

***The New Farmer Movement: An Ethnographic Study of the Growing Agricultural  
Movement Amongst Young People in the Hudson Valley***

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**Abstract:**

This research seeks to investigate the identities and motivations of new farmers in the Hudson Valley in order to assess their status as a social movement and their potential to make political and economic impacts. Current scholarly research on new farmers has focused on farmer training programs and the motivations behind local food consumers, but little has been studied about the new farmer in particular. The alleged new farmers movement has been documented and acknowledged by several forms of media including documentary films, newspaper articles, and memoirs. It is in these media sources that new farmers are widely labeled as an up and coming social movement with a set of unified goals and purposes. For our research, we sought to understand if new farmers identify as part of a larger social movement by asking farmers their motivations, struggles, and alignment with a social movement. We conducted purposive and snowball sampling to carry out semi-structured interviews with farmers in the Hudson Valley who had less than 10 years of experience. We also distributed an online survey as a substitute for an interview, which was intended to broaden our range of respondents. We completed 7 verbal interviews and received 15 responses to our survey. Our results showed that farmers have mixed reactions to their labeling as a social movement ranging from: a) full identification with a social movement, b) acknowledgement of a social movement, but reluctance to identify as part of the social movement, and c) denial of the existence of any social movement at all. With regard to farmer motivations, we found that farmers share a common love for the tangibility of farming as compared to other white-collar jobs and also share a common discontent with the current industrialized food system. With regard to economic influence, we found that farmers seek to entrench themselves in and make impacts on local economies, but are not motivated by the potential to alter the broader capitalist system. In conclusion, we believe that the media has inaccurately labeled new farmers as a social movement as many farmers do not identify with a movement. In addition, we believe more research is necessary to understand the political goals of farmers. Given the brief time frame of our research, further interviews would be productive in validating the status of new farmers as a social movement.

**KEY WORDS:** New Farmer, Hudson Valley, Social Movement, Motivation, Identity

## **Introduction:**

A recent surge in environmentalism has brought attention to the conventional food system and exposed its highly problematic and controversial flaws. In response, new farmers are taking back the land and bringing food production into their own hands. Highly educated young people, former businesspeople, and city-dwellers are entering into farming professions, and the agricultural demographic is therefore shifting away from that of rural, multi generational farm families (Fleming, 2011). The purpose of this research is to better understand the motivations behind the recent popularity in agricultural professions and to capture the potential of new farmers to have political, economic, and social influence. This research further works to evaluate the current status of the new farmer movement, and to determine the extent to which new farmers can qualify as a social movement.

Americans, by and large, no longer see themselves as part of an agrarian society. Over the past 40 years, farms have increased in size and prices have spiraled downward, causing the rural culture to suffer tremendously as more and more people move away from agriculture. The modern food system has been commodified by trade, technology, and retail, and this shift has resulted in a growing distance between consumer and producer. The nature of our industrialized and consolidating food system is characterized by mega dairy farms, processing factories, feedlots, and grain elevators, which makes the business of farming unattractive and less accessible to youth. However, the emergence of the modern environmental movement has caused people to finally start paying attention to food: where it is grown, how it is processed, who distributes it, what pollutes it, and the impact it has on human health (Bradbury et. al., 2012). Though long overdue, this examination has gained prominence as public health and climate change are now at the forefront of national

conversations. A third of our nation's kindergartners are predicted to develop type 2 diabetes in their lifetime, and on the same note, a third of climate change is attributed to the way we produce, manufacture, and distribute our food (Bradbury et. al., 2012). These statistics show that we have reached a cultural crisis, and the food system must change.

Fortunately, the impulse to change our food system has been met by a committed movement of people known as "Greenhorns". This next generation of farmers have devoted their lives to farming. "The work is difficult but it's relevant... We are directly involved in the reconstruction of a local, resilient, and delicious food system." (Bradbury et. al., 2012) Farming is physically demanding, and therefore requires entrepreneurial spirit and emotional strength. These new entrants into American agriculture are unified by their unrelenting willingness to work and change agricultural life for the better. With a mind for business and a strong social agenda, new farmers across the country are surging against all odds to remake the agricultural economy and in a broader context, the American food system.

### **USDA Beginning Farmer profile:**

Currently, the USDA defines a beginning farmer as someone who has "operated a farm or ranch for 10 years or less either as a sole operator or with others who have operated a farm or ranch for ten years or less" (Ahearn & Newton 2009). Beginning farmers tend to be younger than established farmers and are more likely to establish smaller, seasonal farms or ranches. According to a USDA economic research report, "beginning farmers account for 10 percent of the value of U.S. production, but their share of production varies significantly by agricultural commodity (USDA, 2009)." There are currently 469,098 beginning farmers

in the U.S. today. (Vilsack, Clark, 2014). Out of the 27,000 farmers in New York State, 6,400 of them have been farming for the past ten years or less (Vilsack, Clark, 2014). In part, the intent of our research is to offer an explanation for this recent increase in new farmers in the Hudson Valley. More specifically, given the high barriers to entry, we aim to determine what drives young people who have never before worked in agriculture to start farming as a new career choice.

### **Social Movement:**

Aldon Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller, editors of *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory* define a social movement along the following guidelines:

“social movements are instrumentalities to abolish, or at least weaken, structures of political and social domination... they draw their sustenance not from the enhancement of present satisfaction but from a long-term time perspective sustained by the firm belief in the coming of a society embodying justice and democratic equality instead of the here and now of exploitation and denial of human dignity” (Morris & Mueller, 1992)

Throughout the history of the United States, progress has been driven by social movements. Often times a successful social movement results in not only a significant shift in cultural values, but significant political and economic impacts as well. Recently, the LGBT movement achieved both increased acceptance of LGBT people and the federal recognition of gay marriage in a Supreme Court decision in June of 2013. A new culture of acceptance of the LGBT community is emerging around the country, causing campaigns against outwardly anti-gay corporations such as Chik-Fil-A. In the LGBT movement we see a social movement that is working to shift a cultural value and making political and economic

impacts in doing so. The 1960s and 70s environmental movement fostered respect for the environment amongst Americans and created new policy affecting businesses. The environmental justice movement that began with community based organizing like Love Canal and Louisiana's Chemical Corridor led to environmental legislation such as the Clean Air Act of 1967 and the Clean Water Act of 1972. The environmental movement of today has mobilized around the use of fossil fuels and against the Keystone XL pipeline, particularly through the online community 350.org.

