

ALTERNATIVE LAND TENURE: A PATH TOWARDS
FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN SASKATCHEWAN?

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ABSTRACT

In the past few years, a global food crisis has fuelled corporate investment and speculation in land and the attendant dispossession of smallholders and ecological damage, while doing little to alleviate hunger or secure livings for rural dwellers. This phenomenon is most evident in the Global South, but it is happening in Canada too. The dominant industrial agricultural model in Saskatchewan, with roots in the foundation of colonial capitalist agriculture and private ownership of land on the prairies, has resulted in a decades-long “farm crisis” as smaller farmers are forced off the land and agribusinesses consolidate and dominate production. A radically different vision of access to and control over land, as the basis of a new food system, is necessary in striving for socially and ecologically just agriculture.

In this thesis, the concept of food sovereignty is used as a theoretical framework because it challenges the hegemony of global industrial agriculture and offers an alternative vision for land tenure and agrarian reform based on principles of social justice. Using data from in-depth qualitative interviews as well as critical discourse analysis of primary documents, this thesis explores alternative land tenure models proposed and practised by farmers involved in a progressive agrarian organization and participants in alternative agricultural land-ownership models in Saskatchewan. Analyzing key themes from the qualitative data using food sovereignty's principles of agrarian reform, this thesis illuminates the ideology behind the dominant global industrial agriculture system, provides historical, global, and Saskatchewan-specific context for issues of access to land, and suggests an approach that unites resistance and expands possibilities for

alternatives, based on the social justice principles of food sovereignty.

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To my dad, for his inspiring work on agricultural issues in the past,

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And my children, for whom I work for a future of food sovereignty.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the potential of alternative land tenure ideas and practices in Saskatchewan to contribute to a socially just food system in a province dominated by the global industrial agricultural system and its attendant inequities. The introductory chapter contextualizes current land tenure, beginning with a description of the global industrial agriculture system and the neoliberal capitalist ideology that underlies it, supported by data from Canada, and Saskatchewan when available. I then provide a historical, political, economic, and social context of past and present land tenure trends and debates in Saskatchewan to show why the issue of land tenure is salient here when discussing socially just alternatives to the food system.

For decades, the prevailing wisdom has been that nations need to rationalize their agriculture sector, move the surplus labour into industry and then services, and generally abandon the unprofitable occupation of farming. In just the past few years, the financial press has displayed a dramatic reversal of this view—that there is, indeed, big money to be made in farmland, especially for investors. “Food Crisis: Fields of Gold,” a headline in the September 14, 2009 issue of *Canadian Business Magazine* trumpets. “Agriculture Investment: Solid Ground for Unstable Times,” a CNBC headline promises on November 8, 2011. Since the global price spike in staple foods and ensuing food riots in many nations in 2008, there has been an explosion of foreign direct investment (FDI) in agricultural land by sovereign wealth funds and companies such as investment, superannuation, and hedge funds (Burch and Lawrence 2009; Funk 2010; GRAIN 2008). “Land [is] a hot commodity,” as the Wall Street Journal headline of March 29, 2011 says.

This response to the food crisis is driven not only by fears of food scarcity, but by

the recognition that this fear can be turned to profitable advantage. Land is seen as a key future asset and more stable than many other investments, given recent market volatility. The extent of these land purchases or long-term leases, termed “land grabs” by their critics, is hard to measure due to the secrecy of many agreements, but the most recent estimates are forty-five to fifty million affected hectares (World Bank 2010; GRAIN et al. 2011). The major impetus for the land grab comes from food-import-dependent countries such as Saudi Arabia, or countries facing agricultural land pressures and population increases such as China. They are investing in industrial agricultural production and buying farmland in other countries to try to secure and control their own food supplies. The other group of corporate investors is seeking financial returns from both food and biofuels. Food is not only a relatively safe investment because it is a necessity of life that will always need to be produced: it is also one that rewards speculation (GRAIN 2008). For example, Anuradha Mittal quotes Canadian financier Susan Payne, until recently of Emergent Asset Management, who calls the company's investment in South African land an “arbitrage opportunity” and says, “We could be moronic and not grow anything over the next decade and we would still be making money” (Mwansa and Kaluba 2011, para. 18).

The lessors in these land grabs are often cash-strapped nations with weak governance and a lack of investment in agriculture – many may worry about supplying their domestic food needs and believe investment will help increase production in their countries. The communities targeted are often the poorest ones with non-traditional title to lands (De Schutter 2011; Borras et al. 2011). While this FDI may seem to some like a win-win deal—positive investment in agricultural systems that need to modernize and

increase productivity—the result has been overwhelmingly to fuel the replacement of smallholder agriculture and/or pastoralist livelihoods with export-oriented large-scale industrial agriculture at the same time as many people in the land-selling countries experience hunger and even receive international food aid (De Schutter 2011; Daniel and Mittal 2009). Farmlandgrab.org maintains a database of news articles on land grabbing from sources all over the world, and the effects most cited in these articles are: inadequately or uncompensated evictions from land, sometimes with intimidation and property destruction; deforestation; degradation of fragile ecosystems and waterways; and few, if any, low-paying jobs as a result. GRAIN minces no words in summing up the situation: “It should be abundantly clear . . . that behind the rhetoric of win-win deals the real aim of these contracts is not agricultural development, much less rural development, but simply agribusiness development” (2008, 6).

Actors as diverse as the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Food, international peasant movement La Vía Campesina, and the hundreds of scientists involved in the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development believe the increasingly-dispossessed producers are the best hope for, as La Vía Campesina puts it, “feeding the world and cooling the planet” (Hernandez Navarro and Desmarais 2009). This is the belief of the global movement for food sovereignty, a holistic, social justice-based alternative vision for food and agriculture.

The definition of social justice is debatable; it is not static, but fluctuating and context-dependent. Social justice is often indirectly defined through description, as characteristic of a progressive organization or movement's work or goals – and these of course vary somewhat contextually and between groups, leading to varying definitions

of/emphases on what constitutes social justice. According to Nancy Fraser (2005), conceptions of social justice in the previous few decades primarily encompassed economic and cultural dimensions (issues of distribution and issues of status and value). This conventional idea of social justice confines it almost entirely within the nation-state, it being held responsible for ensuring equality of law, opportunities, and access to resources. Fraser argues that the conception of social justice needs to change with changing times. With the rise of globalization and issues that transcend or fall out of the determined purview of nation-states, a new dimension of social justice must be considered – the political. This concerns the questions of who constitutes the group entitled to justice, and how their claims should be judged, outside of a Westphalian system.

Following Fraser, social justice, in this thesis, includes radical challenges to inequity in political and economic power, the concept of equitable opportunities and access to resources, rights including the right of community- and self-determination, and – adding to Fraser's definition - people's responsibilities to each other and to the environment. This conception resonates with the principles of food sovereignty. Arising as a response to globalization, the food sovereignty movement spearheaded by La Vía Campesina incorporates not only the economic and cultural, but the political, dimension of social justice. The sovereignty referred to is not that of a nation-state, but that of a group, peasants, defining themselves and claiming the right to representation and frame-setting, democratizing the process of who gets a say.

First elucidated in 1996 by La Vía Campesina, food sovereignty is defined by the widely-cited Declaration of Nyéléni as “the right of peoples to healthy and culturally

appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems” (Forum for Food Sovereignty 2007). Food sovereignty principles are expressions of social justice. They include food and its production as a human right, fair prices that generate a decent standard of living for farmers and farmworkers, land redistribution, community controlled or fair access to the productive commons, and agroecological farming methods that nurture the environment and don’t endanger workers (Rosset 2003; Windfuhr and Jonsén 2005). Spearheading the food sovereignty movement, La Vía Campesina espouses inclusive, participatory, and democratic decision-making and the strengthened position of women in agriculture (Desmarais 2007).

Food sovereignty aims to provide not only sufficient, good-quality food but also sustainable livelihoods and communities, by challenging inequities of wealth and power and creating a diversity of democratic, ecologically sustainable food systems. A key element is agrarian reform – addressing the aspects of wealth and power in land transfers in order to reform land-based social relations – that is supported by rural development policies and supports (Borras and Franco 2010). Food sovereignty contains basic tenets of social justice: equality, solidarity, dignity, and human rights. These tenets both accompany the work that is done to gain autonomy over the food system, and result from its transformation.

Food sovereignty has the potential to be transformative – to fundamentally change the global agrifood system. In this paradigm, the answers to the food crisis cannot simply be productivist - relying on ever more intensification and expansion. They are necessarily as complex and embedded as the problems themselves.

1.1 Research Goal

Canadian agriculture is not immune to the trend of corporate acquisition of farmland, smallholder dispossession, and associated social and environmental damage. Canada also has a growing food sovereignty movement that challenges the dominance of global industrial agriculture and offers an alternative vision for land tenure and agrarian reform. The purpose of this research is to examine alternative agricultural land tenure¹ in Saskatchewan and its place in developing a more socially just food system consonant with food sovereignty. This research addresses the following questions:

1. What ideas and practices of alternative, socially just agricultural land tenure are suggested or practiced by progressive agricultural organizations in Saskatchewan?
2. How do these land tenure models correspond with agrarian reform principles of food sovereignty?
3. What are the constraints on creating or implementing alternative models of land tenure in Saskatchewan? How do participant organizations address these?
4. What are the policy and social movement implications of these organizations' efforts in alternative land tenure if the goal is to build a more just food system?

To answer these questions, I conducted qualitative interviews with three groups. The first group of interviewees was members of the National Farmers Union (NFU), an agrarian organization that is the torchbearer of food sovereignty in Canada. Other interviewees were drawn from two groups participating in alternate land-ownership models in Saskatchewan: Genesis Land Conservancy² and New Roots Land Trust. The research is

1 The FAO offers a working definition of land tenure: "Land tenure is the relationship, whether legally or customarily defined, among people, as individuals or groups, with respect to land" (2002, Sec.3.1). This includes the more general concept of "access to land".

2 Known as Genesis Land Conservancy since its inception, the conservancy changed its name to

also informed by critical discourse analysis of primary documents such as government records and Hansard, and documents generated for educational and promotional purposes by the NFU and Genesis Land Conservancy. Food sovereignty and its principles of agrarian reform is the frame of reference through which I evaluate my data.

1.2 Research Methodology

As Corbin and Strauss (2008) point out, the methodological approach should be dictated by the research question. My research questions are most appropriately answered through qualitative research and analysis. Typically, in qualitative research, generalisability of findings to wider groups and circumstances is not prioritized and it is largely irrelevant to my work since I am exploring a very historically, politically and geographically specific situation. While my research may help expand or refine the possibilities for practices of food sovereignty, that is not to say that the specific ideas of the research participants would necessarily be feasible outside Saskatchewan or even outside the participants' communities. Qualitative research also suits the theoretical framework of food sovereignty. Although there are fundamental principles, food sovereignty practices are contextual and place-based (Desmarais 2007). Also, food sovereignty's version of agrarian reform is concerned with not merely economic, but social relations, which are better explored qualitatively. As Hammersley and Atkinson point out, “in order to understand people's behaviour we must use an approach that gives us access to the meanings that guide that behaviour” (1995, 9).

My research is informed by critical theory: this choice follows naturally from my use of food sovereignty's critical analyses of the food system. Critical theory and food

Farmland Legacies in March 2012, subsequent to the research stage of this thesis. Because of this, the conservancy will be referred to as “Genesis Land Conservancy” or “Genesis” throughout this thesis.

sovereignty both focus on everyday life and are generated from grassroots concerns and experiences. From a critical perspective, as Lather claims, theory “becomes an expression and elaboration of politically progressive popular feelings rather than an abstract framework imposed by intellectuals on the complexity of lived experience” (quoted in McCotter 2001, 3). Theory is suggested by the data and responsive to it at the same time as it unifies, clarifies, and aids in a fuller expression of themes. In this thesis, theory is used to illuminate and offer a critical perspective on problems, to suggest alternative ways of thinking and acting, “to help us see openings, to help us to find happiness, to provide a space of freedom and possibility” (Gibson-Graham 2006, 7) when constructing models of a desired future. Thus, to shed light on agricultural land tenure issues, I occasionally draw from other areas of study, such as Gibson-Graham's work on alternative economies, to support theories of resistance and struggle, and also of transformation.

Critical theorists not only engage in self-reflection but also in social action in order to create conditions for healthy and just relations (Giroux 1980). Thus, their goals echo those of food sovereignty proponents. Like other critical researchers, I am value-driven, concerned with social justice, and want to actively effect change (McCotter 2001). With this thesis, my goal is “documenting need and creating the basis for action or reform” (Rubin and Rubin 2005, 21).

I believe, like other critical researchers, that there is no independent domain of reality to be objectively analyzed from the outside (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). In conducting research, I have unavoidably adopted a stance towards my topic. My interest in the topic of land began with, in the space of a few months, a quote from Pierre-Joseph

Proudhon ("Property is theft"), a question from my two year old son ("Why can't I walk on that lawn?") and the death of my father that left the fate of the family farm in question. These all suggested not only the arbitrariness but the unjustness of land ownership. I believe the dominant food system needs fundamental change in – change that will not come merely through changing purchasing habits or growing as much of one's own food as possible, but requires different conceptions of land and social relations.

As Hammersley and Atkinson argue, since the researcher can't avoid having an effect on data or using his/her "common sense", this tendency must be acknowledged, reflected upon, and used; even though findings are constructed they still can represent social phenomena. Quality in research, then, could be viewed as dependent on the researcher's ability internally to recognize his or her choices and their consequences and then to articulate these clearly to the broader public (Reason 2006). Throughout this thesis, I have attempted to justify the choice I have made to base my analysis on principles of social justice.

Food sovereignty also explicitly addresses the issue of access to land, the fundamental underlying relationship that makes agriculture possible but seemed to me in Saskatchewan to mostly be underqueried and unproblematized. Because of this, in my desire to explore land, I didn't want to talk to people about how it was (although an understanding of the status quo grounds my research) but of how it could be. I wanted to uncover radical visions, ideas, dreams, and practices that got at the root of problems. What ideas and practices were out there? How did they relate to food sovereignty? Why were or weren't they successful? What were the broader implications of these efforts?

When research is largely exploratory, as mine is, open-ended devices are most

appropriate (Miles and Huberman 1994). Hence, I chose to conduct qualitative, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. Personal contact allowed me to generate rapport and observe as well as record verbal responses. It also facilitated my sampling method. Interviews were open-ended, but structured enough for some comparison between participants—contextual and interpretive validity, rather than generalisability or internal validity, are important (ibid.). To that end, I have also examined documents created by the organizations from which the participants are drawn. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) caution that documents should be treated as social products, not more or less biased sources of data. They reveal much about participant beliefs and values.

Limitations of the Study

The scope of this master's thesis is necessarily limited due to time and page constraints. I have chosen to focus my research on two groups that are currently engaged in actions addressing inequities in the dominant agricultural land tenure system in Saskatchewan. I have not included issues with First Nations land tenure, choosing to work with communities with which I am more familiar. However, there is interesting work being done on contemporary topics, such as the case of a corporate farm renting First Nations land in Saskatchewan and supporting the training of First Nations farm managers (Magnan 2011) and the issue of tenure security on traditional lands (Natcher et al. 2009). With possible privatization of reserve lands looming (Curry 2010), this seems a fruitful area of study for other researchers. Similarly, while I could find little that the University of Saskatchewan Centre for Cooperative Studies had researched specifically on the topic of Saskatchewan land tenure, I am not addressing cooperative farms. There are almost no land-owning cooperative farms remaining in Saskatchewan (although

British Columbia has a few new ones) and again, the study of cooperatives is a well-documented area that I have not investigated but many others have (e. g. Mackintosh 1924; Scharf 1959; MacPherson 1979; Fairbairn 1991; Fulton and Heuthy 2009; Diamantopoulos 2011).

Sources of Data

To situate my research historically and politically, I used histories of the agrarian movement in Saskatchewan, including writing by participants in the Grain Growers Grain Company and anti-tariff movements in the early 1900s. I also relied on histories of prairie agrarian political parties – the Progressive Party, the Communist Party, Social Credit, and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation. I researched previous provincial government initiatives concerning land tenure such as the Regina Manifesto, the 1952 Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life, the Land Bank, and the 2002 Farm Security Act, consulting original documents, secondary sources, and Hansard. This information not only set the scene for my interviews, but was corroborated and enhanced by them.

I analysed select documents created by the NFU and Genesis created for public consumption, including Genesis promotional brochures, newsletters and website, and the NFU website, policies, quarterly magazine, news releases, and briefs. I looked at how these construct a “documentary reality”; how they endeavour to use or produce shared cultural assumptions and endorse values in what is often perceived as a more objective (because more anonymous) format (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, 173). I used critical discourse analysis to attempt to uncover the beliefs implicit in the documents, and “the ways [the] discourse structures enact, confirm, legitimate, reproduce, or challenge

relations of *power* and *dominance* in society” (Van Dijk 2003, 353; italics in original).

This approach helped me integrate analysis of the texts with the larger social context within which they work. In this analysis, I was guided by Corbin and Strauss (2008), Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), Gillen and Petersen (2005), McGregor (2003), Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000), and Bogren (2010) for knowledge of basic principles as well as techniques of critical discourse analysis.

My first group of research participants was drawn from primarily Saskatchewanian members of the National Farmers Union. (Two interviewees are Manitoban and one Nova Scotian; my sampling method led me to these farmers who have thought extensively about land tenure, one of whom lives and farms on a land trust. The land tenure situation in Manitoba is also quite similar to that in Saskatchewan, both historically and currently.) This organization is composed of farmers from across Canada who share the goal of preserving and promoting “the family farm as the most appropriate and efficient means of agricultural production” in Canada³ (NFU, “About” n. d.). The organization engages in advocacy, policy, and education work, much of it centred on federal and provincial agricultural policies. The NFU is also a founding member of the international peasant and farm movement La Vía Campesina. As such, the members of my purposive sample already had some varying experience in farm activism, some knowledge of food sovereignty, and an interest—and stake—in my area of research. I conducted ten interviews with eleven NFU members.

3 The definition of “family farm” is contested, but most agree with Brookfield (2008) that the majority of labour and management must be provided by family members; others include capital in this definition, some definitions include size as a factor, and intergenerational transfer to family members is often implicit. In this thesis, “family farm” is used to refer to farms where the majority of labour, management, and capital are provided by family members – a definition not inconsistent with that used by the NFU.

The second group of research participants encompassed those connected with two Saskatchewan agricultural land trusts. These trusts were created with the goal of preserving sustainably-used farmland. The Genesis Land Conservancy was established in the mid-1990s as a non-profit and charitable organization, originally attempting to address concerns about farm foreclosures and difficulties with intergenerational transfer of land by offering long-term leases to new or small farmers at less than market value. It has received donations of land from across Saskatchewan and into Alberta and possesses over three thousand acres, mostly leased out to chosen tenants. From Genesis and Earthcare Connections (the charitable organization that manages Genesis and conducts other educational activities around environmental sustainability), I conducted a total of six interviews with seven people, including the director as well as donors, tenants and board members past and present. I interviewed four tenants (who are de facto board members) of the smaller New Roots Land Trust. New Roots was established by a group of friends in the mid-1970s on one quarter of land, with the goal of communal cooperative living and self-support through sustainable agriculture. The trust has stayed the same size for decades, and has had two long-term residents, although the members of the trust number more than twenty. Interestingly, two of the NFU interviewees had past involvement with Genesis and spoke about that in their interviews, and one of these was also the initial land donor of New Roots. The thirteen male and nine female research participants ranged in age from twenty-six to eighty and represented a wide range of farming experience.

I used snowball sampling in order to find participants who had worked on or thought about land tenure issues, in order to allot my research time efficiently. In the

main, I found that the networks generated when participants recommended other interviewees helped the participants open up to me. I did, however, experience gatekeeping that did not allow me to contact the number of Genesis Land Conservancy tenants I would have liked, as I could not obtain names and contact information for them from the land trust administration. The land trust tenants I interviewed were either known to me personally or contact information was provided by mutual acquaintances.

Before interview data was collected, ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Board at the University of Regina (see Appendix A). Every participant read and signed a consent form, ensuring voluntary consent (included as Appendix B). Almost all chose to have their real names used in this thesis. For those who did not, I have used pseudonyms to protect their identities. The interviews, approximately one hour to one and a half hours long, were guided by a set of semi-structured questions that addressed interviewees' personal experience with land tenure alternatives, their knowledge and perception of wider agricultural trends, and their thoughts about community and the future of farming (sample attached as Appendix C). Those participants involved with land trusts answered additional questions about the mechanics of the trusts and the goals behind them.

1.3 Thesis Outline

This thesis addresses the question of what form socially just land tenure practices might take in Saskatchewan. The rest of this introductory chapter situates this question in the context of the dominant global agricultural system – capitalist, large-scale, and industrial – with specific data from Canada, and Saskatchewan when available. I then outline historical and current trends in land tenure policy and practices in Saskatchewan

in relation to ideas of property to show the importance of this topic to a discussion of an alternative, socially just food system that redistributes power, provides equitable access to production and consumption resources, and nourishes communities and their environments.

Chapter Two reviews the literature and several theories relevant to a discussion of alternative land tenure within a socially just food system. Gramsci's theories of hegemony and counter-hegemony, along with Polanyi's concept of market society and countermovements, contribute to an analysis of neoliberal capitalism in the food system. Agrarian populist and Marxist agrarian question critiques of the food system will be compared with the analysis of food sovereignty. Food sovereignty is explored as the main framework for my study because of its focus on social justice, radical analysis of the food system, and principles for agrarian reform.

Chapter Three introduces the interview and documentary data, exploring research participants' views of problems in agriculture and land tenure and private property. The second part of the chapter focuses on the NFU. Their understanding of food sovereignty and the global food system is examined. Then the specific suggestions of NFU members regarding alternative land tenure, as well as actions undertaken by the organization, are discussed.

Chapter Four provides a history of the land trust movement in North America and of the two land trusts that were subjects of this research. It describes the structure, functioning, and purpose of the trusts, in order to provide more context for the subsequent findings and analysis. The focus of the latter part of the chapter is on Genesis Land Conservancy's theories of social change and efforts in alternative land tenure, exploring

the barriers to Genesis' success.

Chapter Five completes the thesis with a discussion of the implications of this research for systemic, socially just change in agricultural land tenure in Saskatchewan. Analysis of the data brings out a unitary theme that both connects the best of the alternatives and points to directions in which their actions might be better focused. The land tenure alternatives are discussed in the context of efforts towards a national food sovereignty movement and the utility of this research is suggested.

1.4 Crisis in the Global Industrial Agricultural System

The world food crisis, far from an anomaly, is part of the 'creeping normality' of the corporate food regime. (Holt-Giménez and Shattuck 2011, 132).

There seem to be two trends in the North American media regarding food stories. One trend, a small but growing one, tracks alternative food movements, with stories about farmers markets, young college-educated back-to-the-landers, urban gardening, and the prevalence of artisanal food production. These are largely "good news" stories. The other trend is patterned more closely on conventional headline-grabbing news stories: it focuses on catastrophes. Headlines in mainstream news media in July of 2011 alerted audiences to a famine in the Horn of Africa that caused tens of thousands of deaths that year. In August 2011, two major recalls of food occurred in Canada due to listeria in large processing operations. The preceding January, a spike in global food prices contributed to revolution in Tunisia that sparked protests across the Arab world. Overall, 2011 saw the highest food prices ever, topping the 2008 prices that sparked riots across the globe in over forty countries. Hunger and food safety vied for top billing in the top food stories of 2011.

Many mainstream articles assert the need to increase food production dramatically

in the near future. The claim of an FAO discussion paper published in October of 2009 that seventy percent more food must be produced globally by 2050 in order to feed 2.3 billion more people (FAO 2009) has come to be accepted, often unreferenced, truth. Other than population increase and scarcity, reasons that are cited to support increased production include the changing (meat-intensifying) diets of the burgeoning Chinese and Indian middle class and the adverse meteorological effects of climate change. The common-sense solutions mainstream media propose are reliance on scientific breakthroughs and modern agricultural practices that must be taken up by small-scale farmers in the Global South. For example, a front page article in the June 5, 2011 edition of *The New York Times* suggests that to feed the world, we will need to develop new crop varieties and techniques to increase yield and resilience to climate change – a continuation of the Green Revolution (Gillis 2011). This is an approach championed by large philanthropist organizations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and developed by scientists in international research foundations. Although an article in the *National Post* on August 13, 2011 claims that on average life is better for the majority of people than it was decades ago, due to humans' limitless innovation, it does offer similar solutions to address the “obscure pockets of calamity” that still exist. The *National Post* advocates another Green Revolution for Africa and an end to political corruption to get food to the hungry (Blackwell 2011). This conventional model of agricultural “development” is also advocated by the World Bank, which recently advised facilitating access to markets, credit, assistance, manufactured inputs and seeds, and liberalizing trade to enable a transformation of the peasantry to small commodity producers for export (VanHaute 2011). As the theory goes, this would also have the benefit of rationalizing the

peasantry by increasing efficiency, subsequently creating workers for urban-based manufacturing and service sectors, and thus increasing yields and incomes (Pimbert 2009).

