (Agnew, 2004). Sometimes mistakes were made in the cultivation process, which was almost expected as many of the back-to-the-landers’ only experience with the agrarian lifestyle was through what they had read in *Mother Earth News* and books (Agnew, 2004).

While many of those farms and communes may have shut down for all sorts of reasons, many who failed to sustain a back-to-the-land lifestyle still gleaned much from the experience. Upon re-entry into the mainstream, many homesteaders went into work that was compatible with the ethos of the back-to-the-land existence, supporting food co-ops and farmers’ markets and entering professions such as rural sociologists/anthropologists, social workers, labor lawyers, and teachers (Agnew, 2004). Remnants of that legacy, and the ascension of many back-to-the-landers to the middle class by the end of the twentieth century, may also have contributed to the recent resurgence of farmers markets, interest in organic agriculture, and the creation of modern communities such as Prairie Crossing near Chicago, Illinois, which features an onsite
The early twenty-first century version of the back-to-the-land movement is decidedly middle class, with mid-career professionals opting to live and work in rural areas and maintain “hobby farms” as a lifestyle choice. Many of those people document their experiences in personal essays and autobiographical books, with one example being *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, which chronicled the journey of author Barbara Kingsolver and her family to a farm in the verdant hills of Virginia, far from their original home in Arizona (Kingsolver, 2007). Kingsolver’s move to a farm in Virginia was, she explained, driven by a passion to live by the toil of one’s hands, to minimize one’s impact on the environment, and to reduce the need for food trucked-in from across the world and for water piped across the Arizona desert (Kingsolver, 2007). Kingsolver and her family endured the unique difficulties faced by those transplants from urban and suburban areas who try to make a go of a rural, self-reliant existence — raising and butchering one’s own chickens and putting-up homemade canned goods, for example, are rare skills in modern American culture. Kingsolver’s book is not so much the diary of a newcomer to the country life, but also a resource and guide for those who have an interest in their food and where it comes from; for example, a chapter about raising poultry includes a sidebar from contributor Steven L. Hopp about CAFOs — the “concentrated animal feeding operations,” which dominate the industrial meat production process (Kingsolver, 2007). In a chapter about the issues of farming in America and the slow-food movement, a sidebar includes discussion about the dangers of agrichemicals, their overuse against
insects, and the staggering amount used in protecting crops from nature (Kingsolver, 2007).

Although Americans have long had an interest in what they eat and where it comes from—consider public reaction to Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*, which gave rise to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2008)—that interest appears to have intensified in the early twenty-first century. In recent years, a number of books have been published that have made the topic of food, its origins, and its production a major part of the national conversation. Some of those books, such as Samuel Fromartz’s *Organic, Inc.* (2006) and Michael Pollan’s *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* (2006), as well as those mentioned earlier, all, in their own individual ways, critique the industrial food production system through personal journey, straight reportage, or a combination thereof.

Consider Pollan’s *The Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*. The book is divided into three parts — “Industrial: Corn,” “Pastoral: Grass,” and “Personal: The Forest” — creating an overall examination of the U.S. food-production strata, from the small farmer practicing sustainable and environmentally sensitive agriculture to massive, industrial-agribusinesses giants such as Cargill, Kraft Foods, and Archer Daniels Midland. Along the way, Pollan describes how modern industrial agriculture was spurred on by a need to retool World-War-II explosives factories for use in peacetime. The result of that retooling was the development of high-potency fertilizer with the ability to increase the growth of crops (especially corn) year after year, at the expense of the overall health of the soil and surrounding environment. The over-abundance of corn led to the invention of high-fructose corn syrup, an extremely sweet
and cheap substitute for sugar that gradually found its way into most processed foods. Pollan asserts that it is the preponderance of high-fructose corn syrup in the American diet that has led to the soaring rate of obesity in the general population, and given advocates of organic farming one more example of the fallacies of conventional agriculture (Pollan, 2007; Pollan 2006).

Pest control, too, has benefited from the need to retool manufacturing facilities following the two World Wars. Poisons developed for use on the battlefield, with some changes to dosage or molecular structure, were adapted to use on farms to control insects, plant diseases, and weed infestations (Vandermeer, 1995). Along with industrially produced synthetic chemicals such as those derived from fossil fuels, the new agrichemical paradigm following the end of World War II led to an era of burgeoning yields and lowered overall operating costs on farms (Lockeretz, Shearer & Kohl, 1981). However, agriculture by applied chemistry has also come at a price: the contamination of the environment, both in the fields as well as noxious runoff from both farmland and feedlots, along with chemical traces left on food, even after washing (Edwards, 2003).

Although organic agriculture and organic products are generally seen as healthful and progressive, at least within certain demographics, the overall organic movement has also received a fair amount of negative criticism (Thompson, 1998). Some studies have shown that alternative-agriculture processes such as organic agriculture lacked support from some academics in American land-grant universities, with many faculty at those well-funded and influential colleges of agriculture promoting the conventional farming paradigm as both economically and technologically superior over alternative practices (Beus & Dunlap, 1992). However, in recent years, institutional support for organic
farming has appeared (Hozyash, 2010) in the form of dedicated organic-oriented land-
grant degree programs and course concentrations such as Washington State University’s
Organic Farming Systems and Nutrient Research program, established in 2002, and
Pennsylvania State University’s “Agroecology” undergraduate degree program.
Additionally, institutional support in favor of organic farmers has improved with better
“extension” programs from land-grant universities without dedicated organic-farming
degree programs (Agunga & Igodan, 2007).

The ability of organic farming alone to provide a sufficient amount of food for the
world’s people is greatly debated. It is without question that the world’s food supply,
especially in less-developed nations, is under stress. That is usually attributable to
military and governmental corruption in those nations and regions (Tangri & Mwenda,
2003). Many agricultural experts and academics are critical of opposition to intense
industrial agriculture, which they argue provides greater amounts of food than organic
agriculture ever could and is the only way to ensure the world has an adequate food
supply (Adam, 2007).

The organic movement is far-removed from its incipient “grow your own” roots
set down by J.I. Rodale and Sir Albert Howard; with organic food and products now a
multibillion-dollar industry, it, too, has become industrialized and commercialized to
satisfy the consumer demand for organic goods while exploiting the population’s general
ignorance about how food is actually produced. Organic agriculture has invited
sometimes contentious discourse about whether conventional agriculture and chemical
residues are harmful to humans and the environment. Advocates of conventional
agriculture argue that food produced using pesticides, herbicides, genetically modified
seeds, etc., is hardly more dangerous to one’s health than food produced organically with naturally occurring pathogens and damage from insect pests, while critics claim that consumer fears about chemically produced food is merely indicative of the misperception of the inherent risks of such food — and also representative of cognitive dissonance over the relatively small risks of conventionally grown food (Holden, Trewavas & Abel, 2003; Lane & Bruhn, 1992; Environmental Working Group, 1999).

Samuel Fromartz, a freelance reporter and author, has leveled criticisms against the entire food industry in a series of essays and articles, as well as his book *Organic Inc.* (2006). Fromartz argues that consumer demand for organic food, and the companies and farmers that satisfy that demand, have all contributed to a bifurcation in certain organic markets, such as that for fresh fruit and vegetables: on one end are producers such as Earthbound Farm, which runs a massive business growing produce on thousands of acres, including the organically grown spinach that was subject to a nationwide recall in 2006 due to contamination from E. coli (Fromartz, 2006). On the other end are smaller operations, with farms of 500 acres or less (often much less) that deal more in direct sales to consumers or smaller markets; such growers are the mainstay of local farmers markets and usually service grocers and restaurants that prefer to offer locally grown food. Those producers in the middle, unable to compete effectively in the wholesale market and too big to depend on direct sales to consumers, are left out of the marketplace. That, Fromartz argues, is a mirror image of the rest of the modern agricultural paradigm — the only real difference between organic and conventional agribusiness is the adherence to organic standards in the initial production of raw foods; the processing, packaging, distribution, and marketing practices are essentially identical. Furthermore, that is also representative
of how modern industrial organic agriculture has deviated considerably from the organic models proposed by such early proponents of organic agriculture as Howard and Rodale (Fromartz, 2006).

Additionally, Fromartz notes the difficulties faced by small-scale organic farmers, who must adhere to a set of inflexible standards if they want their products to be labeled “organic” in accordance with government regulations. In an article for The New York Times, Fromartz described how some farmers have opted out of organic certification for their crops due to the labyrinthine rules that some critics argue go against the very spirit and essence of organic farming (Fromartz, 2002). The reasons given by farmers for giving up on organic certification (but not organic practices) include extraneous paperwork, overly restrictive composting guidelines, and competition from farmers overseas in countries such as China, which do not have to adhere to such standards (Fromartz, 2002).

If the demand for organic goods is increasing, how then have the suppliers of those goods—the farmers—reacted to that demand? Living in mostly rural America, farmers are removed from the weight and influence of urban life, but by no means are they disconnected from innovation, information, and public opinion (Kremen, Green & Hanson, 2004). Doubtless, farmers have interacted firsthand with customers at weekly farmers market who have questions about production methods and pesticide use. The number and popularity of farmers markets have grown in recent years, with increasing numbers of farmers at such markets offering both certified organic and “natural” (that is, allegedly uncertified organic) goods for sale (Belli, 2007). Additionally, community-supported agriculture programs, also known as CSAs, have given urban dwellers a
greater stake in the efforts of farmers to grow quality food. CSAs allow consumers to invest in, or "subscribe to," a local farm’s production, and are then given a box or two of fresh, organic produce every week or so (Severson, 2007). Because only food that is in season is included in the weekly box from a CSA, customers get to experience the cyclical nature of the seasons and harvests, an experience that has been nullified by the global food-shipping network, which requires an inordinate amount of energy for transportation and refrigeration (Pollan, 2008). The process of providing people in cooler climates with fresh tomatoes and strawberries, organic or not, in the middle of winter takes a fair amount of logistical juggling, something that CSAs avoid. In the spring, the CSA box may contain fresh greens and early crops such as peas and beets; in summer, the CSA box may contain ripe tomatoes, fresh peppers, and a multitude of vegetables; in the winter, subscribers get mostly root vegetables or winter squash that can be easily stored for months in cool basements or root cellars. The result is that CSA farmers receive a steady flow of income from having a base of committed customers, giving them a degree of financial stability. Furthermore, losses from bad weather, pest infestations, etc., are shared by the CSA subscribers, which limits the overall risk to the farmer (Demuth, 1993). However, some CSA farmers purchase off-site produce to make up for major shortfalls of popular crops, which runs contrary to the very notion of the community investing in a particular farmer’s output and sharing the risks inherent to agriculture (DeLind, 2003).

On the opposite end of the organic spectrum are large companies that specialize in selling organic foods. Chief among them is Whole Foods. With more than 280 stores in early 2010 (some of them 80,000 square-feet in size) and about 51,000 employees, Whole
Foods has become the world’s largest retailer of organic products (Whole Foods, 2010). Whole Foods stores, by virtue of their size and numbers, are defining and shaping the way that most consumers purchase organic goods. Before the appearance of Whole Foods, organic food was most often only available at farmers markets, food co-ops, or other specialty retailers. Now, organic food is accessible and reasonably affordable in most supermarkets, owing in no small part to Whole Foods’ dominance in the marketplace. That company, however, has weathered a certain amount of criticism over its business practices, with organic farmers complaining about the difficulties faced in selling to the company, and consumers complaining about the quality and freshness of some of the goods, especially produce, as well as the high prices at the stores which have led to the alternate name "Whole Paycheck" from some quarters (Burros, 2007; Nocera, 2006). The success that Whole Foods has had in selling organic food has inspired investment in "natural foods" sections of mass retailers such as Wal-Mart, and by their sheer ubiquity, such stores and natural-food sections have made organic foods common in homes nationwide (McTaggart, 2008).

In the middle between massive global retailers and highly localized, independent CSAs and farmers markets are food cooperatives, which serve to extend bulk purchasing power of food products to members, who all have a stake in the business (Cooperative Grocer, 2008). Cooperatives often deal mostly in organic and natural foods, with some cooperatives earning organic retailer certification from the USDA (Anderson, 2002). Those businesses also maintain intimate relationships with individual farmers and often facilitate CSA partnership programs by acting as distribution and sales locations for CSAs (Mulcahy, 2007; Tobin, 2007).
In light of that evidence, there is little doubt that the organic-food movement has entered the mainstream public consciousness over the past few decades, but less is known about how that movement was explained and interpreted by farmers themselves. Popular polemics such as those by Pollan, Fromartz, and others may have an influence on the general public, but they may not have as much influence on farmers’ perceptions of the organic-food movement. One way to examine farmers’ perceptions is to analyze the way the agricultural press covered the "organic farming" movement over time. The role of the farm press in rural/farm culture may be much more influential on food producers, which is why this study will focus on coverage of the organic-food movement in the farm press rather than in the popular press.

**The Farm Press and Organic Farming**

The farm press in America is an important information source for many farmers, who rely on farm-focused newspapers and magazines for news and information about their profession and the farming lifestyle. Those publications typically include articles about agricultural research, government regulations and programs, new farming techniques, listings of crop and livestock prices at farm auctions and commodity exchanges, and the like. Those magazines also include lifestyle content, including recipes, community news, whimsical essays on farm living, etc., as well as many advertisements for farm-related products and services (Walter, 2006; Stuhlfaut, 2005). Farm newspapers tied to specific geographic regions also tend to have large classified advertising sections for the individual exchange of equipment, livestock, crops, and supplies.
Many agricultural publications, particularly farming magazines, are funded in large part by revenue from advertisements for agricultural chemicals, heavy machinery, and large agricultural buildings and structures. Such ads typically seem to offer copy that touts each product’s ability to increase farm efficiency and yields, often placed in tandem with an image of a “model” farmer that embodies the traditional agrarian ideal.\(^1\) (Please see Appendix D for examples of farm magazine advertisements illustrating that relationship.) It has even been argued that the farm press contributes to the promotion of agricultural industrialization and the agendas of corporate advertisers with how it depicts farmers (Walter, 2006). Considering that consolidation within the entire farming industry has led to fewer sources of income for those agricultural magazines, the power that those advertisers wield over the editors and publishers of farm publications is likely high (Walter, 2006). With fewer sources of advertising income, a magazine editor may be tempted to adopt an editorial stance in line with the interests of the manufacturers of conventional agricultural products (that is, their advertisers). That kind of relationship between advertising and editorial stance was found, for example, in a study of another industry-based press, that of automotive magazines (Randle, Rawlins & Parkin, 2003).

Whether such a relationship is appropriate or not is a matter for different debates; in this thesis, the evidence that such relationships exist is the primary issue, and one of the motivations for this study. Extending that train of thought, it might be reasonable to postulate that organic farming, by virtue of eschewing and even castigating the use of agricultural chemicals, would be less favorably portrayed in the pages of mainstream

\(^1\) This observation is from the author's own experience reading such publications, and would be an interesting focus of an additional research project. However, such an analysis is beyond the scope of this study.
agricultural magazines than conventional agriculture. Thinking about the origins of the modern organic movement as partly an extension of the counterculture movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and the conservative nature of most American farmers and farming communities, it would be reasonable to expect that coverage of organic and sustainable agricultural practices might have received limited coverage early in its incipient stage (Knoke & Henry, 1977). Furthermore, when organic farming practices were covered early on in the farm press, they might have received mostly negative attention in the form of backhanded compliments or outright disparaging comments from magazine staff. Certainly, present-day coverage of organic farming in the press tends to be positive in nature, but what about twenty years ago?

