

THE COMMUNITY LOSES WHEN IT LOSES FARMERS: IMPACTS OF A
CHANGING LOCAL FARMLAND MARKET

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

An ethnographic community case study was conducted to document the impact of recent farmland-market changes on the social fabric of a small, typical Central Illinois rural community of 1,000. Using a multi-method research design, data were obtained from: 1) extensive participant-observation of community life (2005-06); 2) 124 community and farmer surveys and in-depth background interviews; and 3) population and agricultural census data. The restructuring of local farmland markets by growing farm concentration, cash-rent replacing crop-share leasing, and the invasion of aggressive non-local landlords and operators raises 21st century challenges to Midwestern rural-community sustainability. The Goldschmidt Hypothesis, which argues that large-scale farms undermine a community's social-economic well-being, and social capital theory, which holds that broad engagement builds a strong community social fabric, are employed in analyzing the social impacts of agricultural restructuring. Findings indicate that the emerging restructured land market and the consequent increased competitiveness undermine the trust and norms of reciprocity among farmers and between farmers and town-residents. The ideal of "bigger is better" chased by local farmers has the unintended consequence of eroding the historically important community participation of local farmers. Farmers are now involved in only those activities that directly affect them and less so in activities that broadly contribute to community well-being, such as service clubs. Farmers and townspeople often travel to work which results in the transfer of their shopping, services obtained, and recreational activities from local providers to where they work in the county seat or nearby cities. Both farmers and townspeople report knowing fewer community members than 10 years ago, reflecting a decline in network size, and the regular social interactions indicative of close-knit community. These factors are leading to the decline of the historically interdependent relationship between farmers and their community, and the degrading of a sense of community. Essentially a bedroom community is evolving from the former farming community spurred by the new farmland market as well as some newcomers moving in.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Despite experiencing much change over the past century, as the agricultural sector restructured and suburbanization spread, small rural towns are still viewed as supporting an ideal way of life by rural people, policy makers, and many urban people (Hummon, 1990; Lingeman, 1980; Salamon, 2003). In general, way of life in a rural community is characterized by a core set of attributes typically agreed to provide a sense of community including dense social networks, social ties of long duration, shared life experiences, and norms of neighborliness and reciprocity (Elder & Conger, 2000; Putnam, 2000; Salamon, 2003). Midwestern rural communities typically evolved in close association with agriculture and land (Lingeman, 1980). Historically small towns supported the farmers and their families by providing farming-related services, shopping, banks, and churches. Today reality differs from this past. Farmers account for only a small proportion of the rural population and small communities are being fundamentally altered by regional agricultural trends, improved transportation and roads, telecommunication developments, and more workers/citizens in nonagricultural jobs (Albrecht, 2006; Lobao, 1990; Ramirez-Ferrero, 2005; Salamon, 2003).

Since 1930, the changes in agriculture caused the numbers of farms and of farm families living on the land, to decline continually in the United States (Hoppe & Korb, 2004). The current Midwestern farm differs greatly from the idyllic picture in the media of a small sized family operation with diverse crops and animals. Farmington, the community focus of this study, resembles most Corn Belt small communities. Its landscape is dominated by endless tracts of intensively farmed, row after row of soybeans and corn. Despite their diminished numbers the family farmer, however, is still assumed to be the pillar of the American rural community, representing the democratic ideals of volunteerism and egalitarianism which perhaps were never the reality of the rural social fabric (Elder & Conger, 2000; Ramirez-Ferrero, 2005). When driving through Farmington's countryside one sees abandoned farmsteads and small country churches, witnesses of a different time nostalgically remembered by older community residents.

The literature about farmland market changes (e.g. Barry, Moss, Sotomayor & Escalante, 2000), the Goldschmidt Hypothesis (e.g. Goldschmidt, 1978; Lobao, 1990) and community social capital perspective (e.g. Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 1993, 2000) each

point to approaches for examining how rural community cohesion, cooperation and engagement can be affected by agriculture restructuring. Specifically these three bodies of literature provide a pathway to focus on issues of the rapid concentration of farm operations, and a farmland market shaped by the ideology of growth, affect the social interactions underlying the customary norms and beliefs that regulate community life. The first two theoretical frameworks lean heavily on the experiences and consequences of the expansion of industrial agriculture, and thus farm scale. Sociological research in this area tends to have a strong orientation against industrialization and farm concentration and concludes that communities suffer from the effects of emphasizing farm growth, efficiency and the associated competitiveness in the farmland market. The community social capital literature provides understanding about the importance of trust, loyalty, and social engagement for community sustainability and democracy.

As yet to be explored is the important linkages between the trend of increasing competitiveness in the farmland market and the local community's social fabric. In contrast to other states, like California where agriculture is highly industrialized, Midwestern agriculture remains composed of family farms, whose operators were always essential players in the rural community (Lobao, 1990). Therefore, this study examines the restructuring of a Midwestern community's farmland market by continuous farm concentration, increased use of cash- rent leases, and numbers of absentee landlords- because of the potential risks these agricultural trends impose on the social structure and the sustainability of rural communities.