Handy and Fehr concisely summarize this model of development in a critique of capitalist industrial agriculture: “To many sensible people, these . . . propositions would seem nonsensical: one confronts a crisis in food production by driving more producers from the land, addresses the fragility of the current system of agricultural production by advocating more of the same and combats rural poverty by turning the rural poor into even poorer urban dwellers!” (2010, 45). To begin with, the assumption that the problem of hunger is one that can be solved by increased yield is questionable. Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen caused a sensation in 1981 when he proposed that famines aren't caused solely by a lack of food, but from social and economic inequalities that affect food distribution. That idea is embraced widely today. In Canada, it seems obvious that food insecurity is likewise not a supply problem, but an access problem, when the need for Food Banks is juxtaposed with the forty percent of food that Canadians waste (according to Gooch et. al 2010) in their households. The neo-Malthusian assertion that population is outstripping production can be challenged as well: according to Holt-Giménez and Shattuck (2011, 112), “over the last 20 years, food production has risen steadily at over two percent a year [FAO in Holt-Giménez et al. 2009], while global population growth has slowed to 1.09 percent, with an average growth rate of 1.2 percent over the preceding two decades [US Census Bureau 2010].”

While hunger is an immediate problem for many that must be addressed, the long-term answer is unlikely to be found in the extension of a capitalist industrial agricultural

system to the Global South. Critics have enumerated many destructive results of this system on rural populations and farmers. One result has been to weaken the capacity of nations to provide for domestic markets as they focus on developing agro-export capacity through government subsidies to agribusiness (Rosset 2008). The United Nations' International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development found that the destruction of the traditional rural sector in the Global South is aided by unfair trade arrangements, dumping of food surpluses, and unsustainable agricultural practices (Ishii-Eiteman 2008). Holt-Giménez (2008) explains how the original Green Revolution, lauded by mainstream economists for increasing yields (among farmers who could afford the associated inputs), also increased pest problems, salinization, inequality in rural incomes, and loss of biodiversity. It also resulted in massive farm worker poisonings in developing nations as it made a negligible difference to the number of hungry in the world. Assadi (2008) attributes tens of thousands of farmer suicides in India in the past ten years to the industrial, input-heavy farming that has indebted and impoverished many farmers and weakened farmers' movements. Clearly, this model does not sustain either the environment or the livelihoods of small and peasant farmers in the Global South, and elides, as Van Haute points out, "the new power relationships in the (world) marketplace (agro corporations), the vast asymmetries in market chains, and the question of equity in labor markets. Most importantly, it fails to interpret the food crisis as a crisis in both food security and food sovereignty" (2011, 54). Naomi Klein shows in *The Shock Doctrine* how neoliberal adherents use crises—or the threat of them—to justify its economic dictates (2007). In interpreting the food crisis in a way such that the solution is more of the same, the solution benefits those causing the

crisis and results in more concentration of power in the hands of the few global elite, imposing class on society as a dispossessed strata is created.

The crisis in the food system requires a deeper investigation that leads to the underlying issues of social justice. It is clear that the belief in scarcity and productivism obscures the power relations in the global food system that not only determine who gets food and who doesn't, but actually create the hungry. Counterintuitively, the majority of the world's hungry are food producers who live in rural areas in the Global South (FAOSTAT 2011). This is not despite, but often because of, the spread of the industrial farming model, global agribusiness, and the supporting ideology of neoliberalism.

Industrial Farming in Canada and the Farm Crisis

The industrial, market-driven farming model is dominant across North America and increasingly exported to the rest of the world. It entails large-scale production, either through monocropping or factory farming, and reliance on chemical and biological inputs and large machinery (Fitzgerald 2003; Kimbrell 2002). Production is geared towards export, dominated by large industrial farms and vertically-integrated corporations, traded mainly by a few massive corporations, and increasingly disseminated by a small number of transnational food retailers (Bello 2008). Along with global capitalism, it is undergoing a process of “financialisation” in which companies do not only engage in productive investment in agriculture, but in speculation (Burch and Lawrence 2009). In Saskatchewan, although this model began when export-oriented petty commodity production was introduced by European settlers and the Dominion policies that recruited them, its development rapidly accelerated after WWII and has been exacerbated by neoliberal policies in the past few decades.

Neoliberalism is the latest variant of western capitalism. It is “a theory of political practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey 2005, 2). In agriculture, neoliberal actions include participation in global trade agreements, mergers and consolidations in agribusiness, and commodification of natural resources (e.g. water markets). In this paradigm, agricultural viability is measured by “factor productivity”: quantitative standards of production, cost-efficiency, and profitability (Cousins and Scoones 2010). As evidenced by the World Bank policies mentioned earlier, development is equated with economic growth (Broad 2011).

With its narrow focus on productivity and financial returns, the global industrial agricultural system doesn't account for externalities in its measure of success. Increasingly, detrimental environmental, health, and social effects linked to this model have been documented. For example, fossil-fuel-dependent, highly processed, export-oriented food production is “energy-inefficient and climate-destabilizing” (PFPP 2011c, 2); environmental damage occurs as, for example, under-regulated intensive livestock operations scale up, contributing to water and air pollution and health problems such as antibiotic-resistant bacteria (Ervin et al. 2003; PFPP 2011c). While industrial farming practices have increased yields of many staple crops, and the percentage of income spent on food by the average Canadian was a mere eleven percent in 2002—a decrease of four percent from 1982 (Industry Canada 2007)—this model still negatively affects the average Canadian consumer. Health issues such as the obesity and diabetes “epidemics” have been linked to the destruction of local traditional diets and the increased availability,

promotion and subsidizing of unhealthy foods like high fructose corn syrup (Nestle 2002). In 2012, e-coli found in beef from an XL plant that processed more than 1/3 of Canadian beef production resulted in a recall of more than 1800 products, affecting more than 20 countries. This shows the vulnerability of a highly centralized and concentrated food system (Pyle 2005). As well, and perhaps most importantly, high yields and cheap prices have not meant the end of hunger even in highly industrialized societies: in 2007-08 in Canada, there were 961,000 households, or more than two million people, who were food-insecure (Health Canada 2011). Although more recent statistics on national food insecurity are unavailable, it is likely the situation has worsened. According to Food Banks Canada (2011), the number of Canadians using food banks has gone up twenty-six percent since the 2008-09 recession, including 851,014 users in March of 2011. The success of the modern food system is not evident in many health, environmental, or social outcomes.

The system's effect on farmers is most noticeably seen in the rate of attrition. Farms have been rapidly disappearing in Canada since a peak number in 1946, from over 700,000 to just more than 205,730 census farms in 2011 (Statistics Canada 2012a). The number of “young” farm operators in Canada (defined as those under the age of thirty-five), represented 8.2 percent of the total in 2011, a decrease from 9.1 percent in 2006 and less than half the proportion of 19.9 percent in 1991 (*ibid.*). Saskatchewan farm numbers peaked in 1941; since then the province has been losing farmers at the rate of about ten percent per decade (Gidluck 1995). The 2011 Statistics Canada Census of Agriculture saw a decrease of 7,377 farms from 2006 —or, 16.6 percent—for a total of 36,952 farms in Saskatchewan (Statistics Canada 2012a). Only ten percent of these farms are operated

by young farmers (Wilson 2011).

The loss of farms in Canada is exacerbated by the prevailing assumption that agriculture, like other industries in a market economy, should be rationalized and reliant on technology for increased efficiency (Fitzgerald 2003), internationally competitive, and unsupported by government (Lawrence, Knuttila, and Gray 2001). In most markets, farmers are at a competitive disadvantage due to their large numbers (despite the aforementioned decline) in relation to increasingly consolidating buyers of agricultural commodities and sellers of inputs. Since the early 1980s, with the spread of neoliberalism, the increased vertical and horizontal integration and global grasp of transnational agribusinesses has resulted in near-monopolies over inputs, processing, and shipping of agricultural products in North America (Easter 2005; Hendrickson et. al 2008), particularly in grain and livestock production which dominate Saskatchewan farming (NFU 2005). Governments play a limited role in supporting agriculture for domestic consumption, and in fact, government acquiescence to agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement actively harms farmers. For example, competition amongst farmers increases with “free” trade, and decreases among agribusiness as mergers and takeovers are encouraged (NFU 2001). All of these factors reduce or eliminate the competitive nature of the marketplace and decrease producer market power, squeezing out the small or mid-sized farmer who is then called “inefficient” (Hendrickson et. al 2008; Kneen 1989; Murphy 2006; NFU 2005). In fifteen of the twenty years from 1985-2005, Canadian farmers' average net market income was below \$5000; it has dipped into the negative numbers many times in the last few decades (NFU 2005). Many farmers are relying on government support, off-farm income, and access to

debt to stay on the farm (NFU 2010; Statistics Canada 2006a).

As the number of farmers dwindles and the average age of farmers increases, rural communities that relied not only on farm business but also on networks of social relations, die (Jaffe and Quark 2004; Stirling 2001). Unsurprisingly, Saskatchewan's rural population has continually declined in every census period over the last six decades (Bollman and Clemonson 2008). This decline is seen in rural areas across North America, with similar outcomes. In a meta-analysis of social science literature, Lobao and Stofferahn (2008) looked at the effects of corporate farming on communities in the United States and found that eighty-two percent of the studies documented detrimental effects: higher income inequality and associated social problems; family instability, decreased community participation, and social conflict; environmental and related health problems; and a decrease in medium-sized family farms. In their study of two rural Saskatchewan communities, Jaffe and Quark (2004) saw these effects and added one: an inadequate rural tax base resulting in a decrease in services and facilities. In the face of depopulation, some communities embrace the neoliberal model of economic growth, attracting industrial farming facilities at the cost of environmental and social health.

The decades-long “farm crisis” in Saskatchewan is thus not only a financial but a social and environmental crisis that affects far more than farmers. Its roots are in the foundation of colonial agrarian capitalist agriculture and private ownership of land on the prairies. This model has flourished and intensified despite challenges from agrarian movements that arose almost as soon as the land was broken.

1.5 Historical and Political Context of Land Tenure in Saskatchewan

Perspectives on Property

By the time European settlement of the Canadian prairies began en masse in the late 1800s, capitalist agriculture was well established in the mother country, Britain – where many argue capitalism originated. In Britain, the agricultural system had evolved from subsistence peasant production to tenant and (increasingly) wage-labourer production for the market. Land that was once cultivated commonly was subjected to individual, legally enforced title and monopolized by large landlords. Peasants went from little engagement with markets to dependency on the market for access to the means of (re)production. This transformation of social property relations subjected landlords and agricultural producers to market pressures and competition in order for them to self-reproduce (Marx [1887] 1976; Wood 2002; Handy and Fehr 2010). Wage-labour was not central to this capitalist development, but the subjection of producers to market imperatives was uniquely capitalist (Wood 2002). This form of agrarian capitalism was exported to Britain's colonies, first Ireland and then the “white settler colonies” including Canada (Wood 2002, 155). Although settlers on the Canadian Prairies engaged in petty commodity production, they were neither the independent, self-sufficient farmers of the American Jeffersonian ideal nor the tenants or wage-labourers of England, but, partly due to the seasonal nature of grain production and partly due to government policy, produced for export to eastern markets that sent manufactures in return. This meant that they were reliant on the market for self-reproduction, and also subject to market forces of commodification and competition beyond their control, engaging from the first in a global grain trading system.

Not only the functional, but the ideological, model was exported. Rifkin argues that the change in land title in Britain, largely accomplished through the enclosure

movement, “introduced a new concept of human relationships . . . Land was no longer something people belonged to, but rather a commodity people possessed. Land was reduced to a quantitative status and measured by its exchange value. So, too, with people” (quoted in Duchrow and Hinkelammert 2004, 32). As Polanyi concludes, since labour is another word for people and land our natural surroundings, “[t]o include them in the market mechanism means to subordinate the substance of society itself to the laws of the market” (1944, 71). Even though land is not a commodity – not produced – it is treated as such in order for the economic system to function.

Philosophical support came from productivist ideals of continual growth and improvement. Philosophers such as Locke justified and perpetuated capitalist social property relations by promoting the “improvement” of land (the cultivation of market-destined stuffs) and the notion that property had to be private and exclusive in order to be improved (Wood 2002). According to Locke's labour theory of value, property is thus created by the application of labour to natural resources. Along these lines, Hume (1817) asked rhetorically, who can deny that if people produce or improve something, it ought to be theirs to encourage them to do more of the same? Conveniently, these beliefs also justified the dispossession of aboriginal lands; Locke refers to indigenous territories as “the wild woods and uncultivated waste of America, left to nature, without any improvement, tillage or husbandry” and asserts that “he who appropriates land to himself by his labour, does not lessen, but increase the common stock of mankind” (1690, Sec. 37). Bypassing the social relations in Britain that resulted in enclosures, Europeans arrived in Saskatchewan to settle on a land that had largely already been enclosed through the establishment of reserves. Ignoring indigenous people's relationships with the land

and its resources, the agricultural cultivation of the colonies was elevated to a moral duty.

The contrast with Canadian First Nations relationships with the land could not be starker. Anishnaabe writer Akiwenzie-Damm writes,

The land does not belong to us; we belong to this land. We believe that this land recognizes us and knows us. In the broadest and most fundamental ways we are inextricably connected to this land. It holds the bones of our ancestors. This land provides for us and our children. It is a birthright granted to us by the Creator. In return it is our responsibility to care for and protect the land. It is our connection to the land that makes us who we are, that shapes our thinking, our cultural practices, our spiritual, emotional, physical and social lives. (1996, 21 [emphasis in original])

This close moral relationship between land and its inhabitants is radically opposed to the idea of land as just another fungible commodity. Rather than managing or controlling land and its resources, Morrison explains, Indigenous people “manage our behaviours in relation to it . . . nurturing healthy relationships with the land, plants, and animals” (2010, 99-100). The concept of “territory” is more apt when speaking of Indigenous relationships with land. Ray (2011) uses the concept of dynamic and often-overlapping spheres to explain Métis communities' fishing, hunting, trading, and transporting activities on the land. It is clear that this relationship with territory posed a great obstacle to the settlement and agricultural “development” of Saskatchewan.

Locke's labour theory of value was used not only to help justify this dispossession of “uncivilized” peoples but also in an attempt on the prairies to destroy First Nations collectivism and convert them to peasant farming beginning in the late 1800s. Indian Commissioner Hayter Reed saw the individualistic British farming model as a good way to destroy the “tribal or communist system” of community ownership on reserves and “implant a spirit of individual responsibility instead” (Reed quoted in Carter 1989, 30), believing that communality encourages the lazy to live off the industrious and provides

no motivation to excel.⁴ Carter points out that the granting of reserve land to individuals also, handily, helped define “surplus” lands and subsequently open them to settlement. Aided by the government's monopoly on force, European settlement proceeded rapidly, but Aboriginal title became a contested area and is still being worked out in the legal system today.

That Canadian Aboriginal people did not quickly embrace the capitalist conception of property is unsurprising: its imposition in England was similarly jarring. Using examples such as the Duchess of Sutherland's clearances where soldiers burned houses and expelled residents, Marx writes that the history of the expropriation of land through enclosures “is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire” (Marx [1867] 1999, Chapter 26). Throughout the 1800s, it was readily apparent to social critics that the imposition and enforcement of property rights both created and exacerbated injustices. For the anarcho-communist Kropotkin, writing in 1892, it was very apparent that capitalist property relations create injustice. He defines justice as the freedom and equal opportunity necessary for people to gain everything they need to be productive and happy; in contrast, he compellingly describes the misery that accumulates from the system of private ownership by the few. To achieve justice according to this definition would entail doing away with private property rights and expropriating all means of production and items of consumption. Kropotkin also makes a strong argument for the arbitrariness of individual property. “Each discovery, each advance, each increase in the sum of human riches, owes its being to the physical and mental travail of the past and the

4 In some conflict with his goal of encouraging individual improvement, Reed banned the use of labour-saving machinery on reserves. He advocated manual labour-based subsistence agriculture, despite the advice of many field agents who rightly saw that this was not practicable on the prairies. The policy did, however, have the effect of limiting Aboriginal competition with white settler farmers and providing “proof” that Aboriginals were poor farmers (Carter 1989).

present. By what right then can any one whatever appropriate the least morsel of this immense whole and say – This is mine, not yours?” (1892, Chapter One). Generally, Kropotkin sees society in terms of relationships rather than in terms of objects: property is a relationship, not an object. For example, housing is an instrument of production in that it renews the worker, and the important justice issue is not ownership of, but access to housing.

This view has more in common with indigenous ideas of the land than it does with Locke's views. Writing earlier in the 19th century, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, often called the father of anarchism, went so far as to declare that “property is robbery!”⁵ in his 1840 treatise, “What is Property?” Equating slavery with murder, he extends the comparison to property and robbery as property rights unjustly dispossess the majority. One of his examples of this is the labourer who loses his “natural right of property in the thing which he has produced” for paltry wages, and the landlord who does not labour but profits nonetheless. His ultimate argument is for the destruction—the impossibility—of property, based on several propositions, including the argument that since all products depend on the production of other things, “united by mutual relations in a single group”, this “makes all individual productions common” ([1840] 2008, Chapter Three). He almost gleefully pokes holes in the philosophical theories of property espoused by Locke and others, but he is, overall, motivated by a concern for social justice, calling property “the negation of equality” ([1840] 2008, Chapter 5).

However, the ideas of Locke and his ilk prevailed, aided by the powerful and wealthy they served, and are seen as common sense today in Saskatchewan. An excellent example is given by agricultural economist Glenn Fox, at a 1994 meeting of the Canadian

⁵ More often translated as the phrase “property is theft.”

Agricultural Economics and Farm Management Society in Regina on the topic of changing land tenure. He posits society as made up of “autonomous individuals” interacting; thus property exchange, protected by law, is naturally voluntary (1994, 520). Transfer of property, then, is only unjust in “cases of physical invasion, the threat of physical invasion, fraud or mental incompetence” (522). Fox believes that several property rights are the surest option for increasing stewardship of land, as the security ensured by this “power to exclude” provides “an incentive for investment” (522). Indeed, the right to exchange property subsequently contains an ethical element that Fox characterizes as a virtue inherent in it. The protection and elevation of this virtue has resulted in property rights in Western legal systems being commonly referred to as “nine-tenths of the law”.

Historical Land Tenure in Saskatchewan

For over a hundred years, beginning with the Dominion Lands Act of 1872, agricultural land tenure in Saskatchewan has been based on private property rights. It is a fee simple land ownership system that provides for single-family, private ownership of land. The Act was inherently biased against multiple-operator, co-operative, and communal farming, as well as female heads of households (Jaffe 2003). However, the model of land tenure didn't conflict with that desired by the vast majority of prairie settlers, who generally had the physiocratic veneration of land typical of the agrarian petit-bourgeoisie (Macpherson 1962; similarly described in Russian peasants by Lenin 1963) combined with the attachment to ownership that likely stemmed from the circumscribed land tenure options of their European ancestors (Bray 1980; Lind 2003). However, the independent individual farmer was not the self-sufficient producer of

frontier myth. From the time of settlement in the late 1800s, prairie farmers, as individual family units, were involved in an export-oriented agricultural system. The federal government intended to turn the prairies into a captive market for Eastern industrialists, producing grain for export and importing manufactures (Conway 2006; MacPherson 1962). As a result, early agrarian movements such as those which started the Grain Growers Grain Company and the prairie Wheat Pools addressed lack of producer market power in the face of monopolistic companies, not the system of land ownership.

Although labour groups often held the public ownership of resources as a basic tenet (Robin 1968), agrarian agitation for public ownership of land only appeared with the insecurity of the Depression era. The United Farmers of Canada (Saskatchewan Section) convention in 1931 not only called for a moratorium on debt seizures and foreclosures, but also proposed the more fundamentally challenging idea of nationalizing land and instituting use leases on all farms (Gidluck 1995). The Canadian Co-operative Federation also flirted with the idea of social ownership of land, proposing to secure farm tenure through usufruct rights rather than through fee simple. The province would hold title to the land itself, and the farmer, a voluntary participant, could use, bequeath, or even sell the usehold rights (Kaye 2006). However, the public ownership of land never progressed further than debates at UFC or CCF conventions. In 1933 the idea was blocked from the Regina Manifesto, the official program of the CCF, on the grounds that that farmers would never support anything but absolute ownership rights to the family farm (Kaye 2006).

In contrast to the use-lease idea, another alternative land tenure model that came out of the Depression era was widely accepted then and continues today: the community

pasture model. The Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act in 1935 created an organization, the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Association (PFRA), to address soil degradation, which it did primarily through implementation of irrigation and community pastures (Paul 1992). For the pastures, the PFRA acquired land which had largely been abandoned or forfeited to the provinces for tax arrears. Sixty of the resulting eighty-five federal community pastures are located in Saskatchewan. Allocation of grazing space was and still is based on a number of factors, the most important being an assessment of need (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada 2011). This emphasis suggests that support of the smaller farm and the principle of equity were fundamental to the pastures' purpose. In Saskatchewan, federal and provincial community pastures never made up a large proportion of grazing land in the province. However, the majority of grazing land in Saskatchewan is still owned by the Crown and leased to individual ranchers or farmers (Bruynooghe and Macdonald 2008). Grazing leases date back to the Dominion Lands Act as an incentive to the ranching industry, providing large leases at low cost.

In the 2012 federal budget, the Conservative government divested itself of the responsibility for federal community pastures as a cost-cutting measure, turning most of the land over to the control of the province. It is likely the pasture land will be privatized, as the Saskatchewan government “has said it does not want to own the land” (Canadian Press 2012). This may result in opportunities for community ownership, or may contribute to the increasing debt load of farmers and signal the move towards privatization of other Crown lands. Given the acceptance of communal grazing by ranchers, it is likely communal solutions will be sought; their success remains to be seen.

There are a few possible reasons for the acceptance of these models of land use.

There was a history of communal grazing on the prairies and in Ontario, as the large landholdings required were too expensive for many to purchase (Kaye 2006). As well, the land used for community pastures was largely unsuitable for crops and therefore not as desirable in the wheat economy. Brown, Gray, and Molder (1992) suggest that positive attitudes to land rental may directly correlate with security of lease, which has been proven to the ranching industry through length of tenure on Crown lands. Perhaps it is easier to accumulate assets in the form of livestock than in land, for ranchers (Currie 2003). Regardless, relying primarily on rented land has seemed to be more acceptable to ranchers than to farmers through most of Saskatchewan's history of capitalist agricultural land ownership. Although rented land has increased as a proportion of total agricultural land over the past few decades, rental (including Crown leases) still makes up less than 40 percent of land farmed in Canada (Statistics Canada 2012b).

Despite government attempts to manage land and support farmers, rural depopulation was apparent by the 1940s in Saskatchewan. In 1952, the CCF government created a Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life to address problems in agriculture and focused on land tenure in one report. The Commission argued that since “the goal of full ownership is not readily attainable or even desirable under all circumstances . . . every effort should be made to encourage alternative forms of tenure” (Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life 1956, 24). The commission's goal was to support family farming, and as such land ownership was seen as less practical in situations where land is attractive to speculators and investment capital, mechanization entails increased capital requirements, risks of low prices promote tenancy, or credit is unavailable. In its consultations, the commission found that many communities proposed

an upper limit on farm size, usually through a graduated land tax. Other suggestions by communities were adopted in the Commission's recommendations, such as the extension of credit facilities for young farmers. Recommendations also included: adapting the credit system to needs of tenant farmers and inter-generational farm transfers; expanding Crown lease policies to family farms, perhaps even buying land holdings of absentee landlords when on the market and allocating them in a similar manner to grazing land; and co-operative family farming for community enhancement and specialization and diversification that could compete on a larger scale. Overall, the rural participants were concerned with the trends to large farms and absentee ownership, the difficulties of young beginning farmers, and the propagation of family farms (Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life 1955). The Commission's suggestions were not followed up by the CCF government and were not addressed by the Liberal government when the CCF lost power in 1964. However, the issues were to resurface when the New Democratic Party (NDP) gained power in 1971.