We are seeking to investigate if the recent rise in popularity in agricultural professions has the potential to function as an organized social movement, capable of shifting cultural values and making political and economic impacts in today's society. New farmers' rejection of an industrial, globalized food system could potentially manifest itself in a number of cultural, political, and economic ways. A newfound cultural appreciation for farmers and value of sustainably produced food may work to shift government subsidies and take money out of the pockets of large agricultural corporations. We would like to determine the extent to which new farmers see themselves as part of a movement working towards some sort of collective political, economic, or social goal.

Through interviews with farmers and fieldwork we sought to immerse ourselves in the community of new farmers and assess their status as a social movement. In our study of new farmers as a social movement we are looking to see if new farmers have a form of organization and a common set of values. We hope to better understand farmers' intentions and if they are implicitly or explicitly working for the accomplishment of the goals of a social movement. Lastly, we are trying to identify any of the criteria of a social movement, as described above, in the new farmers movement. The following literature

review will work to better explain the existing research on new farmers and social movements within the larger agricultural and food ethics community.

### **Literature Review:**

Niewolny & Lillard (2010) explored the current beginning farmer training programs and analyzed them according to their educational qualities. Research was conducted in Virginia and Texas as part of the Extension Services of Texas A&M University and Virginia Tech. Authors conducted a literature review of the existing beginning farmer training programs. Federal support for beginning farmer programs is fairly recent, and arose in the early 2000s as part of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 and the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008. Other support for beginning farmers comes from the USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program and support from private foundations. Authors acknowledge difficulties in finding sufficient studies in agriculture and food systems that involve the key term "beginning farmer." More so, they note that "even fewer studies examine the emergence of beginning farmer education or the contemporary issues pertaining to its development" (Niewolny & Lillard, 2010). While there are not large pools of research to draw from, the authors were able to highlight the key components of the beginning farmer generation. The authors acknowledge the emergence of an alternative knowledge system that is separate from the institutional and federal training programs that have historically been emphasized among beginning farmers. Research showed that this alternative knowledge system is comprised of farmer meet-ups and informal education, and therefore is accessible to new and beginning farmers. This type of informal knowledge sharing is exactly what programs like the Greenhorns or

the CRAFT (Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training) in the Hudson Valley hope to accomplish.

The authors also place the new farmer movement within the context of the larger agricultural community in the United States. Authors argue “practitioners, researchers, and policymakers across the nation have worked together in new and different ways to provide specific programs to maintain the viability of new farms, and the economic, social, and environmental fabric of which they are a part” (Niewolny & Lillard, 2010). The collaboration across all levels of the agricultural community has opened the possibility of farming as a career to young individuals who see farming “as a growing social response to an overwhelming concern” about the current food system in the United States (Niewolny & Lillard, 2010). The rise in new farmers has emerged as a response to growing concerns about food access, safety, and health, coupled with increasing financial and educational support from both governmental and private foundational support.

Lyson and Gupitill (2004) defined the term *civic agriculture* as representative of the rebirth of more locally oriented agriculture and food system. Research found that this value may be present among the new farmer generation, which may place the movement in the context of larger agricultural world. The researchers used cross-sectional and lagged-panel regression techniques to identify factors and conditions associated with civic agriculture farms that sell directly to the public and larger-scale, commodity-oriented farms. The authors used the number of farms selling directly to the public in both the 1992 and 1997 census as the dependent variable and indicator of civic agriculture farms, and farms with sales over \$250,000/year as indicative of a larger-scale, commercial farm. The authors selected several independent variables that have been shown in previous research to be

related to either direct sales or large commodity farms or both, such as proximity to an urban area, factors associated with type of farming, and factors associated with production. The results showed that between 1992 and 1997, the percentage of farms selling directly to the public as a percentage of total farms rose from 4.49 percent to 4.82 percent, and the percent of commodity agriculture farms increased from 6.52 percent to 8.19 percent. Civic agriculture farms accounted for a larger percentage of all farms in the Northeast (12.95%) than elsewhere in the country. If the pattern continues, authors suggest that many small civic agriculture farms will exist closer to cities and larger, commodity-oriented farms will exist farther in rural areas.

Sigurdson (2011) investigates the status of Farmers' Markets as an alternative pathway, new social movement, or biomedicalization effort in response to a huge increase in farmers markets—66% from 2006-2009. Sigurdson defines alternative pathways as “a way of reclaiming technological, cultural and economic control in a globalized world (Sigurdson, 2011). Another important characteristic of alternative pathways are their lack of “explicit of self-conscious goals of fundamentally changing society and yet their success in articulating an alternative that relates to social change goals” (Sigurdson, 2011). Sigurdson is also interested in asking to what extent farmers markets represent a shift from “class oriented economic discontent” to “identity based cultural and symbolic discontent,” thus characterizing farmers markets as a new social movement (Sigurdson, 2011). With regard to new social movements, Sigurdson asserts, “the grievances acted out at farmers' markets focus on cultural and symbolic issues that are linked with identity” (Sigurdson, 2011). Lastly, Sigurdson is interested in knowing if farmers' markets can be explained not by new social movement theory or alternative pathways, but from the recent



shift from “medicalization to biomedicalization” (Sigurdson, 2011). Sigurdson conducts interviews with farmers, customers, and managers of farmers markets and does ethnographic research through observation at farmers markets in San Francisco. Sigurdson finds that farmers markets meet the criteria of an alternative pathway, partially meets or transcends the criteria of a new social movement, and can be explained through biomedicalization, but in a complicated, nuanced way.