Land concentration in U.S. agriculture is not something new. Leasing was historically a widespread alternative to Midwestern landownership because prairie land was always expensive (Bogue, 1963). Historically, crop-share was the dominant rental arrangement in the Corn Belt – a leasing agreement in which income, expenses, and risk are shared between the tenant farmer and the landlord. However, this arrangement has lost importance relative to cash-rent leasing since the 1980's. In a cash rental agreement, tenants pay landlords a fixed amount of money per acre for the use of resources and the landlord assumes no risk. Therefore, it is important to look at the relationship between cash-rent leasing and the recent trend of rapid land concentration in the hands of fewer big, sometimes mega family farmers, in just the past two decades (Lyson, 2004).

Stiff competition in the farmland rental market drives cash-rent values in Christian County, where Farmington lies, now as high as \$250 per acre up from \$140 only a few years ago, according to local farmers. Farmland prices are skyrocketing with the promise of corn-based ethanol driving greater demand. In 2007, central Illinois experienced a surge in prime farmland prices selling for about \$5,000 an acre on average, up from \$3,000 an acre (Davey, 2007). The shift from crop-share to cash-rent and the increased competition for farmland have benefited both local and non-local landowners and larger operators in the targeted community (Levins & Cochrane, 1996). With such a competitive farmland market, it is important to understand why small farmers stick with the conventional belief that “bigger is better” that requires continual expansion of a land base, or, similarly why the small farmer does not look for alternative ways of production that require less land.

A farmland market is shaped by community norms, customary practices, family history, and local information (Salamon, 1992). That is, a local community’s perception of what is going on in farming affects the local farmland market. In the case of farmland leasing, for example, the perceived rent paid versus the actual rent paid in fact shapes the context in which leases are obtained and negotiated. However, little attention has been paid to potential effects on community life of individual choices by farmers and landlords with respect to farm scale and leasing type and other transformations in the farmland market (Strange, 1988). Thus in the emerging world view imposed by industrial agriculture, in which concentration is essential, it is important to understand, whether local social relationships are losing importance to governing farmland market transactions (Robison, Schmidt & Barry, 2002).

How a local farmland market works, and the community consequences of the market is a unique contribution to our knowledge about today’s agriculture because existent data about leasing is in general aggregated at the county or state level and is generally described by tables and statistics. This farming community study, therefore, focuses on farmers’ versus town-residents’ perceptions of one local farmland market including: what factors drive its competition, its community context, and whether or how the newly emergent form of the local farmland market reciprocally affects the small community in which farmers live and work. Examining the lives and perceptions of

community members in this ethnographic study contributes to the existing literature by capturing the variation that exists among local farmers who are operating in the same agricultural and community contexts. We know that such information endows individual households with local information that supports their decision-making as they participate in the local farmland market. Little is known about the impacts of the farmland market decisions on the community. By taking the next step toward examining how a farmland market works at the community level, this study will provide understanding about how indirectly regional agricultural trends are reweaving the social fabric of rural society today.

Chapter Two: The Literature Review

The impact on a community still agrarian¹ in orientation, of a shift to a more industrialized form of food production and recent regional trends in the local farmland markets, is the focus of this literature review. Theoretical perspectives about land concentration, farmland market restructuring and community social capital are employed to frame the question of whether recent change in the farmland market affects rural community characteristics of high engagement, rich social capital, loyalty to place, and tight-knit networks. Together these characteristics are critical to weaving the unique social fabric of historic Corn Belt rural communities.

The strength of rural communities is rooted in overlapping spheres of family, kin, church, and school which facilitate social support and social control among residents (Coleman, 1990). While many consider people living in a common place as a natural community, unity is not inevitable. However, in rural areas community typically emerges from people tied together by place of birth, cultural beliefs, religious and ethnic background (Salamon, 1992). Such ties provide a sense of identity and attachment to place, of people fundamentally committed to one another and to the group (McMillian & Chavis, 1986).

Often, a rural community is viewed as idyllic, close-knit and supportive of its residents (Newby, 1980). The bonds that tie rural people together are interwoven and reinforced by regular even daily face-to-face interactions. Effective social norms and mechanisms of social control derive from high levels of trust and from a feeling that everyone knows everyone else and about everyone else (Elder & Conger, 2000). Such unity has social costs as well as benefits to community members. Bonds of inclusivity are also mechanisms for exclusivity of those deemed as violating group norms or being disloyal (Coleman, 1990).

In the last 50-60 years Midwestern rural communities experienced continuous buffeting by changes that challenge this historic cohesiveness. Today, both farmers and rural communities' relationships are changing in response to countless market forces and many of the existing connections between these two spheres - town and country - of rural

¹ According to Salamon (2003), agrarian communities are characterized by their sharing of an agrarian covenant, high cohesiveness, retention of some younger families, and lack of newcomers to grow the population.

life have been lost and replaced by new ones mediated by tension and indifference (Flora, 1995; Thu & Durremberger, 1998). The organization of the literature review from this recent farming transformation moves from the general to specific farmland market changes with potential to affect community social capital. In particular, I am interested in whether increasing farm concentration, absentee landlords, and outsider-farmers affect the social stability of once vital rural communities in the U.S. Corn Belt.