The 1972 Land Bank was a provincial government program that attempted to support viable rural communities and maintain the family farm. The idea originated with a 1970 position paper for the provincial NDP, influenced by the NFU among others, that proposed making farmland a publicly owned resource. This was to be accompanied by other radical changes in agriculture and the food system including a farm net income policy and pension scheme, nationalization and regulation of food processing, and food distributed on the basis of need (Gidluck 1995) – in other words, an overhaul of the food system that also reflects the social justice principles of food sovereignty. However, despite support from the grassroots, this broader vision of farm support was rejected by

the party in its convention of that year (ibid., 45). As it resulted, when the NDP gained power in 1972, they implemented a watered-down version.

Through the Land Bank program, the government purchased land offered on the market by willing sellers at competitive prices and leased it back to farmers. When possible, these were the retiring seller's children; otherwise the land was allocated primarily on the basis of need, according to a point system. Tenure was guaranteed, with the option to buy after five years. Over ten years, the Land Bank dealt with almost five thousand buyers and sellers and owned 1.3 million acres – two percent of Saskatchewan's agricultural land. This did not end up changing the dominant land tenure system, since eventual buying was expected and encouraged; it was also similar to leasing options that were already established.

While the program was quite successful according to those who actually used it, opposition came from those both Left and Right who were ideologically opposed (Gidluck 1995). The Left criticized it for not going far enough. Its success was limited without supportive policies. The Right condemned it as collectivization, believing that the government should not own land. When a conservative government came into power in 1982, it eliminated the Land Bank program, replacing it with one of loans to farmers. Most, although not all, of the land was subsequently sold. Not since the Land Bank has public ownership of land been attempted on a significant scale in Saskatchewan.

Recent Land Tenure Debates

Land tenure discussions have resurfaced in Saskatchewan in the past decade and neoliberal views have not been absent from these. In 2002 the NDP government amended the Farm Security Act to eliminate restrictions on Canadian ownership of Saskatchewan

land by individuals and companies. Non-Saskatchewanians residents had been limited to 320 acres and Canadian companies to 10 acres. According to the government press release, this change was made in order to be competitive with the other seven provinces with no land ownership restrictions, to “send a signal to other provinces that Saskatchewan is open to outside investment” (Government of Saskatchewan 2002). In a submission to the Standing Committee on behalf of the Prairie Centre Policy Institute in support of amending the Act, Dockstader clearly posited the issue as an ideological one concerning Saskatchewan people's “anti-corporation mindset which is detrimental to wealth creation and economic growth” (2002, 6). Opening land ownership to non-resident, non-farmers has helped open the doors to investment in farmland by numbered companies and investment companies, a growing trend (NFU 2010). For example, One Earth Farms, created in 2007 and controlled by investment firm Sprott Resource, leases 250,000 acres of First Nations land in Alberta and Saskatchewan to produce grains and livestock (Magnan 2011). Assiniboia Capital Corporation, based in Regina, owns roughly 100,000 acres of Saskatchewan farmland and has about \$65 million in assets under management (Waldie 2010). Although foreign ownership of more than ten acres is prohibited, foreign players can be minority partners in corporations that own land (Gillam 2010). Alanna Koch, deputy minister of agriculture for Saskatchewan, revealed government attitudes towards opening farmland ownership to “liberat[e] individual entrepreneurial freedoms” and support free markets, saying that attitudes towards the once-protectionist Farm Land Security Board were changing and “loosened restrictions were likely over time” (Gillam 2010). As Cousins and Scoones (2010) explain it, neoliberal ideology holds that an undistorted market always finds the right price, so

Saskatchewan trends of farm consolidation and buyups by investment companies are positive signs of market efficiency and growth, facilitated by the state in its proper role of supporting property rights.

The idea of agrarian reform in Saskatchewan would thus likely seem ludicrous to World Bank economists as the province has all the ingredients of successful free market land tenure systems that they attempt to implement through market-led agrarian reform: secure individual rights to land, an open land sales and rental market, and easy access to credit (Deininger and Feder 1999; c.f. Borras 2006 for a summary and critique of this type of market-led agrarian reform). However, the Saskatchewan land tenure system is actually contributing to inequality and the destruction of rural communities. The inequity of land ownership in Saskatchewan is growing as farmers (mostly mid-sized) exit agriculture and are not replaced. Farm size has increased correspondingly: from 2006-2011 alone, average farm size increased by 15.1 percent, from 1,450 acres to 1,668 acres (Statistics Canada 2012a). Prices of farmland in Saskatchewan, while still on average less than those in the other prairie provinces, have also been steadily increasing since 2002 according to Farm Credit Canada, including an increase of 2.7 percent in the last six months of 2010 (FCC 2011). This adds up to a forty-four percent increase over 2002 prices (Gillam 2010).

In other words, with its adherence to the free market, Saskatchewan's lack of a land reform policy results in what Borras and Franco call “(re)concentration” - a situation where “land-based wealth and power” is transferred from small family farm holders to large landowners, corporations and the wealthy (2010, 110). Ironically, this is resulting in a form of distortion to the land market that is not the state-regulated distortion which

World Bank economists decry, but that of a “monopolistic land market that is controlled and manipulated by the landowning classes” (ibid., 122). The rising cost of land, the lack of disincentives to corporate ownership, and the pressures of capitalist competition create a situation where land grabbing and many of its attendant ills are likely in Saskatchewan. Thus, while the issue of socially just agricultural land tenure in Saskatchewan has not received much scholarly attention, it nonetheless requires investigation and action. Access to and control over land is an essential piece of any significant alternative to the current food system.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The common problems of land, production, technology, markets, ideological formation, training, poverty—all of these we have in common. But what also unites us are great aspirations. We are all convinced that the current structures of economic, political, and social power are unjust and exclusionary.

What unites us is a spirit of transformation and struggle to change these structures all over the world. We aspire to a better world, a more just world, a more humane world, a world where *real equality and social justice* exist. (Rafael Alegria, former operational secretariat of La Vía Campesina, quoted in Desmarais 2005, 1; emphasis mine)

In this chapter, I will examine the dominant neoliberal ideology present in Saskatchewan agriculture and use concepts from Gramsci and Polanyi to explain both its grasp and resistance to it. Then I will explore three theoretical frameworks that are used by progressive farmers and food system activists today to combat neoliberal hegemony. One in particular, that of food sovereignty, has the most applicability to my research on alternative, socially just land tenure.

2.1 Neoliberalism

It is important to understand and critique the variant of neoliberal ideology currently affecting land tenure in Saskatchewan in order to effectively oppose and transcend it with an alternative. Fundamentally, neoliberalism is more than an approach to economic policy. Framing many social issues in economic terms, it “seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market” (Harvey 2005, 3) through “the commodification of everything” via the consolidation of an omnipotent global marketplace” (Desmarais 2007, 24). Although he was writing about economic liberalism's attempt to set up a self-regulating market system in the 1800s, Polanyi's work accurately described the capitalist trend of commodification that neoliberalism has extended in its push for global free trade. Polanyi calls the result of this trend “market society”: where

society is an adjunct to the market because of peoples' market-dependence (resulting from the commodification of labour and land) and “social relations are embedded in the economic system” rather than the other way around (1944, 57).

In an article in *Review of International Political Economy*, Vikki Birchfield (1999) argues that the neoliberal discourse of globalization is intrinsically opposed to democratic principles. Like Harvey and Polanyi, she sees market logic increasingly being applied to other areas of life, along with the rationalization and naturalization of the self-interested economic-maximizing person. The discourse of “competitiveness, economies of scale, efficiency and inevitability” appeals to and bolsters this view of human psychology (Epp 2011). This results in a devaluing of values - such as tolerance or community - that contribute to democratic participation and decision-making but do not have an obvious or immediate economic rationale.

For example, Hamilton (2006) found that Manitoban farmers in a focus group on land trusts accepted as natural the existence of unavoidable economic laws causing farms to disappear. They believed and accepted the neoliberal premise that the economy follows rules that reward the most competitive (fittest), despite the fact that their values of neighbourliness, collaboration, and interconnectedness were attacked, or not accorded value, by that “reality” (Hamilton 2006). David Harvey describes this attack in Britain by neoliberal pioneer Margaret Thatcher: “All forms of social solidarity were to be dissolved in favour of individualism, private property, personal responsibility, and family values” (2005, 23). Not only does this discourage and effectively limit collective action, it provides a (moral) justification for limiting or eradicating state assistance. This is made palatable through the rhetoric of “choice, freedom, mobility and opportunity - always the

property of individuals alone” (Epp 2011). Thus, the solution to every socially produced problem becomes personal, resulting in massive depoliticization (Brown 2006). The result is a lack of opportunity, freedom, and choice for many who do not possess wealth and power, who hold other values, and whose effectiveness in acting collectively is weakened.

A related characteristic of market society, Birchfield proposes, is that property rights are privileged over personal rights. For example, although Canada is signatory to the 1966 International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, and thus has committed to “the right to food” (Anderson 2008), 7.7 percent of Canadians experienced food insecurity in 2007-2008 (Health Canada 2011) because the ability to pay – the possession of market power - is now the primary criterion for possession of food.

Market power is also the primary criterion for the allocation of agricultural land in Canada. In Saskatchewan, the land-tenure system consists of secure, state-supported property rights for land, land titling, robust land markets, credit facilities to fund land transfers, and the complete commodification of land. This is a prime example of the “institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights [and] free markets” that neoliberals champion (Harvey 2005, 2). Saskatchewan trends of farmland consolidation and buyups by investment companies, for neoliberal adherents, are thus positive signs of market efficiency and growth. Elided are issues of inequity and loss of local control with concurrent negative impacts on many social measures of equality and justice, particularly the exercise of democratic control over the system on the part of communities and food producers.

Essentially, the most damaging outcome of neoliberal ideology is that democratic

rules no longer trump market rules: it is the norm to view political demands that impede market functioning as illegitimate (Birchfield, 1999). In this context, specifically supporting small or medium farmers with subsidies, implementing land size caps, or restricting foreign ownership are unacceptable government actions, regardless of how many citizens would support and benefit from these measures. Thus, the economic sphere is depoliticised, naturalized, privatised, and “rendered democratically unaccountable” (Rupert 2003, 182).

Over the past three decades, neoliberalism has become hegemonic in Saskatchewan government discourse and policy. Enoch (2011) traces the roots of the neoliberal discourse and actions of the current governing Saskatchewan Party. In opposition to the supposedly government-dependent climate fostered by a social democratic NDP, the Saskatchewan Party claimed in 2004 that they would create an economy where profit “will be lauded instead of envied” (quoted in Enoch 2011, 201) - reminiscent of Dockstader's (2002) remarks about the “anti-corporation mindset” in the 2002 farmland ownership debate. In the neoliberal version of the economy, self-reliance, personal investment, and competition ensure economic survival, rather than equality, equity, and using public wealth to provide for all. Consequently, once in power, the Saskatchewan Party government passed a number of anti-union bills and entered the New West Partnership with Alberta and British Columbia to eliminate trade and investment barriers. Proving Birchfield's claim that neoliberals mask political actions to naturalize them, the government posits its policies as “not ideologically handcuffed” and “common sense” (Premier Wall quoted in Enoch 2011, 203-4). This has the effect of disguising an agenda by “eras[ing] consideration of structural or systemic inequality of power” and

masking government policies as neutral or objective technical solutions to problems (Enoch 2011, 204). Similarly, Broad (2011) discusses neoliberal ideas filtering into social services management in Saskatchewan and its definition of productivity: productivity has become standardized, market-oriented, quantitative rather than qualitative and focused on outputs rather than outcomes. This is reminiscent of both the embrace of “non-ideological” agricultural technology in the Green Revolution and the focus on productivism in neoliberal solutions to the food crisis.

It is difficult to gauge the extent that neoliberalism has become “common sense” for the general populace. However, the mainstream media portrayal of farmland ownership trends in Saskatchewan is consistent with neoliberal ideology. *The Globe and Mail* depicts the increasing corporate ownership of Saskatchewan farmland largely as a win-win deal for farmers who need to raise capital “to compete in global markets” (Waldie and Leeder 2010). A perusal of their November 2010 Global Food series revealed investment company CEOs had the most page space and opinions cited. While farmland investment fund Agcapita partner Stephen Johnson believes Canadians have been slower to catch on to this than Americans, he told *The Western Producer* that farmland is “an asset with intrinsic value and a good inflation hedge . . . It’s relatively stable and will ultimately generate a cash yield from the sale of the underlying product, so it’s good for cash flow” (Ewins 2010). Trade magazine *Top Crop Manager* advocates corporations leasing land to farmers (seen as “farm managers”) in order to “make a profit for long-term investors and to enable farm managers to focus on the most efficient grain production in the world” by “dedicating their capital to the operational side of the business” (Dietz n.d.). Associate Professor Marvin Painter at the University of

Saskatchewan specializes in farmland investment, with publications such as “The Financial Gains from Adding Farmland to an International Investment Portfolio” (Painter and Eves 2008) and “Efficient Investment in Saskatchewan Farmland” (Painter 2010), written for the Assiniboia Capital Corporation. Thus, it is likely reasonable to claim, along with Enoch (2011), that neoliberalism is hegemonic among political and economic agricultural elites and their civil society organs. Acceptance of neoliberal ideas is also widespread among farmers, as this thesis shows in chapter three, and can even be seen in the relatively radical research participants.

2.2 Battling Neoliberal Hegemony: Theoretical Perspectives

One of the first steps in creating change is challenging prevailing ideology. Given the hold that neoliberal ideology has in Saskatchewan, Antonio Gramsci's conception of hegemony and counter-hegemony are important in my research. Gramsci explains how an ideology that may not function in people's interests can nevertheless be accepted by them. As he conceives of it, hegemony is an idea of power that looks at more than coercive force; it involves dominance *and* the acceptance of it as natural: “The ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules” (1971, 244). This consent, Gramsci goes on to argue, is primarily won through civil society mechanisms. For example, according to Giroux (1980) schools deliver a “hidden curriculum” that is implicitly conveyed through the normative social relations in a school or classroom. The curriculum reinforces passivity and conformity in order to service the workplace and thus reinforce the reproduction of the dominant society and existing social inequalities. Another civil society organ, the news media, proliferates, giving the appearance of a democratic glut of

information. However, the viewpoints and stories selected are biased by, among other factors, reliance on sources from governments and corporations, technical convergence, the pressures of economic bottom lines and concentrated corporate ownership (Skinner, Compton, and Gasher 2005). Through means such as these, an ideology becomes hegemonic to the extent it is naturalized and not seen as a social construction, at the point where it has permeated cultural discourse, economic relationships, and even law (Davidson 2007). It becomes part of what is generally called “common sense” – a term Gramsci contrasted with the more coherent “good sense”.

Although this “common sense” is not infallible, hegemonic ideology has the ability not only to conceal internal contradictions but to rationalize them and even hold them contradictorily, to an extent. For example, Cousins and Scoones (2010) point to the inconsistency of wealthy nations demanding that the Global South undergo structural adjustment policies while refusing to eliminate their own agricultural subsidies and protectionist tariffs. Nonetheless, the ideology prevails. Gramsci (1971) posits that hegemony is sustained partly by the disintegration of society, the breakdown of solidarity, and the passivity of most people. In Saskatchewan, these factors are indicated by the fragmentation and disappearance of rural populations, rise of individualism, division of farmers along commodity and class/wealth lines (Stirling and Conway 1988) and decline of collective actions and institutions such as agrarian movements and wheat pools. Passivity is both cause and result of the state's role in adjusting people to the requirements of a neoliberal economy (labour flexibility and mobility, austerity, depoliticization) which takes place through increasingly universal norms, institutions, and mechanisms (Cox 2005). Examples of these hegemonic forces include the belief in

meritocracy and rational economic man [*sic*], the prominence of international organizations and agribusinesses, and the formation of international trade rules and the promotion of production for export.

Gramsci points out that the bourgeois class differs from previous classes, which were closed castes, in that it poses itself as “capable of absorbing the entire society, assimilating it to its own cultural and economic level” (1971, 260). Thus, the expectation and hope of those not fully benefiting from neoliberalism, that someday they will benefit if they work hard and play by the rules, means that even they will conform to the hegemonic system. In Saskatchewan, this may mean farmers believing that problems and failures are personal rather than social or structural, again feeding into the atomization and individualism that precludes collective action (Kubik and Moore 2003). As Patel and Courville say, “a great part of the successful adoption of the neoliberal regime comes through its ability to claim that ‘there is no alternative’” (2006, 18).

Gramsci’s theory suggests, as will be seen in chapter three, that most Saskatchewan farmers take present forms of land ownership as givens; therefore, resistance is unlikely and difficult at best. Private property rights are conflated with citizens’ rights to freedom and prosperity, concealing the fact that a specific set of interests benefits from this view (Davidson 2007). Acceptance of this standpoint obviously limits the imagining of possibilities. However, Gramsci also offers a tool for breaking open the dominance of private property with the theory of counter-hegemony – resistance to hegemony and the possibility for transformation that take place within hegemony. He argues that the foundations of a new society must be built within the old one, from the bottom up and grounded in reality – praxis, not philosophy. The war of

position is key to Gramsci's idea of counter-hegemony as the only possible tactic when civil society is strong. It involves changing "common sense" ideas so they are more coherent and reflective of the reality of domination. Class consciousness must be raised, creating solidarity as a basis for action. The contradictions within hegemony and the dissatisfaction with life under neoliberalism provide space for this to take place.

Karl Polanyi's idea of the double movement bears some relation to the concept of counter-hegemony. Polanyi saw two movements in society during the growth of market society. The first was the spread and liberalization of the market and growing commodification. The second, the countermovement led by diverse actors directly affected by the more disastrous social consequences of the first movement, resulted in protective measures taken by society that lessened or slowed the first movement's effects. In *The Great Transformation*, Polanyi describes the countermovement that took place during the enclosure movement in Britain and suggests that this was more than defensive behaviour against change; it was a "reaction against a dislocation which attacked the fabric of society" (1944, 130). He argues that this countermovement was not necessarily economically motivated but socially – as people are primarily motivated. The countermovement was also not so much a coordinated attack as it was the actions of people living out their values individually and collectively. While it did not permanently stop enclosures, Polanyi believes it slowed them and that the rate of change is often as important as change itself and more easily affected.

There are elements of countermovements and counterhegemonic efforts in agrarian movements today, made stronger by the social basis of their attack on neoliberalism and by their organic, grassroots base. Together, Gramsci and Polanyi

provide tools for battling hegemony and criteria for assessing attempts to do so that can be applied to resistance to the global industrial agricultural system.

2.3 Theoretical Frameworks for Critiquing Agrifood Systems

Of the theoretical frameworks that critically address capitalist and neoliberal hegemony, three that are relevant to agriculture and food are: agrarianism, Marxist political economy regarding the agrarian question, and food sovereignty. All three explicitly theorize the food system. They share certain basic critiques of the dominant agri-food system but offer different perspectives on solutions to the problems.

Identified most strongly with Thomas Jefferson, agrarianism in the United States has a long history that can be traced back to the French physiocrats' belief that a nation's wealth is derived from agriculture and the value of the land, with the moral implication that an independent, rural life is superior. Agrarian values include generosity, neighbourliness, peacefulness, conservation, interconnectedness, sustainable productivity, the local as the frame of reference for responsible livelihood, and work as dignifying, satisfying and useful. Wendell Berry, agrarian populism's well-known modern representative, posits agrarianism as the only practical idea to oppose “industrialism” (2002). Agrarianism thus opposes the idea of the farm as a factory with its application of industrial standards of efficiency and profitability, its uncritical worship of technological innovation, and its reductionism (Berry 1996). Agrarianism is based on land: independent landholding ensures “political democracy resting upon the indispensable foundation of economic democracy” (Berry 2002, 44), and the land basis means that the household is the centre of the farm. Moorehouse (1918) and Porritt (1911), organic intellectuals of the early Canadian Prairie agrarian movement, posited the farmer as egalitarian,

hardworking, honest, sensible, and a champion of democracy. In Saskatchewan's early agrarian opposition to Eastern industrial elites, and in Berry's emphasis on localism, the populist elements of agrarianism are apparent.

Agrarian populists have been accused of being narrow-minded, reactionary, utopian, and irrelevant. Lenin (1963) was a prominent critic of agrarianism in Russia, and some of his criticisms are echoed by Allen (2004) and Guthman (2004) in their discussions of alternative food movements today. While Lenin admitted that the Russian agrarian populists had an accurate description of the ravages of capitalism, he accused them of being reactionary romantics who could not see that evil was in the system of social organization of production, not merely in its shortcomings. Guthman accuses the current agrarian ideology of idealizing the family farm as “a proxy for social justice” (2004, 174) and ignoring the negative labour, race and gender relations that enable its continued existence. She also calls attention to the culture-bound assumption that individual land ownership is necessary for democracy and stewardship of resources. In a conclusion that echoes Lenin, Allen holds that agrarian populists' economic critique of the agrifood system generally focuses on “corporatization, globalization, and industrialization” (Allen 2004, 131) – on the effects rather than the fundamental system of a market economy.

To some extent these criticisms of agrarian populism are applicable to historical and current Saskatchewan debates on land tenure. In retrospect, it is apparent that agrarian movements in Saskatchewan seldom – and never successfully – attempted radical anti-capitalist solutions to the problems farmers faced, although their analysis of the problems reveals a sophisticated understanding of them. At the same time, these

periods in Saskatchewan give glimpses of moments where blocs contended for power - the hegemonic bloc was under assault from a war of manoeuvre. Collective action “enjoyed a measure of hegemony within the political and social culture of the region” in the early twentieth century (Atkinson and McCrorie 2003, 325), again at the end of the Depression, and even surfacing in the early 1970's when the far left almost took control of the provincial NDP with the support of many farmers. Its waning legacy is still evident in, for instance, the high percentage of members of cooperatives in Saskatchewan compared to other jurisdictions⁶. It is also true that the radical elements of the movements, while few, did influence the moderate elements, and that the latter's reforms did slow the rate of capitalist exploitation, which, as Polanyi asserts, may not be unimportant. With the swing to neoliberalism starting in the 1980s, a popular critique of agrarian arguments is to construe them as romantic and impractical, as can be seen in Dockstader's 2002 characterization of Saskatchewanians reluctant to change land ownership laws as anti-corporation and anti-growth, thus backwards.

Marxist political economy shares a primary criticism of industrial agriculture with agrarianism: that the locus of economic control is not with those who work the land. It draws attention to the social construction of economic relations and focuses on class struggle. Older Marxist works seem to hold a teleological view of the development of agriculture and see dispossession of small farmers as progressive. This view is not particularly useful in analyzing the situation in rural Saskatchewan from a social justice perspective. Exacerbating inequality, even for ostensibly revolutionary ends, is not acceptable - even less so when the technique has not yet been proven to work. Much

⁶ According to the Saskatchewan Co-operative Association (n. d.), 56 percent of Saskatchewanians are members of at least one cooperative, compared to 40 percent of Canadians overall.

recent Marxist discussion of the agrarian question has been “Neo-Leninist”, concentrating on the tendencies of petty commodity producers in agriculture to become differentiated, forming stratified classes of agrarian capitalists and wage labourers (Buttel 2001, 17-18). In addition to this classification, Bernstein asserts that farming households “typically combine farming with working for wages and a range of precarious 'informal sector' ('survival') activities, subject to their own forms of differentiation and oppression along intersecting lines of class, gender, generation, caste and ethnicity” (2006, 403). Kubik and Fletcher (2012) show in their work on Canadian farm women's increasing labour flexibility and the importance of their labour to keeping the family farm, that this aspect of class analysis is important in a Saskatchewan context. Incorporating this perspective on labour would go a ways towards satisfying Guthman's criticism of agrarian assumptions of homogeneity in the farmer class. A focus on class conflict, however, is perhaps of less use in Saskatchewan where tenant farming had almost no historical presence and waged farm labourers are typically not a large component of farming - barring intensive livestock operations and the increasing growth of corporate industrial farms, as yet a small part of the agricultural sector. Statistics Canada data from 2006 shows that thirty-eight percent of farms use agricultural labour in Saskatchewan and sixty-eight percent of that was seasonal (an average of sixteen weeks per farm); length of employment and numbers of employed all decreased from 2000-2005 (Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food 2007). This drop was faster than the decrease in number of farms (Elliott 2009). The low level of wage labour is largely due to the characteristics of the dominant commodities that determine the technology used and therefore the demand for wage labour (Winson 1996). Petty commodity producers who self-exploit without the

necessity of returning profit to shareholders still outcompete capitalist farms (Friedmann 1978). A new question of labour (Bernstein 2004) may indeed occur in Saskatchewan as or if family farms continue to disappear or mutate into a new form of (perhaps family-based) corporate mega-farms, where small farmers could be integrated as landlords, contractees, or employees (Magnan 2011). While the social relations that influence access to land in this scenario may be an interesting area of future study within the paradigm of classical land tenure, it does not offer much insight into alternatives wherein traditional land tenure is subverted, the subject of this research.