Sigurdson contemplates the alternativeness of the farmers market as industrial organic produce can be found in grocery stores and organic food leaders such as Michael Pollen have appeared on Oprah. However, she concludes that due to the challenge of eating strictly local and our dependence on food imports, farmers markets will remain as a unique space for food purchasing. Alternative pathways are different from social movements because their members are not intentionally creating social and cultural change but are implicitly doing so by their rejection of globalized economic systems. Sigurdson found that the goals of farmers’ markets participants are widely varied. Some farmers do not believe the farmers market is a social movement but just a way to get by, or to some a way to make profit or “real money” (Sigurdson, 2011). Farmers market managers and some customers have explicit activist purposes of building community and improving the environment, while other customers are at the market not for the betterment environment, but strictly for the improvement of their own health. Sigurdson ultimately argues that these mix of goals qualifies farmers markets as an alternative pathway and helps to strengthen the movement.

Next, Sigurdson investigates farmers markets under a new social movement theoretical framework. She asks if farmers’ market participants are acting on social and

cultural grievances and issues of identity as new social movement members do, or if they are acting on economic grievances of working class movements of the past. She finds that the farmers market meets the criteria of both old and new social movements as certain customers patronize farmers markets because they prefer the fresh, organic food and reject the industrial food industry. While these customers' values are related to contemporary cultural values, they have economic relevance as well. It seems that these customers are seeking a new identity as a free and unrestricted consumer with the option to buy a variety of foods. In addition, while the farmers market is connected to a shift in cultural values such as increasing food security for the lower classes, economic restrictions limit the full accomplishment of this goal. While farmers markets would like to see more people of lower economic status eating organic local food, they fear that subsidies for organic food will hurt the livelihoods of small farmers. In other words, "farm security comes before food security" (Sigurdson, 2011). Because farmers markets represent both social and cultural goals, but are inextricably tied to market-based economics, Sigurdson argues that farmers markets exceed the criteria of new social movement theory. Lastly, Sigurdson investigates to what extent farmers markets are avenues for an increase in biomedicalization. Sigurdson finds that while health optimization is a concern of both farmers and customers, the recent field of biomedicalization is still contested and therefore biomedicalization alone cannot explain farmers markets.

Hendrickson & James (2004), published by the Department of Agricultural Economics, focuses on the industrialization of agriculture and how it has altered the way in which production occurs, as well as how it has impacted the decisions made by farmers today. Large, well-financed corporations took control of the food and agriculture system

after the Second World War, and the standardization, mass production, and specialization that characterizes industrial farming has been rapidly progressing into the 21st century. This major shift in agricultural production, alongside other external pressures, limits what options a farmer has available to him or her. The current economic environment, for instance, restricts the abilities of farmers to adopt alternative production practices and therefore creates new ethical challenges that affect farmer decision-making. The paper focuses on the extent to which the economic pressure faced by farmers increases the likelihood that they will consider unethical behavior to stay afloat.

This study is related to our research question in that Hendrickson and James focus on the external pressures that farmers face and how that impacts farmer decision-making and behavior. The social aspect of ethical versus unethical behavior can be used as a stepping-stone in defining the new farmer movement as a social movement. We assume that the rejection of industrial production and unethical behavior is a characteristic of emerging farmers, and therefore the new farmer generation is a reaction to the industrialization of agriculture. By dissenting from conventional agriculture, new farmers have created a social movement that is characterized by alternative production (Hendrickson & James, 2004).

The choice that new farmers make to reject industrial practices can be defined as an ethical decision. Considering that they, too, are faced with a downward pressure on prices and still choose to embrace alternative production practices implies that the desire to enter the farming economy outreaches financial gain. Whereas economics drives large-scale agricultural operations, new generation farmers cannot be defined by such narrow

incentives. These farmers are, therefore, more likely to base decision and action on ethical principles rather than economics.

The deterioration of farmer ethics that emerged from industrialized agriculture has not punctured the new generation. The moral imperative to have livestock on a farm rather than a confined feedlot is one example of an alternative choice that characterizes the new farmer movement in both a social and ethical lens. By defining the new farmers' movement as a social movement, the capacity for farmers to make societal changes is correlated with consumer preferences, which have changed dramatically since the introduction of industrial agriculture. The average consumer is looking for high-quality, yet low-cost food, which has been made possible by efficiency-increasing technology that increases yields on a significant level and in turn lowers prices. Consequently, farmers are being pressed to adopt these new technologies, increase their farm size, or act in unethical ways to increase their revenues in order to keep up with this type of production.

Lastly, Hendrickson and James argue that without high-scale technology and feedlots, new farmers must have broad agricultural production knowledge. Knowledge and skill is ultimately lost when people rely on standardized inputs, and in the absence of machines, new farmers are embracing the agrarian methods and practices that once defined our nation.

Research on the new farmer movement has shown that individuals have chosen to reject a food system that forces the consumption of chemical pesticides and herbicides and depletes the fertility of the earth. According to these pieces of literature, new farmers have expressed a desire to bolster community through the production and consumption of locally sourced, organic food. In this sense, new farmers expand the rejection of the

conventional, globalized food system and have created a new culture surrounding local food shared by both producer, consumer, and in turn entire communities.

The Greenhorns, a grassroots nonprofit promoting agricultural reform, produced a documentary with the same name in 2011 that provided first person accounts of the lives of young farmers across America. The documentary offered insight into the daily lives and struggles of many farmers, who entered into the agricultural community for a wide range of reasons, but a desire to change the current food system was an underlying value shared among all: “I’m doing the best that I can to live honestly, I’m not relying on some strange economic structures that benefit some and hurt others for my livelihood” (Fleming, 2011). The film presented case studies of farmers with varying sized farms; the interviews ranged from small-scale beginning farmers to successful organic farmers with hundreds of acres.

In 2012, the same nonprofit group released *Greenhorns: 50 Dispatches from the New Farmers’ Movement*. Similar to the Greenhorns documentary, this collection of essays narrates the lives of beginning farmers across the country. Together, these essays reflect the shape of the movement in the context of contemporary American life. Individual farmers discuss the tragedies and triumphs that have occurred since the beginning of their farming career. These tragedies include: hurricanes, floods, droughts, infestations, pests, economic meltdowns, runaway animals, and physical injury, to name a few (Bradbury et. al., 2012). On the other hand, the rewards of earning a living off the land and feeding local communities often outweigh these challenges, and the common themes that emerge from these reflections signify a fundamental and shared desire to reclaim the American landscape.