Structural Changes in Agriculture

An historic “bigger is better” world view is part of the American psyche which exists widely and is not necessarily limited to agriculture. “Bigger is better” as a belief shaping behavior derives from the American Dream itself. When the se words were first used by James Truslow Adams in 1933, the idea of the American Dream expressed that everyone, not only the elite, should be able to live richer and fuller lives. The belief in infinite opportunity makes Americans always discontent with the status quo. According to Storti (2004), there is always a sense of endless possibilities no matter how much one has already achieved. In agriculture, starting in the early 1970s, Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz famously encouraged farmers to "get bigger or get out" and to plant "row after row", without limit. During the 20th century, in the pursuit of their agricultural American Dream, farm operators have consolidated into larger, more capital-intensive operations. Furthermore, government support through subsidy policies promoted farm concentration to the detriment of small and medium-sized family farms (Imhoff, 2007).

Tonnies in the 19th century coined the terms *Gemeinschaft* and *Gessellschaft* to highlight the transformation rural social structures undergo from modernization and industrialization:

Both village and town retain many characteristics of the family; the village retains more, the town less. Only when the town develops into the city are these characteristics almost entirely lost. Individuals or families are separate identities and their common locale is only an accidental or deliberately chosen place in which to live. But as the town lives on within the city, elements of life in the *Gemeinschaft*, as the only real form of life, persist within the *Gessellschaft*, although lingering and decaying (Tonnies, 1963: 227).

The concern for the future of the rural community as agriculture in particular becomes industrialized dates to the first half of the twentieth century, particularly the seminal work of Goldschmidt (1978) which found large farms undermine rural communities institutions and welfare. Recently, several studies inspired by Goldschmidt's seminal work supported the hypothesis that structural shifts toward greater economic concentration and fewer large farms have negative impacts on the quality of rural community life (Lobao, 1990; Goldschmidt, 1978, 1998; Thu & Durremberger, 1998; Constance, Rikoon & Ma, 1996). Specifically, the process involves the replacement of systems of smaller scale farming in which families provide all the labor and management by systems of production characterized by a high degree of mechanization with increased use of nonrenewable energy, chemical fertilizers, pesticides, animal antibiotics and other inputs (Lyson, 2004; Marsden, 1998; Pierce, 1994). As a consequence of this transformation an extraordinary increase in the productivity and efficiency of U.S. agriculture occurred over the last 50 years. In addition to adoption of new technologies, the intensification in farming and food production was reached through the great expansion of a farm's land base to achieve economies of scale – with farm size doubling in each generation. However, improvements in profitability become less tangible, as low commodity prices and the necessary constant investments in new technology create significant debt and financial hardship for farm operators (Cochrane, 1958).

As a consequence of the above processes, a decreasing number of farms and farmers in most U.S. regions and an expansion of those farms which survive, farming is executed by a declining number of people (Bowler, 1992). Concentration also leads to increased polarization between large and small farms and what is termed the 'disappearing middle'— or mid-sized family farms (Kirschenmann, Stevenson, Buttel, Lyson & Duffy, 2008). While such changes suggest the efficiency of those large-scale producers who remain, the transformation is accompanied by a decline in local social capital with the decline of the farm population composed by smaller farmers, who tended at least formerly to be actively engaged in community life (Elder & Conger, 2000).

Although large farms and farming corporations often are run or managed by farm families, their goals and organization tend to differ from their smaller counterparts

(Kirschenmann et al. 2008; Lyson 2004). In general, small and mid-sized farms operated by German and other ethnic groups in the Corn Belt view farming as a way of life and the land owned as a sacred trust compared to Yankees (Protestant British Isles) who are larger operators and more likely to view farming as business and land as an asset to be readily bought and sold (Salamon, 1992, 2003; Flinn & Buttel, 1980). That is, the family farm that distinctively characterizes Corn Belt farms is operated by family and community-oriented farmers (Ramirez-Ferrero, 2005). Although agriculture has lost some importance within rural economy (Albrecht, 2006; Lobao & Schulman, 1991), the decline of a community-oriented category of the population potentially has a devastating social as well as economic impact on rural areas.

In the family farming area of the Corn Belt family farmers are central to maintaining the local community (Salamon, 1992). Such farmers are the bulwark of rural community economic and social activities: the viability of agricultural-related businesses; a source of jobs; important to the local tax base; and supporters of public services - schools, banking, and main street businesses (Kirschenmann et al. 2008; Strange, 1988). Moreover, farm families historically considered community well-being a high priority, as witnessed by their active community engagement (Elder & Conger, 2000; Jackson-Smith & Gillespie, 2005; Tolbert, Lyson & Irwin, 1998). In addition, small farmers are cited as achieving higher and steadier production from their land than larger farms operated in similar conditions. Labor intensive practices such as manuring, tillage, ridging, terracing, composting organic matter, and recycling plant products into production to enhance soil conservation and fertility are associated with small family farmers world-wide (Netting, 1993).