Recent Marxist discussions of land reform, such as those in the *Journal of Peasant Studies*, are focused on the peasantry of the Global South; the applicability of this literature to my research is more in its macro-analysis of capitalist (and neoliberal) tendencies than in its empirical micro-analysis. Cousins and Scoones (2010) divide the Marxist thought on land tenure into a few streams: one stream accepts large capitalist farms but advocates policies to improve labour conditions on these farms; another supports the struggle for land by exploited classes. The former does not necessarily fit with ideals of social justice if wealth and power are concentrated in big capitalist farms; the latter may be salient for First Nations land tenure struggles but not as applicable to the dominant system of agricultural land tenure in Saskatchewan that is not predicated on exploited classes of waged labour (however labour might be self-exploited by petty commodity producers or exploited within families through gender roles and child labour).

However, Marxist political economy is useful in other ways. From settlement, since Prairie producers were dependent on the market for their self-reproduction and their agricultural production was export-oriented, Prairie agriculture was and is subjected to

market imperatives. It is bound to the strictures of competition, continually seeking to reduce costs and improve yields in order to generate surplus value to reinvest in the neverending race for increasing profits (Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2010, 271). Marxist political economy's explanations of capitalist tendencies and the structural framework (though uneven and fragmented) that results provide a deeper, richer explanation of the roots of problems in the current global industrial agricultural system than does the attribution of problems to industrialism. The literature around the agrarian question can also help denaturalize capitalism, giving it historicity and specificity, which helps us conceptualize other possibilities and build counter-hegemonic resistance (Wood 2002).

While I will draw on elements from agrarian populism and Marxist political economy, food sovereignty will provide the main conceptual framework for my research. Indeed, it offers a framework that includes the most cogent critiques and significant values from the other two theories. Like Marxism, food sovereignty recognizes that the food crisis is systemic: not in, but of the system (Borras and Franco 2010). With roots in political economy, arising as a response to neoliberal globalization, many of its stances are explicitly anti-capitalist. Raj Patel, for example, recently asserted, “A truly democratic food system . . . can’t happen without naming and confronting capitalism as the enemy of food sovereignty” (2011). However, food sovereignty also shows up the limits of many Marxist descriptions of agricultural relations. McMichael, echoing Engels, shifts the focus from the economic to the political/social constitution of the peasantry. To Bernstein's assertion that “views of the peasantry as a (single) class (exploited or otherwise) common in agrarian populism” are analytically unsound (Bernstein 2003, 7), he responds that rural class inequalities are present, but in the agrarian resistance, the

“impoverishment processes [are politicized], relating them to the privatization of states and subordination of farming to the neoliberal model and its corporate beneficiaries” (2006, 474) and asserting solidarity in the face of individualistic development. As well, the shift in focus means that the struggle for food sovereignty is more than a struggle for economic survival: it is “grounded in a process of revaluing agriculture, rurality, and food as essential to general social and ecological sustainability”(McMichael 2008, 213). Food sovereignty reorients the focus of the commodified industrial agrifood system, and places a higher worth on food production than our society accords it now.

While food sovereignty shares many of the values of agrarian populism such as conservation, interconnectedness, sustainable productivity, and work as dignifying (indeed, Cousins and Scoones [2010, 44] call it “radical agrarian populism”), it does not assume uncritically that those are inherent to rural living or localism. The local is not fetishized, but turned to as counterpoint to the reductionist, homogenizing tendencies of global capitalism. While the principles of food sovereignty are globally applicable, answers to the specific questions of what to produce and how to produce it, and how land and credit are accessed, are to be determined by communities and nations themselves (McMichael 2008). Thus, citizens must be empowered, and participatory, democratic decision-making fostered to generate policies for food sovereignty (Pimbert 2009).

Food sovereignty is thus the most useful framework for my research. It is encompassing yet context-conditioned and flexible and driven by grassroots concerns. Best of all, for my purposes, principles of agrarian reform in the food sovereignty movement explicitly address social justice and land tenure issues as the basis of a transformed food system.

Food sovereignty holds that land should be decommodified. As La Vía Campesina stresses, it “is not, and cannot be a marketable good that can be obtained in whatever quantity by those that have financial means” (La Vía Campesina quoted in Desmarais 2007, 36). The right to access land⁷ should be held by those who work, depend, and live upon the land and its resources should be used first for food production and local needs rather than production for export (La Vía Campesina 2008). This challenges not only the free market basis of access to land in Saskatchewan, but the ownership laws that do not support farmers and the relatively inaccessible and undemocratic political and economic processes that determine who has control over agricultural land. Food sovereignty involves a wholly different way of thinking about land than is the norm in Saskatchewan.

In food sovereignty, land is seen as multidimensional, having social, political, environmental and cultural qualities that cannot be expressed through monetary equivalents (Borras and Franco 2010). In this conception, as in Kropotkin's, property rights are not things, but social relationships (Borras 2006). As the history of Western property rights shows, they are not natural but constructed. Property rights are also continually redefined and renegotiated. Thus, in contrast to other types of agrarian reform, such as the market-led reform advocated by the World Bank, food sovereignty focuses on the aspects of wealth and power in land transfers that are inherent in the interactions in which property rights are worked out (Borras and Franco 2010).

Using food sovereignty's politicized discourse to address issues of power in land tenure can help to deconstruct the neoliberal language of business that, as Kneen puts it, “distorts our vocabulary so that it is increasingly difficult to even find the words through

7 Patel points out, “It is worth noting that La Via Campesina demands are for 'access to land' rather than 'ownership of land.' The whole scope of power through ownership – be it of land, intellectual property rights or gene patents - is challenged by La Via Campesina in various ways” (2010, 193).

which a different vision might be expressed” (1989, 154) and construct a vocabulary with which to formulate a new vision. Borras and Franco reject the private property discourse by referring not to land ownership, but “access to and effective control over” land, and to tenure systems as “land-based social relations” (2010, 107). This highlights the contextual, fluid, diverse, and dynamic nature of land tenure systems, as well as issues of control. Food sovereignty movements also emphasize human rights. This strategic choice to use a concept with mainstream appeal not only legitimizes demands in certain fora, but broadens the definition of rights for human rights movements through the inclusion of rights such as the right to land and right to produce. This was seen in September 2012 when the UN Human Rights Council took steps towards finalizing a UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas. The draft declaration included new rights such as the right to seeds and environmental preservation, and although it is non-binding, could influence various national laws or international treaties as have previous declarations (Edelman 2012). Food sovereignty proponents also challenge private property discourse by speaking of the “collective rights of communities and peoples” (IPC 2006, 10). Invoking the tradition of the commons, the Priority to Peoples' Food Sovereignty speaks of “communities' legal and customary rights to make decisions concerning . . . resources” (quoted in Wittman, Desmarais, and Wiebe 2010, 201), the IPC refers to land as a “public good to be equitably and sustainably distributed” (2006, 8), and Rosset speaks of “lands, forest, water, and other common property resources” (2006, 320). In this discourse, one can see the influence of many different cultures, traditions and contexts, but also the unifying theme of land as a source of food and livelihood, an ecological and a cultural resource, to be used equitably and sustainably

for all. This alternative portrayal of land is part of an attempt to change “common sense” and civil society by giving voice to alternative, often suppressed views.

In opposition to the neoliberal assertion that “choice” and “freedom” characterize capitalist economies, the language of food sovereignty explicitly addresses political and economic power issues in the food system. This is clearly set out in the introduction of Wittman, Desmarais, and Wiebe’s edited volume on food sovereignty: “The term ‘food sovereignty’ was coined to recognize the political and economic power dimension inherent in the food and agriculture debate and to take a pro-active stance by naming it” (Wittman, Desmarais, and Wiebe 2010, 2). Language can be used to expose and challenge the power relations behind the industrial food system and provide a new vocabulary for change (Fairbairn 2010). Attention is called to the abuses of the holders of privilege, the “global elite” (NFU 2010, 12) or “financial oligarchy” (La Via Campesina 2008), individuals and agribusinesses who engage in “exploitative sharecropping, rental, or labor relationships” (Rosset 2006, 316) and “distort and capture policies, subsidies, and windfall profits in their favor” (ibid., 320). Attention is also called to the system, “guided by a drive for corporate profits and the boosting of production for export, [that is] responsible for the increasing concentration of landholdings, resources, and chains of production and distribution of food and other agricultural products in the hands of a few corporations” (IPC 2006, 9). Borras and Franco emphasize the power relations inherent in land tenure systems, questioning who controls the processes “under which land-based wealth is created, appropriated, disposed and consumed” (2010, 108). Because the framing of debates and the definition of success in agriculture significantly influence government policy (Cousins and Scoones 2010), making power visible and subject to

accountability is a key component in counter-hegemonic strategies, as is re-politicizing neoliberalism's depoliticized domains.

In practice, redistributive reform, defined as that in which “land-based wealth and power are transferred from the monopoly control of either private landed classes or the state to landless and near-landless working poor” (Borras and Franco 2010, 109), underpins true agrarian reform. To be successful, the majority of arable land must be affected in order to break the concentration of power in rural areas and empower farm families rather than patronizing them with charity (Rosset 2006). This will inevitably involve political action in order to achieve widespread reform, especially in the face of opposition from entrenched interests. Food sovereignty also argues that while equitable access to land is fundamental for agrarian reform, it is not sufficient. For example, without agrarian reform, increased commodity prices would benefit the largest farmers the most, and agrarian reform without fair prices would mean beneficiaries would have a difficult time making a living. Thus, there must be a many-pronged approach to agrarian reform in the context of creating a just food system. Measures suggested by La Via Campesina (2008) include government investment in rural infrastructure, access to credit established and supported by governments, a focus on food for domestic consumption, encouraging young people to remain on the land by valuing their work socially and economically, and using production capacity rather than land as security to guarantee credit. Agrarian reform thus aims to be “a social solution to the problems of society itself . . . changing the relationships of economic and political power” (La Via Campesina, 2008).

Agrarian reform is best done taking account of local contexts. Desmarais gives

examples of different types of agrarian reform sought by various members of La Vía Campesina, given that its directive is “to support the efforts of its members' local and national constituencies rather than impose a centralized vision of an ideal land redistribution program” (2007, 36). One cannot simply transfer the research on land reform in the food sovereignty literature directly to creating a model or models for Saskatchewan. While the principles of food sovereignty are of general use, most of its literature on agrarian reform refers to particular situations in specific countries in the Global South or the former communist bloc. The empirical research thus is often not all that applicable to the context of land ownership in Saskatchewan. For example, Borras and Franco (2010), in their description of four types of land reform, cite examples from all over the world except North America and Western Europe. In Cousins and Scoones' (2010) outline of different ideological approaches to land reform, the adherents of each approach invariably refer to reforms necessary in the Global South. Despite the lack of attention to it, however, there is a need for research on alternative land tenure in the North as the dominant system is increasingly inequitable and unsustainable. In the following chapters, using the principles of agrarian reform proposed by food sovereignty, I will analyze the findings from qualitative interviews conducted with Saskatchewan farmers and participants in alternative land tenure arrangements to determine the extent to which the alternatives they suggest and practice could be consonant with food sovereignty.

3. PARTICIPANT ANALYSIS OF AGRICULTURE IN SASKATCHEWAN

This chapter delves into the interview and documentary data, beginning with an explication of problems with agriculture and land tenure perceived by research participants and their views on the ideological dominance of private land ownership. The questions posed to participants about land tenure probed ideas around accessibility, community and values, farming as a business or way of life, their personal experience with alternatives, and ways of creating change. From these questions, themes of autonomy and control, systemic problems, politicization, sustainability, community and collective, and alternatives arose. The participants have proposed many different alternatives to accessing land in the current tenure system, and have put some into practice or advocated for them to a greater or lesser extent. The obstacles they face are mainly presented by neoliberalism and the global industrial agricultural system, but others are potentially contained in the strategies they employ. To overcome these obstacles, a clear understanding of both the systemic problems and the nature of social change is helpful. In the second part of this chapter, the National Farmer's Union's food-sovereignty-based analysis of problems in agriculture is explored. The NFU members' efforts and proposed alternatives to the current land tenure situation, as well as actions taken by the organization, are discussed and analysed according to Gramsci's theory of counter-hegemony and food sovereignty's principles of agrarian reform.

3.1 Problems in Agriculture in Saskatchewan

Creating alternatives to the current land tenure system in Saskatchewan that are consonant with food sovereignty requires not only a knowledge of history but a thorough understanding of the status quo. In interviews, most of the participants clearly described a

specific set of problems in agriculture and the land tenure system in Saskatchewan. Several mentioned loss of rural communities and rural population, loss of farmers and lack of new farmers, massive and increasing levels of farm debt, corporate influence on governments, loss of supportive government policies and implementation of unfriendly ones⁸, the siphoning of rural wealth to corporations such as input and technology providers, growth of farm size and concentration of land ownership, and increasing land prices. None of the participants failed to mention the persistence of numerous significant problems. The concerns with debt, government policies, and corporate power were mentioned largely by NFU members, whereas the concerns about rural depopulation and community loss and the lack of new farmers were voiced by participants in both NFU and land trust groups. Inasmuch as rural depopulation and community loss are exacerbated by the other problems, the list indicates that many participants were aware of elements of causality, although it is often difficult to disentangle cause and effect in a negative feedback loop. For example, a lack of new farmers contributes to the increase in farm size as intergenerational succession does not replace all retiring farmers, but the growth of farms and associated capital requirements inhibit young people from entering farming. Interviewees also alluded to other problems that are less material: a loss of collective memory, “hyper-individuality” (Qualman 2010), political apathy, and lack of vision. This shows that some participants have noticed the effects of neoliberalism's depoliticization and focus on individualism. Many of the older participants, especially, recognized that problems such as rural depopulation and concentration of land ownership are longstanding, going back more than half a century - but the acceleration of

8 Interviewees mentioned the loss of the two-price system, the Crow Rate, the hog marketing board, and the Land Bank as well as the implementation of NAFTA and the 2002 Farm Security Act.

corporatization, and government facilitation of it, is correlated with the rise of neoliberalism and is a more recent phenomenon.

The research participants' concern with these problems is not necessarily attributable to the purely economic motivation of the self-interested utility-maximizing person. Their social concerns were shown, for example, by the farmer interviewees' care about the viability of rural communities. To them, loss of rural communities meant a loss of many social values that echo those of agrarianism: mutual (inter)dependence and sharing; diversity of skills, practices, and knowledge; and local tradition and customs. George Burton (2010) commented, "You look at the amount of volunteer work that goes on in a rural community. . . . You couldn't afford to pay for something like that, but the people nevertheless keep doing what's required. And there's the camaraderie of working together." Many participants also emphasized the values of stewardship, equality, helping the disadvantaged, and democracy. A decrease in the number of farmers is a loss of a way of life, not just the loss of business.

The interviewees were clear that the problems are widespread, not just affecting certain communities or commodities. Most telling were comments such as Earthcare's Executive Director Duane Guina's that agriculture has "major problems that accumulated over a number of years and are multifaceted" (2011) or NFU member Kalissa Regier's belief that "the entire system has to change, from the very vastness of global trade and the hugeness of multinationals right down to the very intimate thoughts that farmers have about their own operation" (2010). The NFU's report *Losing our Grip* attributes the problems to a loss of control or sovereignty: because of non-farmer food land buyup, farm debt, and input financing by agribusiness and investors, "autonomy and ownership

are taken from our farmer citizens, [and] Canadians lose their grip on their food system” (2010, 2). This scope hints at systemic causes, as does the complexity and interwoven nature of the problems. As George Burton said, discussing previous agrarian movements' attempts to implement equitable land tenure programs, “I think what it shows is the fundamental change in structure that's needed. You just mess around on the edges of what's there and it's not really going to accomplish anything” (2010). The problems listed by the participants are largely symptoms, indicative of the depth and systemic nature of the root cause: they are not separable from the dominant model of neoliberal industrial agriculture.

The majority of interviewees, in their exposition of the problems in farming in Saskatchewan, recognized that the problems are not discrete coincidences but systemic, and many explicitly named this system. Six interviewees called the agrifood system “capitalist” whereas four preferred the agrarianist choice “industrial”. However, all but one characterized the problems in ways that clearly show there is a system and it is capitalistic and increasingly neoliberal in nature. It is variously export-dependent, “corporate-dominated” (Stirling 2010) and “unsustainable” in many ways, featuring “concentration in the marketplace . . . deregulation, privatization and free trade” (Currie 2010) and leading to “hyper-industrialized, hyper-capitalized farms” (Qualman 2010). Many realize that this system is more than just an agricultural one: it is economic and social. NFU member Fred Tait objected to the social being embedded in the economic: “philosophically [the Saskatchewan and Manitoba governments] believe the marketplace should determine the structure of the communities. Myself, as a citizen, always believe that [using] the democratic process, the citizen should structure the economy to serve the

needs of the community” (2010). In this conception, the assumptions about "economic man" are overturned; the social good is primary, and it is best served by a critically engaged citizenry rather than distant ideological decision-makers. This entails an expanded notion of the citizen who is not just a consumer of corporate choices. Tait's belief in democracy, an ideal of food sovereignty as well as agrarian populists, is shared by Darrin Qualman, former NFU research director, who pointed out the vital importance of local control to democratic decision-making, and the importance of democracy for a socially just future:

If you get to a place, the farms are taken, and that last place where the local people own the economy is taken away, and people who aren't local own the economy, it gets very difficult to maintain democratic decision-making processes, because if you don't own the economy, those who do own the economy are hesitant to let you run it for them. So I think the ownership of the family farm and the real pitched battle over who is going to own that family farm is really foundational to democracy, to civilization, to where we're going to go in the future. (2010)

For the most part, then, there is concordance between the participants' perceptions of the problems facing Saskatchewan agriculture and food sovereignty's critique of neoliberal capitalist agriculture.

3.2 Recognizing and Rejecting the Hegemonic View of Land: Alternative Views

Understanding the depth and breadth of the system they disagree with, participants also recognize the hegemonic nature of the industrial farming model and capitalist land ownership model and the consequent difficulties in imagining, proposing, and working for alternatives. Patel and Courville's (2006) suggestion that neoliberalism posits itself as the only alternative may help explain the relative passivity of many Saskatchewan farmers today, which was brought up by many of the interviewees. Several of the older interviewees contrasted the state of agriculture, and of agrarian agitation

today, unfavourably with that of the past. NFU member Bev Currie (2010) contrasted the inactivity he perceives in the majority of farmers today with the actions of bygone farmers:

We've let the governments get away with all these free trade agreements, and farmers stood by and let that Crow Rate go, buck and a half a bushel gone right down the drain. . . . There's not much evidence that farmers here are willing to do anything. . . . After the Second World War, I was young enough that I went to farm meetings and I can remember having meetings, might have been with my grandfather, and the hall was *packed*. Just packed with farmers at a Farm Union meeting, just full of farmers.

Whether this inactivity can be attributed to apathy, powerlessness, ignorance, or a loss of farmers is difficult to tell. When Burton (2010) discussed the first cooperative agrarian movements and said that now, “people just don't have a thought about, you know, there's something wrong with the system,” he was highlighting both the depoliticization of the economy and the individualistic, atomized thinking that passes for common sense now. Some of the groups' documents, such as the *Genesis Feasibility Analysis and Business Plan*, also comment on the widespread nature of neoliberal hegemony: “Government and commodity groups have largely accepted an extensive, competitive, privatized and non-protected agriculture” (Norm Bray Consultants 1997, 5). Tait (2010) described corporate influence and acquiescence among the farm press where “the nodding heads and the golden hands direct the conversation” and people are not encouraged to think critically or discuss issues with each other. All of the older farmers hearkened back to their youth when vigorous political discussions at the kitchen table with neighbours were commonplace, and implied that these are not common topics of conversation on farms now.

Three of the interviewees, Bev Currie and Henry and Joyce Neufeld, tried to

generate such conversation on the topic of land tenure in 1994. They described the challenges they experienced when they held meetings across Saskatchewan deliberately trying to upset conventional practices and ideas. Joyce Neufeld explained, “We advertised it 'Limiting Farm Size'. We did it deliberately to get the people coming out. . . . if you were in an area where they hated that idea, it really brought them out” (2010). As Currie put it, instead of reproducing the usual farm meeting where experts talked and farmers listened, they asked the audience for solutions to the problem of rural depopulation and facilitated the participants answering their own questions. Attendees participated fully in some meetings, but the organizers all remembered the one meeting where no one in the audience responded at all to their prompts. While they felt it was successful in educating some people, Henry Neufeld (2010) said their attempt to find a community that would set up a group to take action on the issue failed: “None of them would take it by the horns and do it” despite widespread agreement that their communities would be better with more farmers. Perhaps, as land trust donor Ruth Blaser (2010) said, for the majority, “industrial farming has got ahold of us by the throat. We have just never significantly questioned that or had the room to question.”

Common sense regarding the dominant land ownership model is founded on longstanding ideas about property and security, and this cultural weight is something many of the participants feel, and struggle with. Several interviewees attributed the appeal of land ownership partly to historical and cultural roots. “Some of that harks back to the people who came from Europe to settle the land here, and a lot of them had nothing, basically. And that meant a lot to them, to own their own land” (Burton 2010). Regardless of its origin, it is present; a couple of younger interviewees mentioned the

psychological appeal of property ownership, and Joyce Neufeld said that even after groups in her meetings agreed on the benefits of something like the Land Bank, “They still had this idea that they had to own the land” (2010). NFU member Dan Danielson illustrated this tension in his defence against critics of the Land Bank: “[The Land Bank] never said it wasn't better to own land . . . it's not true . . . the bundle of rights that go with ownership, you can't dispute them” (2011). Despite the appeal of conventional practices, however, there wasn't a single interviewee who had not thought critically about some aspect of agricultural land ownership.

Some interviewees challenged the indisputable benefits of ownership, questioning its security and desirability. NFU member and land trust donor Marilyn Gillis (2010) pointed out that “most of it has evolved that individuals don't own the land anyway, the bank owns it” and land trust tenant Dale Dewer (2011) asked, “why would we feel more [economically] secure if we actually had title to this land that nobody wants to buy anyway?” That ownership is more desirable was challenged by land trust tenants who simply wanted to access land by any means and couldn't afford to buy it. They felt that a transparently run land trust with long-term leases and an exit strategy offered the security they needed in order to feel that they could invest in the land.

A few interviewees reflected on the negative effects of neoliberal views applied to land. In the modern economic perspective, “land is just something you buy, you just use it, and if you wear it out and it's no good for the future, well that's the way it works” (Stirling 2010). Guina used the metaphor of mining the land: “in the pursuit of economic security, we're often treating it the same way as we are the low ground in our mining situations” (2011). The effect on soil health was deplored. Bob Stirling also talked about

farm families' tendency to sink their income into land to the detriment of the next generation in the family who struggle under debt, refinancing the land in order to fund the previous generation's retirement: "If you're interested as probably modern corporate farms are, in having strong capital values in land, then it is just a normal process. Let it happen" (2010). Kalissa Regier explained how the application of mainstream economic thinking to land transfer in the Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan (APAS) report *Strategies and Recommendations for New Entrant and Intergenerational Transfer Program Needs* (Scholz 2009) meant that APAS is "promoting the management of farms as businesses, which means that they're also promoting the acquisition of farmland by large corporations and then rolling it over into management positions for farmers" (2010). In the short term, while renting from corporations seems to solve the problem of new farmers lacking capital for a land purchase, it still results in a concentration of wealth and power as farmland ownership is taken from the control of local people.