Author Kristin Kimball published her memoir, The Dirty Life: A Memoir of Farming, Food, and Love in 2011 and it has since gained tremendous popularity amongst beginning farmers. Kimball entered the organic farming scene when interviewing a young farmer as a journalist writing a story on young farmers. Kimball fell in love with the young farmer and decided to leave behind her city life to start a draft-horse powered farm in upstate New York with him. In leaving behind high heels, late nights, and big paychecks for early mornings, dirty fingernails, and financial struggle, Kimball falls in love with her new lifestyle and discovers the true value of feeding herself and her community. Through farming, Kimball learns the insightful distinctions between being rich and feeling rich, the latter bringing her the most fulfillment. Kimball writes, “Food, a Frenchman once told me, is the first wealth. Grow it right, and you feel insanely rich, no matter what you own,” and “I love the farm and the life that comes with it. I love that it makes me feel rich even though we’re not” (Kimball, 2011). Kimball also highlights the rewards of farming in deconstructing the conventional definition of success. She writes, “...we were already a success, because we were doing something hard and it was something that mattered to us. You don’t measure things like that with words like *success* and *failure*. Satisfaction comes from trying hard things and then going on to the next hard thing regardless of the outcome” (Kimball, 2011). Kimball explains how farming redefines wealth and success and realigns one’s values in opposition to those of the mainstream. In our research, we sought to investigate if beginning farmers’ shared a similar set of alternative values and farmed in an effort to avoid the conventional definitions of wealth and success.

“...Some young urbanites are starting to put their muscles where their pro-environment, antiglobalization mouths are. They are creating small-scale farms near urban

areas hungry for quality produce and willing to pay premium,” writes Allen Salkin in a New York Times article released on March 16, 2008 titled, “Leaving Behind the Trucker Hat.” Salkin documents the phenomenon of graduates of liberal arts colleges beginning organic farms after studying the perils of the current food system. Salkin describes the economic opportunities for organic farms today as the key distinction between the young back-to-the-landers of the 60s and the practicing and aspiring young farmers of today (Salkin, 2008). The article quotes Severine von Tscharner Fleming of The Greenhorns as stating, “Young farmers are an emerging social movement” (Salkin, 2008). We seek to interview the demographic Salkin’s article describes and understand if young farmers agree with the labeling as a social movement.

David Hess argues that the organic food movement of today began in the early 1900s and represents a social movement oriented toward science, technology, health, and the environment in his article titled, “Organic Food and Agriculture in the U.S.: Object Conflicts in a health-- environmental social movement.” Hess states that “as a social movement, the development of organic food and agriculture is largely a response to industrial agriculture, which itself was undergoing change throughout the twentieth century” (Hess, 2004). Again, this article, labels the organic food and agriculture movement as a social movement that has existed since the beginning of the twentieth century, but has the author asked farmers if they feel a part of a social movement?

### **Research Questions:**

The tripartite purpose of this research is to: (1) contribute to the body of research investigating new farmers’ motivations and identities, (2) determine the extent to which

new farmers have access or influence in economic, political and social decision making (3) determine the extent to which new farmers contribute to or express a collective identity as a social movement. In doing so, we hope to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent do new farmers qualify as a social movement?
2. What are new farmers' motivation in entering into agriculture?
3. To what extent do new farmers have access to political, economic, and social decision making?

### **Methods:**

#### *Population and Setting:*

According to the 2007 Census of Agriculture, there are 19,624 residents of New York who cite farming as their primary occupation (Vilsack, Clark, 2007). Although the percent of new farm operators is highest in southern and western New York, between 26-34% of all farmers in New York have been farming for 10 years or less (Vilsack, Clark, 2007).

According to the 2012 Agricultural census, 7,183,576 acres of land were devoted to farmland in New York. There are 583 farms in Saratoga County, a decrease from the 641 cited in the 2007 census. 90 farmers of Saratoga's 583 farms have been farming for 10 years or less. Farmers in the United States are predominantly white males, and have an average age of 56. These statistics speak to the need for young people, city dwellers, and former business people to enter into farming as a career.



### *Instrumentation:*

Our team of three conducted purposive and snowball sampling using semi-structured interview methods with seven participants (Creswell, 2007). We used Survey Monkey as the tool to organize and present our 13 survey questions, and the American Farmland Trust assisted us in publicizing and distributing the open survey. We used the survey as a substitute for an in-person interview. We conducted in-person interviews using the same questions as in the online survey. We recorded our interviews using a voice recorder to be analyzed later, and allowed the conversations to flow freely using questions to guide the conversation. Each interview lasted between 20-40 minutes. The purpose of our interviews was to understand the motivations, struggles, and identities of young farmers. We asked questions surrounding their motivations for farming, their relationships with other local farms, and their identity as a young farmer. A complete list of interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

### *Data collection, analysis, and limitations:*

Given that populations of young farmers are difficult to access due to time and distance constraints, we conducted purposive sampling with new farmers in New York State (Creswell 2007).

From January to April 2014, we collected data during 7 semi-structured interviews with new farmers, and 15 survey participants. Respondents ranged in terms of farming experience, but all had under 10 years of experience and no one had a family history of farming: 20% of survey respondents have been farming for 1-2 years, 40% have been farming for 3-4 years, 6% had been farming for 5-7, and 13% have farmed for the past 8-10