There are a number of inherent problems with organic agriculture that have been emphasized by critics of the movement over the past few decades. Some of those drawbacks are monetary: organic farming is generally seen as more expensive for farmers due to certification fees, government and certification audits. Moreover, the expense of converting farmland from conventional use to organic standards (which can take many years of letting fields lie fallow to ensure agri-chemicals are fully depleted), and higher production risks as well as fluctuations in crop prices also make organic farming an expensive proposition. Other costs include a potential lack of support/interest from local marketplaces, a lack of financial incentives to farm organically (such as grants and loans), or even derision and resultant isolation from one’s neighboring farmers (Rahayu, Smith & Russel, 2005). Prior to organic agriculture’s recent ascent into the mainstream, those costs may have been a regular theme of negative editorial treatment of organic agriculture in the farm press.
There are several hegemonic ideologies in conventional modern farm culture that also could be seen as hostile toward the organic movement. For example, it might be possible that the dominant opinion of the mainstream agricultural press is the promotion of farming practices that maximize yields and minimize production costs, often achieved by farming conventionally. As such, organic agriculture (in which yields are reduced and production costs are higher) might be compared against conventional-farming counterparts, rather than considered on its own merits. While many farmers do practice “split” agriculture, with certain parts of their farms designated organic and other parts farmed with conventional practices (with physical barriers and buffer zones between them), most farm operations early on in the 1980s were either one or the other (Leslie, 1988). It could be possible that, at least early in the modern organic-farming movement, the agricultural press likewise presented farming practices as an "either/or" situation, pitting the dominant approach (industrial farming) against the minority approach (organic farming), rather than presenting them as compatible, yet separate, ideologies.

The possibility of hegemonic bias against organic agriculture in the farm press could further be demonstrated by the fact that the agriculture industry has been increasingly consolidated, and according to a number of researchers, now exists as an oligopoly alongside the major agribusiness corporations. It is argued that in the grain, beef, and poultry markets specifically, an oligopolistic situation is perpetuated by only a relatively small number of corporations that in effect “squeeze” smaller independent producers out of their respective markets (Drabenstott, 1999; Stuhlfaut, 2005). The same can be said about the major manufacturers of farming equipment and supplies, who in recent decades have merged, sold-out, and outsourced themselves into market dominance
by virtue alone of their size. Consider the former Deutz-Allis Corporation, which renamed itself AGCO in 1990 and embarked on an acquisitions run, adding to its dossier many formerly competitive tractor and machinery manufacturers, including such brands as Allis Chalmers, Challenger, Massey Ferguson, and White (AGCO, 2008). Other examples of such leviathans in the farm-equipment business include Deere and Company — manufacturer of arguably the most recognized brand of farming equipment, John Deere — and CNH Global, which is majority-owned by Fiat Limited and owner of the New Holland and Case IH brand. That latter brand is itself an earlier consolidation of two of the historic giants in the farm-equipment industry, Case and International Harvester (CNH, 2008; Nelson, 1994). That consolidation not only affects the sales of new equipment, but also consolidates the lucrative side-business of selling replacement parts for older equipment made when the various brands were independent (many farmers continue to use equipment that is decades old; meanwhile, the restoration of antique tractors and equipment also is a popular hobby in rural America, further enhancing the market for replacement parts). Such massive, sprawling corporations dominate the marketplace through brand acquisition and aggressive consolidation, such that the above-named corporations and a few others in the farm-chemical, seed, fertilizer, and food-production industry — such as ADM, Cargill, Monsanto, Kraft, and Nestlé — capitalize on nearly all aspects of the food supply, from selling seed and feed to farmers to processing and marketing name-brand products for consumers.

The trend toward consolidation is hardly different in the farm press. Like most other agricultural industries, the larger agricultural publishing corporations have bought up smaller independent publications and closed down unprofitable magazines (Pawlick
2001; Banning & Evans, 2005). Magazine publishers, too, view the trend toward consolidation in the agricultural industry and publishing industry with concern (Banning & Evans, 2005). Interestingly enough, the actual number of farming periodicals has changed little over the past 40 years – it is instead consolidation within the ownership structures that have reduced diversity within the industry. Compared to the general press, in which multi-title companies publish a mere 13 to 14 percent of magazines, 117 out of 191 (or 61.2 percent) of farm magazines were owned by a multi-title company, according to a study on consolidation within the farm press (Stuhlfaut, 2005). The agricultural publishing industry at this writing is dominated by five publishers: Farm Journal Media, Farm Progress Group, Meredith Corporation, PriMedia, and Southern Progress Company. Together, those publishers in 2002 (the most recent ownership study available at this writing) controlled 63.16 percent of the agricultural-press market share (Stuhlfaut, 2005).

Two of those companies, Farm Journal Media and Meredith Corporation, publish such farm magazines as *Farm Journal* and *Successful Farming*, with total circulations of 420,454 and 440,045, respectively. A third, *Progressive Farmer*, is owned by the Southern Progress Corporation, (itself a division of Time-Warner), and has a total circulation that dominated the market in the past decade, at 651,142 in 2008 (Standard Rate and Data Service, 2008; Hoover’s, 2008). The pages of those three magazines, and in fact most agricultural magazines, are filled with news of the latest tools, machinery, cultivation methods, farmer profiles, and the like, but also content related to farm culture, such a country-cooking recipes or ruminations on the art of farming and the benefits of farm living (Stuhlfaut, 2005). As such, those three magazines could have tremendous influence not only on how farmers think about farming, but also on how they think about
their role in broader culture. A cursory examination of recent issues of those three magazines shows that *Farm Journal* features content tailored more for the business-minded farmer, while *Progressive Farmer* and *Successful Farming* also focus on the farming culture and lifestyle in addition to technical articles and industry news.

Those magazines have all had a long history of publishing: *Progressive Farmer* was first published in 1886, *Successful Farming* in 1902, and *Farm Journal* in 1877 (SRDS, 2008a). With that in mind, one might surmise that the magazines have retained a certain amount of respect and trust within their respective (and shared) audiences by virtue alone of their long-standing history and enduring popularity.

Similar too, are the smaller-circulation farming publications that are of either a state or regional focus. Unlike the high-circulating magazines read by a disparate crowd of farmers across the U.S. and beyond, those smaller “farm papers” generally contain information that is directly applicable to the farm communities of a particular region. Many of those are in the form of weekly newspapers, such as *Farm and Dairy* in Ohio and *Lancaster Farming* in Pennsylvania, which both cover not only their home states, but parts of neighboring states as well (*Lancaster Farming*, for example, is based in southeastern Pennsylvania and covers nearly all of Pennsylvania as well as Maryland, Delaware, and parts of New Jersey and New York). The justification for regional farm newspapers is obvious: A Midwestern farmer likely raises corn, hogs, or soybeans, while his or her counterpart in a New England state is more likely to produce greenhouse goods and specialty dairy commodities, whereas farmers in California may grow fresh fruits and vegetables year-round (USDA, 2008a; USDA, 2008b). However, it is not unreasonable to imagine that many of the larger issues facing the industry, such as federal agriculture
policies, commodity pricing, fuel prices, etc., are important to all farmers, regardless of geography. One need only glance at the covers and the editorial content of region-centric farm publications to see anecdotal evidence of that fact. It is important to note that some of the national farming magazines also tailor their content according to the types of crops grown in their primary circulation areas (that is, the regions where the majority of their subscribers work), or they may include regionalized editions as Farm Journal does (SRDS, 2008b). According to a recent media kit (Progressive Farmer, 2011), Progressive Farmer concentrates its focus on farmers in the south and Midwest, but by virtue of its size, it is likely to be read by farmers outside of those geographical areas who may find some of its content about farm culture and machinery, among other topics, relevant to their interests. Progressive Farmer’s readership is 50 years old, mostly male (80 percent), and mostly farms commodities such as corn, soybeans, wheat, and beef (Progressive Farmer, 2011).

Successful Farming’s demographics are nearly the same – the average age of its audience is 57, is a male (57 percent), and owns a farm averaging 647 acres. 92 percent of its readers grow corn, 89 percent grow soybeans, and 96 percent raise cattle (Successful Farming, 2011). Farm Journal’s audience, too, is a commodities-based audience: with a 2011 circulation of 380,475, 266,337 of those readers grow corn and 222,211 grow soybeans, and 170,450 raise beef (Farm Journal, 2011).

In summary, the literature regarding the coverage of the organic-farming movement by the U.S. farm press leads to several guiding arguments for the present study. First, the organic food movement has a long history, but only in the past decade has it gained widespread acceptance and popularity in the United States. Second, there
are strong financial and cultural connections between the corporations that profit from conventional agriculture and the media targeted at American farmers and farm communities. Third, there has been increased consolidation of those farm-focused publications into a handful of publishing corporations, paralleling the trends toward consolidation in agriculture and agriculture-related businesses. The connections between those three conclusions have not been adequately studied by mass communication researchers and it is the goal of this thesis to study those connections by analyzing the coverage of the “organic farming” movement by the three dominant farm publications in the U.S. over time. Specifically, the literature has guided the formation of research questions for this study.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This study considers the possible agenda-setting role of the farm press as demonstrated by how they frame coverage. “Framing” in this study is considered in terms of frequencies, in the tradition of quantitative content analysis, but also in terms of likely interpretations of the content by the intended audience, which here is accomplished via qualitative textual analysis guided by hegemony theory. This section provides an overview of agenda-setting, framing, and hegemony in the literature, and how those different approaches to understanding media influences were synthesized in the present study.

Agenda Setting and Framing in the Agricultural Press

The theory of agenda-setting in mass communication describes the process by which the media homes in on certain subject matters and portrayals of those subject matters (the “agenda”) and in turn suggest what is “most important” to the public (McLeod, Kosicki & McLeod, 2002). Largely attributed to the researchers McCombs and Shaw (1972), who distilled the theory out of their research into issue salience in the 1968 U.S. presidential election, the concept of “agenda-setting” explains how media develop and/or use communicative schema of the news and issues, which in turn influence public attitudes about what news and issues are most important (McLeod, Kosicki & McLeod, 2002; Severin & Tankard, 2001; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). McCombs and Shaw found there to be a strong correlation between “the major item emphasis on the main campaign issues carried by the media and voters’ independent judgments of what were the important issues” (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 180). Other data suggested strong positive
correlations between the “emphasis placed on different campaign issues by the media […] and the judgments of voters as to the salience and importance of various campaign topics” (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 181).

As a news operation is an imperfect organization making an attempt to “sum up” news and information for its audience, sometimes individual points of view and biases of each news organization (or even individual journalists within those organizations) can show through coverage: the authors explained, “In short, the political world is reproduced imperfectly by individual news media. Yet the evidence in this study that voters share the media’s composite definition of what is important strongly suggests an agenda-setting function of the mass media” (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 184). Furthermore, “The media are the major primary sources of national political information; for most, mass media provide the best – and only – easily available approximation of ever-changing political realities” (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 185).

A 1973 study by Funkhouser noted that there are several mechanisms that all work in concert to contribute to the agenda-setting process and the attention that a particular issue receives in the media. Those mechanisms include the “adaptation of the media to the stream of events,” “overreporting of significant but unusual events,” “selective reporting of the newsworthy aspects of otherwise nonnewsworthy situations,” “pseudoevents, or the manufacturing of newsworthy events,” and “even summaries, or situations that portray nonnewsworthy events in a newsworthy way” (Funkhouser, 1973, pp. 533-538). This list echoes some of the aspects of the findings of the McCombs and Shaw study, further asserting the agenda-setting process as a possible explanation of the interactions between the media and the audience.
Brewer and McCombs (1996) studied how one newspaper portrayed stories about issues related to children, such as healthcare and education, as examples of the agenda-setting potential of a single media outlet. Over the course of a year, the newspaper devoted significant amounts of coverage in the form of major features and stories to those issues, and the scholars suggested that perhaps the amount of coverage was related to an increase of funding for youth programs in the community. The authors also noted that the extended coverage of issues relating to children did not lead to any fatigue on the part of the readers, a distinct possibility when a media outlet emphasizes a certain story theme.

However, the agenda-setting process can also be limited by adherence to the same values and routines that also bolster it, especially when considering the public’s typical uses of the media: for prestige, information about the world, information about the local community, etc. That is especially true in cases of “oversaturation” — when the media “pushes” a certain agenda topic so much that public interest starts to diminish from a constant day-in-and-day-out bombardment of messages. A study by Protess, Leff, Brooks, and Gordon (1985) that studied public responses to news stories about rape and sex crimes illustrated that public policy agendas started to shift in response to newspaper and television reports about increases in incidences of sex crimes in Chicago, “The rape series showed no comparable agenda-setting effect on respondents exposed to the newspaper articles” (Protess, Leff, Brooks & Gordon, 1985, p. 30). One of the more interesting insights to come from that study, in regard to the limits of the “normal” agenda-setting process, was the idea that “the underlying premise that the news media not only can influence audiences and policy making, but can be significantly affected by them as well” (Protess, Leff, Brooks & Gordon, 1985, p. 33). Interestingly enough, the
authors also referenced the negative corollary effect described in Fishman’s 1980 study of a “media crime wave” that found despite an increase of crime stories in local media outlets, there was actually a decrease in the rate of reported crimes over the same period (Fishman, 1980).

Ideally, the media would accurately represent the state of the world, but in pushing agendas such as the “If it bleeds, it leads” maxim, news media can contribute to public misperceptions and potentially to misappropriation of public resources, such as spending too much or too little on police or security (Fishman, 1978). Additionally, competing media organizations sometimes reinforce one another’s agendas by echoing the same headlines and content themes found in the work of their competitors or other media outlets — and establishes a socialized consistency within media organizations regarding news judgment.

Part of the general agenda-setting model is the “second-level” model that builds on McCombs and Shaw’s initial research into agenda-setting, but deepens and extends the degree to which the individual attributes, assets, and deficiencies of a certain agenda factor in the whole schema (Severin & Tankard, 2001). As an example: in a presidential election, a first-level of an agenda of issues would include such broad topics as foreign policy, law and order, civil rights, and economics. At the second-level, under the main issue of economics would be such agenda attributes (and more salient voter concerns) as income tax reform, balancing the budget, reducing the national debt, and interest rates (Severin & Tankard, 2001, p. 236).

The second-level of agenda setting can also include “presentation variables“ that are those variables that describe how a particular issue is presented by the media to an
audience. In stories about crime, for example, such variables might include the reader’s “sense of social distance” to the subject(s) of the story, the way the story is physically presented on the page (headlines, pull quotes, graphics, or other visuals), the site of the crime in relation to the circulation area of the newspaper, and so on (Ghanem & Evatt, 1995).

Further research suggests that the second-level of agenda setting is similar to the concept of media framing. Ghanem (1997) named four parameters of framing that are interchangeable with second-level agenda setting:

1. The topic of the news item (what is included in the frame)
2. Presentation (size and placement)
3. Cognitive attributes (details of what is included in the frame)
4. Affective attributes (tone of the picture)

According to the characteristics of the agenda-setting process, news media can either prompt the public to recognize and address serious social issues or allow some issues to go by unnoticed. A public issue can be made to seem more or less newsworthy by the way that particular topic is covered in the media (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In regard to this study, agenda-setting theory would suggest that the more the farm press covered the organic-farming movement, whether with positive, negative, or neutral presentation, the more likely it would be for conventional farmers to consider the importance (or lack thereof) of that movement. This thesis does not assess resultant public opinion in the true agenda-setting tradition, but rather focuses on likely (rather than actual) agenda-setting influences of agricultural magazines on farmers’ perceptions of organic farming.
The amount of coverage alone only tells part of the story — the manner and tone of that coverage, or how it is “framed,” can also influence attitudes toward public issues. As a model of communication ancillary to agenda-setting, framing is the process a communicator such as a journalist can use to influence audience choices and opinions with intentional or unintentional framing. Framing is rooted in the idea that an audience, in trying to understand the world around it, can be swayed by the way an issue is characterized and portrayed through the use of interpretative schemas or constructs (Scheufele & Tewskbury, 2007). The way a sentence is worded, the types and number of sources used in an article, the images that accompany a magazine article or television broadcast, etc., all can contribute to the framing phenomena, and all have the potential to affect how people in an audience perceive a situation. Those processes sometimes exhibit the biases of the reporter or the news-making organization for which the reporter works; other times it can be reflective of general public sentiment (Scheufele, 2000). Framing also operates on both macro- and micro-levels to allow media professionals to identify information most relevant to the needs/wants of their audiences, and to also package disparate packages of information (such as that from a news event such as a natural disaster, with potentially hundreds or thousands of possible sources of information), and to distill it all down into something digestible for that audience (Scheufele, 1999; Gamson, 1989).