Numerous forces contributed to farm-size growth² and increased specialization of U.S. agriculture over the last half century. Among those forces are low commodity prices, farm-income support programs, high land values, technological advances, and verticalization of value chains (Buttel, 2003; Dobbs & Dumke, 1999; Ramirez-Ferrero, 2005). The Corn Belt agricultural landscape since the 1960s became increasingly that of mono-culture - corn and soybeans - with little diversification. Fences, buildings, and trees

² Both acreage and sales data show a trend toward larger farms, those farming at least 500 acres and or selling at least \$250,000 in farm products (Hope & Korb, 2004).

were removed (including wind breaks that help stabilize soils) to make fields large enough for efficiency of the industrial-level of current production, such as usage of 24+ row planters and combines (Goldschmidt, 1998).

Maximization of profits motivates farmers in the incessant competition that generates farms more specialized, more mechanized, and larger in scale – a process termed the *technological treadmill* by Cochrane (Cochrane, 1958; Fliegel 1993). Farmers are constantly bombarded with new products that promise higher profits. In general, these technologies require more capital, but less labor and management. Farmers are assured that with adoption the costs of production are reduced and productivity increased. However, as more and more farmers adopt the same technologies, production increases cause commodity prices to fall, which eliminates the profits of the early adopters. Those who lack the resources to adopt new technologies, or adopt too late, are driven out of business (Tweeten & Amponsah, 1996).

Levins and Cochrane (1996) argue that a treadmill is still present in agriculture although in an altered form. The product-price treadmill has given way to a land-market treadmill, which is similarly compelling. Due to U.S. government price supports for agriculture, technologically-induced shifts in supply no longer set in motion a treadmill of falling product prices but instead drives a treadmill which accounts for rising land prices. Federal programs stabilizing commodity prices have the unintended consequence of rising farmland rental costs. The new treadmill dynamic has a similar negative net impact on farm profits associated with displacement of farmers, as did the technological treadmill's motion to: "keep farmers chasing the unattainable goal of lasting higher profits" (Levins & Cochrane, 1996: 552). In the long-term, beneficiaries of government programs to support the farming industry through the provision of higher prices and cost-reduction technologies are landowners, who increasingly are neither farmers nor local community residents (Levins & Cochrane, 1996).

Industrialization and government policies are therefore the forces driving the transformation of agriculture as a way of life, focused on family-owned and operated farms, to farming focused solely on a business-model, with larger operations using sophisticated technology, and an emphasis on greater profits (Goldschmidt, 1998; Lyson, 2004; Ramirez-Ferrero, 2005). Profit always drove farming – otherwise the farmer would

not survive. However, nowadays farmers want to maximize returns more than previously to meet the challenges of a competitive commodity market. According to Lyson (2004), proponents of industrial agriculture claim the larger the farm, the more efficient it is. Likewise, specialization of agriculture is promoted. As a result, the Midwestern countryside currently is almost exclusively covered by row crops of intensively cultivated corn and soybean. In the endless search for efficiency, the widely accepted idea imposed by the market that “bigger is better” is largely shared and chased by most American farmers. It is a world view that guides their behavior in farming (Gibon & Ponte, 2005).

Although industrial-agriculture advocates admit that larger farms endanger the existence of midsized family farms and the sustainability of rural communities, they maintain that these effects are the inevitable cost of efficient food production and maintenance of cheap food supply (Lyson, 2004). The union of large-scale farms with technology is sold to the public as the basic condition for efficient production and low food costs for consumers (Kimbrell, 2003).

That larger farms are more efficient than smaller ones is perhaps among the most repeated beliefs in American agriculture (Lyson, 2004). It follows thus that for farmers, expansion of their land base is logically the only strategy for remaining competitive. However, economic evidence exists that small operations are actually quite efficient, when compared to large farms. Schumacker (1973) claims in “Small Is Beautiful” that small-scale, labour-intensive farming is economically, ecologically and socially desirable to industrial farming. Kirschenmann et al. (2008) point out that when the yield of only one or two crops is considered, industrial farms are indeed more productive, simply because they take advantage of economies of scale over thousands of acres. However, when diversified production that includes grains, fruits, animal products, and forage of a particular farm is taken into account the diversified, smaller farm is more efficient by comparison, and also is more beneficial for the environment.

In contrast to the “bigger is better” idea, studies actually show diseconomies of scale as farm size increases. Peterson (1997) examined the efficiencies of Minnesota farms ranging in size from \$2,500 in annual sales to \$500,000 and over. The larger farms had higher than average total costs, while smaller operations (up to \$250,000 in sales) had lower than average costs overall. Similarly, Duffy (1998) examined the relationship

between farm size and efficiency in Iowa. He found that for row-crop farmers, the cost of production starts to lose its efficiencies from a size advantage somewhere between 400 and 600 row-crop acres.

In the recent decades some farmers began seeking alternative crops that command higher prices and are appropriate to the growing demand for products that provide consumer safety and low environment impact (Dimitri & Oberholtzer, 2009). The alternative strategy to the “bigger is better” view, proposed by the advocates for maintaining the “Agriculture of the Middle,” involves production of diverse commodities in accordance with sustainable farming systems³ standards. Lyson (2004), for example, promotes the concept of *civic agriculture* defined as “. . . a locally organized system of agriculture and food production characterized by networks of producers who are bound together by place (2004:102).” He suggests that production according to civic agriculture addresses the loss of middle producers and the associated decline of the local community connected with the price/production and land treadmills. For civic agriculture to work, it involves a commitment between community and farmers to support an economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable type of agriculture and food production that depends on local resources, and serves local markets and consumers.