The participants' rejection of this purely economic neoliberal attitude towards land suggests that they have a sense of land's multidimensionality. While this wasn't as clearly articulated by the interviewees as it was in Akiwenzie-Damm's (1996) description of First Nations views of land, these facets emerged in discussion of other questions such as what they enjoyed about farming. Many see land as a place to experience and enjoy the spiritual/aesthetic aspects of being in nature. Land trust tenant Nikko Snyder (2011) explained, "I'm happy to find spiritual meaning within my actual physical environment, things that fuel me and the land, and the collaboration that's required to grow food." Some associated land's cultivation with a rural way of life that has attributes such as a

high level of voluntarism and belonging, contrasted with urban life. Participants who placed a high value on ecologically sustainable land use see it as a place where other systems and species flourish, and some land trust members explicitly mentioned the importance of preserving it for future generations. For land trust tenant James Gant, “the whole commodity thing where people . . . just see it as \$400 an acre or whatever” that he sees in Saskatchewan mainstream agriculture doesn't place an accurate value on land (2010).

Most radically, some participants fundamentally question the idea of land as property. Those who argued for the decommodification of land are, perhaps unsurprisingly, people involved with land trusts in some capacity. Some questioned the historical and philosophical roots of land ownership. NFU member Cammie Harbottle (2011) rejected the Lockean labour theory of property: “why do we have a right to own land, who gave it to who in the first place . . . we're putting monetary values on it while buying and selling it and it's become this commodity and it's not at all valued for its internal parts.” Land trust tenant Jeremy Sauer (2011) spoke of a new “awareness and consciousness of the concept of owning land, of stewarding land” since he became a land trust tenant, and asked, “Can you really own the land?” Some see it as a special type of resource that must be treated differently: Guina (2011) suggested, “that which is the essence for life, our land, water and air, perhaps need a different set of criteria than rubber, oil, plastic, sand, cotton, things we can extract or produce.” Land trust tenant Lisa Ranger (2010) declared “the idea of taking land out of the commodity market and having it as a resource, as something that people have a right to access, that's great – that's exactly what should be” and the most recent Genesis brochure concurred, explaining that

the land trust is “an alternative ownership model that removes land from the commodity market and uses it as a long-term resource.” Speaking of the quarter section she placed in trust with Genesis, Blaser (2010) asserted, “Everything about that land is about our lives, and that land is not a commodity.”

These alternate views of land seem to result in part from incorporating moral considerations, which follows both from the participants' affinity for social and environmental justice and from Genesis Land Conservancy's interdenominational religious origins. Paul Brassard, the founder of Genesis, posits the most important question in agriculture as “What are the ethical and moral issues that we face?” (1994, 497). He suggests that land owners have a social responsibility to communities and to soils: stewardship and sustainable rural areas require “a way of farming that attaches people to the land much more intimately, carefully, and democratically than the industrial system has been able to do” (ibid., 499). Bringing a moral analysis to this system, he decries the profit motive that results in wealth concentration and rural depopulation – themes echoed by some of the farmer interviewees who bring up “greed” as a key motivator in rural Saskatchewan. The environmental sustainability aspect seems to particularly appeal to land trust participants. Dewar and Blaser talked about the best ecological direction for the land they tend, and how it should be stewarded for optimal health of the land and species living on it. Earthcare Connections promotes this aspect of its work quite assiduously on its website, with frequent use of the words “sustainable” or “sustainability”. As well, Earthcare Connections describes its work with Genesis as a partnership “that strives to define and promote sound land stewardship practices with ecological sensitivity and the preservation of biodiversity” (Earthcare Connections,

“Statement of Principles” 2010) Earthcare's Gen-Assist program attributes health and societal benefits to its “sustainably raised . . . grass-finished meat” (Footprints 2011, 2) and the program's holistic management principles are predicated on environmental stewardship of grazing land.

The National Farmers Union also addresses sustainability, but its Sustainable Agriculture Policy includes “economically viable” and “socially just” as well as “ecologically sound” as criteria for a sustainable food system and practices (NFU, “Policy on Sustainable Agriculture” n.d.). Similarly, this expanded view is part of NFU member Regier's definition of food sovereignty in which she coupled “sustainable production and sustainable social strategies” (2010), reminiscent of Paul Brassard's idea of social responsibility in agriculture. The National Farmers Union's perspective on the food system is firmly grounded in food sovereignty.

3.3 National Farmers Union: Analysis and Alternatives

The National Farmers Union possesses an incisive analysis of agriculture that illuminates the hegemonic system. The system is defined mainly in contrast to a family farm model that the NFU aims to both promote and safeguard: “The National Farmers Union strives for a system of food production, processing, and distribution that is, in all stages, economically viable, socially just, and ecologically sound. The current system does not meet these criteria and, thus, is not sustainable” (NFU, “Policy on Sustainable Agriculture” n.d.). That the problem is comprehensive is clear from their description of the forces working against sustainable agriculture, which are “short-term political and economic goals; international trade liberalization; and the continuing concentration of financing, agricultural trade, and food processing; . . . using up our resources and

damaging our forests, lakes, and rivers”, privileging economic growth and profit over environmental protection (ibid.). The NFU recognizes the influence of transnational corporations on governments and the constraints placed upon governments' control on agriculture through global trade agreements. While the NFU frequently engages with federal and provincial governments, it also recognizes that since global society today is characterized by neoliberal globalization, building successful alternatives will often mean engaging with adversaries and allies on a transnational level.

Opposing these powerful, wide-ranging forces, the NFU has focused since its origin on collective and political action as the most effective tactics. As Holtslander writes in the *Union Farmer*, “If we are empowered to make the key decisions around food and agriculture, we can prevent big corporations from taking over our food system. The NFU has always been a strong voice promoting policies that empower farm families” (2011, 3). On the “About” page of its website, the National Farmers Union states its goal is to “work together to achieve agricultural policies which will ensure dignity and security of income for farm families while enhancing the land for future generations” (National Farmers Union Canada, “About” n.d.). This goal is reflected in the “public face” of the website and quarterly magazine. The website features press releases and briefs on topics such as the CWB campaign, CETA, and correspondence with government over local issues such as the Ontario drought in summer 2012. Less prominently than on the pre-2012 website, there are links from these issues to actions spearheaded or supported by the NFU such as rallies, letter-writing campaigns, and informational meetings. The magazine includes news from each of the regions in Canada as well as articles relating to international sister organizations. Here, too, actions are

suggested, varying from using producer cars, phoning open line radio shows, and donating to disaster relief. The emphasis is often on democratic rights and responsibilities. In the Spring 2012 edition of the *Union Farmer*, Executive Director Kevin Wipf writes that the “democratic rights of Canadians are being undermined” (2) by secretive CETA negotiations and the dissolution of the Canadian Wheat Board's monopsony, and urges grassroots organizing in response. The merit of grassroots-based, participatory democracy is clearly communicated in NFU materials.

The focus on collective and political action is also evident in the actions taken by the National Farmers Union and individual members on land issues: advocacy, work with other organizations, and educational outreach. The aforementioned meetings on land size organized by Currie and Neufeld are an example of educational outreach and an attempt to stimulate grassroots action. In the past ten years, there have been two major NFU efforts on land issues in Saskatchewan. The first occurred in 2002 in anticipation of the changes to *The Saskatchewan Farm Security Act*. Action included researching, writing and disseminating information through press releases, at least three submissions to the Standing Committee on Agriculture, lobbying individual sympathetic Members of Parliament, and liaising with other community organizations that presented on the issue. Through these actions, the NFU opposed the opening of farmland ownership laws, arguing that they would result in absentee landlord holdings and consequently speculation, lack of stewardship, and rising land prices that would become a barrier for Saskatchewan family farmers (Wells 2002). As well, these could prove a barrier to young farmers and encourage corporate farming (Luthje 2002). To allay these fears of the future, a representative of Lane Realty and Richard Gray from the University of Saskatchewan

argued that corporations do not want to farm and don't see farm land as an investment. “Don't worry about opening the floodgates to corporations – they are too smart to go farming” the former declared (Standing Committee on Agriculture 2002, 14). This is ironic given the increase in corporate ownership of land that has occurred in Saskatchewan since, the subject of the next NFU major action on land tenure.

The second major effort resulted in the 2010 NFU report *Losing Our Grip: How a Corporate Farmland Buy-up, Rising Farm Debt, and Agribusiness Financing of Inputs Threaten Family Farms and Food Sovereignty*, an attempt to inform civil society and the farm community. The report outlines three threats to food sovereignty: corporate farmland purchases in Canada, input financing by corporations, and farm debt load. As the NFU has published extensively on farm debt, the bulk of the new research in the report concerns ten Canadian “land grabs”, including four companies operating in Saskatchewan. The language used clearly points to power and wealth in the land tenure system; the first pages state, “the core issue is one of autonomy and control . . . as farmers are forced more into the arms of corporations and investors, farmers lose control of Canada’s farms and foodland. And as autonomy and ownership are taken from our farmer citizens, Canadians lose their grip on their food system” (2010, 1-2). The closing recommendations include: limiting farmland ownership to provincial residents; taxing foreigners and corporations at higher rates; setting up farmland transfers that don't rely on loans, such as land trusts and land banks; community financing; and restricting transfer of agricultural land to non-agricultural uses (ibid., 13). These arguments address aspects of agrarian reform promoted by food sovereignty, namely a redistribution (or prevention of further concentration) of wealth and power in land, local decision-making, and the

maintenance of foodland for farmers. The principles of agrarian reform present in these recommendations are the same as those implicit in the 2002 arguments, although the recommendations are more proactive in the 2010 report. As well, the intended audience of *Losing Our Grip* is broader; the NFU directs some appeal to consumers and non-farming citizens, using the concept of food sovereignty. The 2002 arguments centred on an agrarian populist valorization of family farming that may have less appeal to those who think of farmers as “producer-entrepreneurs of the highest order,” as Premier Wall labelled farmers present at the opening of the Regina-area John Deere facility in the 2011 provincial election campaign (Mandryk 2011).

According to the NFU's former research director, *Losing Our Grip* was disseminated through the media via a well-attended news conference in Saskatoon and a news release to a list of print, television, radio, and magazine media from across Canada. It was also posted on the internet for free access. Subsequently, some of the ideas have been incorporated in briefs and forthcoming articles (Qualman 2011, pers. comm.). NFU members also participated in the People's Food Policy Project⁹ (PFPP) where access to land was a major topic of one of ten discussion papers, worked on extensively by NFU members, and recommendations similar to those in the NFU's report were made (PFPP 2011c). Thus, the NFU recognizes the need to educate – to “move little pieces of public consciousness” (Tait 2010).

The National Farmers Union clearly embraces politicization: not only action in the political arena, but the recognition that agricultural issues are political ones both in the narrow sense of “involving governments” and the broader sense of engaging with

9 This project, spearheaded by Food Secure Canada, involved grassroots consultations with 3500 people across Canada, led by members of Food Secure Canada, and resulted in a national food policy document, *Resetting the Table*, in 2010.

power in the public sphere. This is a direct challenge to the depoliticization of neoliberalism, and gets to the heart of problems in the food system. As former NFU president Roy Atkinson said, “People look at me and say, 'well, he's a radical.' Well, I hope I am. The definition of a radical is someone who gets to the bottom of an issue” (2010). At times, this takes the form of a direct confrontation with the state, often to protect infrastructure collectively created by farmers. In these situations, the NFU's actions are mainly defensive, which is clear, for example, in the news release about the president's speaking tour on the Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement between Canada and the EU (CETA). The NFU president is spoken of as “defending”, “actively protest[ing]”, “warning”, and “drawing attention to the dangers” (National Farmers Union 2011). By some, this type of action is viewed as moderate. Speaking of the actions around the Farm Security Act in 2002, Atkinson asserted that the NFU's attempts at “rational discussion” were useless. He believes they failed to educate and motivate people; to illustrate this, he says that he was the only observer in the gallery at the legislature when the Farm Security Act changes were passed. Atkinson believes this move away from more visible forms of protest dates back a couple decades. Speaking of the struggle around the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool's change to a publicly traded corporation in 1996, he opined, “We should have had fifty farmers to go in and go to the eighth floor, occupy it... Maybe some would get thrown in jail, that's okay. You motivate the people. This is ours!” (2010).

In contrast to Atkinson's view, even the NFU's current political engagement may seem off-putting to some who may otherwise support the NFU's standpoint. Regier spoke to this when discussing attempts to reach out to young farmers through the NFU: “We

[the NFU] spend so much time fighting, and we have to do it, we're the only ones that are going to stand up for people, but at the same time, that's not what gets people involved, it's not the kind of thing that instigates positive participation" (2010). Current NFU youth president Cammie Harbottle remarked, "I always struggled when I was younger with activism that happened through protests and what I felt often happened was it didn't feel very constructive to me" (2011). Harbottle's own farming operation on a land trust suggests that she is inclined to model change, although her testimony at the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food in May 2010, advocating help for alternative land tenure arrangements, shows that she feels political action is valuable as well. At the same time, Regier suggested that farmers may have "put too much emphasis on expectations of [changing] government programs. [Governments] do very little to look into the depth of the problems that they're trying to solve with the programs. . . . it's just not the kind of system that bodes well for real [change] – it's too bureaucratic for the kind of change that's needed" (2010). While this may explain the NFU's focus on policy rather than programs, it also points to the need for the system of government to change as well. This requires the war of position in civil society – more a fundamental attack than confronting the state that enforces hegemony. While reports such as *Losing Our Grip* may be an attempt to influence civil society through consciousness-raising, more is needed to, as Gramscian ideals would have it, build the foundations of a new state in civil society (Cox 2005, 38).

Focusing on building their constituency, the NFU Youth launched a Campaign for New Farmers and have recently reached out to urban farmers as well as those in the underrepresented coastal region of British Columbia. Their current work concentrates on

collaborating with other organizations and “develop[ing] a positive direction for the year to come” (Union Farmer Spring 2011, 7). The National Farmers Union Youth, however, are far from depoliticized, as not only their membership in the union shows. Their website makes explicit mention of the role played by their political analysis as well as educational opportunities and organizational partnerships (National Farmers Union, “Youth” n.d.). Regier and Harbottle, past and present youth presidents, displayed a keen political analysis of the food system in the interviews and this analysis informs their wide-reaching attempts to bring about change.

In my interviews, individual members of the National Farmers Union also revealed many ideas to facilitate access to land that they had heard of or worked out, but that have not been put into practice. Tait (2010) explained that the two barriers to land transference in the current system are the income requirement and tax responsibility of the retiree or seller, and the debt and interest payments of the buyer. His solution is to use a third party guarantor, such as an Agricultural Credit Corporation. Instead of a lump sum, the seller would receive a modest cheque as income each month from the buyer through this third party, perhaps with a tax break. To be truly effective this option would also require regulations on land size and market controls to keep buyers from bidding up the price of land to make up the difference. This would help young farmers access land and prevent land concentration. Qualman (2010) suggested a cooperative effort between municipalities and the province where they would possess land close to cities and allot it to people who want to grow food for these local markets. This would support food sovereignty principles of local food production for local needs and keep farmland for farmers. He also suggested a government organization akin to the Land Bank that, after

land ownership laws were changed to restrict ownership to food producers, could purchase land for redistribution to increase the density of farms. Currie (2010) explained his idea for a non-equity cooperative that addresses the problem of inter-generational transfer in cooperatives. Basically, assets would be owned by a mother company in perpetuity, and farmers would receive an income and a share of profits.¹⁰ These suggestions address the concentration of wealth and power in land, and could have some public appeal – they have some historical precedent in Saskatchewan and do not work entirely contrarily to the system, although there are doubtless banking and investment interests that would oppose the ideas. Although these suggestions do not radically challenge the attachment to private ownership, Gibson-Graham's 2006 work on alternative economies suggests that ideological purity is not necessary and that realistic alternatives take into account the extent and limits of restricting forces.

Similarly, NFU member David Neufeld also recognizes the hegemonic nature of capitalist industrial agriculture, and finds ways to work within it, positing that as the most realistic opposition strategy. He advised that people “be very active looking for opportunities and [do] the best we can until either there's a crash or more sense. . . . are we going to dismantle capitalism or are we going to try to fit in the cracks? I don't have the energy to dismantle it, so I'm going to try to find the cracks” (2010). Fitting with that philosophy, he suggested more individual or small-group actions to access land - linking with landowners who have too much land to manage, pooling resources in collectives, mentorship that results in preferential sales of farmland, using urban land for small-plot farming, preferential leasing that “kind of depends on somebody having wealth and a vision” - generally, “lots of models” (ibid.). This contributes to the plurality and diversity

¹⁰ Bev Currie published a detailed explication of this model in *Farm Communities at the Crossroads*.

of economic forms which Gibson-Graham (2006) argues helps deconstruct the hegemony of capitalist discourse. At the same time, this pluriactivity raises the question of whether Neufeld is in some ways conforming to the flexibility demanded of labour in neoliberal economies. This pluriactivity, however, was characteristic of many agricultures pre-capitalism, and indeed agriculture in Canada until the importation of early 1900s business models into agriculture (e.g. Fitzgerald 2003) transformed farming post-WWII. Moreover, engaging in alternative economic practices can also deconstruct economic forms, as in the example Neufeld gave of a group operating a community-supported agriculture program in Winnipeg on public land.

In a metaphor similar to Neufeld's, Harriet Friedmann describes this creative diversity in the urban food movement as “plants breaking through the cracks in the asphalt!” (quoted in Holt-Giménez and Shattuck 2011, 132) – an image that suggests that fitting in the cracks is not merely to avoid notice, but to widen the cracks, perhaps to the point of rupture. Widening the cracks, perhaps, has prompted Neufeld to be instrumental in the creation of a farm mentorship program that has links with Manitoba Agriculture and Food and Rural Initiatives and the University of Manitoba. His version of living and working for an alternative – perhaps Scott's (1985) everyday forms of resistance - is collaborative, and takes into account disparities of wealth and power. This form of activism is very locally focused, and does not have radical transformation of the system as a stated goal. However, it has achieved success on that scale. Linked with a public challenge, this type of place-based activism can also promote transformation at a larger scale and contribute to counter-hegemony.

The NFU as an organization has not undertaken work on these individual

suggestions. Setting aside the question of sufficient resources to pursue the ideas, Qualman pointed to two possible reasons. The first is that currently, due to the aging farm population, there are more farmers interested in selling than in buying land in Saskatchewan and many NFU members are included in that group that would benefit from a “diverse pool of buyers with more money” (2010). Due to personal interest, perhaps, the issue of radical land tenure change is not palatable to members. The second reason pointed to the complexity of the issue of agrarian reform in a climate where commodity farming is not all that profitable for most: “I think the NFU has a lot of concerns about effective control as opposed to just simple having your name on the title” (ibid.). Regier echoed this when she said that the NFU has not worked on succession planning per se:

I'd say we're advocating in general for stronger farms, more resilience on family farms, which in turn is going to result in the next generation wanting to [farm]—and I also think we focus on helping farmers that are on the farm already be more successful so they don't have to rely on sales of land. But nothing organized. I really also think that it's something that has to happen very holistically, like it all has to come together. We need to be able to see enough success on the farms that are out there that so that they just sort of transfer themselves. (2010)

The issue of land is a complex one, and simply changing the tenure system without changing other aspects of the food system will have little effect. However, as many interviewees professed, land is a fundamental piece: “If one does not have access to land one has access to nothing. And one cannot fight the other battles” (Tait 2010).

Thus, although the National Farmers Union as an organization and as individual members generally have a keen understanding of problems in the global industrial agricultural system, the organization has spent relatively little time and resources on the issue of land tenure, and the effort undertaken has been a defensive one against

concentration and loss of local control of land. The example of the Landless Workers Movement (MST) in Brazil shows that practice and theory must work in tandem. On their struggle for land, Stédile comments:

We knew we would not accomplish anything by getting a few families together and taking over unused lands. We had learned from the past that if peasants or agrarian producers did not organize and fight for something more than just a piece of land they would never develop a wider class conscience, which would allow them to confront a variety of underlying problems. Because land in and of itself does not liberate agrarian producers from exploitation (quoted in Teubal 2009, 16).

Borras and Franco (2010) suggest that agrarian reform must not only fight against land reconcentration policies but promote food sovereignty as a viable alternative through experiments and initiatives. These experiments surely should include ways of accessing land. Based on analysis of the ravages of the dominant agricultural system in Saskatchewan that are often externalized, naturalized and/or ignored by hegemonic elites and unrecognized by consumers, it is certain that the ideological work that the NFU does must be undertaken. However, as Patel says, “a sound ideological footing matters little if ideas aren’t turned into practice. We need concrete ways of growing, eating and sharing food that make people’s lives better” (2011).

While NFU interviewees have suggested niche solutions, regulatory solutions, financing solutions, and community solutions consonant with many of food sovereignty's principles of agrarian reform, the bigger question is how to make agrarian reform happen. As Stirling (2010) said, “it seems to be an idea that was thought about for decades, decades in rural Saskatchewan, so that the knowledge of [what to do], generally speaking, is there” but the implementation is a problem.

In 2001, Bob Stirling wrote a letter that resides in the “land tenure” file of the

NFU library. The letter informs the NFU research director of a new Saskatchewan land trust, Genesis Land Conservancy, of which some NFU members were in fact already aware as they had participated individually in discussions about it. Some NFU members also became Genesis land donors. The next section explores the land trust model in Saskatchewan – its potential as a solution to land tenure problems and as a practice of food sovereignty. Is it a pragmatic form of change that weds theory and action? Land trust tenant Jeremy Sauer would seem to think so:

To live a life that exists within the system . . . but is very contrary to the system . . . is sort of the level of activism that I'm interested in. And simply to demonstrate to myself and to others that there are perhaps alternatives, perhaps more sustainable ways of living. (Sauer 2011)

4. AGRICULTURAL LAND TRUSTS IN SASKATCHEWAN

Agricultural land trusts have a long history, taking different forms at different times in response to pressures that created a need for alternative ways to access land. Today, the obstacles to the viability of agricultural land trusts are mainly presented by the global industrial agricultural system. Growth in farm size and increasing land prices mean that land trusts, that often have difficulties obtaining financing, are less able to compete for land. Rural depopulation makes community organizing more difficult and the the naturalization of private property rights may make land trusts look eccentric or unworkable. To overcome these obstacles, a clear understanding of both the systemic problems and the nature of social change is helpful. This chapter begins with an outline of the history of and philosophy behind land trusts. Then, the NFU's Canada-specific analysis and conception of food sovereignty and land tenure from the previous chapter is used to examine the theory and practice of Genesis Land Conservancy and New Roots Land Trust. In the concluding chapter, the strengths of the organizations' different approaches, and how they might instruct each other, are discussed.

4.1 Brief History of Land Trusts

It is useful to delve into the history of land trusts in order to understand their foundation of stewardship, alternative ideas about ownership, and notion of the multiple functions of land. Placing current land trusts in the context of other similar attempts to conserve land and make it more accessible helps explain their evolution and compare the different forms they have taken. This section will give a brief history of the North American land trust movement and then outline the particular histories of Genesis Land Conservancy and New Roots Land Trust.

Although models vary somewhat, a land trust essentially is a private, nonprofit organization that has as its primary mission the protection of land through acquisition and/or stewardship. This protection may be of ecological features, agricultural uses, aesthetic landscapes, or cultural or historical features. The land trust movement addresses the questions of how land will be shared outside of the institution of private property, how it will be passed on to the next generation, and if/how it can be exchanged with others. Although the first land trust in the United States was created in 1891 in Massachusetts, land trusts have a history going back to the Roman Empire. Starting in the 1970s, the land trust movement gained traction in the United States, spurred by a weakening of governmental protection of land and an increase in development pressures (Glynwood Center 2008). The International Independence Institute, in its seminal 1972 publication on community land trusts, claims many precedents: *ejidos*, village commons, “American Indian” traditions, traditional landholding in Africa, and the *gramdan* movement in India. All of these examples take into account not only individual but community rights - and responsibilities. They reveal a multifaceted view of land that incorporates social values and concern for future generations on the land.

There is somewhat of a distinction between a community-based land trust (CBLT) and a traditional conservation land trust, based on their purpose and regulations. Lawless (1994) distinguishes between traditional land trusts, such as the Nature Conservancy of Canada, that usually protect the undeveloped nature of natural areas and CBLTs that facilitate land use for human needs, such as housing or farming, and work towards a common good, as decided by a community. While both types of trust may promote stewardship and preservation of land, the CBLT is clearly an economic land trust as well,

intended to support livelihoods.