As a result, the framing effect can be looked at as both an independent and dependent variable in how information is transmitted from the media to the audience, and vice-versa (Scheufele, 1999). Numerous studies of the presence of organizational and individual frames in the news media have found that a reciprocal effect between the two
bodies exists in all manner of permutations (Scheufele, 1999, pp. 109-114). The concept of framing also has entered the public lexicon, and not just the academic lexicon. For example, a 2005 article in the New York Times Magazine examined the role that issue framing had on the 2004 U.S. presidential election, arguing “Exactly what it means to ‘frame’ issues seems to depend on which Democrat you are talking to, but everyone agrees that it has to do with choosing the language to define a debate and, more important, with fitting individual issues into the contexts of broader story lines” (Bai, 2005).

Whatever the definition, the focus on framing as a way of altering public opinion, while also reflecting public opinion, is a valid one well worth studying. Possible methods of further analyzing the framing process include qualitative textual analysis, which is the process by which a text is closely examined for certain content themes and subject portrayals—that is, to use informed interpretation, rather than coding of frequencies, to predict likely interpretations of media frames by the intended audience. As indicated, public opinion is mutable and research has shown that to be generally true. Perhaps a more interesting question may be what exact messages and themes is the audience seeing?

**Culture, Hegemony, and Ideology**

To be sufficiently rigorous for scholarly study, textual analysis should be guided by one or more theoretical frameworks (McKee, 2003). This study will use the theoretical models generally referred to as “hegemony theory,” as applied in the cultural-studies tradition of media analysis (e.g., Hall, 1980). In order to gain a better understanding of relevant intertextual cues in a textual analysis and those texts’ cultural and ideological
relevance, it is important to consider the relationships between dominating and subordinate cultures. In the discipline of cultural studies, the idea that there are underlying semiotic cues that refer directly and subconsciously to cultural practices and constructs of a ruling and hegemonic class is one that has a long history, with the most noted early works along those lines coming from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the mid-1800s. Their essay “The Ruling Class and the Ruling Ideas” suggested that the “ruling class” (taken to be in that essay aristocrats and the bourgeoisie) perpetuated a hierarchy and base of power by predicing its very existence upon the philosophy of its “ruling ideas” (which can perhaps be interpreted to be institutional policies, laws, norms, and other societal structures). Marx and Engels argued that with the dismissal of the ruling class, the ruling ideas would so go with them and “general interests” would prevail (Marx & Engels, 1845-1846, pp. 39-42). As a modern example, one thinks of the cultural dominance of modern monopolies and far-reaching globalized corporations such as Microsoft and that company’s decision to bundle Internet Explorer with every copy of Windows, which inspired the wrath and derision of technology bloggers and led to anti-trust investigations by the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (United States Department of Justice, 1998).

This general idea of corporate branding and hegemony is a critical part of the work by Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno presented in their essay, “The Culture Industry” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944). In that essay, the authors discussed how cultural symbols and ideas were generated and dispersed through the then-developing media outlets, such as film and music that by the mid-twentieth century were well on their way to becoming commonplace and accessible to most people. The authors pointed
out that subcultures and countercultures belong to the very same cultures that they work against, “Once registered as diverging from the culture industry, they (resisting cultural groups) belong to it as the land reformer does to capitalism” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944, pp. 48-49).

Raymond Williams continued that discussion of culture in regard to hegemonic structures in “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory” (1980). As the title suggests, the essay is rooted in the work of Marx and Engels mentioned earlier. Williams’ central thesis is that culture incorporates a “determining base” that includes basic production, and is contributory to the productivity of real life, instead of the “superstructure” that is built on the basic sense of production (Williams, 1980, pp. 132-133). Williams discusses the allegory of the piano-maker and the pianist. The piano-maker is seen as contributing to the base structure through labor, but the pianist does not, because the pianist does not produce anything material. However, that argument posited that the pianist by virtue of his craft also contributes to the base society by his contribution of playing of the piano and creating music, not just its construction (1980, 133). Thinking of that, the base in the modern era can refer to industry — the culmination of production. Under the umbrella of the base and superstructure is the idea of “residual” and “emergent” cultural forms. In that sense, a residual culture is a vestigial culture, an example being the pastoral tradition in Great Britain, which is treasured and valued, even though the dominant cultural paradigm in Great Britain is reasonably urban and modern. In that case, the residual culture feels pressure from the dominant culture. Emergent cultures are those that are continually in development, with new experiences, protocols, and values. A possible example could be that of the subculture of punk rock that itself
was an offshoot of the mod and skinhead underground movements of Great Britain. Greil Marcus (1989) noted that punk was “a load of old ideas sensationalized into new feelings almost instantly turned into new clichés, but set forth with such momentum that the whole blew up its equations every day. For every fake novelty there was a real one” (Marcus, 1989, p. 77). That is, punk rock railed against popular culture, but widespread popular interest in punk rock subsumed it into the culture it opposed. Similar arguments could be made about many other counter-cultural movements throughout history.

Dick Hebdige (1979) summed up many of the above points in his discussion of culture, ideology and hegemony, starting by dissecting the definition of culture and the interpretations of culture by public intellectuals and writers such as T.S. Eliot, Raymond Williams (mentioned earlier) and Richard Hoggart. On the study of culture, or “cultural studies,” Hebdige referenced Hoggart, “Literary critical analysis can be applied to certain social phenomena other than "academically respectable’ literature (for example, the popular arts, mass communications) so as to illuminate their meanings for individuals and society” (Hebdige, 1979, p. 146). By accepting that idea, the process of analyzing a text for hidden/overt meanings becomes a task worth pursuing.

Hebdige’s discussions on hegemony echoed some of the sentiments of Marx and Engels in that hegemonic structures are a perpetuation of the dominating societal and political structures and through a process that seems natural, contributes to a marginalization of those groups out of the mainstream and the creation of a “total social authority” (Hebdige, 1979, p. 150). Hegemony in capitalistic business, as in most political structures, is demonstrated by the perpetuation of the major sub and super-structures in a way of those who are in power to control and hold on to power. It is those
last few points that stick with regard to the informing of the textual analysis portion of this research thesis.

The social-scientific concept of agenda setting and the cultural-studies considerations of hegemony may come from two divergent paradigms, but together they provide a firm, interdisciplinary grounding for discussions of framing as both a journalistic practice and a factor in meaning-making by audiences/individuals. Considering all those theoretical frameworks together and applying them to the review of previous research on the organic-farming movement and research on the farm press lead to the construction of research questions for this thesis.
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions for this project draw from the literature and the theoretical overviews to make queries as to the extent organic farming has been covered in the farm press, how it has been portrayed during two decades, and the frames that are evident regarding the organic-farming movement. A cultural-studies approach to analyzing the findings provides context by which reasonable arguments can be made as to how audiences of the publications in question may have constructed meaning and opinions about organic farming over that 20-year span, and as such, may have resulted in agenda-setting influences on professional farmers in America.

The research questions are:

RQ1: What changes, if any, have there been in the amount of content about organic agriculture published in *Farm Journal, Successful Farming,* and *Progressive Farmer* from 1985 to 2005?

RQ2: In what manner have *Farm Journal, Successful Farming,* and *Progressive Farmer* compared or contrasted organic farming practices to conventional farming practices?

RQ3: What dominant themes appeared in those texts with regard to the portrayal of farmers’ justifications or reasons for farming organically?

RQ4: What thematic changes, if any, are evident in the texts over time regarding the organic farming movement?

Those questions encouraged the author to adopt a mixed-methods approach to this study, involving quantitative content analysis to assess quantity and frequency of
coverage and qualitative textual analysis to identify frames and to consider potential interpretations of those messages by the intended audience.
CHAPTER 5: METHODS

Overview

This author gathered and analyzed data from the agricultural press’ coverage of organic agriculture first by quantitatively examining how frequently *Farm Journal*, *Successful Farming*, and *Progressive Farmer* mentioned that topic over time and by coding for terminology that framed coverage of organic agriculture. Articles about “sustainable” agricultural practices were included within the scope of the study as well, because articles about organic agriculture tend to use the term “sustainable agriculture” as a synonym for the organic agriculture. After the quantitative analysis, a qualitative analysis of selected articles from the sample was performed to further examine the rhetoric used to portray organic farming over time. Articles or advertisements about agrichemicals and conventional farming techniques were not included.

The three farm magazines identified in the literature review – *Farm Journal*, *Successful Farming*, and *Progressive Farmer* – were selected because they are three of the largest-circulating farm magazines in the U.S. and thus likely to have the greatest agenda-setting and framing influence on the American farming sector as a whole. Other farm-related publications may have circulation numbers higher than the three magazines selected here for study, but they are either regional or state-centric publications or they are the publications of professional organizations and not commercial magazines (i.e., *FFA New Horizons*, which is a publication of the National FFA Organization, until 1988 known as the Future Farmers of America).

The time frame for the study was from 1985 through 2005. The purpose of that specific period was to ascertain recent trends across two decades of coverage broken-up
into reasonable increments (five to six years each). The sample began in 1985, a year that
was the mid-point of the decade in which organic agriculture first began to gain
mainstream attention in the United States, and therefore, was likely to be mentioned at
least occasionally in mainstream farm publications. It ends in 2005, by which time
consumer demand for organic goods had become relatively established (by that time,
organic-foods retailers Whole Foods Markets and Trader Joe’s had expanded to become
national chains, and most other grocery store chains, including the nation’s leading
grocery retailers—Wal-Mart and Kroger—had organic food sections in many of their
locations).

What follows is an outline of how each stage of the study was conducted, starting
with the method for quantitative content analysis followed with an outline for the less-
structured qualitative textual analysis.

**Quantitative Method: Sampling and Content Analysis**

A systematic random sample of issues of each of the three magazines was drawn
from four periods between 1985 and 2005, using the “constructed year” method.
Population sampling and sample size were based on a study by Lacy, Riffe and Randle
(1998) who argued that a constructed year of 12 magazine issues from over a five-year
period yields a superior degree of efficiency of findings than a random sample across the
entire time-period to be studied. By following that protocol for this study, the total
population of about total 900 magazine issues across four periods, with each of the three
magazine titles contributing about 12 issues per period (for a total number of issues of
144), led to a total pool of data that was manageable and still statistically significant.
Despite variable publishing schedules for each publication over time, the constructed
years of all three magazines consisted of a standard constructed year of 12 issues (one per “month”), which included special edition and seasonal issues. Random assignment was accomplished using a computer-generated numbering system.

Sampling was particularly challenging for a number of reasons. First, because farming is an industry that is very much tied to seasonal changes, an attempt had to be made to ensure that each of the four seasons were more or less equally represented. Furthermore, the three magazines’ publishing schedules changed many times over the course of the time frame studied and also within each year itself. For example, in some years, Successful Farming and Farm Journal published bi-weekly early in the year (during planting season), then moved to a monthly publishing cycle for the summer. Progressive Farmer maintained a regular monthly publication cycle through the spring, then consolidated its June-through-August issues into a single summer issue. That publishing schedule lasted only for a few years, at which point the magazine went back to publishing monthly. Because of those inconsistencies in publication schedules, not all months in the constructed year are represented by issues published on those particular months. If the random sampling did not generate an exact match for the month needed, the closest issue to the month needed was chosen from the results of the random sampling. If the random numbers selected a particular month for any given year twice, the next in the list of random numbers was used to select the next issue. For example, for the 1985-1989 time frame of Farm Journal, three issues were chosen per year using a set of randomly generated numbers from 1 to 12 corresponding to each regular calendar month (“1” for January, “2” for February, and so on). Bi-weekly issues such as the “Mid-February” issue were assigned the number “3” as that issue would have been the third
issue for that year. If the random selection were to choose both May issues, the next issue
(the first issue of June) was selected instead. Special and supplementary issues of the
magazines were included in the study as well. That was to ensure consistency in the
results and allow for a closer comparison between all three magazines. Overall, the
author put great care into ensuring that the constructed years were as consistent as
possible given the above-outlined challenges.

The editorial content of each selected issue was closely scrutinized for any
mentions of organic and/or sustainable agriculture, including articles about organic
farming practices, profiles of organic farmers, organic-centric companies and farms, and
so on. Only articles that specifically mentioned organic agriculture, sustainable
agriculture, or for stories about meat producers, “natural” meat, in the first five
paragraphs of the article, or in the title, headline, captions, pull-quotes, or display text,
were included in the study. To assess the amount of coverage over time (as asked by
RQ1), only articles that adhered to those criteria were counted. The coding sheet, along
with a description of how each variable was coded, is included in the Appendix. For RQ2
through RQ4, articles were coded for photographs, length, and other information
necessary to complete a thorough textual analysis. Other data from organic farming
articles such as photographs, if present, would be included to help provide an accurate
reference point of information. The emphasis of the quantitative aspect of the analysis is
on the frequency of organic farming articles.
Qualitative Method: Textual Analysis

The second stage of data-gathering was guided by the techniques and considerations outlined in McKee’s *Textual Analysis* (2006, pp. 92-101). The remaining three research questions guided the textual analysis of articles with the intent of identifying common themes across the texts selected for an analyzed for RQ1. That part of the analysis was relatively open-ended in the tradition of cultural/critical textual analysis, with the end goal to discover and categorize possible themes across the texts.

This part of the study adopted a post-structural approach toward the material, which McKee notes is the idea that a particular culture looks at the world differently than another, and in a way, experiences reality differently (McKee, 2006, pp. 9-13). That is not to say that the rural farmers who make up most of the audience of the magazines have a totally different point of reference than, say, a city-dwelling graduate student, but rather their experiences and needs are distinct enough to demonstrate significant cultural differences, and those distinctions need to be considered when analyzing texts for likely interpretations. McKee notes that the way a person makes sense of the world, and understanding how that person’s sense-making practices work, is necessary to understanding his or her needs. By interpreting texts in that manner, one can come to a greater understanding of the motivations behind an individual person’s actions and beliefs (McKee, 2006, pp. 15-26).

Textual analysis can complement traditional quantitative content analysis procedures because, according to McKee, contextual clues may get lost when relying strictly on frequencies identified by content analysis — the data resulting from a content analysis may be far removed from how that text may be interpreted in normal sense-
making practices. McKee notes (2006, pp. 128-129), however, that textual analysis is itself sometimes overshadowed by the statistical heft and replicability of a content analysis study. Neither procedure alone results in a whole, complete analysis of media messages, McKee argues, but when used in tandem, the methods can achieve a greater depth of understanding. McKee notes the importance of both macroanalysis and microanalysis when deciphering the details in any particular text, but a certain amount of control is needed, lest the textual analysis become unwieldy, massive, or ineffectual: “All texts have some elements that are more important than others; and not all of the elements you analyze might bear any relation to questions that you are trying to answer” (McKee, 2006, p. 75). Thinking of that advice, it is worth explaining that only the text and information relevant to the topic at hand was included in the analysis.

In this study, articles were analyzed for the presence of recurring rhetorical themes that might fit into one of three broad categories: dominant hegemonic viewpoints, viewpoints that were oppositional to the dominant hegemonic perspective, and themes that existed in between (Hall, 1980). Hall referred to that middle ground as the “negotiated” approach (Hall, 1980). The negotiated approach posits that decoding messages and themes requires one to acknowledge elements from the hegemonic world such as its definitions and significations. However, the negotiated approach also makes its own rules and can accept local exceptions to the hegemony according to the situation (Hall, 1980, p. 172). It is adaptive and able to view different viewpoints from each respective side with the same accorded weight. In this study, the dominant hegemonic viewpoint was considered to be supportive or accepting of conventional, chemical-based, large-scale agriculture, and most likely dismissive or negative toward the fringe
movement of organic agriculture. Viewpoints that are critical of conventional agriculture in favor of organic/sustainable farming methods were viewed as “oppositional” of the hegemonic viewpoint. Viewpoints that expressed both benefits and drawbacks to conventional agriculture and organic agriculture in a more-or-less neutral or balanced manner were considered “negotiated.” With that in mind, the analysis looked for more nuanced rhetorical themes that fit into the three approaches to interpreting media messages outlined by Hall (Hall, 1980, pp. 170-173).