Although the evidence shows that “bigger is better” idea is not necessarily accurate, this belief, dominant in the industrial agriculture age, drives demand in the farmland market and contributes to the demise of the mid-sized operators - those most likely to be social-oriented farmers. Therefore, it is important to understand why the belief that “bigger is better” is viewed by farmers as the best and only strategy for survival in agriculture today (despite being responsible for farm concentration). Hence, it is essential to identify the processes that influence farm concentration and the proliferation of the technological/land market treadmills at the level of the local community.

Goldschmidt Hypothesis and Related Studies

The relationship between the structure of agriculture and the social and economic well-being of U.S. rural communities was documented as early as 1946 by the anthropologist Walter Goldschmidt. His classic study, *As You Sow*, compares two

³ Sustainable agriculture entails a set of production practices that are economically profitable for farmers, while preserve and enhance environmental quality, and contribute to the farm household and community well-being (Lyson, 2004)

Californian communities in the same region with similar populations and agricultural sales. Goldschmidt (1978) found that the community quality under the system of large-scale, absentee-owned, industrial farms, was poorer across a host of dimensions when compared with the quality of a community composed mainly of family farmers, who provided the management and labor for their owned farms. Known as the “Goldschmidt Hypothesis”, the argument is that communities dominated by larger-industrial farms have a smaller middle-class, lower family incomes, poorer-quality public services, and less community participation than do communities dominated by midsized family farms. That is, interdependence exists between farm size and community quality. When industrial scale increases, community quality according to Goldschmidt is expected to decline because it is the middle-class (midsized farmers) that is most closely associated with a better quality of life according to almost any accepted measure of community well-being (Putnam, 2000).

It was not until the 1970’s, when Goldschmidt’s controversial study from the 1940s was republished and widely circulated, that a series of studies emerged stimulated by testing the “Goldschmidt Hypothesis”. These rural sociological studies examine the relationship between farm scale (sales, acreage) and agricultural structure. Social-fabric indicators of community well-being that were explored include population loss (Swanson 1980), social disruption (Lobao, 1990), civic participation (Heffernan & Lasley, 1978; Lyson, 2004), class structure (Goldschmidt, 1978), and voting patterns. Lobao (1990) examined 18 studies carried out between 1972 and 1985 and found nine that supported the Goldschmidt hypothesis that increasing large farms affects negatively the community quality of life, while seven showed mixed results and two did not support it. Lobao (1990) suggests that the last group used relatively irrelevant indicators and that in general she found sociological agreement with Goldschmidt. During the 1980’s and 1990’s new studies attempted to address some of the weaknesses observed in the previous studies associated with the Goldschmidt hypothesis (Barnes & Blevins, 1992; Gilles & Dalecki, 1988; Green, 1985; Harris & Gilbert, 1982; Lobao & Schulman, 1991). Some extend the farm scale/community quality issue to new theoretical questions. For example, Gilles and Dalecki (1988) include agro-climatic factors in the analysis and Lobao and Schulman (1991) emphasize the importance of regional contextual factors, such as labor market

conditions, citizen engagement in public life, and state regulatory efforts. They argued such factors show adverse effects of large scale farms on community well-being.

In general, however, most rural sociological findings using the Goldschmidt Hypothesis have a basic flaw because they are based on county-level data from the national Agricultural Census, data with limited suitability for explaining community-level variation to which they are applied. Relationships between farm organization and community characteristics are location-specific and mediated by size and economic diversity of the community, agricultural commodities produced, and proximity to urban areas (Lobao & Meyer, 2001). Thus, it is imperative to do more community-level research, particularly in the context of changes wrought by the emergent land market treadmill, an idea which emerged after these studies were done.

In contrast to the earlier studies, later studies found more mixed results testing the Goldschmidt Hypothesis (Green, 1985; Harris & Gilbert, 1982; Lobao & Schulman, 1991; Lobao, Schulman & Swanson, 1993). Of course, 30 to 40 years had passed since Goldschmidt's original work. Agricultural economists, in particular Barnes and Blevins' (1992), show that farm size is positively related to median income and inversely related to poverty. They also found the number of hired farm workers employed is inversely related to poverty. These results support the economic argument that economy of scale is not responsible for the decay of small rural communities.

Studies in Illinois and other Midwestern states (Buttel, Lancelle & Lee, 1988; Van Es, Chicone & Flotow, 1988) found no negative impacts of farm structure on rural communities. One possible explanation is that in the 1980s the Corn Belt and Illinois, in particular, had large scale corn-soybean row-crop agriculture, a production system which does not necessarily fit the industrial model of heavy dependence on capital or labor, as in California's horticultural farms (Lobao, 1990). Gilles and Dalecki (1988) even found a positive association between the number of large scale farms and well-being in Corn Belt farm counties and in the Great Plains (1950-1970), although counties with greater numbers of farm workers tended to have lower socio-economic well-being, similar to Goldschmidt's (1978) prediction. It is important to remember all these studies were done about 20 years ago, and farm concentration has proceeded rapidly since then.

Furthermore, the research continues to be based on county-level as opposed to community-level data (Jackson-Smith & Gillespie, 2005).