Accordant with the variation in trust models, there are various ways of placing land in trust (Watkins and Hilts 2001). The most common in North America are through conservation easements¹¹ that secure permanent protection of landscape features without direct ownership by the protective organization, followed by purchase or donation of threatened lands. Land trusts may also engage in property management, disposing of lands to an appropriate management agency (such as a government parks or wildlife agency), and acquiring lands to resell with restrictions that are usually in the form of conservation easements. The majority of land trusts in North America are conservation trusts that seek to preserve wilderness habitat; the next most common type of trust provides affordable urban housing. In 2005, the United States had 1,600 land trusts that conserved almost fifteen million hectares of land (Gorsuch and Scott 2010). In Canada, land trusts took off in the 1990s. By 2001, there were over eighty trusts operating across the country (Watkins and Hilts 2001). Saskatchewan land trusts, mainly conservation trusts, owned 51,000 acres in 2000 (*ibid.*); at present, the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation owns approximately 30,000 acres and shares costs for another 30,000 acres with organizations such as Ducks Unlimited Canada (Jim Kroshus, pers. comm.).

An agricultural land trust is an economic trust that aims to preserve prime agricultural land, primarily from urban development, and facilitate environmentally sustainable agricultural use (Gorsuch and Scott 2010). Title to land is held in perpetuity

¹¹ “An *easement* represents a right to a parcel of land which is otherwise the property of another. A positive easement allows its holder to make some use of the property, such as the right of way to pass through the land. A *negative* easement allows the holder to restrict the principal owner from some otherwise permissible use or transfer” (Lawless, Chapter 2). Most conservation trusts make extensive use of easements, as they are far cheaper than purchasing land and still allow for regulations that ensure environmental stewardship.

by the trust. The elements of tenure – access to the land, security, and the ability to redeem investment in the property (Ruhf 2002-2003) – are satisfied in the following way. Commonly, the land in an agricultural trust is leased to farmers, on long-term or lifetime leases. While there is some variation, buildings and other infrastructure on the land are typically privately owned by tenants, and exit agreements offer various compensation, based on depreciation, for the improvements should a lessee leave the trust. There may be agreements (covenants) as to approved land uses such as restricting use of pesticides, maintaining water control structures, or specifying acceptable tillage practices (Norm Bray Consultants 1997). Agricultural land trusts are much less common than wilderness preservation trusts, comprising only seven percent of land trust area in the United States (Gorsuch and Scott 2010). They have appeared in Canada in the past couple of decades, mainly in British Columbia and the Maritimes.

The potential benefits of land trusts are many: long-term protection of farmland for food production; environmental stewardship; helping farmers with affordable access to land; increasing local food production and local control of the food system; and strengthening communities (Hamilton 2006; Gorsuch and Scott 2010). While it is possible that the benefits of land trusts could be diminished – for example, tenants could produce for export rather than local markets – most land trusts have bylaws ensuring environmental stewardship and affordable access, and governing members are generally drawn from a progressive constituency that encourages progressive land use. Challenges that land trusts in North America often face include difficulty obtaining financing, ensuring long-term functioning to fulfil long-term responsibilities, and providing enough flexibility in structure and requirements for farmers to be able to change land uses in

response to economic changes/pressures (Glynwood 2008; Gorsuch and Scott 2010). The successful incorporation of the community aspect of a land trust seems to be vital to its success. Despite the difficulty in defining community, the decline of place-based community organizing, and the tendency of some communities to be parochial, Bryden and Geisler (2007) argue that community support and empowerment is a key to success in different types of land reforms. The relationship between access to land and social relations, to social structure and identity, cannot be bypassed or ignored in land reform attempts if they are to be accepted by the community and have significant impacts.

Lessons from Community-Based Land Reforms in Scotland

Recent developments in land tenure in Scotland provide a good example of community land ownership and agrarian reform that may have lessons for agricultural land trusts. Community ownership of crofting lands has flourished in the past decade, helping rural population retention and economic viability of communities. This ownership upsets centuries of feudal land relations and oppressive landholding. In the Highland Clearances of the 16th and 17th centuries, rural tenant farmers, or crofters, were displaced from their lands to make room for sheep and later for sport hunting. These crofters ended up densely concentrated in the outlying and less desirable parts of estates in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, where land was of poor quality. Because of this history, as of 1999 and perhaps yet today, Scotland had a feudal system of the most concentrated private land ownership in the world. Two-thirds of the privately owned rural land was owned by 1252 landowners (0.025 percent of the population), in large estates. One quarter of the land was in estates of 30,700 acres and larger, owned by just sixty-six landowners (Wightman, Callander, and Boyd 2004). Many landowners were (and are)

renowned for their neglect, paternalism, and iron-fisted control over the land and any changes or developments to be made to it, facilitated by Scottish property laws (Bryden and Geisler 2007).

Today, approximately 17,000 crofting tenancies occupy 800,000 hectares or twenty percent of the Highlands and Islands (equalling seven percent of Scotland's total land area) (Bryden and Geisler 2007). Individual crofts are typically established on an average of five hectares of “in-by” - land used mainly for vegetable, arable and grassland production rather than grazing. Each township traditionally manages poorer quality hill ground as common grazing for cattle and sheep, which is the main agricultural activity. Because of the small plots and poor quality of this land, crofters traditionally rely on income from other activities in addition to agriculture. Thus, the definition of a crofter, as an aggregate of self-definitions from Shucksmith's 2008 Committee of Inquiry on Crofting, is a person who works on the land, resides in a crofting community, and has a range of jobs or income sources. However, as the crofters make clear, crofting is a way of life: crofters feel a responsibility to the community, the environment, and the future, and see crofting as a way to pass on skills and traditions.

In 2003, the four-year-old Scottish Parliament introduced the Land Reform Act, changing land laws that had been in place since the eleventh century. This Act granted rural communities in Scotland the right of “first refusal” on the sale of estates and granted crofting communities the right to buy their croftlands on a collective basis, even over the objections of land owners. Community buyouts take different forms, but generally form or use a democratic body to represent the community and then usually create a company that owns and manages the property on behalf of the community (Bryden and Geisler

2007). There are a variety of ways to obtain the purchase price of land. Funding for community buyouts is available through National Lottery money in Scottish Land Fund, as well as grants such as those the Highlands and Islands Development Corporation provides. Some money comes from the purchasing community, other from donations and loans. As of 2009, some two hundred groups have been helped to achieve buy-outs by the Scottish Government's Community Land Unit. More than two and a half percent of the nation's land—a third of a million acres—is now under such ownership (Brown 2007).

Communities possess the same security and rights of conventional land ownership under Scottish law as well as additional benefits. While crofters still lease their in-by-land for agricultural production, they lease it from the community organization that also owns the common land. Other than land, community property often includes community facilities, heritage assets, and economic resources such as wind turbines (Wightman, Callandar, and Boyd 2004). Community ownership allows diversifying croft activities that require collective action. Examples include horticulture developments, sheep's wool for house insulation, stock clubs, tree planting, sensitive tourism, or a small hydroelectricity utility as in Assynt (Mackenzie 2010). Community ownership has many other potential benefits. It can provide greater security allowing people to plan for the future, provide greater freedom to use assets, facilitate access to greater funding, encourage social networking, allow profit to be retained in the community, promote community cohesion and pride, and provide greater transparency and accountability in decision making (Slee and Moxey 2008). Shucksmith (2008) found that crofting had significantly contributed to population retention, improving economic vitality, safeguarding landscapes and biodiversity and sustaining cultural diversity. Importantly, it

contributed a number of benefits together.

There seems to be an attitude towards land and rural development on part of the Scottish government that is very different from that of neoliberal governments in Canada. The Scottish government justifies intervention in the land market and private property rights on the grounds of social justice, capture of economic opportunity, population retention and self-determination. This helps convey the moral authority that communities need for feasible ownership. So does the ethic of community rights trumping individual rights that is rooted in Highland culture (Brown 2007). Because this system of land reform addresses the concentration of wealth and power through community development, it speaks to the issue of not only land reform – everyone being able to access an equitable share - but agrarian reform. It may serve as a model for contemporary resistance to capitalist processes of appropriation and privatization of land, the “powerful tide of enclosure” (Brown 2007, 507) that in Saskatchewan takes the form of dispossession of small farmers and increasing corporate and absentee ownership of land.

While Saskatchewan does not share many aspects of Scotland's rural history, it does have an agrarian history of creating co-operative solutions to problems. In their study of community based land trusts models for Saskatchewan, Brown, Gray, and Molder (1992, 57) suggest that despite the attachment to private property among Saskatchewan farmers, land trusts are likely to have some appeal because of the “co-operative nature” of the people. The histories of two land trusts in Saskatchewan, Genesis Land Conservancy and New Roots Land Trust, show just such an attempt to create a solution to problems in agriculture by experimenting with alternative land tenure, notions of community, and a view of the land that acknowledges its many facets.

Genesis Land Conservancy – History

The 1980s in Saskatchewan saw high numbers of farm foreclosures, high interest rates, low farm incomes and concerns about intergenerational transfer in farm families. In the early 1990s, Credit Union Central of Saskatchewan, Federated Cooperatives Limited, Inter-Church Committee on Agriculture, and Saskatchewan Wheat Pool initiated and funded a study by agricultural economists from the University of Saskatchewan. In this study, the researchers evaluated the potential of community-based land trusts to address the concerns about Saskatchewan agriculture and created two models for an agricultural community based land trust (Brown, Gray, and Molder 1992). The model they recommended has the basic features of a land trust: land held in perpetuity by the trust; community (as defined by CBLT bylaws), capital donor, and tenant control of the trust's board; long-term leases; and tenant ownership of improvement on the land. The main challenge they addressed was that of financing. They recommended giving nonvoting shares, as well as one voting share, to people who transferred land to the trust. These shares could also be widely sold, and would provide a typical agricultural rate of return. Tenants would pay a flexible annual cash lease. Governments would have no role in financing, but could provide a conducive legislative environment and administrative assistance. Feedback from a technical committee and focus groups was mixed; most thought this was appealing from a tenant perspective but not from the perspective of a capital provider. They felt that it could help ameliorate some of the problems associated with land tenure, but could not commit to the idea that the trust would have no buy-back mechanism – essentially negating the idea that a land trust takes land permanently out of the commodity market.

From this study, it was the religious organizations involved in commissioning the Brown, Molder, and Gray study that took up the idea and under the leadership of Paul Brassard, coordinator of the Catholic Rural Life Ministry, the Genesis Land Conservancy was started in 1996. According to Bob Stirling (2010), who helped Brassard think through the concept, Brassard saw a land trust as “really a Christian thing to do”. This moral view of land and farming, combined with a critique of the dehumanizing market system, is evident in an article by Brassard:

When work, instead of serving man, is organized primarily in terms of profit, it is man who is ultimately subjected to the unyielding demands of production, competitiveness and consumption. . . .The value of land is determined almost completely by its role in the market system . . . In our view, land ownership involves significant social responsibility. (1994, 497)

Agrarian populist views are evident in Brassard's list of values associated with the family farm (“love of the land, perseverance in work, a sense of family life, seriousness, endurance in the face of setbacks caused by the weather, a love of tradition, hospitality”), the importance of stewardship borne of an attachment to the land and respect for its sacredness, and in the emphasis on finding solutions in community for the collective good (497). His vision of a desirable future is “thriving rural communities surrounded by many family farms living in dignity and caring for that land so that future generations can also enjoy its productivity” (ibid., 500).

The first Genesis brochure¹² echoes this vision. On its cover is a quote from Aldo Leopold, referring to “land as a community to which we belong,” and inside the earth is portrayed as “a vital, living organism whose permanent well-being must never be endangered.” Aside from this, however, the brochure sets out the specific ways they will

¹² The exact date of its publication is not given on the brochure, but from the address on the back, it was shortly after the inauguration of Genesis in 1997. Norm Bray Consultants (1997) refers to a brochure that had already been developed at that time.

accomplish their goals to “assist farmers to transfer farmland, to make land available under lease to farm operators, to promote sustainable agricultural production”. At this point, it was suggested that land would be acquired through purchase, donation, bequest or lease, and funds for purchase raised through a subsidiary holding company as well as through management and rental income. Leases were to be long-term (thirty-forty year) and sustainable practices would be required. The brochure also explains the advantages of donating or selling land to Genesis and how Genesis will benefit community. The appeal is to the agrarian populist notion of farming – key words are community, local, sustainable, and conserve. The longevity and security of the trust and its work are emphasized. However, there is also a recognition of farmer independence; land owners are allowed to designate the tenant and farming practices to be followed.

In 1997, Genesis began to administer the leases of four quarters of land belonging to four of its board members. It also commissioned the *Feasibility Analysis and Business Plan*, produced for Genesis by Norm Bray Consultants in 1997. This plan differs from the Brown, Gray and Molder model in several ways. It does not suggest financing through shares, but proposes a number of potential revenue streams and ways of acquiring land – the lease administration they were already engaged in, a limited amount of mortgage financing, donations, membership sales, term deposits from supporters that could be reinvested, grants, a self-directed RRSP program, and an initial fee from long-term lessees. It emphasizes the educational role of Genesis, advising that it provide a clearinghouse for landlords and tenants and education on sustainable agricultural practices. It also advocates a lobbying role for Genesis as the champion of “family farming, rural values and a conservation ethic” and working in coalitions with other

organizations who share goals (Norm Bray Consultants 1997, 5). Recognizing that access to land is not enough to solve farmers' problems, part of the report is devoted to discussing production and processing options that may improve income for Genesis tenants. Similar to the Brown, Gray, and Molder report, Norm Bray Consultants makes use of focus groups to give feedback on the model. Their reaction was reserved; they generally saw the requirements for sustainable practices and the land-management aspect as threatening independence. They also thought an option to purchase land should be included. Norm Bray Consultants concludes that in order to reach farmers, Genesis must expect them to be “seeking a business advantage” and therefore must be “seen to be practical and business-like if it is to move beyond a sub-set of farmers with primarily 'green' concerns” (1997, 29).

The Genesis Land Conservancy of today displays the influence of these precursors, but has evolved in many ways. When Brassard passed away in 1998, Duane Guina assumed responsibility for Genesis and currently works as Executive Director for Earthcare Connections, the organization that manages Genesis. The conservancy is a registered charity, and received its first donation of land in 1998. It relies on planned giving, acquiring land in five ways:

1. Charitable gift: a tax receipt is issued for the full market value of the land
2. Bequest: farmer remains on the land during his/her lifetime
3. Joint ownership: the farmer manages the land and receives the income until passing
4. Retained life interest: the owner continues to occupy the land that Genesis receives

5. Preferred sale: the difference between the market price and the sale price is seen as a donation to the organization and is tax deductible.

Donated lands are located all over Saskatchewan (with one or two parcels in Alberta, as Genesis is registered to operate interprovincially) and amount to more than three thousand acres in about a dozen parcels (see Fig. 1). These lands are leased to farmers, with land rents forming part of Genesis' revenue - about \$40,000/year (Guina 2011). Genesis does not place covenants on the land, or use easements; it encourages stewardship through education of tenants and interested parties, feeling that restrictions such as requiring organic farming would unduly limit the pool of potential farmers and thus limit viability and impact (Hamilton 2004).

Genesis's sibling organization Earthcare Connections was established as an incorporated entity in 1998, and acquired the status of a charitable organization in 1999. It serves as the management agency for the land trust, and its board members are Genesis' trustees. In addition to managing Genesis, Earthcare engages in a number of educational and revenue-generating activities. Previously, it ran a CSA and greenhouse in Marysburg (Forum on Religion and Ecology 2004). There are three major activities at present: Gen-Assist, the Earthcare Balloon, and The Home Quarter. The Gen-Assist program is a partnership with Heifer International dating to 2002 that initially provided livestock to thirteen farm families who then underwent holistic management training (Heifer International n.d.). In the past couple of years, Gen-Assist farmers have formed a new generation co-operative to market their grass-finished meat¹³. The Earthcare Balloon is a

13 New generation co-operatives are used in agriculture primarily by farmers looking to add value to their products through ownership of processing facilities. They are similar to traditional co-operatives, but have closed membership after the initial share offerings. As well, delivery rights are tied to investment equity in the co-op.

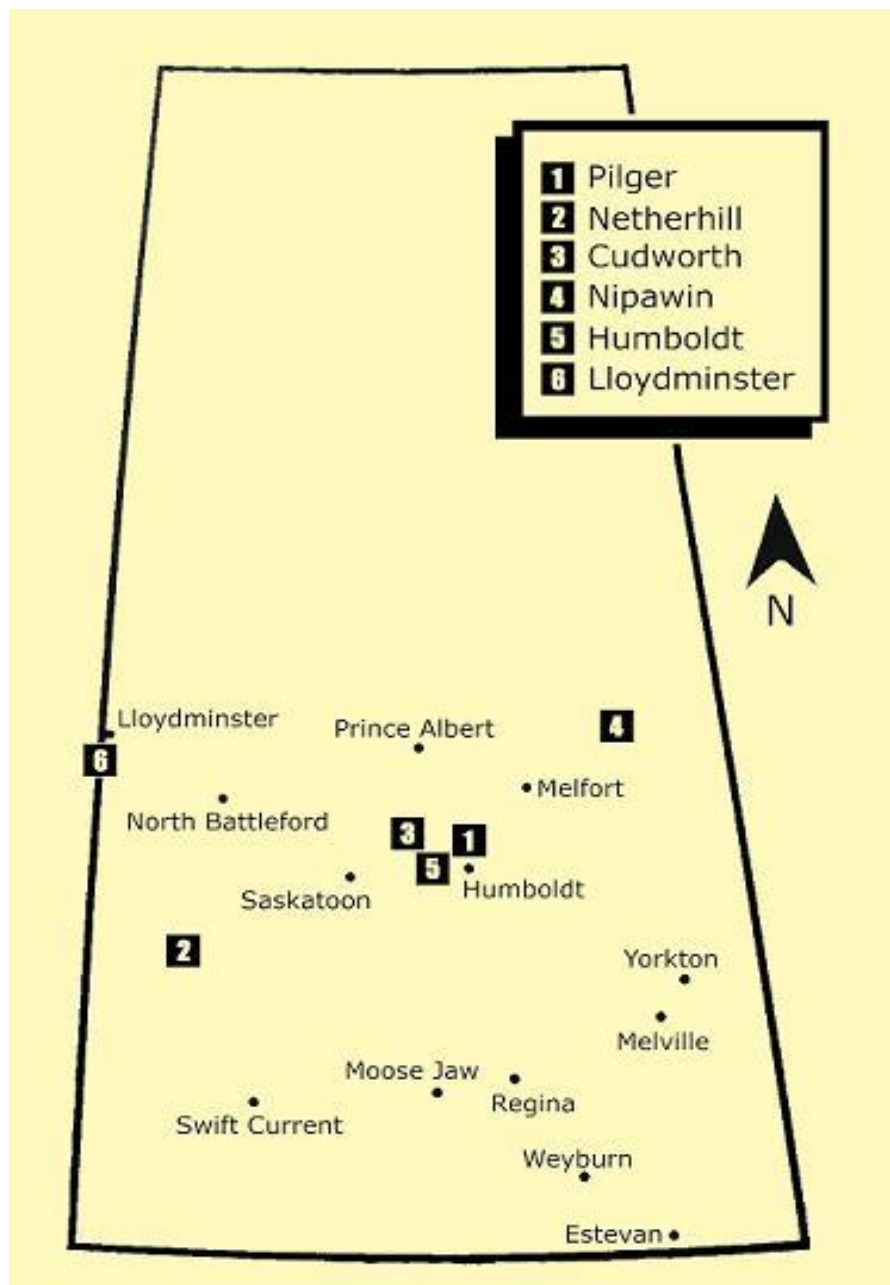


Figure 1: A map of Genesis properties in 2005. No current map is available.
Source: <http://web.archive.org/web/20071123115254/http://www.earthcare.ca/genesis/map.html>

giant inflatable model of the earth that is used along with curricula developed in presentations to schools to foster awareness of environmental issues. The Home Quarter is a working model farm under development, demonstrating sustainable agriculture. Earthcare has an executive director (Guina) and as of the last newsletter (*Footprints* 2012) a half-time office manager. It occasionally hires other contract workers, such as a consultant to develop a business plan for the Gen-Assist program, when money becomes available. Revenue comes from the balloon program in schools, private and faith-based donations, and grants that are deemed adequately unrestrictive (Guina 2011; Gorsuch and Scott 2010).

For the future, Executive Director Guina feels that Genesis is on the verge of being able to expand more quickly. The present focus is on starting a capital campaign and ensuring that administrative structures and staff are capable of handling the expected increased interest in Genesis (Guina 2011). Guina says that the idea of “land as a gift, not a possession” has evolved as the organization has developed (*ibid.*); there is no question of a buy-back of Conservancy land, and it is stressed that Genesis takes land out of the commodity market (Earthcare Connections n.d.).

New Roots Land Trust – History

New Roots Land Trust has a longer history than Genesis, but it is largely an unwritten one. Consequently, much of the following information comes from interviews with Gillis, Dewar, Curry, Snyder, and Sauer. The New Roots Land Trust owes its existence to the efforts of a small group of people who met through university, National Farmers Union, or similar connections in the early 1970s. They found that they had similar beliefs about what Dewar (2011) referred to as the “wrongness” of owning land,

and some had knowledge about the *gramdan* movement in India and land trusts operating in the United States. One of them, Marilyn Gillis, was a farmer and NFU member who owned a quarter section of land that she decided to donate in order to form the New Roots Land Trust, with six other founding members. New Roots was formed in 1975 or 1976 as a non-profit community land trust under the Corporations Branch of the Department of Justice. Members felt a land trust had the advantage over a co-operative because there could be no division of land and selling of shares, and therefore more likelihood that it would continue into future generations. New Roots' objective was to “encourage and facilitate ecological, communal and cooperative living and to aid and advance the practical ecological coop agriculture and industrial arts” (Gillis 2010).

The initial goal was that many of the group would live on the quarter of land and support themselves on it through sustainable agriculture. Various people did live on the land trust at various times, but some found they couldn't make a living off the land, and others came to realize they didn't understand the amount of work involved in horticulture or animal husbandry, so did not stay long (Curry and Dewar 2011). Since 1998, it has been primarily occupied by one family that leases land from the trust and owns their own house on it. They do a fair amount of self-provisioning through their garden, but they have off-farm occupations. Much of the quarter section is in hay, in a crop share agreement with a neighbour for a number of the past years. The current focus is largely on environmentally friendly stewardship. Tenant Dale Dewar said of the quarter section, “it's very stony, it probably should never have been broken. So using it as hay land and letting the ponds become little islands of trees and grass strikes me as the right ecological direction to have this land go in.” New tenants Snyder and Sauer (2010) spoke of the land

as an informal wildlife sanctuary. They engage in self-provisioning as well, but also work jobs off the land trust.

The New Roots Land Trust has slowly grown with the addition of original members' children and the two new tenants who moved to the land in fall of 2010. Dewar and Curry bought two adjoining quarters of land in 2006 that are being transitioned into the land trust as funds become available. Today there are approximately twenty-five members of New Roots, many of whom get together at the annual general meeting, but the day-to-day management of the land is done by the residents. Tenant Bill Curry (2011) reflected on the impact of the land trust: “One of the things [another member] said that had a big impression on me in a meeting, when I was feeling we haven't accomplished anything, we've accomplished only a small percentage, he said, this is about preservation, what you're doing here, even if all it is is a holding action. So it doesn't get cleared of trees and spoiled by chemicals.” In New Roots' evolution, the emphasis on conservation has come to be more prominent than the emphasis on agriculture, but Sauer and Snyder agreed that stewardship through community - “a community of people managing the land” - is the focus of the trust (2010). New Roots members provide some insight into various beliefs about land ownership and social change, and the resurgence of interest in the trust may have implications for the future of land trusts in Saskatchewan.

4.2 Genesis Land Conservancy: Theory and Practice

Although the primary obstacles to the implementation and viability of a land trust in Saskatchewan are inherent in the global industrial agricultural system, others are potentially contained in the strategies a trust may employ in its attempts to gain support and expand. In this section, the NFU's Canada-specific analysis and conception of food

sovereignty and land tenure from the previous chapter is used to inform the potential, progress, and limitations of Genesis Land Conservancy's alternative land tenure practices. New Roots Land Trust is discussed in the context of the intersection of agricultural and ecological land trusts.