That process is similar to the process in a textual analysis of occupational and gender roles in Seventeen Magazine, in which the author found women’s roles were presented more in terms of the entertainment/fashion industry and the sexual power structures that dominate those industries (Massoni, 2004). Massoni also showed that some content was concerned with the male hegemony in the professional world, in the form of images and representations of men as both typical workers and as the holders of power, represented by men in high-powered roles such as CEOs and lawyers. Similar to the Massoni study is one by Taylor (2005), who analyzed texts in three “lads” magazines, looking at how those magazines, whose audiences are mostly young men, portray sexual relationships and gender. The discussion focused mostly on explaining the numerical data with examples from the magazines, which included FHM, Maxim, and Stuff (Taylor, 2005).

Those authors’ examinations of stereotypes, gender roles, and the role that power structures, both sexual and corporate, have on gender representations in the media are interesting, but for the purposes of this study, it is those authors’ methods that informed this research project. Understandably, there are different categories of textual themes
found in the farming magazines under review here, but the idea that most of the articles can be divided and sorted according to theme/frame is one that played an important part in this study.
CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS

Research Question 1

The amount of coverage of organic and sustainable agriculture in the three farming magazines varied widely from one magazine to another, and coverage was most often lumped around certain time periods with long stretches in between without any stories about organic agriculture. Stories about organic and sustainable agriculture represented a minimum of pages in nearly all issues of all magazines drawn for the sample. With few exceptions, most magazine issues contained one or two content pieces about organic agriculture; occasionally a magazine featuring a multitude of stories about organic practices was published, but that occurred only seven times across all of the magazines.²

Table 1. Number of Content Pieces About Organic Agriculture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content by Period</th>
<th>Farm Journal</th>
<th>Progressive Farmer</th>
<th>Successful Farming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1985-1989</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-1994</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995-1999</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2005³</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Content</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

² An arbitrary threshold of five content pieces about organic and sustainable agriculture to determine whether a magazine contained a large amount of coverage of organic agriculture or a little.
³ The author acknowledges the issue of the last time period containing an extra year, which was due to an oversight in the development of this study.
As is shown in Table 1, the number of content pieces (articles, photos, illustrations) specifically pertaining to organic and sustainable agriculture was highly variable for both *Farm Journal* and *Successful Farming*. Both those magazines encountered a lull in coverage (in the case of *Farm Journal* in the period from 1995-1999) or a large spike in the case of *Successful Farming*.

The findings in this study belie the hypothesis that coverage would start slow and grow over time.

However, the study did identify spikes in coverage over the years, indicating that there were times when the magazines felt the issue of organic/sustainable agriculture warranted more coverage. Specific magazine issues with large amounts of organic farming coverage were often coincident with governmental consideration of legislation affecting organic agriculture. Also, because coverage about organic agriculture was so slim in relation to the abundance of content pieces about general farming topics, any one large feature about organic farming that included many photos or sidebars would cause a spike in coverage.

The following charts illustrate the number of organic content pieces in each magazine over the timeframe of this study. It is clear that spikes in coverage do appear occasionally and that there are long time periods bereft of organic farming coverage. *Successful Farming* was more regular through the 1985-2005 timeframe, with an average of 1.26 content pieces per issue; *Farm Journal* with 0.66 content pieces per issue; and *Progressive Farmer* with 0.39 content pieces per individual issue of the magazine.
Figure 1. Content in *Successful Farming* over time

Figure 2. Content in *Farm Journal* over time
The spikes in coverage in all three magazines through 1990-1992 and 2000-2002 are attributable to several issues that focused specifically on various aspects of organic farming. *Farm Journal’s* spike in coverage in the 1990-1992 period includes issues that featured several long features about California Proposition 128, colloquially known as “Big Green,” which would have restricted agrochemical use and increased environmental research and forestry project funding (Reinhold, 1989). Articles about California Proposition 128 that contributed to the *Farm Journal* spike include “‘Big Green’ stalks West Coast farmer,” (Hillgren, 1990, pp. 17-19) and “‘Big Green’ turns them red,” (Braun, 1990, pp. 46-47). Both of those feature articles spanned numerous pages and contributed heavily to the number of content pieces identified from that time period. The spike in the 2000-2002 period in *Farm Journal* is largely attributable to the October 2000
issue, which featured a two-page feature story “Organic Optimism” that included a several photographs and a sidebar (Henderson, 2000, pp. 30-32).

The spike in coverage in *Progressive Farmer* in 1990 can be attributed to several articles in the magazine about the United States Department of Agriculture LISA (“Low Input Sustainable Agriculture”) competitive grants program, which started in 1988 as part of the 1985 Food Security Act (Madden, 2010). “Profile: Bring on LISA” (*Progressive Farmer*, 1990, p. 20) is a profile with Gary Myers, president of The Fertilizer Institute, about his views about the LISA program and how sustainable and organic farming has affected the fertilizer industry, which he represents. Not surprisingly, Myers is not a proponent of sustainable agriculture and believes the fertilizer industry’s products are not the root causes of groundwater pollution. “What Are Consumers Eating?” (*Progressive Farmer*, 1990, p. 44) discussed a survey of the magazine’s readers which found they preferred buying and eating pesticide-free food. The November 1990 issue of *Progressive Farmer* included a feature story “Forget LISA; How About Sam?” that discussed different applications of sustainable agriculture practices in farming with the controversy over LISA, “[…] people realized that low input really could mean low income. So how about a new term: sustainable agriculture methods (SAM)?” (Kidwell, 1990, p. 22).

The spikes in *Progressive Farmer*’s organic farming coverage in 2000-2001 can be attributed to a small fact-based article in the May/June 2000 issue called “New Organic Regs” (Keller, 2000, p. 44) that discussed the USDA’s incorporation of new national organic standards instead of the then-piecemeal state and private certifications. The July 2001 issue also contributed to the spike with an article about the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University titled “Between the Rows”
That longer article examined many of the difficulties faced by organic and sustainable agriculture practices, but also pointed out the time was ripe for sustainable farming’s surge in popularity due to the real threat of water-quality problems from field runoff and factory farming.

Successful Farming’s coverage of organic farming was considerably higher than its two peers and exhibited less clustering of coverage. However, two issues of the magazine in particular created spikes in coverage: the February 2002 and the mid-February 2005 issues. The February 2002 issue featured a multi-page profile about a natural beef rancher in Colorado titled “Branding beef: How Coleman grows and grows” (Freivalds, 2002, pp. 5-8). The mid-February 2005 issue of the magazine also featured seven different stories pertaining to organic farming practices, including several about grass-fed and natural beef exclusively.

Mentions of organic agriculture topics on the covers of the magazines were exceedingly rare. Progressive Farmer had one mention of organic agriculture on the cover of its November 1990 issue, Successful Farming two from the December 1992 and mid-February 2005 issues, and Farm Journal had none.

Research Question 2

In response to Research Question 2, which asked how Farm Journal, Successful Farming, and Progressive Farmer compared and contrasted organic farming practices to conventional farming practices, there was a certain amount of difference in how all three magazines portrayed the two different agricultural paradigms. The amount of coverage of organic and sustainable practices, while generally minimal in comparison to coverage of conventional agricultural practices, was sufficient to suggest magazine editors and staffs
were not ignorant to their audiences’ potential interest in organic and sustainable practices.

Yet the overarching presentation early on showed a clear sense of skepticism toward organic methods and considerable emphasis on public “misperceptions” about the safety of agrichemicals. For example, in the November 1989 issue of *Farm Journal*, a staff essay that was critical of a National Research Council Report on the safety of “alternative” agriculture said:

> It seems to us that the political activists—even those in such unlikely places as the National Research Council—have figured out that, if it was consumer demand which impelled farmers to produce bright, blemish-free and uniform fruit, then it will be consumer demand which will impel farmers to produce the kind our great-grandparents had to accept. Of course, the prerequisite to that strategy is a frightened consumer—even when the science doesn’t support scare headlines. (*Farm Journal*, 1989, p. 56)

Likewise, *Farm Journal*’s staff environmental specialist Dick Fawcett’s opinion piece from the August 1991 issue, “Agrichemicals: Who needs them?” highlighted the political and cultural split between “alternative” and conventional farmers (Fawcett, 1991, p. 44). The column mentioned various studies of the impact and necessity of agrichemicals on production, with those studies showing conflicting findings. One study stated that agrichemicals were reportedly good for production and had a minimal impact on the environment and, if banned, would lead to worldwide food shortages and higher food prices. Another study claimed cuts in agrichemical usage would have a minimal impact on production and would serve to improve the environment (Fawcett, 1991, p. 44). Noteworthy, though, is the attention and consideration paid by Fawcett to public perceptions of farming and agrichemical use: “The message the public is getting is that agrichemicals are bad, that there is no need for them, and that farmers would be better off
without them whether they know it or not” (Fawcett, 1991, p. 44). He added, “The public, the media, and many policy makers have bought the idea that these chemicals are risky and they will evaluate agricultural performance with the question ‘how many acres were treated with chemicals this year?’” (Fawcett, 1991, p. 44).

What does that imply? Seemingly it asked farmers to take up the task of engaging in a public-relations campaign in order to preserve the standards of production to which they were accustomed, which Fawcett asserted, “If farmers want to have agrichemical inputs available to use, they will have to get more involved in letting the public know why they use them and that there are benefits. And they will need to convince the public that farmers are concerned and competent enough to use agrichemicals safely” (Fawcett, 1991, p. 44).

The portrayal of organic farming as an unsuitable replacement for conventional agriculture was most clear in coverage of the California Hayden-Van de Kamp legislation of the late 1980s and early 1990s, known colloquially as “Big Green,” which was on the state ballot as California Proposition 128. That referendum item sought to impose a statewide ban on the use of all agrichemicals that were potentially carcinogenic or that caused reproductive damage and limit the allowable exposure by farm worker to agrichemicals (Reinhold, 1989). The bill, which ultimately failed to pass and was derided as overreaching by many conventional farmers and environmentalists, was fodder for a discourse that highlighted the differences between organic and conventional farming philosophies.

Both Farm Journal and Successful Farming covered the “Big Green” legislation, and in that coverage, the disparity in attitude toward organic agriculture was apparent. A
Farm Journal article titled “‘Big Green’ turns them red,” by Dick Braun, surveyed farmers’ attitudes about the bill in the town of Kerman, California. The piece portrayed organic agriculture negatively and included statements such as, “It’s crazy to go back to the dark ages [before pesticides],” “There is no proof of anyone dying from food as the result of farm-applied pesticides,” and “[A.J. Yates, a farmer interviewed] doubts that consumers really want food produced organically.” “When they have a choice at the necessary 30% increase in price, there is not much volume” (Braun, 1990, p. 46-47). The coverage in Farm Journal was clearly representing a dominant hegemonic viewpoint within the agriculture industry.

Successful Farming’s coverage of “Big Green” included an editorial by Mike Holmberg, the magazine’s Farm Chemicals Editor, who argued all involved parties in the debate had valid points but were both building their arguments on shaky ground:

Both sides use some questionable assumptions. The anti-chemical types often assume that all farmers pour on as many pesticides as they can and that few farmers use crop rotations, banding or mechanical weed control. Those assumptions are wrong. I’ve visited many farm operations where chemical use has been cut dramatically (Holmber, 1990, p. 21).

Which is then followed with, “The pro-chemical side often assumes all farmers use the bare minimum in chemicals. I know that’s not true either. I’ve talked to other farmers who apply insurance insecticides or enough herbicides to make sure they don’t have weeds” (Holmber, 1990, p. 21). Holmberg’s editorial presented a much more “negotiated” position on the issue, while still emphasizing the theme of “public misperceptions” about the issue.
This theme of "misperception" was reinforced strongly by Dan Miller, the Midwest Editor for _Progressive Farmer_. In Miller’s editorial titled “The Mysterious ‘O-Word,’” from July 1998, he argued the organic agriculture sector is confusing in its regulations and misguided in its ethos: “I understand the philosophy underpinning organic farming—the process is as important as the product. But how does biotechnology muck that up? Are organic tomatoes produced only from some ancient, pure seed stock? Is it antiorganic for plants to resist the extremes and ravages of pests? To produce an appealing, more saleable product? To produce more food on less land?” (Miller, 1998a, p. 20). The implied answer is that conventional agriculture, using agrichemicals and genetic modification, is the process that will achieve the results of plentiful, saleable products produced cheaply, which is a mark of success for most any farmer; meanwhile, the argument is that conventional methods are, in essence, organic. Miller confuses and minimizes the differences between biotechnology and organic methods and diminishes or omits the fact that organic farming, as defined, makes no allowances for most biotechnological products, and the concerns of organic farmers about chemical overspray and unwelcome cross-pollination by bio-engineered crops on neighboring farms. 4

Seemingly, the subtext in Miller’s editorial was that organic farming, by virtue of its definition, is some kind of irrational practice. Miller went on to say organic farmers are “proudly hippies no longer,” albeit “with a vocal part that remains attached to an antiscience, antitechnology and anticorporate past” (Miller, 1998a, p. 20)—again,

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4 The concern about cross-contamination (pollen drift) of non-genetically modified corn by pollen from genetically-modified corn is a legitimate one and as such “contamination corn” is banned by many countries outside the United States (Thomison, 2004). So, too, worries about the Monsanto “terminator gene” that would limit food crops to one life cycle, meaning harvested seeds would not be viable and growers would have to purchase new seed from Monsanto every season (Service, 1998, pp. 850-851).
suggesting that promoters and practitioners of organic farming are on the fringe of society and that their messages are misleading the public.

That was not a one-time polemic. Miller’s editorial for *Progressive Farmer* the next month, titled “A McComfortable Nation,” was similar in tone:

I was finishing the last bites of my umpteenth Quarter Pounder, reading a scattering of online pieces about organic farming, hog production and the use of pesticides. None were really related, but you can guess the theme. Organics, good. Big hogs, bad. Pesticides, bad. Another decried irrigation. (Miller, 1998b, p. 24).

Miller in the same piece did strike what appears to be a conciliatory tone near the end:

“Organics may offer some answers, but it has trade-offs in efficiency of production. That Quarter Pounder meal can be produced for $3 and change, with scientific, measured farming practices that don’t bring ruin to the environment or the family farm” (Miller, 1998a, p. 24). That olive branch, though, reads more as an acknowledgement of the market demand for organic goods rather than an implied or outright acceptance of the methods by the mainstream. The metaphor of a McDonald’s value meal, itself a symbol of corporate hegemony in America, is made up mostly of the very same commodities grown by *Progressive Farming*’s audience, produced inexpensively and in great surplus.⁵

The language in Miller’s editorials acknowledged, but more importantly reflected, a philosophical divide between conventional and organic farmers. What is interesting, though, is that the editorials were written by one of the magazine’s editors, which suggests an institutional bias against organic agriculture at *Progressive Farmer* — Miller holds that position to this day (*Progressive Farmer*, 2010).

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⁵ Many of the components of McDonald’s food items contain processed food ingredients such as the high fructose corn syrup used in the baking of sandwich buns, the hydrogenated vegetable oil used in French fries, or the mold inhibitors in the shredded cheddar cheese (McDonald’s, 2010).
That attitude seemed to soften in later years at the publication. In the July 2001 issue of *Progressive Farmer*, writer Gregg Hillyer profiled Fred Kirschenmann, director of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University, in an interview titled “Between the Rows: Journey Toward a New Agriculture.” In that interview, Kirschenmann’s criticism of conventional agriculture was featured prominently, such as when he pointed out conventional agriculture is perceived as a “public problem … associated with polluted groundwater, soil erosion, intolerable odors and food-safety issues” (Hillyer, 2001, p. 41). He then added, “Farms are more than factories. The 20th century vision for agriculture, producing as much as possible as efficiently as possible and externalizing all of the costs, may have worked in an empty world. It doesn’t work in a full world” (Hillyer, 2001, p. 41). Although organic agricultural practices are not exactly synonymous with sustainable agricultural practices, many organic farms are sustainably farmed, and many farms that practice sustainable techniques are also organic (as discussed in the literature review). The Kirschenmann interview portrayed an approach to conciliation between the organic/sustainable world and the conventional: “The new agriculture Kirschenmann envisions won’t develop unless farmers quit being passive recipients of market signals. That reduces farmers to raw-materials suppliers for a globalized food system” (Hillyer, 2001, p. 41). Kirschenmann’s interview also calls for greater public involvement: “Instead of farming the market, growers need to be marketing the farm by engaging with consumers to form a special farmer/customer link” (Hillyer, 2001, p. 41). The subtext in the interview is that sustainable agriculture is more in keeping with the demands of consumers, many of
whom want healthy food, free of harmful additives, that is produced with minimal impact on the ecosystem and community.