Lyson, Torres and Welsh (2001) confirmed the Goldschmidt hypothesis by finding negative effects related to farm concentration in rural communities. Their New York study showed that in a rural community - where residents are engaged in civic activities, self-employment is high or small businesses are common - a more favorable social and economic situation is found compared to where concentration of businesses as well as farms has taken place. Likewise, Tolbert, Irwin, Lyson and Nucci (2002) found that increase in farm scale negatively affects community social and economic well-being, but that the involvement of local business people and family farmers in social activities is a factor enhancing social well being. Lobao and Meyer (2001) argue that recent studies denote significant impacts of farm structure on communities and find consistent results over time and across different levels of farming dependent counties with the Goldschmidt hypothesis. Thu and Durrenberger (1998) similarly support the hypothesis in their examination of the development of recent, industrialized hog operations impacts on Iowa communities. Therefore, the common operator assumption that a large industrialized farm is the only strategy for achieving family economic goals clearly has unintended negative consequences for the quality of life of rural communities.

Finally, some studies focus on the links between farm size and structure and farmers' engagement in community organizations. Wright et al. (2001) found that the closer individuals are involved with livestock agricultural production the fewer concerns they express about its social and environmental impacts on their community. Other studies qualitatively document the community consequences of changes in farm organization and size on the quality of relationships within specific rural areas documenting intense negotiation and friction between community residents and the pork industry (Bonanno & Constance, 2006; Constance & Bonanno, 1999; Thu & Durrenberger, 1998). In a recent study, Jackson-Smith and Gillespie (2005) analyzed the effects of agricultural change (growth in farm size, use of hired labor and other structural changes) on Wisconsin dairy farm operators' involvement in community organizations, and their ties with neighbors. They found that larger dairy farmers are more likely to be part in formal and informal community social groups, but have less contact with those

neighbors who complain often about farm odors. Jackson-Smith and Gillespie argue it is the type of person and not the size of farm operation that most influences personal relationships with neighbors and community engagement. However, the animal/dairy operations they studied may differ qualitatively from intensive agricultural operations when scale is increased. Therefore, their findings cannot be extrapolated as contradicting the Goldschmidt hypothesis.

The Goldschmidt hypothesis literature does not give a clear answer about whether continued grain-farm concentration in the Midwest, where farmers historically had high community engagement (Elder & Conger, 2000; Salamon, 1992), will have direct consequences for their continued participation, affect levels of trust among neighbors, and therefore, have consequences for the local store of social capital in the local community.

Recent Change in the Farmland Market

Farmland markets are essentially local and participants heavily influenced by nearby social, financial, and economic factors (Raup, 2003, Morehart, 2009). The economic vitality and competitiveness of agriculture relies on farmers' access to farmland, either through ownership, custom operations or leasing agreements with landowners (Sotomayor, Ellinger & Barry, 2000). Corn Belt farmland values rose dramatically over the past decade becoming almost prohibitively high for small and young farmers to expand through land purchases. Morehart (2009), points out that higher farmland prices in the last decade are related to robust growth in farm income sustained by government support payments to grain commodities, suburbanization gobbling up land, investors seeking protection from the stock market, and the seller use of IRS code section 1031 exchanges, which provides a tax incentive to farmers who profit from selling farmland. According to 1031 rules, if sellers make a like-kind exchange for farmland elsewhere they abstain from paying capital gains on the transaction (Helmert, 2005).

The leasing of farmland is an old and widespread practice in the United States that facilitates farmers' access to land. Due to the current historically high land values the leasing rate in Illinois is especially high (Bogue, 1963). Data for participants in the University of Illinois Farm Business Farm Management (FBFM) System indicates that

these farmers leased 79 percent of the land that they operated in 1997. Through leasing farmers can avoid illiquidity and share risks through crop-share arrangements (Barry et al., 2000).

Farm leases, however, have changed drastically in the last three decades. Historically, share leases were the dominant lease agreement in the U.S. Midwest. However, a significant shift from crop-share to cash-rent has been documented for the region (Baron, 1982; Barry, Sotomayor & Moss, 1998). In the 1990's, Scott (1994) confirmed the increase in cash-rent leases and a consequent decline in crop-share arrangements in the American Midwest. According to annual survey data summaries issued by the Illinois Farm Business Farm Management Association (FBFMA) the percentage of Illinois cash-rented farms increased from 31% in 2000 to 37% in 2005.

Leasing farmland was once viewed as the bottom step in mounting the agricultural tenure ladder to land ownership (Kloppenbergs & Geisler, 1985; Wunderlich, 1994). It was a strategy for a young farmer to begin farming despite having little capital. Nowadays, leasing is the method used by established farmers to access farmland for enterprise expansion (Barry et al., 1998). The widespread shift to cash-rent potentially presents barriers for young people starting farming, because bias exists toward established farmers, in a rental market dominated by high lease rates (Wooddard et al., 2010; Wunderlich, 1994). But we have little data, other than the rising average age of farmers (U.S. Census of Agriculture, 2007) to confirm whether young or beginning farmers being shut out of the rental market is an actual trend.