The executive, board members, and land donors I interviewed who are currently involved with Genesis generally see themselves as providing a positive, constructive grassroots model that will help farmers have viable operations and engender a public awareness of sustainable food and farming. Today, the activities of Genesis's sibling organization Earthcare Connections suggest that there is a realization that simply providing land to new farmers is not enough for economic or environmental sustainability. Board member Stacy Meartin sees Earthcare as doing all the things necessary for sustainability - "the land, the education, and the people, and you need all of those" - through its land trust, incipient model farm, and Gen-Assist livestock assistance program. The model farm attempts to be a "tangible aspect of education" to influence the community (Meartin 2011). The Gen-Assist program addresses farmers' income problems through niche marketing – as an Earthcare newsletter says, "[the Gen-Assist] farmers . . . realized that without a marketing strategy that provides a fair price for their livestock, long-term economic sustainability would be difficult" (Earthcare Connections 2010b, 2). Genesis has also successfully broadened its donor base from the original religious organizations; recent land donors have been attracted by Genesis' notions of environmental stewardship (Earthcare Connections 2011; Blaser 2010). Genesis' goals are consonant with many aspects of agrarian reform: the commodification of conservancy land; the focus on a group that lacks wealth and power in land transfer,

resulting in some redistribution; the many-pronged approach to change; democratic access through its elected board; and the preservation of agricultural land for food production.

In practice, Genesis has not fully realized the potential of a land trust to radically alter land relations in its own operations, let alone in a defined geographical region. For a time, it seemed to focus its help on new farmers, but that focus has faded. Hamilton, basing his information on the old Genesis website (prior to 2010) and an interview with Earthcare staff, writes in 2004 that “Farmers wanting to lease Genesis land must be ‘beginning farmers’ defined as having net worth less than \$250,000 and a net farm income of \$20,000 or less” (38). In Gorsuch’s 2010 report, this restriction has been moderated to “Genesis prefers to help beginning farmers when selecting tenants” (22), perhaps due to a difficulty finding local tenants who fit the criteria as Gillis (2010) suggested. Guina (2011) acknowledged that assisting new farmers through preferential rents is not yet the practice: “when we can satisfy the basics of the land trust, well then we will be able to offer land to young people at, for taxes or a little more, and there will be an alternative point to enter the land market.” In practice today, conservancy land is generally only a small part of tenant farmers’ operations, and tenants may be large or small. Leases are generally short-term and renewable: “our goal is to have life-time leases that you can pass on to the next generation so you have the same security as family farms, but we do that in five-year increments because you just can’t look that far into the future” (ibid.). Sustainable practices are encouraged but not mandatory: “organic farming is a step in the right direction, but it’s not really any more sustainable than conventional because it’s still based on fossil fuels and export. . . . We’re talking about something bigger than that,

deeper, a long term benefit for the health and welfare of all society” (ibid.). While this vision of fundamental change is appealing, it does not seem to have yet manifested in a significant way. In the present, Genesis does not have a significant redistributive land reform aspect, and agroecological practices may be recommended or modeled by a few tenants, but are not required.

Some solutions to the problems associated with insecure land tenure only tackle one or a few aspects, using only one or a few methods or strategies. This may contribute to the diversity of solutions that is acknowledged by food sovereignty, but in some cases it may also result from inadequate characterizations of the system and limit impact. In a recent Earthcare newsletter, board member and biodynamic farmer Ed Bespalko suggests farmers diversify and produce healthier food, saying, “You have to try and uncouple yourself from the current system” (Earthcare Connections 2010a, 3). Given this context, the system he refers to is possibly the “industrial chemical” one referred to by many of the Genesis participants – dating back fifty years, according to Guina – rather than the more longstanding and far-reaching global capitalist one referred to by food sovereignty. Uncoupling suggests working outside the system rather than attempting to change it. In contrast with Bespalko, former Earthcare board member Stirling argues:

“as long as you are in the kind of corporate-dominated society that we're in with the public relations departments that we have . . . that leaves you with the prospect that there can be a small sidebar of family farming in a corporate-dominated world, and I don't know if that's possible. Maybe the corporate power structure is sufficiently negligent so that it would overlook that kind of resistance on the side. That's about where we're at.” (2010)

He suggests that hegemony is so comprehensive that uncoupling from the dominant agricultural system can't be done in a significant way – and that if the outside operation poses a threat, it will be quashed. Consequently, initiatives like Genesis appears to be

insignificant alternatives that do not pose a threat to the system.

In the new Genesis brochure (n.d.), tenants Kurt and Julie Rempel provide an example of working within the system. They are quoted as saying that they do not have the banking resources to increase their land base through ownership, so renting from Genesis helps them continue to farm. However, it helps them compete only on the basis of size, which does not challenge the premise of “get big or get out” but rather seems to reinforce the status quo. Admittedly, in some cases, the acceptance of hegemonic assumptions may be unconscious, but in others it may be strategic. The Genesis *Feasibility Analysis and Business Plan* cautions that “Genesis must be seen to be practical and business-like if it is to move beyond a subset of farmers with primarily 'green' concerns” (Norm Bray Consultants 1997, 29). As well, the above examples may simply show that while some organizations advocate significant change to the agricultural system, others may see incremental change as the most practicable and thus effective. Indeed, much of the research data shows participants had conflicting ideas about how to accomplish change – through modelling, advocacy, individual or collective efforts, focusing narrowly on a particular aspect to be changed or being involved in many causes, working for radical or gradual shifts in ways of being, or a combination of the above. However, the identification of major, long-term problems like dwindling rural population and increasing farm size by most of the participants suggests that a minor tweak will not adequately address their concerns. This is consonant with food sovereignty's belief that agrarian reform must be fundamental and radical to be socially just; it must address causes, not only symptoms. It needs to encompass more than land reform and requires action on many fronts. Therefore, the solutions must be evaluated in this light as well.

Some of the delay or failure of Genesis to implement its original plans is likely due to a revenue problem, not adequately solved since the founding religious organizations stopped their ongoing financial support a few years after Genesis' incorporation. Currently, Genesis eschews most government grants, relying on donors and rents for its functioning. "We don't want to be controlled by the prescribed outcome [of government grants], and usually their criteria set too much. Usually their goals for systemic change are too short-sighted" (Guina 2011). In the executive director's opinion, the lack of a capital base and secure staff salaries inhibits solicitation of donors - "we don't have the backup yet to go real public with this concept or we won't be able to deliver" (ibid.). This also results in a lack of human resources. Unfortunately, it seems a bit of a vicious cycle – if the concept can't be spread then it is more difficult to obtain financial donations which could help the organization deliver. It can be difficult to decide what the most effective use of scarce resources is. Genesis staff is spread thin between the model farm (which is worked by the executive director), administering leases, running the Earthcare balloon program, finding funding and cultivating donors. This may also be a reason for the abandonment of two previous model farms and the slow development of their third model farm.

Genesis could potentially achieve more success if it concentrated more on engaging particular geographical communities. Currently, land parcels are dispersed throughout the province and Genesis board members and tenants come from many different communities, primarily because of the reliance on donated land from individuals. Brewer (2004) suggests one reason that farmland trusts are less successful than conservation trusts is the perception that there is a lot of farmland – as Qualman

(2010) said, “There's a lot of land here, my dad's got land, I've got land, my uncle's got land, lots and lots of land . . . and I know how to farm, I've got some real nice infrastructure sitting around, I'm sitting on some land, and I'm not farming it because the economics are so poor.” While this abundance is true of Saskatchewan's land market as a whole, it may not be true in certain localities, such as close to urban areas – and this is the level at which a land trust could have the most effect, addressing a local need. However, the Genesis materials show a shift away from focus on a place-based community. The older brochure appeals to supporters by saying Genesis promotes and aids “local income”, “community involvement”, a “deep sense of community”, “local land in local hands”, and “land as a community to which we belong”. The newer one contains only one such mention amongst much more text: that land can be kept “in local hands” through a donation to Genesis. Part of this shift would seem to be a reaction to the loss of rural population that often leads to travelling greater distances to fulfill needs a local community once filled. Gillis refers to this when contrasting the “homogenous rural community” she grew up in happily with her adulthood where “neighbours started to be fewer and fewer . . . The infrastructure was falling around our ears” (2010). However, she recognizes the importance of/opportunities for connecting with like-minded people in a farther-flung or even virtual community as she did with membership in the Organic Crop Improvement Association. Stacy Meartin speaks of this tension as well: “There's the community of where we live and how that works together but it's not necessarily the same as the community that's trying to do the same things on the bigger picture” (2011). With the Gen-Assist group Meartin belongs to, “Certainly there's frustrations around that, that we do live so far apart and because we all have animals and stuff, getting together is

almost impossible because once you have livestock you don't leave. I think that's the thing that I struggle with the most in terms of being a farmer" (ibid.). Although Genesis has fostered communities of like-minded people, such as the Gen-Assist producers, there is a move even in this group away from collective action: the latest Earthcare newsletter, explaining the failure of Gen-Assist to incorporate as a new-generation co-operative, states that the reconstituted group of Gen-Assist members "maintains its initial interest in joint marketing, but is looking at a less collectivized approach whereby family farms maintain their individual identities in the marketing system" ("Joint marketing effort gets fresh start" Earthcare Connections 2012, 2). It seems that neither community nor collective action are significant factors in Earthcare's operations. Subsequently, Genesis' impact is potentially diluted compared to that a community land trust based in a locality could have – and does have, as seen in examples of community ownership in Scotland.

In order for Genesis to achieve a land base of any significance in a community, governmental support at the municipal or provincial level would seem to be necessary, along with community buy-in. This would suggest a broadening of Genesis' education and reaching out, as well as collaboration with other agricultural and community organizations. While Genesis has connections with holistic management educators and Heifer International is a partner in Gen-Assist, there is no formal collaboration with other Saskatchewan agricultural organizations that could potentially result in resource-sharing and support. Altering hegemonic ideas is more effectively done through a broader push to influence civil society mechanisms and engage in collective work.

The organization is cognizant that a socially just, sustainable agriculture requires a shift in worldview. Genesis has made efforts in the area of education, which Meartin

singled out as a recent focus (2011). Earthcare offers an educational workshop for students in schools and Guina has been asked to speak at various conferences and meetings and has been contacted for information and advice by other nascent land trust organizations. However, providing elective education seems to be seen as the sole factor in creating change; what happens after the education is made available seems to be rather nebulous. “What happens in a relative shift of consciousness? Anything is possible. We don't know. We can't put a time on it” (Guina 2011). Guina suggested that the power of thought plays an important role in creating change:

Just like matter is neither created nor destroyed, perhaps soul or spirit or energy isn't either. And so when that awakening or tipping point happens, all that has to happen is like the wall coming down, right? If enough rich people . . . wake up one day and say, 'Wait. I've got tons more than I need' and they band together to change and foster something new – that current has just taken a new direction. And we don't know at what point that happens. Some would argue that it happens when there's enough people thinking about it. (ibid.)

The Genesis newsletter also reinforces this idea. The Fall 2010 and Spring 2011 issues of *Footprints* available online have had reflections on change on the back page. One states, “Action tends to follow consciously-made intention, because suddenly new opportunities open up, new alliances are formed, new resources materialize” (Latta 2010, 4). In practice, to introduce people to the land conservancy, Guina said, “we go by word of mouth, people who hear about the land trust or find us, we just kind of let it evolve” (2011). Thus Genesis seems almost to be relying on change to occur in a spontaneous way rather than through concerted effort. The reliance on generous (wealthy) benefactors and lack of organized, grassroots action suggests a more passive view of change and agency than that espoused by proponents of food sovereignty.

Despite the significance of the organization's practical challenges, then, the main

obstacles to Genesis' impact on land relations stem from the organization's lack of understanding of the workings of the capitalist industrial agriculture system and its hegemonic grasp. For example, the Gen-Assist program helps farmers through some provision of stock, but most farms in Saskatchewan engaged in dominant commodity production also have machinery, equipment, and working capital needs that a land trust generally cannot fulfil. A land trust may thus be more suited to horticulturalists for whom land is the primary cost, as is seen in British Columbia (Gorsuch and Scott 2010), but Saskatchewan lacks a large market and much of the processing infrastructure necessary to support a large number of these types of small intensive operations. While the Gen-Assist program engages in niche marketing of grass-fed beef in order to increase financial returns, it does not address the causes of low cattle prices through action or advocacy (c.f. NFU, "The Farm Crisis and the Cattle Sector: Toward a New Analysis and New Solutions" 2008). Gen-Assist may only be attempting to provide a solution for a few farmers, rather than believing that niche marketing can be a solution to the problems of corporate concentration in the beef industry for more than a few people over the short term. However, the emphasis of current Earthcare members on education and awareness suggests that they do hope to have wider influence on the dominant agricultural system than they do now. "What I'm doing with the land trust is not about the land trust. It's about planting a seed and giving it an opportunity to grow" (Guina 2011). While their increasing engagement with civil society in the area of education could be a positive step in creating change, the interviewees currently involved with Genesis, and the recent documents put out by Genesis, show a lack of understanding of how hegemonic forces sustain themselves. There is no opposition to the forces that discourage alternative land

tenure and support the status quo; rather, there seems to be a reluctance to engage with them. As an organization, Genesis has not addressed, for example, the government's free-market ideology that promotes opening up land ownership to corporations. Genesis participants want to change ideas around land (Meartin listed this as Genesis' major challenge: a land trust's premise is “a big shift in thinking for a lot of people” [2011]) but they aren't addressing the mechanisms that are keeping those ideas in place. A more successful approach would be to realize that it is not just lack of knowledge about alternatives that is an obstacle, but belief in the current system's rightness and naturalness and support from those who benefit from it. Genesis has tried to redistribute wealth and power without naming or engaging with the current monopolizers of that wealth and power.

Among the current Earthcare participants, there also seems to be a fear of being perceived as radical or confrontational that results in depoliticization. The depoliticization cannot simply be attributed to the restrictions on political activities of registered charities. For instance, Genesis could have presented, but did not, research to the Standing Committee on Agriculture regarding the 2002 Farmland Security Act changes. The Canada Revenue Agency states, “In order to serve the public, the information charities give on public policy issues should be presented in an informative, accurate, and well-reasoned way to enable society to decide for itself what position to take . . . charities may choose to advance their charitable purposes by taking part in political activities if they are connected and subordinate to those purposes” (Canada Revenue Agency 2011). Land trusts have typically been apolitical, appealing to a broad sector of the population, but also can incorporate aspects of land advocacy, which, given state involvement in land

tenure, may become more political (Brewer 2004). However, Earthcare Board member Meartin (2011) described Earthcare's current efforts as a “quiet revolution that can grow without waves” and Guina said, “we've never taken an approach to be adversarial in that regard, because the minute you do, you get labelled as an organization that you're anti-this or you're anti-that” (2011). Two former board members spoke of having advocated for a more political role for the conservancy in its infancy, and being rebuffed. Explaining the choice to focus on providing a positive example rather than engaging in political advocacy, Guina said, “you could lobby but you might be like the poor old wolf who can't blow the brick house down” (2011). However, this position may work against Genesis in some cases since many aspects of the land tenure system are politically dictated. In Canada, governments have considerable influence over the direction of land ownership through farmland ownership legislation, high caps on farm support programs based on acreage, promotion of and technical assistance for land markets, and even financing through the federally-controlled Farm Credit Corporations (NFU 2010).

It seems obvious that political engagement and political proposals must be undertaken to create change in these areas. Some land access policies could potentially easily be changed with a political decision, such as the changes to the Farmland Security Act in 2002. For example, Guina (2011) mentioned that “the state of Vermont has a real estate tax to government. Any real estate transaction, a portion of that comes back to support the sustainable land initiatives in their state”. This is a revenue stream Genesis is unlikely to see without either political action of some sort or connections with others who work in the political arena. However, political action is unlikely to be seen as important without a comprehensive understanding of one's place in the global industrial agriculture

system and a desire to make significant change. That desire may not be present: Guina said, “I want diversity. Nature is the model. [Land] shouldn't all be held in one way. There should be many choices” (ibid.). Unfortunately, Genesis currently exhibits some failure to understand the systemic forces that constrain choices.

It is possible that Earthcare Connections’ focus has shifted more towards environmental stewardship/sustainable practices on agricultural land than the acquisition of land and preservation of farm livelihoods. The recent emphasis on the model farm, and the recent acquisition of land from donors wishing to preserve native prairie or ecological features would suggest this (Blazer 2010, Earthcare Connections 2011). Certainly, with the increase in land prices and investment companies purchasing land, it is difficult for a trust to compete as a buyer on the level of monetary exchange, if not on the ethical level. This shift may also reflect the environmental side of the contemporary food movement, with a focus on the consumer health and ecosystem benefits of organics and products such as grass-fed beef.

Like Genesis, New Roots began as an agricultural trust, but metamorphosed to more of an ecological trust as the difficulty of making a living farming the land became apparent and knowledge of organic farming spread (Dewar 2011; Gillis 2010). The emphasis on community living and prevalence of members with urban backgrounds may also have lessened/eliminated the impetus to expand the land base. The renewal of interest in New Roots is primarily among a younger generation who are environmentally conscious, seeking community, and active in the latest permutation of the food movement (local food) but not in becoming large commodity farmers. Engaging in pluriactivity, Snyder self-provisioned, sold produce at farmers markets, and taught preserving and

gardening classes. She summed up her position: “I hope to eventually identify as a farmer but probably not in the sense that most people in Saskatchewan identify as farmers. Certainly not in a large-scale, commercial sense, never, that would not be my goal” (Snyder 2011). This suggests there is a desire for land trusts to play a role for smaller-scale, niche farmers. It is difficult to see it as a model for large commodity farmers. However, there may be opportunity for the land trust model, and community land ownership more broadly, to unite conservationists and farmers in the recent issue of the privatization of federal community pastures, as the next chapter will show.

5. CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored initiatives for alternative agricultural land tenure in Saskatchewan undertaken primarily by two agricultural organizations, the National Farmers Union and Genesis Land Conservancy, concerned with social justice issues in agriculture and land tenure. The research data suggests that many ideas abound to increase farmers' access to land by lessening reliance on money and debt, by addressing low farm income, and by changing dominant ideas about private property. Due to constraints, the various ideas have been implemented to greater and lesser extents: for example, the two land trusts in Saskatchewan have provided some access to land for a few needy farmers, but low and fluctuating farm income has not been successfully addressed on a broad-based level – indeed, mechanisms such as marketing boards have been dismantled in the past few decades, despite protests. Many of the ideas, however, could be more practicable in differing contexts. Land trusts have worked more successfully in British Columbia and Nova Scotia for growing food intensively near to urban markets (Scott and Gorsuch 2010, Harbottle 2011), and geographically proximate land that is community owned seems to provide for more plurality of uses and community benefit than dispersed parcels (Mackenzie 2010). Community ownership may work better for common grazing land like community pastures with a history of communal use than for individual plots – the frameworks can be applied to that situation. Linked with food sovereignty, these ideas may contribute to “a vision of global transformation through the accretion and interaction of small changes in place” (Gibson-Graham 2007, 196) – as it is commonly phrased, thinking globally and acting locally.

For the most part, these alternative land tenure models embody essential food

sovereignty principles. Active, democratic participation in the food system is engendered through democratic governance, community representation, and outreach to underrepresented groups, although gender issues were not raised as a concern by interviewees nor addressed through the structure of the alternative models. The alternative models – land trusts, alternative financing, public ownership - focus on access to land and resources for those who produce food, especially those left behind by the global industrial agrifood system, although the issues of wage labour and immigrant labour in relation to access to land, let alone First Nations' land claims is, again, not explicitly addressed. Importantly, the alternatives acknowledge the holism of the food system; they do not focus only on access to land but also address factors such as sustainable farming methods, increased returns to farmers, and community-building. Accordant with food sovereignty principles of agrarian reform, they aim to create redistribution of wealth and power to poorer and newer farmers, emphasize access to land for resident farmers rather than corporations or absentee owners, and take into account local contexts rather than prescribing a one-size-fits-all solution. The element of land's multidimensionality is less evident; participants see land more as an economic and environmental resource and less as one with cultural or religious meaning.

Much of the data gathered for this thesis shows that most participants have a solid critical analysis of the food system, consonant with the analysis of food sovereignty. The NFU in particular uses political language to name and challenge the possessors of power and wealth in the system. With a growing societal awareness of social justice issues, food sovereignty's political discourse could serve to “promote self-recognition and foster connection among a plurality of movements, contributing to a counterhegemonic

'postcapitalist' project of resignification and enactment” (Gibson-Graham 2007, 80).

However, the human rights-based language of food sovereignty is not significantly used by the National Farmers Union or land trust participants in regards to land. Despite the implicit incorporation of morality in interviewees' conception of just land tenure, only two interviewees spoke of access to land as being a *right*. The older Genesis brochure asserted that “all people have a right to access the earth's resources to meet their basic needs” but this use of the term did not appear in any other documents analysed. To the contrary, the one article on land in the *Union Farmer* Summer 2011 issue was about rights of landowners vs wind farms rather than any right of food producers to access land. This may be because property rights are an accepted – hegemonic - use of the concept of rights, whereas economic, social, and cultural rights have a shorter history. As well, Alkon and Mares (2012) suggest that under neoliberalism there has been a societal erosion of the rights and entitlements provided by government, and a lessening of governmental responsibility in favour of personal responsibility. However, further research would be needed to discover the reasons that the participants do not significantly use rights-based language in confronting this aspect of neoliberalism, especially those actors who focus their activism on governments.

While many land trust participants brought up the issue of commodification of land, only one NFU participant brought up commodification despite the fact that decommodification is a basic tenet of food sovereignty. One reason may be that the land trust members interviewed who currently engage in agricultural production use very small areas of land (growing mostly vegetables) in contrast to most NFU interviewees who were or are farmers of commodities that require more land for production. This

could also be due to the long-standing naturalization of ownership in Canada; those who questioned it were also mainly young and new to farming. Lacking the ability to own land, they saw the need for decommodification. However, to draw any firm conclusions from this data is unsupportable.

While the research data I gathered reveals impediments to implementing land tenure alternatives, such as increasing land prices, concentration of land ownership and loss of supportive government policies, these are a symptom of deeper causes. Participants' analyses overwhelmingly pointed to the roots of land tenure problems in capitalist social relations, private property ideology, and the hegemony that sustains them. This is exacerbated by the more recent neoliberal emphasis on individualism that has infused government and civil society. The National Farmers Union is a collective response to these longstanding problems. Their actions as an organization on land tenure issues include political advocacy, protest, and research and education. Some individual NFU members have become involved in working models of alternative land tenure, including Genesis Land Conservancy. Genesis' main response to the problems in the system is to present an alternative by attempting to opt out or step out of the system and also engage in some education. These attempts by both organizations have met with some successes, but there is potential for even more effect.

Recalling Fraser's third dimension of social justice, the NFU, Genesis's, and New Roots' efforts in alternative land tenure have lessons for food movement efforts in social justice. Fairbairn (2011) links neoliberal economism to the tendency of many food movement organizations to seek entrepreneurial and market solutions – framing people as consumers, entrepreneurs, and volunteers – which results in a depoliticization that

releases governments from their obligations to their citizenry. As the National Farmers Union knows, re-politicization of food issues, using food sovereignty's critical understanding of power and control, is a necessary step in creating a more just food system. Rejecting the roles of individual consumer or producer, and self-determination of communities demanding social justice is key to this process. Regarding the anti-GMO campaign that concentrates on changing individual consumption choices, thus reinforcing the neoliberal market-oriented status quo, Roff (2007) argues that food movements must create identities for people that position them as members of a collective society to foster real change. The projects and relationships created through this process could then be employed, under the umbrella of food sovereignty, to “build power and eventually mobilize for a broad-based transformation of the corporate food regime” (Alkon and Mares 2012, 12) – a larger collective of many organizations and movements striving for a more socially and environmentally just food system.

