



— THE LAND —
CONNECTION

How do we achieve a sustainable food system?

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Who am I?

- Born and raised in Downs, IL
- Art school
- Recycling
- Peace Corps
- Farms, gardens, vineyards
- University of Michigan
 - *Environmental Psychology*
 - *Conservation Ecology*
- Sustaining Family Forests
- The Land Connection





THE LAND CONNECTION



— IN DEVELOPMENT —
Organic Grain
Apprenticeship
FARMLAND ACCESS HUB
2021



Organic Grain
Conference
& Trade Show 2020



Champaign
Farmers Market



The C.Urrant
Your C-U Farmers Market Newsletter

What can a small nonprofit do?

- ✓ Support individual behavior change
- ✓ Advocate priorities to funders and policy-makers
- ✓ ????



What are our spheres of influence?

How can we create systems-level change?

Behavior, Landscape, & System Change

- Current models put the onus on the individual
 - *Personal responsibility & shame* (a good person does the “right” thing)
 - *Context & conditions*
 - *Food System: consumer purchasing*
 - *Food Waste: label confusion*
 - *Recycling: label confusion*
 - *Climate change: too abstract, little agency*
 - *Rely on information activating motivation*
- How much do your buying preferences affect the system? How do they affect the landscape?



Identity Narratives and the Adoption of Conservation Practices by Commodity Farmers

Hypothesis

Identity-based decision-making is a theory of human motivation that explains how a person's perception of their identity shapes their choices.

We hypothesize that assisting farmers in incorporating regenerative practices into their identity as “successful farmers” will facilitate the adoption of these practices.

The literature is clear that social norms which construct the meaning and identity of what constitutes a successful farmer can be very strong motivators and/or deterrents in adopting new practices. Yet, the mechanism by which they function is not understood.

Identity Narratives and the Adoption of Conservation Practices by Commodity Farmers

Purpose & Objective

- To understand more about the role of occupational identity as a motivator in adoption of conservation practices by commodity farmers
- To provide recommendations for educators on how to identify opportunities and mitigate barriers in the adoption process

Identity Narratives and the Adoption of Conservation Practices by Commodity Farmers

Methodology

- SARE Research & Education grant
- 20 in-depth interviews with commodity farmers in Central Illinois
- Single proprietors of family farms or shareholders in family farm corporations
- All male
- Varied levels of use of conservation practices
- Varied age range and farming experience

We assumed we would find clear differences in the identity narratives of farmers who had adopted a relatively high number of conservation practices and those who had not.

We found little difference.

This led us to propose identity as a reflection of how farmers interact with the industrial agriculture system rather than as a driver of their behavior.

System has Constraints/Limits

Most of elements that affect a farmer's decision about a proposed conservation practice are already in place in the system at the time it is introduced

Power and Influence in the System

- Land and landlords who control it
- Technology and equipment
- Labor

How do these create a system that slows the adoption of a beneficial conservation practice?



Interventions that only address one piece of the system are insufficient.

Cover cropping:

- NE \$I inter-seeder lease
 - *Reduced barrier of access to specialized equipment*
 - *What's missing?*
- IL fall covers for spring savings premium discount
 - *provides \$5/acre crop insurance discount*
 - *What else is needed?*



Interventions that only address one piece of the system are insufficient.

Food access:

- WIC & SNAP incentive programs
 - *Increased purchasing power*
 - *What's missing?*



Problem: The Future of our Farmland

- Massive generational land transfer underway now
 - ◆ Who will own the land?
 - ◆ How will it be farmed?
- Farmland consolidation:
 - ◆ limits access to new entrants
 - ◆ reduces the likelihood that land will be farmed for food
 - ◆ perpetuates the techno-chemical treadmill
 - ◆ increases opportunities for corporate and foreign interests

Problem: The Future of our Farmland

How can we create the conditions in the system that allow opportunities for new and beginning sustainable food farmers?

How can we ensure equitable transitions of the land?

Programmatic Interventions

Organic Grain Apprenticeship

- ❖ Build a qualified pipeline of next-generation organic farmers prepared to manage large tracts of land for landscape-scale environmental benefits
- ❖ Increase innovative farmland access, transfer and succession strategies
- ❖ Increase the pace and scale of conservation in agriculture at a time of significant land transitions



Programmatic Interventions

Farmland Access Hub

- ❖ Farmland Access Navigation services
- ❖ Statewide FarmLink website
- ❖ Farmer and Landowner training
- ❖ Succession and Transition Support

...down the road

- ➔ *State statutes for farmland transfer*
- ➔ *IDNR land leases*
- ➔ *Agrarian Commons*



Problem: The Future of our Farmland

**WHAT ARE WE
MISSING???**

Systems change: The Future of our Farmland

- Who/what holds power in the system?

 - *Actors*

- How can power be shifted?

 - *Interventions*

- How can we create the conditions to achieve our desired outcomes?

Thank you!

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