Historically, crop-share rental was the traditional Midwestern leasing form. Owners and operators shared production risks, due to a positive correlation between the value of crop production and rental responsibility to the landlord (Barry et al., 1998). The critical difference between share and cash agreements consists of risk sharing, asymmetric information⁴, transaction costs with multiple landlords, and contract law (Sotomayor et al., 2000). The risk-sharing characteristic of share leases makes it the preferred choice over cash-rent leases by farmers trying to minimize high variability of crop yields and farm income (Barry et al., 1998). Typically, crop-share leases are used when landlords

⁴ Information asymmetry occurs when one party to a transaction has more or better information than the other party.

and tenants have a close cooperative relationship (Salamon, 2003). Under a crop-share agreement, landowners are more involved in the day-to-day decision-making, supervision and operation coordination. Thus, crop-share agreements involve joint management by the landowner and the tenant.

Prior to the 1990's crop share arrangements dominated rural Illinois agriculture, because landlords were mostly relatives, retired farmers, or long time neighbors (Salamon, 1992). Crop-share leasing contracts are typically simple and informal, and in many instances oral with the proverbial handshake sealing the deal. Because community social controls and family reputation are effective at maintaining equitable relationships, such informal leases worked (Allen & Luek, 1992). There is no account in the literature whether the increase in competition for land among farmers, land commoditization⁵ and more industrial scale operations that prioritized "bigger is better" and profit-orientation will make extinct long term, informal relationships between tenant and landlord (Foster & Magdoff, 2000).

By the late 1980s cash-rent replaced crop-share as the dominant leasing type nationwide, with 65% of leasing agreements in cash leases and 30% in share leases (Rogers, 1991). In a cash lease the owner cedes management control and use of the farmland to the tenant in exchange for a fixed cash payment negotiated before the growing season (Barry et al., 1998). Cash leases demand less involvement by owners, and the gain of management autonomy by tenants. In addition, in cash leases the tenant is entitled to government payments, while in share leases the payments must be split between the landlord and tenant in the same proportion as the crop is shared under the lease. However, cash-rent tenants assume all the risks associated with production and marketing in a bad year, or reap all the benefits in a good year (Barry et al., 1998). Cash-rent is believed to increase investment returns, to adjust to higher land values, and to provide a stable pattern of return over time (Barry et al., 1998).

Recent increases in cash leasing are viewed as largely landlord-driven, although larger producers, who deal with multiple landlords and understand the leasing market well, may prefer this arrangement (Barry et al., 1998). Woodard, Paulson, Baylis and

⁵ With the commoditization of the land, social and cultural values related to land lost importance and land price started to be determined only for its economic value.

Woodard (2010) found that larger farmers in Illinois pay higher cash-rents because they have the economies of scale to spread the costs for such rental rates. Sotomayor et al. (2000) observe that landowners with limited farming experience, who are absentee, retired, with no desire to participate in production and management decisions, or family members leasing land to a family corporation, are more inclined to use cash-rent leases. The high demands on a landlord for monitoring a tenant's actions under a crop-share lease also favors adoption of cash leases (Braverman & Stiglitz, 1982). In addition, female landowners are less likely than men to want involvement in farm decision-making, making it more likely for older women, in particular, to cash-rent their farmland (Constance et al., 1996; Rogers & Vandeman, 1993). Research on cash rent leases tends to use large data sets, such as county level data, and thus critical aspects of leasing agreements and the land market are overlooked. Therefore, it is important to learn whether additional reasons and players are leading the trend toward cash-renting and its effects on the local farmland market, and consequently, on the resources of community social capital underlying the local social fabric.

Effects of Farmland Market Restructuring on Community Social Capital

Using data from the late 1980's, Gilbert and Beckley (1993) found that Midwestern farmer-landlord relations were typically harmonious and satisfactory. In general, farmers place great importance on family bonds, trust, and the welfare and security of family members, their closest kin connections (Salamon, 1978, 1992). These values historically mediated choices made about leasing, intergenerational transfers of land, and length of farming careers. Until relatively recently most Illinois midsized farms were operated by a family member. When a farmer retired, a relative or a close family friend took over the land. Although landlords prefer kin as tenants, escalating land values now make it difficult for family members farming to pay their kin rent or buy for what the land is worth in an over-valued market (Duffy, 2004).

Although information about the leasing market is limited, informal evidence from farmers, professional managers and others suggest that the competitiveness and scope of negotiations between farmers and landlords have increased as growth-oriented farmers bid intensively against other operators for additional land and cash lease is used as a bidding strategy (Barry et al., 1998; Ramirez-Ferrero, 2005; Sotomayor et al., 2000).

The trend toward cash-rent in Illinois and elsewhere raises concerns about: 1) the risk associated with it, 2) reasonable levels for rent values, and 3) the social costs to families and communities (Barry et al., 1998). Narrow profit margins prevail when farmers compete to offer the highest rent (Edwards, 2003). Increasingly, only the largest Corn Belt farmers can afford cash-rented land due to the capital required to cover production loans (Fraser, 2004; Woodard et al., 2010). Often cash rent is associated with those farmers strongly profit-oriented. Sotomayor et al. (2000) found that cash-rent is related to a short-term relationship between landlords and operators, and to farmers with higher debt-to-asset ratios, characteristically larger operators. Cash-rent leases are also associated with a greater turnover of operators (Pieper & Neil, 2000), decreased long-term management investments, and the erosion of good communication between landlords and tenants (Carolan, 2006). These are factors particularly relevant to the character of the local community's social fabric.