5.1 Community and Collectivism in Social Movements

As is fitting when the topic is the transformation of the food system based on local democratic involvement, interviewees themselves suggested a crucial factor in creating change; discussion of implementation of land tenure alternatives almost inevitably led to the theme of community/collective. Ranger (2010) summed up many participants' idea of community in her definition: “mutual support and connection, working together for something larger rather than just individual financial goals . . . a safe and supportive place to raise kids and work together on projects . . . to really depend on each other. . . . there's also that opportunity for spiritual growth.” This echoed many values implied by interviewees: interdependence, volunteerism, the idea of a greater purpose than individual

success. The attractiveness of community was often spoken of by interviewees as if it were self-evident, and critics might challenge this view as romanticized. However, those who had worked and/or lived in community were fully cognisant of the difficulties engendered and the work that it took to be successful in a close relationship with others. For example, Ranger's "spiritual growth" occurred because when issues arose with a close neighbour they had to be confronted and worked through due to the proximity that made it impossible to walk away and write off the relationship (2010). Harbottle's land trust group brought in an external facilitator preventatively to do conflict resolution and mediation training. Other interviewees spoke of the necessity of doing the work on relationships when living near others in a relatively isolated situation where dependence occurs: "There's something interesting about finding yourself in a community where you have no relationship with your neighbours except through your needs for one another. . . . We create a mutual dependence over the fact that we live out here" (Dewar 2011). The interviewees had a realistic view of the challenges and benefits of living in their rural communities.

The theme of community/collective also arises from participants' identification of problems such as loss of rural communities, from their discussions of social movements past and present and from their struggle with the individualist aspects of neoliberalism. When the collective actions and agrarian movements of the past were brought up by the interviewees over the age of seventy, not just the cooperative movements such as the Pools were referred to, but also the way knowledge was generated and passed on and problems solved. Atkinson (2010) spoke of organizations' need to inculcate organizational memory in their members. Tait (2010) contrasted the "intergenerational

transfer of agricultural knowledge that goes right back to the Euphrates Valley 10,000 years ago” passed on in farm families with the way knowledge is now bought or rented by farmers in the form of outside technology and expertise from, for example, pesticide salesmen or hedge fund managers. Stirling (2010) spoke about past communities' role in disseminating not only knowledge “through the networks in the community, through friendships and over coffee and over dinner” but providing a range of skills and abilities, a store of history to access and modify, and enough differing perspectives to provide input to really hone an idea. He referred to past research, such as the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life in the 1950s, that saw a role for the communities' organic intellectuals: after the experts created the studies, they were brought to the communities for feedback and thence revision. This speaks to the principle of grounding food sovereignty in local contexts and relying on democratic participation and knowledge, thus appropriately addressing local needs.

While the decline of cooperative institutions, the individualism of neoliberalism, and/or the legendary independence of the farmer could suggest that farmers today are less familiar or comfortable with working together, the younger interviewees were very interested in working collectively and in revitalizing community. Harbottle (2011) commented, “More and more young people seem interested in doing things cooperatively, not necessarily all by themselves.” Regier (2010) observed a significant increase in new women farmers who are interested in a model more consonant with food sovereignty: “family, small-scale, community production, direct to consumer, feeding people . . . it's not an industrial model.” It is also likely that people in previous movements had to figure out how to work collectively as they did it. In the past, these agrarian activists were

battling the individualism that accompanied capitalism on the prairies in the myth of the “rugged individualist” farmer. Roger Epp (2011) points out that this individualism is not only an inaccurate picture of reality, but has the effect of internalizing criticism rather than directing that critique towards society. A couple of the interviewees referred to the tendency of farm families to blame their failures on themselves rather than seeing systemic forces at work; in tandem with this, success has often meant displacing your neighbour. In opposition, as McCrorie writes, the agrarian movements' challenge “was not a rejection of individual rights, obligations and responsibilities. Rather it was the elevation of collective rights, obligations, and responsibilities to a community, regional and national imperative” (2007, 129). In this spirit, Tait (2010) commented, “I always look towards the collective way to do things, because I desire my neighbour more than his land. Because without my neighbour, the land isn't much good to me, because an agricultural desert is not the place I want to live.”

Collective action tied to creating community today also strikes at the heart of neoliberal individualism, not only countering individualism but extricating society from the economy and placing society foremost. Guina (2011) framed it in philosophical terms: “We're not in competition. There's only one 'we' and it's everybody. That's the greatest notion, I think, we have to realize beyond a philosophical or intellectual level that we cannot win at someone else's expense.” Qualman (2010) echoed this challenge: “One of the problems we have is the hyper-individualization. The average suburbanite in Saskatoon or Regina sees very few problems to which the solutions are community based.” Snyder and Sauer talked about how the individual land ownership model encourages isolation and their discovery that for food producers “what will allow for

freedom is actually interdependence” (2011). This contradicts the neoliberal assertion that freedom equals individual opportunities to choose. The NFU report *Losing Our Grip* also reframes the issue, asserting that “In working to ensure autonomy and control, the aim is not farmer 'independence,' but rather healthy interdependence—the farmer as an integral part of his or her family, community, region, and nation” (2010, 1).

The successes and failures of the alternatives suggested or undertaken by the interview participants depend to a great extent on the engagement and development of community. There was general agreement among interviewees that solutions must be collective. The reasons for this are more than tactical, although practical reasons were suggested by interviewees. Burton (2010) put it simply: “If everybody does their part, then it's much easier. If there's just a few, well it's just not going to get done.” Sauer (2011) suggested that “Any sort of movement . . . needs people who are in academia, who are on the front lines pushing for political change, who are simply living the life and sharing with others. . . . You benefit from having people on all of those fronts.” Regier referred to the support of the National Farmers Union community that gives her vision and motivation (2010). Harbottle explained the practicality of a community land trust such as hers for beginning farmers. It “make[s] land and housing accessible and affordable to people, with security, but without having to worry about mortgages . . . and we could still have the same community benefits of living together and working on some projects together” (2011). Community can thus mean a pool of many skills and strengths, a united effort that results in more than the sum of its parts, and a support group that shares the same goals.

However, community does not only have value if there is homogeneity and

agreement among members. There is much value in diversity and the processes of developing and strengthening community. Many participants acknowledged the difficulty of this struggle. Speaking of a land trust in which participants shared many beliefs, Snyder (2011) said, “Sometimes the collective models – I mean, they take a lot of time and that's one of the challenges of being able to be effective and productive and still give it its due. Being able to put in the time to really explore the questions of philosophy and dynamics and all that stuff.” Working in community with those who are less alike can be even more challenging. Gillis felt that traditional farm backgrounds often didn't provide the social or conversational skills needed for farmers to work together. “All that isn't in our cultural background, so we need to learn those things, I guess” (2010). This may be one reason why many interviewees mentioned their membership in “communities of choice” – non-geographic groups of people with shared pursuits such as organic farming or holistic management. However, participants still felt that there was value in the collective struggle, even if results were not guaranteed. Food sovereignty necessarily involves a wide constituency, in which communities are “sites of diversity, differences, conflicts, and divisions most often expressed along gender, class, and ethnic lines and characterized by competing claims and interests” (Desmarais 2007, 37-38). This diversity implies conflict and struggle, but also suggests that the key to building community is not what is done, but how it is done. Gibson-Graham, engaged in action research with “intentional community economies” (2006, xxii) suggest that communities should be based not on values such as localism, sustainability, or self-sufficiency, but on principled processes: democratic negotiations about using resources based on needs; cooperation and participation; and collective knowledge and collective work (Gibson-Graham 2007).

Therefore, engaging and building in community involves negotiation, consideration, listening skills, openness and transparency.

In this vein, Qualman (2010) suggested, “What's healthy about the local food movement is it begins to bring non-farmers and farmers together into a conversation – they get talking about what farms in Canada should look like, and there's a tension there. There really is. And that's a healthy tension.” The National Farmers Union, while focused on its core farm constituency, frequently reaches out to expand its base of support. The *Union Farmer* magazine's description of the NFU in every issue states: “In the National Farmers Union, we work collectively to strengthen the farm community by: building ties between farmers in all parts of Canada, with farmers in other countries and with non-farm people” - and, recently, with the inclusion of urban farmers. This is also a task that the aforementioned NFU Youth have embraced. Eaton (2009) provides another example of collaboration, one of NFU membership in an alliance of nine diverse organizations opposing the introduction of Roundup Ready wheat in Canada. While these organizations may not be natural allies on other issues, and actually oppose some activities of the others, they were able to find unity on the issues of lack of transparency and democracy in policy and regulation, and use their diverse expertise to highlight areas that each had most knowledge and experience in. Building community is therefore not about finding people exactly like oneself, but building through debate. It assumes not everyone will agree on the food system but creates space for the debate to take place. This process, if democratic, transparent, and empowering, can provide practical experience in creating a model for participatory democratic governance (Evans 2008), with applicability to alternative land tenure. Brassard (1994) argued that communities help farmers operate

responsibly. NFU member Tait (2010) agreed:

There's always enough good men and women within every community and every organization and given the opportunity to use the democratic process they will inevitably come to decisions that were in the best interests of the community. . . . if we give people access to land without debt, they've got a pretty good opportunity at least to start regaining some democracy within the community.

5.2 Implications for Building Food Sovereignty

As food sovereignty gains wider usage within the US context, it is important that its global ambition remain at the forefront rather than the search for practical, local applications leading it to become completely transformed by the militant particularisms of its new context. (Fairbairn 2011, 14)

The practical, local models of alternative land tenure explored by the participants have something to say not only about a Saskatchewan struggle for food sovereignty, but about the big picture of the global industrial agrifood system outlined in chapter one of this thesis. As the National Farmers Union realizes, the struggle must have a global focus because the global reach of agricultural policy and transnational corporations affects even minor choices of farmers and eaters. Without a solid analysis and understanding of the system, alternatives undertaken run the risk of being incomplete, co-opted, or ineffectual.

A politicized organization, with a citizen rather than a consumer or producer base, could demand and have more affect on democratic decisions regarding the food system. Politicization can result in a more focused effort and target. Without politicization it is more difficult to scale up models and practices. As was seen with the change in land ownership laws in Saskatchewan in 2002 and the subsequent increase in corporate farmland buyup, policy can delimit possibilities and is most often geared to support the global industrial agricultural machine. In turn, Genesis' attractiveness to donors shows that movements need to build alternatives, not only resist. However, the movement must not be afraid of dissent, as it is a normal and essential component of development. Most

importantly, efforts at achieving food sovereignty in the food system must be collective and challenge neoliberal individualism and associated values. The movement needs to be broad-based and reach out to many sectors of society in order to build counter-hegemony. Many organizations, from dieticians' associations to those fighting for farmworkers' rights, are working in different ways to reframe food as food rather than a commodity or investment; extending this conception to agricultural land would have significant implications for its access and use.

The movement for food sovereignty in Canada is growing. Food Secure Canada, the organization behind the People's Food Policy Project, unites in its membership groups that run the gamut from the Canadian Auto Workers and Canadian Union of Public Employees to Heifer International Canada, Dieticians of Canada, and Association pour la santé publique du Québec, as well as the National Farmers Union. Through the PFPP, Food Secure Canada promoted food sovereignty as “a coherent set of effective alternatives to our current food policies, alternatives that can restore prosperity, sustainability, and healthfulness” (PFPP 2011a), uniting health, livelihood, and environmental concerns. They adopted the six pillars of food sovereignty from the Declaration of Nyéléni (2007) and added a seventh: food sovereignty 1) Focuses on Food for People, 2) Values Food Providers, 3) Localizes Food Systems, 4) Puts Control Locally, 5) Builds Knowledge and Skills, 6) Works with Nature, and 7) Recognizes that Food is Sacred (PFPP 2011c, 10). These were used as a rubric to guide federal food policy based on ten policy discussion papers. Indigenous peoples of Canada were expressly included: the first discussion paper is on “indigenous food sovereignty” and the addition of the seventh pillar also reflects this inclusion. This is a key element largely

lacking in the advocacy and outreach of the NFU and in Genesis' efforts.

One of the PFPP discussion papers, *Agriculture, Infrastructure and Livelihoods: Supporting family farms and local food production, processing, and distribution systems*, dealt more specifically with the issue of land, advocating “Curbing non-farmer land ownership and creating new land tenure, financing, and farmland protection mechanisms” (2011a, 2). NFU members contributed greatly to this paper, and recommendations in it encompassed most of the ideas of the interviewees participating in this research. They included the principles of control and access to land by those who work it and the inclusion of indigenous people. Specific mechanisms were: reduce debt barriers; some public or community ownership in addition to private ownership; prohibit foreign, corporate, investor, and absentee ownership; preferential taxation for farmer owners; land trusts; community-based financing; government-supported seller-finance; incentives for long leases; control of conversion; and recognition of ecological services of land.

In addition, the PFPP included a discussion paper on how to create change. *Food Democracy and Governance* suggested “a framework and a set of strategies for establishing open, democratic, and transparent governance processes that lay the foundation for the policies outlined in the previous discussion papers with the overall goal of building a sustainable, healthy and just food system” (2011b, 1-2). This framework contained four key points. Speaking to the earlier analyses of the National Farmers Union and of food sovereignty, one point drew attention to the necessity of holistic policy that addresses root causes of problems in the interconnected food system. Another point, reflecting Gibson-Graham's “ethical discourse of the community economy” (2006, 90) and the suggestion of the inversion of Polanyi's market society, is

that diverse economic approaches are needed that value environmental and social health and justice rather than profit and individualism. A third key is local, contextualized knowledge production and dissemination, to which this thesis hopes to contribute. The fourth key relates more to governance: establishing inclusive, representative councils or roundtables to work on food policies with all levels of government. This acknowledgement of the actual and potential power of states is characteristic of McMichael's "global agrarian movements" and speaks to the principle of participatory, democratic governance; it does not inevitably mean reliance on the state, denial of extra-state forces, or acceptance of hegemony.

Food Secure Canada has followed up on the People's Food Policy Project, continuing to work for food sovereignty. The policy spawned articles, media coverage, press releases, and possibly contributed to both the focus on food strategies in the 2011 federal election campaign and the spate of national food policies being developed in Canada by groups such as the Conference Board of Canada and the Canadian Federation of Agriculture. Although the latter groups are not aligned with food sovereignty principles, and in the case of the Conference Board of Canada have been accused of "masking [food industry] lobbying as a national food strategy" and being "dishonest, self-serving and morally corrupt" (Sumner, quoted in Kneen 2013), the interest shows that mainstream actors are perceiving the necessity for a conversation about food policy. Food Secure Canada has also provided tools for activists. On their website they advocate talking to Members of Parliament and provide tool kits for doing so. The website also contains links to other resources and pamphlets on food sovereignty principles. They educate through national assemblies and newsletters, and facilitate links between member

organizations. They have continued to challenge power, speaking to the Senate Agriculture committee in April 2012, and helping bring Olivier de Schutter, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, to Canada in May 2012. De Schutter's visit was his first mission to an OECD country to examine the state of food security. The ensuing report and media coverage may help promote the concept of a "right to food" in Canada, providing another pace – the global human rights forum – in which to work for food sovereignty. Uniting so many diverse voices, the work of Food Secure Canada may indicate a growing food movement that could lend its strength to progressive action about land tenure.

Although current food movements contain aspects of anti-corporatism and agrarianism, their acceptance of food sovereignty offers a way beyond these essentially reactive ideologies. Food sovereignty shares many criticisms of the food system with these theoretical frameworks, but offers a concrete alternative vision that unites actors in the food system to create a new, socially just system. Specifically regarding land ownership, food sovereignty posits a new concept of access to land through agrarian reform that reframes the issue as one of social justice – equitable access to the means of production as a right of self-defined communities of food producers. A politicized movement in Saskatchewan that is linked to a global one through food sovereignty and the right to food could be very effective on issues of land tenure.

The struggle for access to land is ongoing, and manifests in new conflicts all the time as neoliberal adherents seek to extend the penetration of the market. New terrains of struggle in Saskatchewan – and thus possibilities for new research – include investment company land ownership and the impending privatization of federal community pastures.

Further research is needed on changing land ownership in Saskatchewan and the question of labour related to land concentration and foreign-backed ownership.

Regarding the community pastures, while the Saskatchewan Minister of Agriculture, Lyle Stewart, has stated that the government's goal is “to ensure patrons are able to continue using these lands and . . . give them every opportunity to have input about the transition of their pastures,” and indicates community groups are interested in buying, sales will be “based on market values” (Government of Saskatchewan 2012). Given the rising price of Saskatchewan farmland that is inviting – and perhaps partly due to – increasing interest by investment companies (Cross 2012), it may not be possible for farmers groups to wholly finance the purchase themselves. Conservationist Trevor Herriot (2012) suggests “all that money waiting at the border for those fast return land investments will find its way into the hands of the patron groups. And it won’t be a gift” - investors will expect and gain control quickly, especially as the predominantly-older farmers retire. Herriot points out that although conservation easements will be mandated, they are an inadequate form of protection. In the end, he argues, “once the land is no longer part of the public trust and is in private hands, the economic benefits will outweigh any ecological considerations and will serve distant investors instead of the local farm communities” (Herriot 2012).

The struggles outlined above indicate not only the difficulties facing Saskatchewan farmers and others striving for food sovereignty, but the increasing importance of land trusts and alternative models of land tenure. The principles of agrarian reform and importance of community effort and diverse voices can aid these struggles. It is hoped that this thesis can be of use to those involved in the efforts around community

pastures and investment company land ownership: to illuminate the ideology behind the actions; to provide historical, global, and Saskatchewan-specific context; and to suggest an approach that unites resistance and expands possibilities, based on the social justice principles of food sovereignty.

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APPENDIX A – ETHICAL

CLEARANCE



OFFICE OF RESEARCH SERVICES
MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 12, 2010

TO: Naomi Ellen Beingessner
44 Wolfe Place
Regina, SK S4R 8S5

FROM: Dr. Bruce Plouffe
Chair, Research Ethics Board

Re: **Food Sovereignty and Alternative Land Tenure in Saskatchewan (File #18S1011)**

Please be advised that the University of Regina Research Ethics Board has reviewed your proposal and found it to be:

- ☒ 1. APPROVED AS SUBMITTED. Only applicants with this designation have ethical approval to proceed with their research as described in their applications. For research lasting more than one year (Section 1F). **ETHICAL APPROVAL MUST BE RENEWED BY SUBMITTING A BRIEF STATUS REPORT EVERY TWELVE MONTHS.** Approval will be revoked unless a satisfactory status report is received. Any substantive changes in methodology or instrumentation must also be approved prior to their implementation.
- ☐ 2. ACCEPTABLE SUBJECT TO MINOR CHANGES AND PRECAUTIONS (SEE ATTACHED). Changes must be submitted to the REB and approved prior to beginning research. Please submit a supplementary memo addressing the concerns to the Chair of the REB.** Do not submit a new application. Once changes are deemed acceptable, ethical approval will be granted.
- ☐ 3. ACCEPTABLE SUBJECT TO CHANGES AND PRECAUTIONS (SEE ATTACHED). Changes must be submitted to the REB and approved prior to beginning research. Please submit a supplementary memo addressing the concerns to the Chair of the REB.** Do not submit a new application. Once changes are deemed acceptable, ethical approval will be granted.
- ☐ 4. UNACCEPTABLE AS SUBMITTED. The proposal requires substantial additions or redesign. Please contact the Chair of the REB for advice on how the project proposal might be revised.


Dr. Bruce Plouffe

cc: Dr. Annette Desmarais – International Studies

** supplementary memo should be forwarded to the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at the Office of Research Services (Research and Innovation Centre, Room 109) or by e-mail to research.ethics@uregina.ca

Phone: (306) 585-4775
Fax: (306) 585-4893
www.uregina.ca/research

APPENDIX B – LETTER OF CONSENT

To be presented on University of Regina Letterhead

CONSENT FORM

Food Sovereignty and Alternative Land Tenure in Saskatchewan

Researcher: Naomi Beingessner, graduate student, Dept of Justice Studies

Advisor: Dr. Annette Desmarais, Associate Professor, International Studies

Introduction

The purpose of this research is to investigate Saskatchewan farmers' ideas of alternative land tenure and the potential for these to support principles of food sovereignty. The data collected will be used by the researcher in writing a thesis towards the completion of a Master's degree in Justice Studies at the University of Regina.

Procedure

You are being asked to participate in a one-on-one, semi-structured interview on the topic of land tenure, based on your ideas and experiences. With your permission, our interview will be audiotaped. Please initial here _____ if you grant permission to audiotape our interview. The session should take approximately 60 to 90 minutes. You may also be contacted following the interview for further clarification on any point raised in the interview.

Risks and Benefits

There are no anticipated risks involved in your participation in this study. You will be entirely free to discuss issues and will not be coerced in any way into providing information that is confidential or of a sensitive nature. The only inconvenience or cost to you will be the time required for participation. This research will help develop possibilities for food sovereign practices in Saskatchewan.

Confidentiality

Every precaution is being taken to protect the confidentiality of all participants. During the study, the data will be securely stored in a password-protected electronic folder on the researcher's personal computer or in a locked filing cabinet accessible only to the researcher. At the conclusion of the study, and for the following three years, only the researcher and her thesis supervisor will have access to the original data, which will be stored securely on campus by the supervisor. After three years, all original data will be destroyed using a paper shredder and electronic file deletion mechanism.

For all participants, any information disclosed will be held confidential. Pseudonyms will be used throughout the transcripts and the thesis, not only for the participants themselves,

but for each person mentioned in the interviews. Complete anonymity may not be guaranteed as there is a slight chance that direct quotes or stories, especially those of staff and leaders may identify the participant to others, particularly colleagues, due to the size and nature of the organization.

If participants prefer that their name not be publicized, a pseudonym will be used to conceal the participant's identity. All participants have the option of having their name used in the research:

_____ I do not approve of the publication of my name; please use a pseudonym
 _____ I approve of the publication of my name

Voluntary Participation

Your decision to participate is voluntary. You are free to decline to answer any of the questions posed of you; you are also free to address additional issues that you consider of importance, but which have not been included in the interview overview. If you choose to withdraw from the study, you may do so at any time without question or penalty. A summary of the research will be made available to you upon request.

Ethics Approval

This project was approved by the Research Ethics Board, University of Regina. If research subjects have any questions or concerns about their rights or treatment as subjects, they may contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at 585-4775 or by e-mail: research.ethics@uregina.ca.

Consent Statement

I, _____, have read the above and voluntarily agree to participate in the research study described above. I understand the procedure and objectives of the study. I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. I also understand that, if I have chosen confidentiality above, my identity will be kept completely confidential. Likewise, I understand that if I have chosen so above, the interview will be audiotaped. I understand that signed consent forms will be stored separately from the data. I have been provided with a copy of this consent form for my records.

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher Signature _____ Date _____

If you have questions concerning your participation, the results, or this study in general, please feel free to contact the researcher Naomi Beingessner (545-4277, 44 Wolfe Pl, Regina SK) or her advisor Dr. Annette Desmarais (585-5066, International Studies, University of Regina).

APPENDIX C – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Topics (Land Trust Participant)

Information about participant

Age
Current occupation
History of family farm, succession plans

Genesis

How did you hear about the Conservancy?
Can you describe your involvement/role with the Conservancy? For how long?
Has Earthcare/Conservancy focus shifted/changed at all since you started?
Obstacles and successes the past (how many) years?
What best practices have you learned from/incorporated?
What is the political importance of Genesis/land alternatives? Is there a political role for Genesis/Earthcare?
What do you think of the conservancy's idea of land as a gift, rather than a possession?
Has your experience with Genesis changed the way you think or feel about food production/farming/land ownership/the environment? Has it changed or affected your actions?

Discussion of land tenure

Importance of land tenure to farming viability
Ways of making land accessible to new farmers
Positive/negative trends observed in land tenure
Perceived governmental/societal attitude/policy towards land
Position of women in terms of succession and ownership

Community and Values

Definition of community and explanation of membership in one
Community health, viability, and future
Community/agrarian organizations and roles in them
Role of farming and related institutions in environmental stewardship
Familiarity with food sovereignty?

Future of Farming

Predictions
Advice/assistance for new farmers

Interview Topics (NFU Participant)

Information about participant

Age
Current occupation
Farm background/history of family farm
Succession plans

Information about farm when it was last farmed?

Farm size
Renting vs owning land?
Was it a mixed farm
Farming as business/industry or way of life
What does 'family farm' mean
What was enjoyed least/most about farming

Discussion of land tenure

Personal experience with land tenure experimentation/advocacy for change
Where is land on the agriculture discussion radar, and why?
Ways of making land accessible to new farmers
Positive/negative trends observed in land tenure
Perceived governmental attitude/policy towards land
Roles of key players in land tenure debate
Position of women in terms of succession and ownership -> do/did alt land tenure forms address gender explicitly or implicitly?

Community and Values

Definition of community and explanation of membership
Community health, viability, and future
Connection between land tenure and community
Community/agrarian organizations membership and roles

Future of Farming

Predictions
Possibilities for food sovereignty in SK

Advice for new farmers