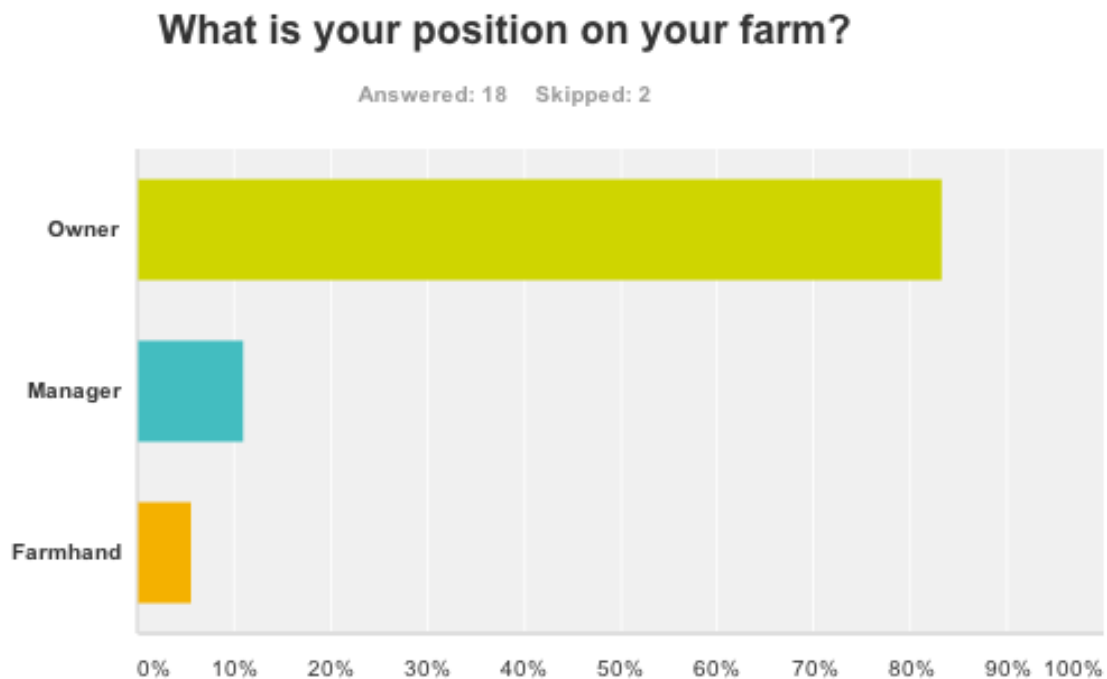
years. We conducted the 7 semi-structured interviews and recorded all interviews using a voice recorder. We analyzed the interviews and surveys by looking for common themes, ideas, and words amongst all the responses. Given the variety and richness of responses, we used descriptive narratives to present the various responses from our interviews. The four major themes that emerged from our interviews and surveys are as follows:

1. Identification with a social movement
2. A desire to do “tangible” work
3. Farming as an expression of discontentment with industrial food system
4. New farmers’ role within the current political and economic system

### **Results and Discussion:**

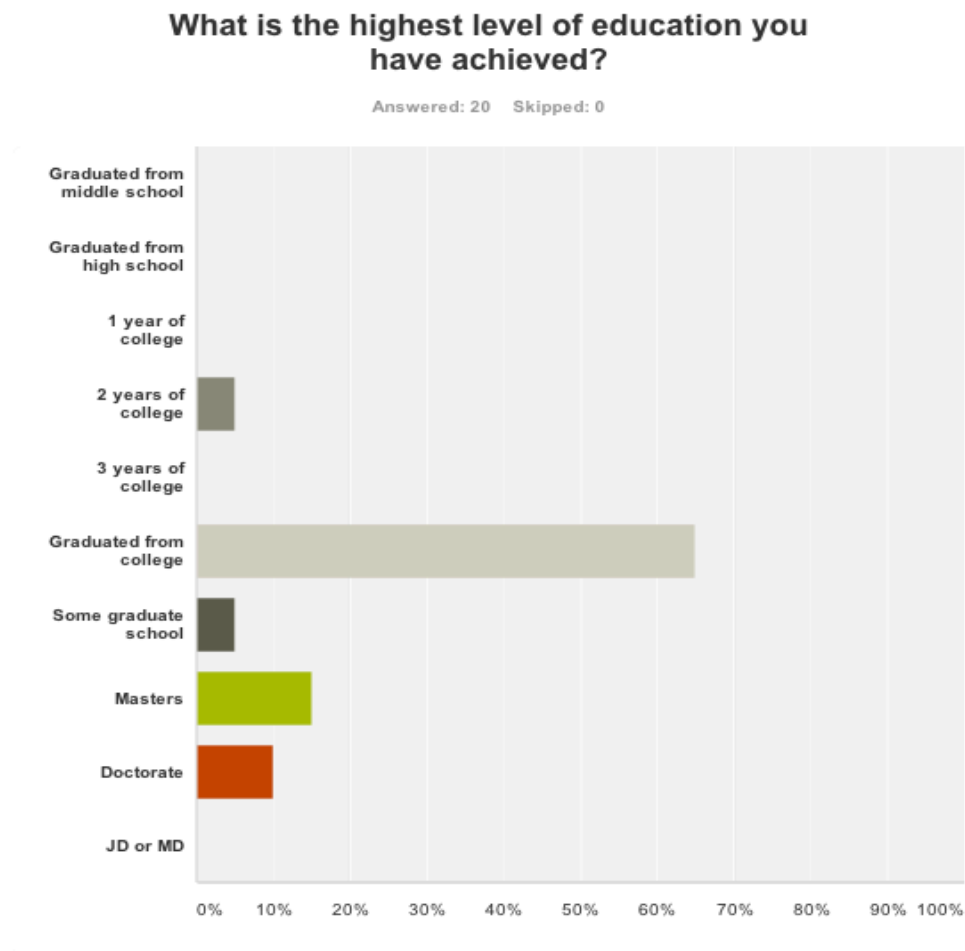
We found that a desire to do physical, intentional work and an interest in producing and adding value to the local economy are the main motivations to enter into farming as a career. We also discovered that the unpredictability of weather is a common struggle among a majority of the participants. Our survey results echoed the trends we saw in our interviews. Most new farmers (75%) are the primary owners of their farm, while 15% are managers, and 7% are farmhand employees (Table 1).

