

which, until recent years, has failed to take the NFO seriously. The political disorganization of farmers became worse when the number of farmers declined, which diminished their political power even more. Soon nonagricultural constituencies such as consumers, environmentalists, and taxpayers were interfering in the agricultural policy-making process.

The disorganization of the farm constituency and the rise of new interest groups ultimately led to the retrenchment of farm programs. Sheingate quotes the work of other political scientists for the rather obvious proposition that "when interest groups are highly fragmented . . . they are less able to defend programs" (26). The result was the adoption of the "Freedom to Farm" legislation in 1996, when both farm prices and budget deficits were high, conditions that legitimated the concerns of nonfarm groups and justified farm policy retrenchment. In the end, Sheingate's brief for the continued validity of pluralist political theories convinces. He thus undermines the cynical theories of the "capture school" at a time when we can't afford to be cynical about our political institutions.

A Green and Permanent Land: Ecology and Agriculture in the Twentieth Century, by Randal S. Beeman and James A. Pritchard. Development of Western Resources Series. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001. ix, 219 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth.

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A society does well to critique its dominant cultural wisdom. Alternative experiences and visions, rather than the well-guarded traditions of the establishment, have often been the more adaptive resources of a culture. In *A Green and Permanent Land: Ecology and Agriculture in the Twentieth Century*, Randal S. Beeman and James A. Pritchard demonstrate how lessons learned from the history of alternative agricultural ideas and practices in twentieth-century America sustain a wider range of options for the twenty-first century.

Focusing on alternative agricultural innovations, Beeman and Pritchard argue that the hegemonic discourse of technologically driven decision making was ever countered by alternatives that gained considerable momentum in the twentieth century. The authors make significant methodological contributions to the study of agricultural history by defining the cultural and historical context in which alternative ideas and practices emerged, diverged, and converged.

Engaging in a critique of mainstream culture and its internal contradictions, Beeman and Pritchard highlight the interdependent ecological relationships among the soil, rural community persistence, consumer health, the environment, and economic viability that ultimately define sustainable agriculture. Historically, most Americans have had difficulty grasping those relationships. Yet a significant number of individuals were able to envision, concretely integrate, and effectively communicate moral and scientific solutions to crises in soil erosion, rural social decline, chronic economic catastrophes, and a growing public malaise regarding pollution. Detailing the intellectual history of ecological ideas and their influence allows Beeman and Pritchard to explain the cultural context within which alternative ecological agriculture practices were perceived as viable, "cultish," or threatening to the establishment.

Beeman and Pritchard describe the influence of many counter-cultural intellectuals, scientists, and practitioners, but none receives more credit for his ability to demonstrate economic success and recognition for scientific reasoning than does Dick Thompson of Boone, Iowa. In the midst of established cultural wisdom that promoted "bigger is better" (but not necessarily profitable) technologically dominated production, Dick and his wife, Sharon, demonstrated the ability to think outside of the box. Drawing on a rich tradition of alternative rationales for scientific research, the Thompsons exposed the heresies of conventional "profit-making" systems with tested methods for non-chemical, ecologically oriented grain and livestock production in Iowa. From their chronicle of intellectual traditions that defined conservation visions and the ecological movements in response to agricultural crises, Beeman and Pritchard were able to explain where Thompson was coming from and why his ideas gained so much momentum in Iowa and throughout the U.S. in the 1980s. As the charismatic spokesman of the Practical Farmers of America, an Iowa-based organization, Thompson communicated effective alternatives to more than 500 Iowa farmers and associate members. Beeman and Pritchard argue that the research and educational activities of the organization's network gained greater cultural legitimacy as it reinforced the claims of other nationally recognized high-profile leaders of successful scientific research organizations.

Beeman and Pritchard further argue that Iowans like Dick and Sharon Thompson played a significant role in gaining public attention and drawing intellectual and financial resources toward sustainable ecological agriculture. Due to their efforts, mainstream culture changed slightly to consider the limitations of technologically driven agricul-

ture and the scientific study of natural systems, and rural ecology became a mainstream endeavor. Iowa State University, an establishment stronghold of technologically driven production research, founded the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture and created a new *Journal of Sustainable Agriculture*.

Beeman and Pritchard argue convincingly that "sustainable ecological agriculture" as an alternative movement was co-opted and adopted by traditional agricultural institutions because it provided viable scientific and ethical solutions to problems associated with soil erosion and environmental pollution (88). This detailed study provides the cultural context from which alternative farming practices in the twenty-first century should be scientifically evaluated and culturally rewarded in Iowa. Beeman and Pritchard point out that only 1 to 3 percent of Iowa's agricultural research dollars are targeted toward sustainable projects. Anyone concerned with Iowa agriculture and the environment should read this book. Then perhaps that will change.

Mapping the Farm: The Chronicle of a Family, by John Hildebrand. 1995. Reprint. Borealis Books. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2001. 245 pp. Illustrations, notes. \$23.00 cloth, \$14.95 paper.

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Perhaps a better title for Hildebrand's book would have been *Son-in-Law of the Middle Border*. To be sure, there are maps of the O'Neill family farm near Rochester, Minnesota, which Hildebrand married into, and considerable effort is spent charting the story of the farm and its farmers since the 1880s. In chapter two, several maps and aerial photographs are unfolded and explained in an attempt to get at what Hildebrand wants: "a series of overlays that will orient me not only to how the land lies but where we fit into it" (15). Like other writers who have similar questions about the farmland and farmers of middle America, Hildebrand is smart enough to begin with maps, but wise enough to know that knowledge of surfaces is just that. Something as vast as the cornfields of the Midwest is best approached through the telescopic power of the map, at least for beginners, and then through the microcosm of a family farm; Hildebrand does both. But Hildebrand's best answer to his ancient question is in his in-law "overlay," which fits somewhere between the cold objectivity of the cartographer and the heat of old blood ties—in what he discovers about his own relationship to the farm.

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