Tempered recognition of changes in the food production market was also outlined in a 1997 editorial by Successful Farming’s Conservation Editor John Walter, who made predictions about agriculture’s future and ruminated on agriculture’s past. That essay portrayed organic proponents and methods as somehow maturing away from the fringe and into the mainstream, but also used gendered arguments to frame the issue. Walter compared contemporary sustainable agricultural practices to those practiced in the previous 10 years, “The idea of sustainable agriculture was new in ’85, and because of the unfortunate LISA label (low-input sustainable agriculture), it first became equated with something weak and sissified. Today, the idea of farming with a greater bent to nature is no longer seen as a threat to one’s manhood” (Walter, 1997, p. 23). The subtext is that practitioners of sustainable agriculture were once thought of as un-masculine, but in a process of incorporation into the accepted agricultural economy and increasing public support, are now no longer un-masculine and no longer “sissified.” Walter not only belies the male-centric hegemony of American farm culture (stereotypically, men do the farming, wives keep the house and help when needed), but he also alludes to the possibility that early attitudes toward sustainable agriculture were positioned as an “us vs. them” issue, much like the attitudes taken by Miller in his editorials for Progressive Farming.

There also was evidence of an “us vs. them” attitude in coverage of the controversial issue of genetically modified foods. The issue of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) was covered a great deal in all three farming magazines, often
focused on proposed laws and regulations associated with genetically modified goods. Organic agriculture was not often mentioned in the same articles that covered GMOs, but occasionally it was, highlighting the philosophical difference between the two conventions. The *Progressive Farmer* brief “Not in *MY* Corn Chips” from the July 1999 issue trivialized the underlying reason why snack food manufacturer Terra Prima was forced to recall 80,000 bags of corn chips after GM corn was found in the product during third-party testing in Germany (*Progressive Farmer*, 1999, pp. 6-7). The article noted that because Europe’s laws on GMOs are stricter than those in the United States, the marketing of products using ingredients derived from GMOs is considerably different, “Although retailers in the U.S. are apparently not concerned about the genetics controversy, Terra Prima is operating in a market where European retailers routinely ban engineered crops as ingredients” (*Progressive Farmer*, 1999, pp. 6-7). Implied here and from the essay’s title (which is suggestively mocking), is that *Americans* would have no quarrel with GM food, but because “finicky” *Europe* is such a large market, the American farmer and food manufacturer must accommodate Europe’s more stringent food regulations. The tension amounted to a sort of war of cultures — the efficiency and scale of the American food production system butting up against the regulatory, socialist states of Europe (Fonte, 2000-2001).

The dominant hegemonic position also was reinforced by portrayals of organic farming as difficult, expensive, and often unsuccessful. *Successful Farming* framed parts of the argument between conventional and organic agriculture as a financial one in “Top Talk: Are you doing or thinking about doing organic production?” from its April 2000 issue (*Successful Farming*, 2000, p. 34). While the article was a collection of responses
posted to the *Successful Farming* online discussion board, the responses selected illustrate the difference in opinion in the magazine’s readership about organic agriculture. Every answer reported was a negative one. One farmer said, “I hoed at least twice before admitting that I was growing a great crop of giant ragweed. When I think about planting organics, I think of that” (*Successful Farming*, 2000, p. 34). Another wrote, “I believe that consumers are not interested in the content of the produce so much as they are interested in the way it is produced and processed” (*Successful Farming*, 2000, p. 34). Yet another argued, “If the consumer is willing to pay for it, then so be it. But my guess is that if inflation continues, we’ll see resistance in the amount people will pay for healthy foods” (*Successful Farming*, 2000, p. 34). Assuming other less critical message board posts were available, the results of the selection process of the comments indicates a possible bias against organic agriculture by those on *Successful Farming*’s staff who chose those particular posts and possibly bias by farmers on the magazine’s message board.⁶

In many articles about organic farming, the difference in editorial treatment and framing of organic agriculture with its conventional counterpart was often subtle — the differences were apparent, but not immediately striking. More illustrative are those more scathing articles and editorials: Dan Miller’s editorials in *Progressive Farming* are not enough to indict the magazine as a whole, but it speaks to a certain institutional bias against organics in favor of conventional growing practices, due to Miller’s role as an editor of the magazine.

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⁶ The *Successful Farming* website www.agriculture.com no longer has posts from 2000 in its archives. A search through the archived web pages on www.archive.org was unable to find those posts, frustrating any attempts to gauge the other opinions available to the editorial board of *Successful Farming* when writing the “Top Talk” article.
Research Question 2 was focused on how the magazines compared/contrasted organic methods and conventional agriculture. In summary, the overall analysis of the texts shows that the magazines, for the most part, portrayed pro-organic arguments as minority and/or controversial positions open to debate, while they portrayed conventional agriculture as misunderstood by critics and as the only way to produce the most popular foods in sufficient quantity to meet market demands. The benefits of organic methods were not entirely dismissed but were couched in terms of diminished efficiency and increased risk on the part of the farmers. Most notable was that direct comparisons were often portrayed as an “us vs. them” issue that was either supportive of the dominant hegemonic ideology or presented a negotiated position that organic methods have slowly gained mainstream acceptance over time due to consumer demands. The agenda-setting influence of such frames possibly perpetuates a conflicted mentality among farmers that organic methods can be profitable in the long run. However, the food needs of the world still require production levels attainable only with the use of agrichemicals.

Research Question 3

Despite organic agriculture’s countercultural origins, organically produced goods are thoroughly mainstream now and can be found on the shelves in the nation’s largest retailers and supermarkets. Certainly, no small number of organic growers can still be lumped in with the counterculture, but because of the growth potential in that sector of the agricultural industry, farmers’ justifications for taking up the practice of organic farming would perhaps change over time from ideals rooted in the counterculture to ideals rooted in market capitalism. The justifications for farming organically offered by farmers profiled in the farming magazines in this study included such themes as: a sense
of obligation to reduce farming’s negative impact on the environment, a need to reduce the amount of agrichemicals used in the production of food, and the advantages of reaching a growing number of consumers who are willing to pay premium prices for certified organic fruits and vegetables.

As revealed by the findings with regard to Research Question 2, many articles analyzed for this study focused on the inherent difficulty of organic farming. That included a lack of an established sales and brokerage network fully able to distribute food off the farm, inconsistencies in governmental regulations, the challenges of organic certification, and technical challenges such as managing weed/pest infestations or protecting fields from agrichemicals and GMO pollen that could blow onto organic crops from neighboring farms.

Most often, texts from earlier in the timeframe of this study portrayed individual farmers’ dislike of agrichemicals or beliefs in more holistic farming methods as their main motivation for farming organically. This theme could be considered organic farming as an ethical or environmental choice. Progressive Farmer, the magazine with the lowest number of articles about organic farming practices, most often covered organic farming within the scope of “best practices.” One such article from the March 1986 issue titled “Fresh Fruit From Your Own Backyard” (Progressive Farmer, 1986, pp. 128-129) profiled an apple farmer who “doesn’t claim to be an organic gardener, but admits that he leans that way” (Progressive Farmer, 1986, p. 128). That farmer was quoted as saying, “I hate to spray anything we’re going to eat” (Progressive Farmer, 1986, p. 128). In the November 1990 issue of Progressive Farmer, farmers profiled for an article about sustainable agricultural methods (SAM) said they had chosen those methods to save
money first, and save the environment second (Kidwell, 1990, pp. 22-23). One farmer claimed, “We’ve tried to hold down our chemical inputs for years [...] Around here, we call it farming cheap” (Kidwell, 1990, p. 22). A February 1995 Progressive Farmer article about a farm with a CSA program titled “The Community Supports This Farm” indicated that while the farming operation profiled was profitable for its two owners, it was also an operation borne out of an obligation to the community and to organic goods in general (Brunner, 1995, 48). One farmer said “If we started using chemicals, half of our members would stop buying vegetables from us.” (Brunner, 1995, p. 48). The author of the article noted that “This consumer-farm connection is what makes the operation so interesting. The customers share the risks of farm production” (Brunner, 1995, p. 48), suggesting the importance of community investment and purpose attached to the farm.

A profile of four farmers in the Mid-March 1989 issue of Farm Journal (Farm Journal, 1989, p. 26) asked them “What’s your opinion of sustainable ag?” with the resulting answers leaning more toward the economic than the environmental. One farmer said, “We realize there may be health effects and also some of those chemicals may be banned someday [...] We all need to learn about new alternatives for those reasons and to reduce cost of production” (Farm Journal, 1989, p. 26).

The health and environmental angle also appeared in more recent stories. “Organic Optimism” from the October 2000 issue of Farm Journal is a wide-ranging profile piece about several different farmers and the unique challenges they faced as they engaged in organic farming — and this article also highlighted the various justifications for organic farming (Henderson, 2000, pp. 30-32). One farmer switched to organic methods when he discovered his fields were maintaining high levels of carryover
Soil samples revealed I had three years’ worth of atrazine carryover in spots where I’d used labeled rates [...] For me, it was the beginning of a continual erosion of trust toward synthetic inputs used in agriculture” (Henderson, 2000, p. 30). The article is not necessarily optimistic and positive, and it highlights the challenges more than the benefits, possibly to caution conventional producers interested in capitalizing on the organic market: “This back-to-the-earth movement (organic farming) may have been birthed by nonconformists and fueled by a faith bordering on the spiritual, but it now faces multinationals acquiring branded organic foods companies. And some conventional farmers, seeing opportunity in the new interest in organics are trying to go chemical cold turkey on at least a portion of their land” (Henderson, 2000, p. 30).

In a letter to the editor in the mid-February 2005 issue of Successful Farming titled “Organic is no fluke,” the writer argued, “Producers are turning to organic grain production in my area because of the profits to be made, and because many have had health incidents in their families that they can relate back to the use of chemicals on the farm” (Arens, 2005, p. 6).

However, it’s the economic aspects of organic farming that by and large, presents the most dominant theme in organic coverage in this study. The idea that sustainable and organic farming had potentially great profit potential was regularly found in farmer interviews. The ability of an organic farmer to find a unique market angle and produce profits is the underlying foundation of this theme. In Farm Journal’s September 1985

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7 Due to environmental contamination and deleterious effects on wildlife, along with its cancer risk, atrazine is a banned agrichemical in Europe. However, it still finds widespread use in the United States, with the USDA asserting that it carries no risks (Ackerman, 2007, pp. 441-449).
issue, an article titled “Grow crops with less for higher profits” (Farm Journal, 1985, p. D6) discussed a conference on organic farming and reported “The nearly 300 men and women who jammed the big meeting room worried less about labels than net return” (Farm Journal, 1985, p. D6). The article also detailed the costs and benefits of low-input agricultural systems that “puts you in a better position to survive or profit under today’s economic conditions” (Farm Journal, 1985, p. D6). Another farmer said in an article about sustainable agriculture, “If it means making a more careful selection of inputs to maximize profit potential, I can live with lower yields” (Farm Journal, 1989, p. 26). The economics-first argument continued in 1999 when Farm Journal published an article titled “21 Tips for Coping with the Cash Crunch” that addressed the then-current financial crisis in farming (Farm Journal, 1999, pp. 18-21). Tip 13, “Cost Sharing for Sustainable Ag,” noted there were programs developed to assist those farmers willing to invest in that practice, “If you’re going to survive in this business, I think you’ve got to take advantage of everything that’s out there” (Farm Journal, 1999, p. 20).

In the February 1987 issue of Successful Farming, a profile article titled “Homing in on home-based businesses” featured a farmer who said, “Organically grown and natural products give us a marketing plus” (Successful Farming, 1987, p. 19). Market potential again was the focus in another article, titled “Opportunities Abound,” in the November 1987 issue. That article is about a bean farmer who maintained a profitable business growing edible soybeans and adzuki for health food stores — and capitalized on the fact that the market itself was so underdeveloped that he was able to provide those goods while others could not (Allen, Johnston, & Tevis, 1987, pp. 20H-20I.)
“Organic Farming Odyssey” from the May/June, 1995 issue of Successful Farming profiles a farmer with a long life experience in producing organic products. The farmer, Dave Vetter of Nebraska, started farming intending to “raise food, not feed. More specifically, he wanted to raise organic food” (Successful Farming, 1995, p. 42). But the economic potential is mentioned, as Vetter says, “The structure of organic farming keeps changing, and relationships keep shifting [...] But the organic market has grown into a billion-dollar-a-year market” (Successful Farming, 1995, p. 42).

A dominant theme running throughout many of the articles studied is one of organic agriculture’s profit potential. Even in the early stages of the timeframe of this study, it was clear that a major argument for farmers’ adoption of organic techniques was to capitalize on an emerging market that had potential for serious future growth. Even though organic practices might have been viewed as “sissified”8 and even hostile toward conventional farming practices, a farmer farms to make money, and framing the coverage of organic farming in terms of potential profits appears to have been a way for the magazines, which were steeped in the agribusiness-dominated hegemony, to negotiate a position by which they could broach the subject and remain within the dominant hegemonic mindset. A conventional farmer who reads a profile about an organic farmer’s profit-making abilities may devote a field to organic goods or explore more sustainable farming techniques.

Research Question 4

The organic farming movement, like many other social movements, has changed significantly over time. While its core construct has remained the same — that being the

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8 The term was used in Walter’s December 1994 editorial in Successful Farming.
production, promotion and consumption of foods produced without the use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, livestock-feed additives, and genetically modified organisms — the movement has shifted in response to market demands rather than broader cultural changes.

As the author read and re-read the texts for this analysis, it became more and more apparent that portrayals of organic farmers in the farm press tended to lie along certain broad-based thematic categories that could be interpreted as a series of “stages” by which the magazines came eventually to accept organic farmers and farming practices. Those categories were determined by taking into account the amount of coverage, the types of stories about organic farmers, and portrayals of organic farmers and practices in the stories themselves (that is, an overall analysis of the findings of the first three research questions). It should be noted not all three magazines contained stories from all three thematic stages. One magazine’s overall editorial emphasis may reside more strongly in one stage of coverage longer than the others. Those broad categories are as follows:

Broad Thematic Stages in Organic Farming Coverage from 1985-2005

1. Organic farming movement is portrayed as a niche and a possible emerging market but not a viable replacement for conventional agriculture
2. Organic farming movement has a certain amount of market support and recognition from mainstream and strong profit potential
3. Organic farming movement has been adopted into the mainstream in terms of economic potential for upscale markets and customers

The first stage is exemplified by editorial treatment that portrayed organic farming operations as small, independent, even casual operations, serving niche markets with foods made available from few sources. The magazines cast those farmers in a light that showed them as independent, entrepreneurial, and sometimes quirky (i.e., on the
fringe). Organic farmers in the first era were most likely to be portrayed as countercultural, or at least somewhat anomalous. Organic farmers in that era had to actively seek out their customers because no ready-made markets existed, making the practices unattractive to large-scale growers of commodity products (corn, beef, wheat, etc.). As such, recurrent themes in that era mentioned organic farmers struggling to turn a profit and their devotion to the craft of farming for farming’s sake in lieu of greater financial rewards. They were portrayed most clearly as oppositional to the dominant hegemonic position, that being the industries and support systems that backed conventional farming.