Table 1: Response to Survey Question



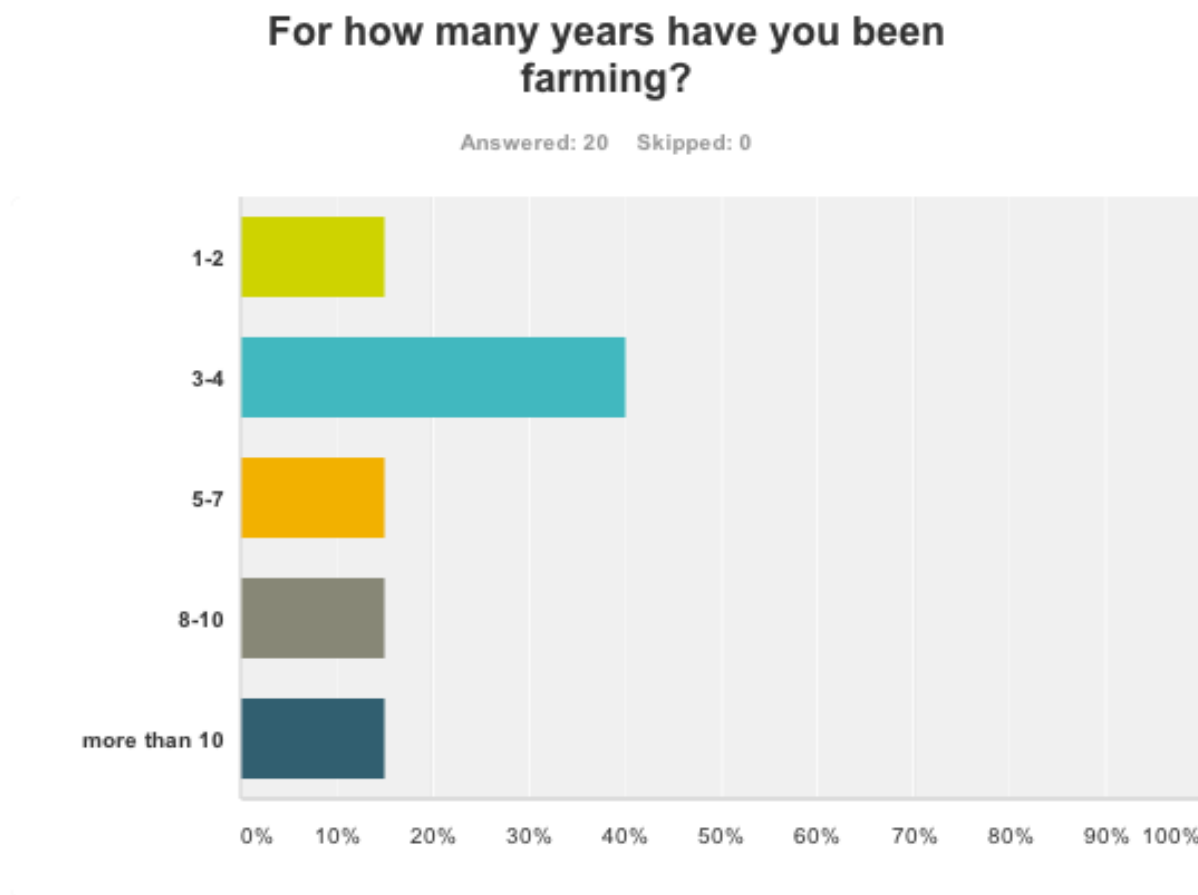
The farmers participate in a diversity of markets, and most farms participate in a combination of retail outlets. As a whole, 78% of farmers sell their produce at farmers markets, 65% sell using a CSA model, 35% operate a farm stand, 42% sell wholesale or to restaurants, and 28% sell their food through local co-ops. 14 of the 15 survey respondents and all seven of our interviewees held jobs previous to farming; most respondents recognize their work in blue or white collar jobs as necessary to gain the capital required for farming. Survey respondents mentioned that their desire to leave their previous jobs lies in a “commitment to land-based living” and because they “wanted to do something real and rewarding” with their lives (Becky, personal communication, 2014). All respondents had attended at least two years of college, most had graduated, and some had received Masters or Doctorate degrees (Table 2).

Table 2: Level of Education Attained



Most respondents have been farming for 3-4 years, with an even distribution among the remaining respondents between 1 and 10 years of farming experience (Table 3).

Table 3: Farm Experience Survey Response



All 15 survey participants mentioned attending at least one farming related meeting or conference within the past year, as did all seven of our interviewees. Many of the farmers we interviewed attended conferences through Cornell Cooperative Extension, Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA), and the National Young Farmers Coalition (YFC). Likewise, four survey respondents are members of NOFA, five are members of YFC, and two are members of the Greenhorns.

### **Identification with a social movement**

We asked both interview participants and survey respondents to what extent they felt they identified with a larger social movement, and there were three general sentiments expressed: some farmers identified as “part of this movement- a solidarity with other young, beginning farmers in sustainable and alternative agriculture,” (survey- JV) some acknowledge that the movement exists but do not agree that it is unified or classified under one collective goal, and others acknowledge some form of unity or collectiveness but do not “want to associate with the media’s image of the new farmer” (9 Miles East).

We identified three themes of responses that helped us to conclude that, although the media defines the new farmers movement in a specific way, our research suggests that farmers reject this representation and connect to their work in a more “tangible” way. This rejection is best described by the new farmers themselves. As such, we have chosen several farmers’ responses to represent the major themes that arose out of this research.

To what extent do you identify with a larger New Farmer Movement?

<b>Identify with the New Farmer Movement</b>	<b>Acknowledge the movement's existence, but reluctant to align</b>	<b>Reject the idea of a New Farmer's Movement</b>
<p>"We definitely feel part of it by choosing to do something that we feel is good for ourselves and good for the world (even though we know our impact on the world's problems is negligible) when we could have done other things that made more money." -Becky, Old Ford Farm, New Paltz, NY</p> <p>"I feel that we are both a part of this movement in a very real way... The world right now is set up to be against us -- small farmers." - Kara</p>	<p>"I'm hesitant to name it is as one thing, because I don't think it is something that can be easily reduced to one particular motive or another. People do this for lots of reasons, on any given day I do this for lots of reasons." -Faith, Letterbox Farm Collective, Hudson, NY</p> <p>"Yeah, okay sure. But it's more about doing than thinking about doing for me." -Andrew, Farm Run</p>	<p>"It doesn't mean anything to me. Not to be a pessimist, but I don't think there's such thing as a new farmer. Maybe this is our first crack at it, but farming is so intertwined with the human existence." -Ian, Fledging Crow Farm, Essex, NY</p> <p>"Being in Ag &amp; Hort, I don't believe we consider, or even think about being part of a "movement"....[we] really just go about our business because it's part of our lifestyle. The fact that society and media are finally catching on is just a happy bonus." -Dawn, Wild Things Rescue Nursery</p>