The **second stage** portrayed organic farmers as engaging more with niche demands of the more mainstream consumer markets. Farmers in the second stage were portrayed not as on the fringe of culture, but rather as conventional-farming entrepreneurs who were venturing into organics to diversify their operations and invest in a market they saw as having long-term growth potential. Those farmers were portrayed as less interested in the environmentalist or counter-cultural philosophy of organic agriculture than in becoming one of the few (if not the only) organic farmers in their chosen markets. Recurrent themes showed organic farmers as more engaged with their eventual consumers than commodity growers, often selling directly to customers through their own retail outlets or “you-pick” operations, or by adding distribution to retail outlets to their overall business practices. Throughout the second stage, concern for the health of the farmer and consumer was a primary motive for the adoption of organic farming techniques, but often couched in terms of customer demands for foods deemed to be “healthier” for them. The magazines, therefore, eventually adopted a negotiated position
in which they couched the benefits of organic farming within the dominant priorities of 
profitability for the health-conscious consumer, while maintaining the narrative that 
conventional practices remained safe but also necessary to feed the masses.

The **third stage** depicted the organic movement as fully, or nearly, an accepted 
part of the mainstream. Mirroring organic food’s significant share of the mainstream 
marketplace, the organic movement was portrayed as a legitimate sub-sector of the 
dominant superstructure. Massive farming operations that seemed antithetical to organic 
farming in decades past are now farming without chemicals and produce products that are 
certified organic from USDA or other official certification agencies. Texts from that era 
still depicted the organic movement within the terms of its more idealized origins, often 
portraying organic farmers as being in touch with their consumers and sometimes 
carrying the torch for agrarian traditions with direct sales, CSAs, and farm tours. The 
coverage tended to insist organic farmers are still small, independent operations serving 
niche markets, but also suggested that large-scale organic farming also is possible and 
profitable, albeit still not suitable to meet the food needs of a growing world population.

Because *Farm Journal, Progressive Farmer* and *Successful Farming* have each 
portrayed organic farming somewhat differently, as explained in the analysis of the first 
three research questions, it would be brash to assume those three magazines have 
similarly followed the same thematic plots. However, the analysis for RQ4 determined 
the above stages could exist in each of the three magazines studied, albeit to varying 
degrees.

The caveat with attempting to structure a universal timeline of coverage is that not 
every magazine covered organic agriculture in the same manner at the same point of
time. While all the magazines may have at one point treated the organic farming movement as a curiosity, it is possible that during the timeframe studied here, a magazine’s editorial treatment may follow a path within the “second” and “third stage.” As such, a constructed timeline using the three magazines’ articles in aggregate was developed to trace how coverage has changed over time and to notice any exceptional articles that suggest future developments in the organic farming movement, such as predictions of organics in major supermarkets or revisit older themes like the misconceptions that were part of the counterculture movement.

*Farm Journal,* for example, early on portrayed the organic farming movement as one within the greater agricultural tradition, as opposed to a separate insurgent movement. “Grow crops with less for higher profits” (*Farm Journal*, 1989, p. D6) said in reference to a workshop for “biological” farmers at Iowa State University, “If ‘biological’ throws you, just substitute ‘organic.’ But the nearly 300 men and women who jammed the big meeting room worried less about labels than net return.” The January 1989 issue of *Farm Journal* featured an article about a natural beef producer “Home of the natural burger” (Johnson, 1989, pp. 20H-20I), who was portrayed as an entrepreneur with a unique product that had “found people are willing to pay a premium for ‘natural’ beef from the meat market” (Johnson, 1989, 20H). The article mentioned the operation bucked some of the conventions of the industry, particularly that of supply-chain and market consolidation. Additionally, the story framed the farmer as not rooted in the countercultural ethos, but rather, an entrepreneur who had found a way to maximize profit in an underexplored market. In the Mid-March 1989 issue of *Farm Journal,* a small brief asked four farmers “What’s your opinion of sustainable ag?” (*Farm Journal,*
1989, p. 26) with three of four farmers giving answers that indicated an interest in exploring organic farming’s profit and marketability potential instead of catering to environment or ethical concerns.

*Farm Journal*’s eventual acceptance of organic agriculture was evident in more recent articles such as “Organic Optimism” in the October 2000 issue (*Farm Journal*, 2000, p. 30) which described the growing popularity of organic goods with the consumer market. The article pointed out that “[The] organic back-to-the-earth movement may have been birthed by nonconformists and fueled by a faith bordering on the spiritual, but it now faces multinationals acquiring branded organic food companies. And some conventional farmers, seeing opportunity in the new interest in organics are trying to go chemical cold turkey on at least a portion of their land” (*Farm Journal*, 2000, p. 30). The prevailing narrative was organic agriculture always had been considered something of a “contender” in the market, but it took a number of years before the general marketplace, farmers, and *Farm Journal* could give it serious consideration.

*Successful Farming*’s coverage and editorial treatment of organic farmers traced a path similar to *Farm Journal*’s. Its earlier coverage focused on organic farming as a niche serving a small section of the market, with such articles as “Homing in on home-based businesses” from the February 1987 issue of *Successful Farming* (*Successful Farming*, 1987, p. 19). However, the economic aspect of organic farming was emphasized in that era with one farmer who said, “Organically grown and natural products give us a marketing plus” (*Successful Farming*, 1987, p. 19). By the mid-1990s, the organic farming movement had gained a certain foothold on the market and earned greater popular support. *Successful Farming*’s May/June 1995 issue contained a positive profile
article titled “Organic Farming Odyssey” that described organic farming as an entirely economically sustainable process (Successful Farming, 1995, p. 42).

In the April 2000 issues of Successful Farming, the “Top Talk” farmer-feedback section of the magazine asked the question, “Are you doing or thinking about doing organic production?” (Successful Farming, 2000, p. 34) The responses received are mostly critical and skeptical: “The demand for organic produce is a construction of the belief systems of consumers” and “If the consumer is willing to pay for it, then so be it” (Successful Farming, 2000, p. 34). Those statements indicated organic farming still faced a certain amount of resistance from the dominant class in American farming. While organic food was at that time a fast-growing commodity, the criticism of it suggested there was entrenched resistance to the idea from the dominant agricultural class.

In contrast to Successful Farmer or Farm Journal, Progressive Farmer devoted the least amount of editorial coverage to organic agriculture, according to the findings in RQ1. Tracing how Progressive Farmer covered organic agriculture was difficult in light of the fact that Progressive Farmer published only 25 articles specifically about organic or sustainable agriculture in this study’s timeframe; that lack of coverage alone may have been a factor of the magazine’s apparent bias against organic farming and toward conventional farming. The scant early coverage of organic agriculture in Progressive Farmer focused on organic farming as an exception to the standard hegemony. “Fresh Fruit From Your Own Backyard” from the March 1986 issue of Progressive Farmer is a best practices profile piece that detailed how best to create a small-scale fruit growing operation (Progressive Farmer, 1986, pp. 128-129). The article quoted from an organic farmer who said “I hate to spray anything we’re going to eat” (Progressive Farmer, 1986,
p. 128) and has adopted such techniques as filling gallon jugs with vinegar, sugar and water and hanging them from trees to deter pests. Contextually, the fact that the profiled farmer used organic methods made little difference — the mention is a brief one and the classification is dismissed by the farmer: “John [the farmer] doesn’t claim to be an organic gardener, but admits that he leans that way” (*Progressive Farmer*, 1986, p. 128). While that farmer may practice organic farming techniques, by the fact that he declines the title indicates a possible unwillingness to be associated with the organic movement. Likewise, the November 1990 issue of *Progressive Farmer* featured the article “Forget Lisa; How About SAM?” which discussed new USDA sustainable agricultural standards (Sustainable Agriculture Methods) after the demise of the LISA (Low Input Sustainable Agriculture) program (Kidwell, 1990, p. 23). That article profiled farmers who still mostly relied on chemical inputs, but to a lesser degree than some of their counterparts. One farmer, asked if he practiced sustainable agriculture said, “Without chemicals we just couldn’t farm.” Another said, “We’ve tried to hold down our chemical inputs for years […] Around here, we call it farming cheap” (Kidwell, 1990, p. 23). *Progressive Farmer* had the opportunity in that article to include positive attitudes toward farming without agrichemicals; instead, the article focused on farmers who reduced spray rates to save money but dismissed the feasibility of abandoning agrichemicals altogether.

The February 1995 issue of *Progressive Farmer* featured a mostly positive profile article titled “The Community Supports This Farm” about two farmers who run an organic CSA operation outside Coker, Alabama (Brunner, 1995, p. 48). That article served more as an introduction to CSA programs in general, written to an audience that may be unfamiliar with the concept. “The Community” also detailed the steps the farmers
profiled have taken to maintain profitability. “The Community” also included a chart detailing the farm’s income and expenses, further emphasizing to readers the profit potential of a CSA program. Because CSA programs in 1995 were well established in some regions of the country, yet not entirely commonplace, the likelihood of a farmer lacking a good understanding of the concept and the cost structures involved (subscription fees, membership, shares in food that may or may not be delivered because of harvest variables) is good (McFadden, 2009). That article is indicative of *Progressive Farmer* following its peer magazines in emphasizing the market capitalization aspect of organic farming.

For the most part, though, *Progressive Farmer* maintained strong editorial bias against organic farming practices, as evidenced by its Midwest Editor Dan Miller’s editorials about organic agriculture from 1998, as discussed earlier in this thesis (Miller, 1998a, p. 20; Miller, 1998b, p. 24). Where *Farm Journal* and *Successful Farming* seem more accepting of organic practices, *Progressive Farmer*’s lack of coverage about the topic and occasional editorials decrying the practice suggest that the editorial board of that magazine remained skeptical about organic farming’s place in the marketplace.
CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION

This study analyzed the content of three popular and likely influential farming magazines for content about organic farming. In general, there was a low amount of content about organic farming in all three magazines across the studied time frame, despite consumer market demand for organic food. Furthermore, much of the content was text-based. While this study coded for visuals such as photographs, there was a lack of reportable results for those elements. When qualitatively analyzing content, editorial treatment of organic farms, food, and farming techniques ranged from wholly positive to overwhelmingly negative. Possible explanations for those findings are diverse and range from lack of institutional or governmental support for organic farming to market volatility to skepticism of long-term consumer demand and so forth. It bears repeating that the United States Department of Agriculture did not have an organic certification program in place until 2002 with the creation of the National Organic Program (USDA, 2009). While other certification programs existed before then, that program was the first initiative from the official federal agency responsible for overseeing and promoting agriculture in the United States. As such, governmental support for organic agriculture was lacking for a large portion of the timeframe under study.

That can partially explain why organic coverage was sometimes minimal for some of the magazines examined in this study: without institutional support from the federal government to farm organically, farmers had fewer incentives to adopt organic measures. And with less governmental interest or involvement, mainstream farming magazines, as opposed to those magazines focused directly on organic or alternative agricultural practices, might have had less reason to report on organic farmers and
organic techniques. That in turn helped reinforce the “cultural dominance” of conventional agriculture. Referring back to Marx and Engels’ (1845-1846, 1976, 2001, pp. 39-42) ideas of hierarchies of power as well as Williams’ (1980) notions of residual and emergent cultural forms, organic agriculture can be seen as an emergent and insurgent variation of farming that goes up against the conventional farming paradigm. Conventional agriculture is, by the governmental support it has long enjoyed and by its ubiquity, the dominant agricultural mode in America. Most farming magazines are an extension of that dominant culture – the vehicle that shuttles between advertisers, editorial, advertising sales, and ultimately readers. The ultimate influence of advertisers on editorial content in magazines (Randle, Rawlins, and Parkin, 2003) and the farm press is very real (Walter, 2006) and could have a bearing on how often content about organic farming would find its way onto the pages and how it was discussed.

Because the topic of food and where it comes from has recently become a large and growing part of the national conversation (Fromartz, 2006; Pollan, 2006), the idea that farming magazines would increase organic coverage in response to that interest over time was an obvious one. However, that was not necessarily the case, with the exception of Successful Farming. Because Successful Farming’s coverage of organic agriculture was more prevalent and generally more positive than that of the other two magazines studied here, it is a reasonable assumption that the editorial board of Successful Farming either had a more positive attitude toward organic agriculture and/or that magazine’s readers had indicated that they wanted more coverage about organic agriculture. It is possible that the magazine tried to position itself as distinct from its competitors by having a more pro-organics editorial stance.
Overwhelmingly, most farmers profiled in the three magazines studied here were portrayed as being most interested in organic agriculture for economic reasons.\(^9\) While organic farmers farm that way for other reasons, usually a desire to avoid the use of dangerous chemicals, the motivation highlighted most by the magazines was profitability. In that way, organic farming could be made more palatable to parties resistant to the concept. Because organic farming was in some ways, very transgressive to some agricultural norms established after World War II (Pollan, 2006 and Pollan 2007), perhaps the only way the topic could be broached was by painting it as conventional and normal a light as possible. By emphasizing organic farming’s symbolism as an extension of 1960s counterculture (Agnew, 2004), a farming magazine could further perpetuate corporate agricultural hegemony – a practice that all magazines engaged in at different times.

Many of the texts examined here rarely portrayed farmers who practice organic techniques as countercultural types, which goes against the assumptions that many organic producers are still very rooted in environmentalism and anti-corporate sentiments (Rodale, 2008). It can be argued that as far as readers of mainstream farming magazines would understand it, organic farmers can be just like their mainstream “conventional” counterparts, albeit they avoid the use of agrichemicals on their crops and livestock and jump hoops through the USDA certification process. That is perhaps in part due to editorial emphasis — if a farming magazine profiled an organic farm operation, it would perhaps serve its readership better to frame the farm as “much like yours, but organic.”

The oppositional roots of the organic movement were either ridiculed or downplayed in

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\(^9\) As an example of this mindset, Successful Farming’s tagline for a large portion of the period studied here was a magazine “For Families That Makes Farming Their Business.”
editorials or articles. If the organic farming ideal could be considered an emergent cultural form against the dominant conventional agriculture form, many of the articles in the farming magazines studied here belied that notion. Organic farming’s roots as an extension of the residual (Williams, 1980, pp. 132-133) farming ideal, emboldened with the idealism of the back-to-the-land movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Jacob, 1997), was mostly invisible in the content studied.

The economic aspects of organic farming were the overriding theme in most content about organic operations in the three magazines. Farm Journal, Successful Farming, and Progressive Farmer are all magazines that are less about the farming lifestyle and more about farming as a business. As noted in the media kit of each magazine, the audiences for those publications are generally commodities farmers with large 500-plus acre-sized operations. For the readership of the magazines studied here, farming is their livelihood and a primary, if not their only, source of income. Farming isn’t a hobby or a past-time – the growing of food is what pays the bills. The editors of Farm Journal, Successful Farming, and Progressive Farmer understand that and tailor content to appeal to that mindset. If the editors notice that organic food production presents a new and emerging market, they will be certain of mentioning that to their readers. A farmer quoted in a Farm Journal makes the point clear, “If you’re going to survive in this business, I think you’ve got to take advantage of everything that’s out there” (Farm Journal, 1999, p. 20).

Over time, a shift in coverage of organic agriculture was somewhat evident in Successful Farming and Farm Journal, suggesting that the corporate agricultural hegemony (Hebdige, 1979, 150) was not impenetrable by the growing interest and market
share of organic agriculture. Both of those magazines published more stories on the topic that were generally more positive than *Progressive Farmer*, which published few stories about organic and sustainable agriculture and when it did, those stories were either brief and non-expository or derisive and largely negative. Where *Successful Farming* and *Farm Journal* gradually accepted the emergent organic agriculture “subculture” to a degree that could be accommodated without the potential for conflict with their advertiser and reader base, *Progressive Farmer* resisted acceptance of organic farming, evidenced by discussion in some editorials and articles (Miller 1998a, 20 and Miller 1998b, 24).

One explanation for those shifts, perhaps, is the different editorial focus of the various magazines at different times. *Successful Farming* was very much in the earlier part of the study period a magazine focused heavily on meat production, *Farm Journal* more with crops, *Progressive Farmer* with technology – and in many ways how those magazines portrayed organic agriculture and how often they printed stories lay contingent upon those basic editorial focuses and advertising bases.