Becky, Ian, and Faith encapsulate the three perspectives that developed out of the strain of our research related to the extent to which a New Farmers Movement exists. Almost all farmers acknowledge the recent media interest in young, new, and beginning farmers. However, some farmers, like Becky from Old Ford Farm, are more enthusiastic about the movement than others. Some respondents to the question listed above were cautious to narrowly define the goals of all new farmers as a social movement, as our question posed. This is important in that it further explains some of our initial

preconceptions, which were that new farmers feel very connected to each other, and seem to be working towards collective social change to the industrialized food system.

Although some farmers were reluctant to identify with a new farmer movement or highlight specific goals of the movement as a whole, all of the farmers we interviewed were involved (in some way) with local and regional agricultural support networks. It is important to note that the presence of groups like the Greenhorns, the Young Farmers Coalition, the Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA), and the Collaborative Regional Association for Farmer Trainings (CRAFT) network imply that there is a network of support for new farmers. While the motivations behind farming are varied, as demonstrated by our respondent quotes, farmers are still unified and active within their support networks.

### **Desire for tangible work**

A second theme that arose from our interviews (and all but one survey respondent) is the motivation to farm because of the tangible and physical aspects of the work. Farmers juxtaposed the “tangibility” or “real work” of agriculture with the monotony of blue and white collar labor. Many also recognized a desire to separate themselves from the “digital platform” in which modern jobs are so deeply rooted (Faith, personal communication, 2014). Gordon articulates the differences between farming as a career and other professions:

I really like the very tangible nature of producing something. What my day jobs for the last 20 years have all been very abstract in that you have a bunch of meetings and you send a bunch of emails, and things happen in very intangible ways. Whereas you go to some meeting and talk about the data and sharp ratios of some financial product, but you come home and chisel plow a field, that is not abstract. You just chisel plowed a field, you got something done. So I find that tangible aspect very gratifying. That’s real.



(Gordon, personal communication, 2014)

Farmers cited the second theme, of the tangibility of agriculture, as a fulfilling aspect of their lives and their work. This theme became apparent in all of our interviews; although we did not initially expect the physicality and intentionality of agriculture to be a fundamental result of our research, this common sentiment was shared by all of the farmers we interviewed. Several farmers also acknowledged that creating value physically through “harvesting sunlight and turning it into dollars” was fulfilling (Faith, personal communication, 2014). Faith, of Letterbox Farm Collective, articulates this well: “I feel like it’s fulfilling for me to be creating value and also filling a need. And I feel like it’s also fulfilling for me to be outside, in the world, to live a sensory life” (Faith, personal communication, 2014). Her response hints both at the satisfaction that stems from creating value and also at the tangible, or sensory, aspects of farming as meaningful.

### **Farming as an expression of discontentment with the industrialized food system**

Those who reject being labeled a “new” farmer (most notably Ian and Faith) did so in defense of farming as an ongoing and necessary aspect of humanity. Faith articulates this assertion in commenting that “farming is a critical aspect of being alive.” Similarly, Ian says:

I don’t think there’s such thing as a new farmer. Maybe this is our first crack at it, but farming is so intertwined with the human existence... it’s got to be frustrating as a farmer who’s been farming your whole life and then you’ve got a wave of people under 30 years old starting farms while men and women in America have been doing this for years and years and years.

(Ian, personal communication, 2014)

In acknowledging the agrarian roots of American society, Ian views the new farmer label as invalidating to the multitude of farmers who do not fall under the Greenhorn criteria. It is evident that both Ian and Faith do not consider their work in farming to be a groundbreaking achievement, but rather a chosen career path stemming from a number of motivations.

That being said, Ian did recognize that his choice to farm is “instinctively and inherently a reaction to our food system”, which shows a modern motivation that differentiates him from pre-industrial farmers. While Ian denies being a part of a larger social movement, the social component of Ian’s work aligns with that of the self-proclaimed Greenhorns. As such, despite a personal rejection of the new farmer label, Ian does farm partly out of reaction against our highly flawed food system. More importantly, however, Ian noted that after a decade of farming experience, he is now focusing on making a living for his family and son, and not making a social statement.

Ian’s comments highlight a third theme that arose from this research: farming as a reaction to or influenced by discontent with the current industrialized food system. Our initial expectation before conducting this research was that farmers would have a strong connection to a movement with a collective goal to change the modern food system. Although strong feelings of discontentment with the current food system are common amongst all respondents, our research refutes our initial hypothesis. Faith comments that one motivation for her farming is because it places her directly within the food culture: “It’s fulfilling for me to create a really high quality product and represent that product and have others value it. I feel like I’m in dialogue with a food culture” (Faith, personal communication, 2014). Faith exemplifies the ways in which the tangibility and practical

aspects of agriculture are influenced by and influence her ideological ideas about the food system. Jules, of Mack Brin Farm, expresses her disapproval of the current food system because she has seen its effects on her children; “I don’t think that what we’ve been doing has done anything but make our kids sick. We really need to come up with a better solution for the future” (Jules, personal communication, 2014). Again, one motivation to enter into agriculture is to actively work against the current food system.

### **New Farmers’ role within the current political and economic system**

In response to the third research question, our responses revealed multiple perspectives. Some farmers acknowledged their role in the capitalist system, as farming and capitalism are inherently linked through the market economy. Gordon, of 9 Mile East, says:

There are a lot of people who love growing vegetables, but really as a farmer your job is selling vegetables. And really you need to love that part, too, because you can grow all the vegetables you want... but you’re not sustainable if you’re not sustainable as a business. (Gordon, personal communication, 2014)

Most respondents understood that farming embedded them deeper into capitalism because their livelihood was dependent on their produce being purchased. Faith articulates this well in saying that through farming she can “participate in a local economy by harvesting sunlight and turning that into dollars” (Faith, personal communication, 2014). This awareness of a presence within the local economy supports our research question in that farmers feel that they do have an influence, at least locally. However, this influence is not necessarily used to change the capitalist system as a whole. Faith, like many other respondents, acknowledges her presence in the local economy and sees her impact as a

positive change on a local scale. For some farmers, their value in agriculture lies in influencing communities on a local scale.