Those advertisers, too, are likely contributors to how the three different magazines decided their editorial slants. This study did not analyze advertising content, but it is worth briefly discussing some of the more prominent advertisers in the three magazines. For instance, the March 1990 issue of *Successful Farming*, besides featuring advertisements from major manufacturers such as Deere & Company and DuPont, also includes advertisements from Wix (a maker of oil filters), Red Brand farm fencing, and Morton Buildings, Inc. (a maker of prefabricated sheds and barns). Similar, too, is *Farm Journal*’s advertising content. It’s Mid-March 1985 issue featured advertising from tractor manufacturers Allis-Chalmers and Ford, as well as Astro Buildings, makers of
building materials. The March 1993 issue of *Progressive Farmer* has an advertisement from CLAAS, a maker of hay balers, and Alfagraze, an alfalfa feed blend developed by a researcher at the University of Georgia Agricultural Experiment Station. Such advertisements indicate that the three magazines are tailored to dedicated working farmers that as the magazines’ media kits indicate, likely own large farms that mostly produce commodities.

Overall, stories about organic agriculture early in the timeframe of this study emphasized the uniqueness of the profiled operations, making clear that organic production required a sort of dedication and attention to detail some farmers might not have the necessary patience, money, or interest. Stories about organic agriculture progressively started emphasizing the market and money-making potential for organic goods in light of increasing demand from consumers for food made without pesticides, herbicides, growth hormones, etc. The underlying motivations of the organic movement — environmental stewardship, anti-corporate sentiments, and the need to build strong communities — were largely absent from organic farming coverage in those influential magazines. Although some magazines that cover the organic farming movement with greater frequency, such as *Acres U.S.A.*, *Organic Gardening*, and *Small Farmer’s Journal* also are influential, they are also niche publications with a much smaller readership than any of the mass-market farming publications studied here. Referencing again Hebdige’s (1979) discussions of hegemonic structures as well as Horkheimer and Adorno’s (1944) ideas of subculture and counterculture, it is apparent that as organic agriculture underwent a massive transition from its place in the realm of the counterculture to being integrated into the corporate agriculture hegemony, its role as a
divergent form of farming compared to conventional farming was likely always a temporary status as consumers started asking for organic food, a request that major retailers would be more than happy to satisfy. It can be argued that once Wal-Mart, one of the largest retailers in the world with billions of dollars in sales each year, started stocking large amounts of organic goods, the organic movement’s counterculture status was effectively revoked.

The effect that agenda-setting may have had on coverage should also be considered. McLeod, Kosicki & McLeod’s (2002) research into how the media creates an informational schema is especially applicable here. The farming magazines studied, by virtue of their large circulations and importance as major news sources for farmers (Walter, 2006), may have had an especially important role in determining whether a farmer would seriously consider organic farming as a viable practice. As mentioned earlier, editorial discussion of organic farming practices was usually brief and tinged with skepticism. Looking back, it is clear that organic farming as a whole was not seriously affected by such media messages – the abundance and popularity of organic food with consumers today in 2010 proves that. However, did the lack of major positive coverage about organic farming influence farmers in other ways? That question is beyond the scope of this study.

Funkhouser’s (1973) research into agenda-setting also suggested that the process of setting a media agenda depended on the media’s “overreporting of significant but unusual events” and “selective reporting of the newsworthy aspects of otherwise nonnewsworthy situations” (Funkhouser, 1973, pp. 533-538). In the case of this content analysis, there is doubt that the three farming magazines contributed heavily to the
organic farming agenda. The lack of a corollary effect between the farming magazines’ “organic” content and the growing popularity of organic food indicates that perhaps that was the case. Further studies could possibly examine the mainstream media’s coverage of organic farming and compare the results to that from the agricultural media. It was interesting to note how an article about organic farming would occasionally be bisected by an advertisement for an agrichemical company. Perhaps such placement was intentional. Perhaps not. It was an interesting juxtaposition, however.

It does bear repeating that a good number of news stories in the magazines that were about organic farming were overwhelmingly positive. However, it does demonstrate that organic farming was gradually becoming acknowledged as part of the agricultural system – a first step on its acceptance as part of the agricultural hegemony. Furthermore, how organic agriculture was discussed in articles published in more recent years also illustrated that the editors of farming magazines had become more accepting of the alternative paradigm of organic farming.
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

The goal of this study was to provide an overall assessment of how the mainstream farm press covered the rise and eventual acceptance of organic farming into the mainstream. That goal was accomplished, for the most part. As noted earlier in the review of literature, there are very few research studies of farming magazines, let alone studies that have examined the role of editorial prioritization and agenda-setting of farming topics. Moreover, there is a lack of research about media coverage and editorial treatment of the organic food movement. Most research on organic agriculture has focused on the historical or scientific aspects of organic food production, not how the media has reported on it. With all that in consideration, this thesis serves as one of the few examinations of media discussion about the organic farming industry.

Although this study suggests that the farm press may have an agenda-setting effect on its readership – the general farming population of America – the overall effect that organic farming content may have had on that population may be minimal. Because there was so little discussion about organic farming in farm trade publications, readers of those magazines may have never been adequately informed of the potential benefits of organic farming practices. There may have been other forces at work limiting knowledge and coverage and the farming agenda. With that in mind, any agenda-setting practices by farming magazines of promoting advertiser interests and entrenched farming traditions may have affected editors, and may suggest why there was such a small number of articles about organic farming practices, and why many of them were dismissive or skeptical. The word choices and editorial tone in those articles also contributed to how organic farming issues would be interpreted by readers. Articles featuring derogatory
words used to describe organic farming would likely have a negative influence on popular farmer perception of organic practices.

Putnam (2000, p. 288) has said that social capital, which is the measure of one’s social connectivity, can drive a community’s interactions and can increase both an individual’s and the whole community’s financial capital and wealth. Readers of farming magazines – farmers and owners of businesses serving farmers – may carry large amounts of social capital in their communities, and if one farmer with high social capital decides that organic farming is worth doing, others in the nearby farm community may take part as well. That follows Rogers’ (1962, pp. 6-8) ideas of the diffusion of innovation, which posits social change can effect as an idea is shared in a community – with organic farming, if multiple farmers in a community try organic farming practices, and do so successfully, it is likely that general attitudes about organic farming in that community would merge toward acceptance.

Thinking back to Ghanem’s (1997) parameters of framing and agenda-setting, future studies along these lines should consider the role that advertising content may have had on influencing editorial decisions about prominence of organic farming content. Obviously, it is impossible to determine the choices farming magazine editors made years ago when they were selecting articles about organic farming for publication, but it would be interesting to note how prominent agrichemical advertisements and pro-agrichemical content were in issues with organic farming content.

This study also demonstrates how competing publications covering specific industries might collectively, over time, subsume controversial movements into the mainstream. According to the textual analysis of organic agriculture content in the
farming magazines studied here, editorial treatment of that content varied according to
the magazine and the time period. Progressive Farmer’s editorial slant was more
skeptical; Farm Journal’s was more open-minded. As organic farming was portrayed less
as trying to distance itself from the conventional farming paradigm and more about
making money within (or at least alongside) that paradigm, the likelier it may be that the
magazines would write favorably about the practice. In essence, organic farming had
become subsumed into mainstream agriculture, and was portrayed as simply just another
variation on farming that had become stripped of some of its originating “counter-
cultural” identity in the process.

The organic farming industry of today, while worth many billions of dollars, also
retains many of its vestigial cultural markers. Advertisements for organic goods feature
photos of small farms that bear no resemblance to the factory-style operations where
most organic goods are grown; or they contain design elements that remind the customer
of the products’ (alleged) rural origins. That is effective marketing and follows Williams’
(1980, pp. 132-133) idea that as a counterculture is embraced and integrated into the
superstructure, vestiges and irrelevant cultural markers still make themselves apparent.
Future studies should consider the relationship between advertising and content in
farming magazines.

This thesis was limited in several ways. First, the focus on just three national
magazines precludes making any generalized claims as to how all farming and agriculture
magazines covered the issue. Because organic farming media content was often rare in
this sample, it was possible any individual issue of any magazine with relatively large
amounts of organic-farming content could skew the results and show a particular
magazine as averaging out to have carried more of that content than was typical. Future studies along these lines might consider a much larger sample, or even a census, to control for spikes and lulls in coverage of specific issues in the farm press. It would also be worth conducting a textual analysis on issues of magazines that focus strictly on organic farming, such as *Acres U.S.A.* Magazine, that would likely feature large amounts of content about organic farming practices and could provide additional context and information about the movement as a whole during the studied timeframe. Because the constructed-year method has its own flaws, this study may have been better served by the use of the interval method or census to collect data. As the body of data was so thin with regard to statistical analysis, any additional materials would have provided additional context and insight to farmer attitudes and motivations about organic agriculture, as well as simply providing a more accurate description of how often general farming magazines cover that topic.

Also with regard to future research, an expansion of the study might include content that is not necessarily about organic or sustainable agriculture, but would still be of interest to farmers who practice organic and sustainable farming, such as stories about legislation restricting the use of agrichemicals or coverage of genetically modified crops. While not often explicitly mentioning organic farming practices, such articles could have just the same impression and effect on a reader interested in organic farming as an article strictly about the practice.

The time period of this research did not include years prior to 1985, which excludes any content about farmers from the back-to-the-land movement of the 1960s and 1970s. It also excludes earlier, foundational books and articles about organic farming
trends and practices. Further research should expand the study time period to note any incipient trends in coverage or discussions about pioneer organic farming operations.


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APPENDIX A: CODING PROTOCOL

Introduction

The purpose of this content analysis is to determine the frequency of articles about organic agriculture, and the portrayal of that subject matter, in farming magazines from 1985 to 2005. Attention will be paid to the way organic farming is portrayed in these articles, including depictions of farmers, farming practices, farming alternatives, and so on. The following definitions are important in finding and coding the content under study.

Organic Agriculture:

According to the United States Department of Agriculture\textsuperscript{10}, organic farming is not just farming without the use of synthetic agrichemicals or genetically-modified organisms, but a whole farming ‘philosophy’:

Organic production is not simply the avoidance of conventional chemical inputs, nor is it the substitution of natural inputs for synthetic ones. Organic farmers apply techniques first used thousands of years ago, such as crop rotations and the use of composted animal manures and green manure crops, in ways that are economically sustainable in today's world. In organic production, overall system health is emphasized, and the interaction of management practices is the primary concern. Organic producers implement a wide range of strategies to develop and maintain biological diversity and replenish soil fertility.

Organic production entails the following practices:

• Use of cover crops, green manures, animal manures and crop rotations to fertilize the soil, maximize biological activity and maintain long-term soil health.
• Use of biological control, crop rotations and other techniques to manage weeds, insects and diseases.
• An emphasis on biodiversity of the agricultural system and the surrounding environment.
• Using rotational grazing and mixed forage pastures for livestock operations and alternative health care for animal wellbeing.
• Reduction of external and off-farm inputs and elimination of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers and other materials, such as hormones and antibiotics.
• A focus on renewable resources, soil and water conservation, and management practices that restore, maintain and enhance ecological balance.”

Articles about Organic Agriculture:

With the aforementioned definitions in mind, stories about organic agriculture would in some way contain content that described organic agriculture as the main focus of the story. In an effort to only include stories in the study sample that prominently feature organic agriculture content, included stories MUST mention organic agriculture in the first five paragraphs. Stories that mention organic agriculture in the title, headline, captions, pull-quotes, display text, and cover must be included.

Stories may appear in the form of interviews, letters to the editor, farmer and farm profiles, how-tos, staff opinion pieces, business profiles, infographics, magazine covers and any other content that mentions organic agriculture practices or ideology.

As an example, a two-paragraph story that features a headline such as “Organic Strawberries Find Large Profits” would be included, same with a 15-paragraph story that profiles a farmer who raises organic chickens. A story that would not be included would be one that briefly mentions organic agriculture as an aside in paragraph 10 of a 12-paragraph story, or uses organic in the context of “organic matter” which refers to decaying carbon-based material, from an animal or plant, and not agricultural practices.

The “Portrayal” Issue:

To discern whether a particular article treats its subject matter positively, negatively, or neutral, one must look closely at how the article is written, the language used, the sources are used, and what kind of information is included in article ancillaries such as photos, graphs, lists, and so on. A story overwhelmingly positive in its portrayal of organic agriculture will discuss only the virtues of that farming technique, and will include little to no quotes from contrarians or advocates of conventional agriculture. On the other hand, a story overwhelmingly negative in its portrayal of organic agriculture might highlight the disadvantages of organic farming, such as productivity and costs, and include a great deal of quotes from proponents of conventional agriculture. A neutral piece is just that – both sides of the organic and conventional debate are portrayed in an even-handed and fair manner, with advocates from either side evenly quoted. A neutral article might appear in the form of a “pro & con” piece, or a general overview of the organic movement itself.

Frames and Themes

Articles about newsworthy topics are often written in a particular way to emphasize a certain story angle. Stories about organic agriculture are no different – because organic agriculture is practiced for so many different reasons, a particular article is likely to be written in such a way that emphasizes a certain attribute of the organic movement.

Read the stories carefully and note how organic agriculture is portrayed. Some articles may discuss only the economic benefits or disadvantages of organic farming; others may
focus largely on the environmental aspect, with a brief mention of the organic movement’s role in the counterculture of the 1960s.

Procedure

The following steps should be taken when analyzing and coding stories:

A) All relevant organic farming stories are closely read to identify dominant themes and characterizations
B) All stories are read, coded, and recorded by one coder
C) All stories are analyzed for specific characteristics listed below (Appendix B: Code Sheet)
APPENDIX B: CODING SHEET

New Soil coding sheet ___________________________ date coded ___________

Magazine (circle one):
  Farm Journal  Progressive Farmer  Successful Farming

Issue info (Month/Year): __________/_________ (Volume/Number): ____/____

CONTENT TALLIES

Is “OG” mentioned on the cover (circle one):          YES     NO

No. of FEATURE ARTICLES regarding OG:               __________

No. of SHORT ARTICLES/BRIEFS regarding OG:           __________

No. of OPINION PIECES (editorials, LTEs, columns) about OG:  __________

No. of PHOTOS/GRAPHS/ILLUSTRATIONS about OG:         __________

Total content items regarding OG:                     __________

CONTENT DETAILS

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<th>Article title</th>
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<th>Total paragraphs mentioning OG</th>
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ATTACH PHOTOCOPIES OF EACH ARTICLE LISTED ABOVE
APPENDIX C: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following books and academic papers informed my preliminary research, both as sources for data and information, but also as illumination: to give me a greater understanding of the issues facing the agricultural community and the journalists who cover that beat. Many of these books, particularly the older ones, only briefly mentioned organic agriculture, but even then, they were able to provide a much-needed perspective on the topic and on farming in general.

Books


Published several years before the passage of Reagan’s farm bill, and a number of years after the various crises of the 1970’s, *Empty Breadbasket* is a sort of status report on America’s relationship with the food system, from producers to consumers. In this book, all the various facets of the food supply network receive a fair amount of criticism, with seemingly-prophetic reports on possible water crises, the collapse and consolidation of the family farm, food security, and so on. While this book does provide an admittedly left-leaning perspective on food issues in America, it is also fair in what it describes as the “Cornucopia Agenda: Finding the Path to Food Security,” which are a series of essays and calls for American investment in sustainable food production and policy.


An autobiography framed within the context of a larger movement, *Back from the Land* is the story of the homesteaders of the 1960’s, who in a part-rejection of popular society, moved “back to the land” by buying land, building houses, and living an often-hardscrabble existence, with the additional goal of realizing the agricultural ideal that some felt inherent to the framework of America. As many of these homesteaders were either hippies, yippies, or otherwise a member of the counterculture milieu, they came to the land with hopes and dreams to build a prosperous life for themselves out of the land, and as the title of this book suggests, it was a dream that for many, was short-lived. One bad harvest, a drought, a hailstorm, and many of these farmers had to either “work out” (take a real job) or pack it in and move back to the city. This book highlights and illustrates the struggles unique to small-scale farming, from buying the land and preparing it for farming, to life in the home and the often inevitable conflicts that arise when snowbound and cold.