Farming isn't the solution, it is a way of living with the questions. It is not a way out of capitalism, it's a way of answering the questions. Farming further embeds you in capitalism, but in a way that you are doing real work (Faith, personal communication, 2014).

While we had expected that most respondents would reject the capitalist system and claim to be working against it, our results showed the opposite in that farming was a response to the capitalist system in a way that respondents felt they could impact their local communities and live a fulfilled life for themselves.

### **Conclusion:**

This research supports Niewolny & Lillard (2012) in that the transfer of knowledge through alternative mechanisms is essential to the success of beginning farmers. Most farmers in our study participated in at least one new farmer organization like the YFC, NOFA, the Greenhorns, or the network of regional trainings in the Hudson Valley, called CRAFT. Sigurdson (2011) presents the idea of alternative pathways as “explicit of self-conscious goals of fundamentally changing society and yet their success in articulating an alternative that relates to social change goals.” This self-consciousness aligns with our finding in that the majority of new farmers are reluctant to identify as part of a subversive movement yet feel strongly that they are influencing local communities socially and economically. While the presence of new farmers is felt in the Hudson Valley, these farmers have a long way to go before they can be explicitly be characterized as a social movement.

Organizations like The Greenhorns continued to be important to our research as respondents noted that these grassroots networks contributed to feeling a sense of community and support from other new farmers in the region. However, by projecting a universal image of new farmers as a social movement through documentaries and interviews in popular media, The Greenhorns may be reducing new farmers to a single identity. Through our interviews, we found that some new farmers, such as Ian from Fledging Crow, do not believe in the reductive nature of The Greenhorns portrayal of the new farmer. While we did find common trends and themes amongst the new farmers we interviewed, our findings cannot be generalized due to the wide range of responses we received. In order for our research to affirm the existence of a unified social movement amongst new farmers, we would need to interview a majority of the new farmers in the Hudson Valley and find a clear articulation of not only common goals, but goals that shared clear subversive purposes.

Given our findings, we have concluded that the media has inaccurately labeled new farmers as being a part of a social movement with a collective social or political goal. Given the brief time frame of our research, more research is necessary to understand the political goals of farmers, and further interviews would be needed to determine the potential for new farmers to qualify as being a part of a social movement.

If our respondents had expressed a unified desire to become a social movement, we would suggest using the existing networks of the Greenhorns, NOFA, YFC, and the CRAFT trainings to garner support and community involvement. The New Farmer Movement would need to publicly display their solidarity through a protest, rally, or demonstration. One way to improve the fact that the new farmers at this point do not have a unified set of

values would be to develop a constitution or a elected leader. The majority new farmers would need to understand and support a common goal. Given our research, these explicit goals could be a desire to refocus food economies to a local scale. The New Farmer Movement would therefore need to gain social recognition and impact the national conversation regarding local and sustainable food in order to achieve their goals. The New Farmer Movement should use the existing environmental movement to bolster their goals for a restructuring of the food system towards widespread sustainable agriculture and against the industrialized food economy. For example, new farmers and supporters of sustainable agriculture would benefit from the organization and demonstration rallied around the Keystone XL pipeline. As it stands today, new farmer organization is focused around improving sustainable farming practices and fostering connections amongst new farmers. If new farmers seek to become a social movement, organization should focus around the intentions of new farmers to upset the current food system and ways of achieving success on a national level. However, the majority of new farmers need to agree upon their desire to make major political, economic, or social change. Our data suggests that not all new farmers believe in farming for subversive purposes, rather they view farming as an ongoing and necessary facet of human civilization, and a viable and fulfilling career. If new farmers decide they want to become a social movement, they have a lot of organization and goal-setting to conduct. We see new farmers in the Hudson Valley as having enormous potential to impact local communities, but currently lack the qualifications of a social movement.

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## Appendix A: Interview Questions

- Tell us about your farm
- Do you have a family history of farming?
- Do you have an education in farming? What is your highest degree of education, and what field did you study?
- Through what channels are you in contact with other local farms?
- What was your motivation to enter into agriculture?
- Does your choice to farm have anything to do with our current food system?
- What does the phrase New Farmers Movement mean to you?
- Do you currently identify as part of this movement?
- Where do you see the New Farmers Movement heading?
- In what ways is your work fulfilling for your life?
- What are your greatest challenges in your work?
- Where would you like to see this farm in the future? Do you have any plans for expanding or larger goals?

## Appendix B: Survey Questions

1. Please state your highest level of education achieved

- A) Middle School
- B) High School
- C) Some college
- D) Associates Degree
- E) BA
- F) BS
- G) Masters
- I) Doctorate
- J) JD or MD

2. What is your position on your farm?

- A) Owner
- B) Manager
- C) Farmhand
- D) Other, please specify

3. Are you involved in any of the following? Choose all that apply

- A) CSA
- B) Farmer's Market
- C) Farm Stand
- D) Restaurants/ Wholesale
- E) Co-ops
- F) Other, please specify

4. How do you stay connected to other new farmers in your region?

5. For how many years have you been farming?

1-2

3-4

5-7

8-10

more than 10

6. What are your motivations for farming?

7. In relation to farming, how many conferences, meetings, and organized meet-ups have you attended in the last year?

8. If you answered yes to number 7, please list the names of the conferences, meeting, and organized meet-ups you attended.

9. If you consider yourself a member of any formal organizations working to benefit farmers, please list the organizations in the space below

10. Sigurdson (2011) qualified farmers at San Francisco farmers markets as part of a new social movement based on their “cultural and symbolic discontent” with the globalized food system. Do you consider yourself a part of a greater new farmers movement as Sigurdson suggests?