Miguel A. Altieri’s book is a scientific explanation of the processes that dictate sustainable agriculture, from primitive farming operations in South America, to more
pertinently, those of modern organic agriculture. While avoiding the polemics of some other similar books, Altieri makes mention of the efficacy and worth of sustainable farming, in a purely academic voice that makes its argument through graphs and charts rather than pleading. His discussion on organic agriculture explores the tools and implements needed to operate an efficient organic farm – on both a small and large scale, which gives the reader a good sense of what exactly falls under the organic “umbrella.”


To Wendell Berry, the farm, the soil, and the land are not just mechanisms of food production, institutions out in the country, and far removed from the city, but rather the glue that binds together society and all of humanity. Berry is a man much interested and maybe obsessed with how modern society, in its quest to absolve itself of its agrarian roots with gleaming cities, mass-production, and high levels of efficiency achieved only through invention, is still inextricably attached to the fields and forests from whence it came. It is this connection that strikes at the heart of the essays collected here in *Gift* – the “taint” of progress, with its mechanized and chemical means of production, has Berry here questioning whether such progress is rather just a step backward. Berry is a proponent of the agrarian ideal, because he *lives* it. To him, a farmer with his or her own hands and a set of well-selected tools, is quite capable of producing enough food to make a living off of, without submitting to the tragedies of factory farming, with its farms of excess acreage, chemicals, and short-term production goals, ignorant of land stewardship or conservation.

Perhaps the greater import of Berry’s work, is that the act of growing food is not just a profession selected according to what one is best-suited for, but maybe more a philosophical journey, one that carries with it a gravity that has unfairly been stripped from it by the stomp of progress in the years following the Industrial Revolution, and more specifically, after World War II.


This book echoes many of the same sentiments in *The Gift of Good Land*, but it’s more an examination of the connections between agriculture, human society and culture, and the environment, and how a fracture in any part of that triumvirate sends echoes and tremors to the other two. It seems the argument here is that by the rise of the city and the demands that urban dwelling places upon the environment (through pollution and urban sprawl), and the food supply (it’s awfully difficult, if not impossible for a city dweller to raise enough food to live off of), the agrarian environment must in turn compensate for that demand, which impacts the environment, usually negatively due to the demand for perfect produce and marbled meats, which often requires the use of pesticides, hormones, and other ‘supplements’ to the growing process. Not so much as *Gift*, *Unsettling* further reinforces and embraces the organic ideal of the rural land, and by proxy, the art of farming, as a sort of religion – a cult of the pure soil. Berry never lets go the notion that our grip on the Earth is transient – certainly our mark has been irreparably made, but we
are, for all intents and purposes, stewards of the land. We could either trammel upon it, or
coddle it, either is within our means, but Berry argues that it is our own personal
responsibility to treat the planet as we ourselves would want to be treated.

It is this idea that is at the heart of many of those who farm organically: humans are mere
caretakers of the land, and by farming organically, one is keeping with a sort of farming
“ideal.”

Sacred Cows and Hot Potatoes: Agrarian Myths in Agricultural Policy. Boulder,

Sacred Cows is a compilation of a number of arguments for reform and change in
American agricultural policy, set alongside a critique of the misconceptions of the ties
between rural America and the farming lifestyle. The authors discuss and deconstruct a
number of agrarian “myths”, such as the importance of agriculture to the rural economy,
and the effects of government regulation on farming operations. The basic premise of the
book is that the romanticized ideal of the family farm, is, by and large, no longer relevant
to the formulation of new farm policy, and as a result, should be discarded. This book
does offer up a perspective on some of the regulatory restrictions and policies enacted by
the government to preserve American agriculture, often with the end result being the
promotion of farm consolidation.

Chelsea, Michigan: Lewis Publishers, Inc.

This book is made up of a series of reports on the impact of modern agriculture on the
environment, accompanied by expositive essays that help to illustrate the major themes.
Canter’s book starts with a summary of the progression of American agriculture from the
its earlier, more primitive state in the 1700’s, to the inception of industrialization and the
decline of the rural-based American economy of the 19th century, to finally the modern
technologically-advanced food and farm industry of the past several decades. Canter then
moves on to detail the various environmentally-detrimental aspects of modern
agriculture, by describing such activity’s impacts on soil, water, air, and noise/solid waste
disposal. This book is even-handed and academic – it, like Altieri’s Agroecology book, is
a scientific look at the impact of agriculture on the environment, without distracting itself
with partisanship.

Washington: Island Press.

A massive, well-thought-out compendium of essays from a disparate spectrum of people,
all tied together under the umbrella of being distinctly anti-industrial agriculture. This
book is full of perspectives, from academics interested in farm policy, to gourmet chefs,
such as Alice Waters, who is known for her near-exclusive use of local food in her
restaurants. Much like Michael Pollan’s The Omnivore’s Dilemma, this is a book written
for the masses, but on the contrary, this hardly detracts from the content. Fatal Harvest does make an attempt to be all-encompassing – nearly every facet affected by industrial high-yield agriculture receives attention, from the environment, to farming communities, to even the big city. Also like The Omnivore’s Dilemma, is this book’s use of specific foodstuffs, such as corn and soybeans, to prove points, but minus Pollan’s even-handed approach. The arguments here, while certainly one-sided, are balanced from where they are sourced – those in academia have their say, just as much as those from other points in the sphere of influence. A major focus of this book is organic agriculture, and while its devotion to the topic is certainly understandable, Fatal Harvest does find room to critique certain aspects of the organic movement, such as the “Wal-Martification” of organics.


This text by Edmund Morris must have served as inspiration for so many of those back-to-the-landers depicted in Eleanor Agnew’s Back from the Land. Here, Morris details the exact steps he took to remove his family from the congested city of Philadelphia, and install them into the countryside of New Jersey where he commenced to build a personal economy that was sustainable and profitable, with only a small initial sum with which to make all his first purchases, including the farm itself. And Morris hardly dwells on just the pecuniary riches that his farm generates – he talks briefly about humankind’s role on the landscape, as both stewards, and as advanced animals, capable of destroying just as much as creating (91-92), which echoes many of the sentiments expressed by Wendell Berry.

The relationship between Morris and his land is a testament somewhat, of the power that farming, practiced sustainably, has to be profitable. Certainly, some of his techniques and equipment used are obsolete now in this era of information-tech and mechanization, but Ten Acres serves as a lesson that one need not dive deep into indebtedness and farming on gargantuan farms in order to live a sustainable and worthwhile existence on the land.


Besides giving an academic critique of U.S. farm policy and farm management, Political Economy also offers up a look at organic agriculture, especially with respect to the use and disuse of pesticides in the essay “The Evolution of Pesticide Policy,” by Katherine Reichelderfer and Maureen Kuwano Hinkle. In this essay, the authors lay out the history of pesticide use in the United States, as it is so defined by through governmental agencies such as the EPA, USDA, and FDA. Discussed are the pros and cons of the growing use of pesticides, which for the purposes of my research, provided perspective on this one particular facet of the organic debate. Perhaps the greater value of the Reichelderger and Kuwano Hinkle text is that it is a look at pesticide policy, written for researchers by researchers with an exhaustive bibliography and set of sources.

More of a compendium of the major agricultural literature, this book is a fairly exhaustive source of many of the major, and not-so-major, monographs and papers on agriculture and agriculture economics. Many of the titles listed are divided according to whether they are written on the now-somewhat antiquated notion of first-world, second-world, and third-world agricultural economic structures. Additionally, Olsen ranks the works according to a mathematical formula, based upon the number of times that a certain work is cited, the rank given by a reviewer, and whether that work has received an award or special citation. While the value of this system is certainly open to debate, it is certainly helpful in finding research material of worth.


Thomas F. Pawlick’s book is an interesting animal. In the central thesis of the book, Pawlick bemoans the decline of farm and agricultural journalism. He lays out his case by describing the degree to which that farm reportage has declined in both prevalence, quality, and scope. Once reports from rural America were commonplace in major metropolitan newspapers – now, not so much. With the exception of a chapter devoted almost entirely to a discussion of the pitfalls of large-scale corporate agriculture, Pawlick hardly deviates from his analysis of agricultural journalism. Additionally, a look at the agricultural journalism of Africa, and for that matter, the overall agricultural situation in that continent, both in various states of disrepair, give Pawlick cause to urge on training for Africa’s agricultural journalists as a way for Africa to better its food production system and infrastructure. Referenced by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) and ACCE (African Council on Communication Education) documents, the case is made for the importance of agricultural journalism, not just in Africa, but across the entire world. The value of this book to my work is in the fact that it discusses farm and rural journalism, as not just a variant of community journalism, but instead a genre all its own with real power and importance in the journalism world.


In succinct terms, this book is all about the way that we eat. An examination of where our food comes from, how it is made, and how it wends its way from the farm to dinner plate, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* is a crafted look at the ways that modern society has created a system to produce food on an immense scale, both organic and non, and also those producers and farmers who still practice the art of farming on intimate terms. Michael Pollan tours a massive feedlot packed with thousands of steers, followed by a walk around a small farm that engages in sustainable practices, and has built up a customer base and profits through the production of quality food. He praises the ideal of organic agriculture, while also pointing out that its recent popularity has led some organic producers to practice industrial agriculture on massive scales. While incredibly
fascinating, informative, and balanced, Pollan’s book helps to answer why people find organic food worth the additional premium over conventional produce. And when one answers that question, does it become apparent why agricultural magazines would find it worthwhile to cover organic agriculture in a positive light: there’s money to be made. However, under the influence of the agrichemical industry that subsidizes most of those magazines through advertising, the potential of organic farming may be mitigated or dismissed entirely. So when a book comes along such as Pollan’s, the possibility exists that organic agriculture may become more accepted across all fronts, even as it is now a part of the mainstream of popular culture.


A book expressly for those agricultural novices who, lacking the necessary experience, need the basics of farming on a small-scale explained. Schwenke lays it all out – he covers the basics of tilling, tilth, fertilizer, crop rotation, tractor and implement selection, and so on. This book is a guide to the art of farming as practiced by millions of Americans – on a scale manageable by a farmer, his or her family, and maybe a small crew. This work shows the labor necessary to build-up and operate a small farm, conventional or organic, while also describing the financial peril inherent to farming, such as that induced by natural disaster or poor-planning. Additionally, for the purposes of my research, this book has given me a solid baseline of knowledge regarding the farming profession and lifestyle, which furthers my perspective and research focus.


More of an overview of sustainable agricultural practices, Joy Tivy’s book is also a melding of the scientific method of Canter’s *Environmental Impacts of Agricultural Activities*, and the more critical and polemical approach of *Fatal Harvest*. Tivy also provides case studies of agricultural systems worldwide, from the rice paddies of southeast Asia, to the fields of Africa. While not necessarily so important to my particular study and research, such data gives a comprehensive examination of how the various economies of agriculture differ from what we see here in the United States. Also, like *Fatal Harvest*, correlations are drawn between agriculture, be it intensive or not, and conventional or organic, and its effect on the environment. This, unsurprisingly, gives Tivy the room to argue that organic non-intensive agriculture has less of a negative impact on the environment than other forms of farming.

**Research Papers**

This paper studied the oft-complicated relationship between farm magazine publishers and the advertisers that subsidize those magazines, with regards to the influence of those advertisers on the editorial content of a particular publication. This paper offered an overview of the whole range of opinions of publisher and advertiser collusion on editorial content, with some publishers having experienced more pressure than others, and in different forms from advertiser to advertiser. This particular paper is especially valuable for its discussion of industry consolidation, both in the magazine industry and in the agricultural product business.


“Localized Debates” is a study of the types of coverage and framing given over to articles about agricultural innovations such as GMOs, herbicides and pesticides, etc. in community, small-scale newspapers in California and Missouri. This paper is particularly interesting and relevant as it breaks down and analyzes articles on the basis of a number of frames such as a “Safety Frame,” “BST Frame,” “Frankenfoods Frame,” and so on. In addition, the dominant sources of information for these articles are analyzed as well. As a result, this article provides a solid root for discussion on how media sources frame agricultural stories, and in turn, what the factors are that may determine those particular frames.


This paper, which provides a perspective on the organic agriculture debate in Europe, is particularly interesting for the fact that it debates the utility and profitability of organic, conventional, and combined farming operations, especially in regards to their contribution to the rural economy and lifestyle. Also interesting was the idea presented here that farmers choose to grow organic food as a way of participating more directly in the rural economy with a contribution rooted in pro-environmentalism and high-quality food. The greater value of this paper is its descriptions of farmer motivations for adopting an organic production agenda.


In this paper, Hays and Reisner argue that farm magazine journalists experience a detrimental amount of pressure and influence from the advertisers that subsidize and support their publications. The authors’ data and claims were sourced from a questionnaire mailed to members of the American Agricultural Editors Association, which yielded 190 responses to questions about the nature of the advertiser-publisher relationship, the extent to which such relationships influence magazine content, and so on. What is most interesting is the authors’ claim that a culture of blame, or third-person
effect, exists within the farm press, where farm journalists tend to think of their peers as being more suspect of being influenced by advertisers than themselves.


This discussion of the perceptions of bias perceived by journalists both part of and outside of the farm “beat” in the farm press is also a compendium of assessments of both the self and others by those journalists. The authors found that stories about agriculture tend to be superficially written when written by non-farm journalists, and that stories written by farm journalists tend to tread the thin line between providing in-depth, insightful coverage, but with a pro-industry and pro-advertiser slant. This study bookends the Hays and Reisner paper “Feeling the Heat from Advertisers,” which argued that farm journalists are under considerable pressure to adhere to a pro-advertiser slant. This paper added context to my interest in how organic agriculture, with its diminished, and “different” reliance on the agriculture industry is covered in the farm press.


This study is similar to the Hays and Reisner “Feeling the Heat” survey, in that it examines the relationship between a publication’s editorial board, in the case of this study, popular newspapers, and the advertisers whose dollars help keep those newspapers profitable and solvent. The authors’ findings indicate that, in fact, advertisers do exert a considerable force on the editorial boards of newspapers by pulling sway over the sales departments of those publications. It was found that smaller papers experienced greater pressure than their larger counterparts, which indicates the implicit greater need that a smaller paper has on its bigger advertisers. The most significant takeaway from this paper is the idea that by knowing that such advertiser pressure exists, journalists are more likely than not to participate in a gatekeeping strategy.


Here, it is argued that the magazines that report on farms and farmers is becoming a more consolidated industry, i.e. one in which publishers buy out their smaller competitors, and as a result, effecting an oligopolic economy. This mirrors the situation with agricultural advertisers, who are also experiencing consolidation into only a handful of companies. As a result, there are fewer advertisers advertising their goods and services in a dwindling number of publications, and due to all of that, those smaller companies on both sides of the equation have experienced a sort of “squeeze” in their business.

the rural community as a source of information and economic context. And much like the Stuhlfaut and similar papers, this study argues that the editorial direction of farming magazines has an embedded bias toward conventional agricultural industrialization – as the advertisers of those magazines would prefer. This study, just like those others, gives a degree of insight into how the farm magazine business is so dependent on its advertisers for economic solvency, and how easy it is for magazine publishers to push advertiser agendas.


The field of agricultural communications, as it were, is not the most glamorous of topics in the research world. Compared to many of the other journalistic disciplines, the farm press has not received a large amount of attention. This paper is a compendium of some of the more useful resources available to the farm press researcher, which includes reference books, websites, professional associations such as the ACE (Agricultural Communicators in Education), and so forth. This paper was extremely useful in sorting out books which would lend background information to my research.
Appendix D: Farm Magazine Advertisement Examples

Figure 4. Advertisement for Triple “F” Feeds from June 1985 issue of Successful Farming (p. H14).
Figure 5. Advertisement for pig feeding program from October 1985 issue of Successful Farming (p. 18-U).