Instability of tenure, characteristic to cash-rent leasing arrangements, communication issues, and conflicting goals between owners and operators have community costs. Carolan (2005), in a study of the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices, suggests that the "worry" about losing a lease prevents tenants from discussing alternative management practices with landlords, indicative of a lack of trust between parties. Trust is a critical loss to agriculture and communities as farmers and landlords increasingly find their relations more adversarial as well as geographically, socially, and culturally distanced (Carolan, 2005; Pieper & Neil, 2000).

Geographical, social or cultural segregation decrease the frequency of general social interaction and, eventually, negatively affects trust building and community maintenance (Putnam, 2000). Baumgartner (1988) argues that distancing among people generates weak community-level social controls and also erodes strong patterns of mutual aid. Therefore, where people are atomized and separated from one another by social distance groups are likely to experience lack of intimacy, social cohesion and cooperation - factors which directly influence community social capital generation. Therefore, aggressive, growth-oriented farmers' actions have the potential to erode institutionalized community trust via their actions in the farmland market. As a result, a decrease in trust could affect the kind of relationships that are forged between farmers and landlords, farmers and

farmers, and farmers and community. We do not know whether erosion of trust will undermine rural communities that in the past depended on trust and engagement to make them work or what the implications of farm concentration will bring for communities. An ethnographic study is opportune to understand the local culture and the consequences of agricultural change on the community.

According to Salamon (1992) and Allen and Lueck (1992, 2004), the local farmland market's distinctiveness is that community context matters. That is, the local community can and does affect farmland market opportunities for operators. In the Midwest, personal and business reputations are critical knowledge for participants in local farmland leasing transactions (Allen & Lueck, 1992; Salamon, 1992). Reputations are formed by life-long relationships and access to reliable information. Farmers' and landowners' behaviors are constantly assessed by the community and influence decisions about whom landlords or tenants prefer to deal with. For example, farmers seeking to represent themselves as good citizens with a good reputation, to impress current and potential landlords, are motivated to be engaged in the local community. This farm- business goal customarily motivated active engagement in church, community service and social organizations (for example, the school board). However, a good reputation and positive information about performance may be losing importance in operators' decision-making, due to a recent trend of local landlords being replaced by absentee owners and non-local investors (Duffy, 2004).

The Decline of Social Capital in Rural Places

Putnam defines social capital as “features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Putnam, 1995:67). Social capital enables people and communities to pursue shared goals effectively, strengthening bonds of social trust and overcoming challenges of collective action (Putnam, 2000). Considerations about whether traditional social ties and institutions have declined with “modernization” (i.e. urbanization and industrialization) have long been discussed in the social sciences (Putnam, 2000; Stein, 1960; Wirth, 1938). Putnam (2000) provides an influential explanation for changes he observes in U.S. community social and civic life. He argues that since World War II trust declined and social ties weakened across all aspects of U.S. public life. His research shows that

Americans are becoming less engaged in community voluntary associations, political activities, and many forms of informal social interactions, although the U.S. has higher levels of these factors than other nations. Also, he argues that the decrease in civic participation is associated with falling levels of social trust and neighborliness, and he insists that “trust and engagement are two facets of the same underlying factor—social capital” (Putnam, 1995:73).

Land is a sensitive topic for rural communities because it is part of a community’s cultural heritage (Salamon, 1992). In rural places, where social capital is abundant, relationships, empathy, or trust can be destroyed by behaviors relating to land perceived as opportunistic or ignoring reciprocity (Robison, Schmidt & Barry, 2002). Practices related to community land - farm-industrialization, farm consolidation, cash-rent increases, absentee landlords, and non-local operators working community land - all have the potential to affect community social and economic well-being. Robinson et al. (2002) suggest that to completely understand the community implications of the land market restructuring, social capital should be included in the analysis.

When social capital is high, relationships among community members are characterized by regular social interaction, respect for others, and recognition of their interdependence. In small communities, neighborliness, trust, and civic engagement are influenced by the social expectation that people share - norms of reciprocity - that help make life predictable and equitable over time (Coleman, 1990,1993; Putnam, 2000). “Actors do not behave or decide as atoms outside a social context, nor do they adhere slavishly to a script written for them by the particular intersection of social categories that they happen to occupy. Their attempts at purposive action are instead embedded in concrete, ongoing systems of social relations” (Granovetter, 1985:487).

In general, research about rural community social capital focuses on the community effects that arise from ‘networks’ of individuals and the ‘shared values’ that comes up from living together (Flora, 1998; Salamon, 1992). Tolbert et al. (2002) found that small towns anchored by civic minded entrepreneurs, endowed with public meeting spaces, and integrated by active civic organizations are associated with greater social well-being. Lyson et al. (2001) also found that communities with higher levels of well-being indicators (more engaged citizenry, more churches, more public spaces, more civic

organizations) are associated with lower levels of: poverty, income inequality, or crime; along with higher median family income and better health indicators. Higher levels of social capital – visible in more interaction among community members – can lead to productive social and economic outcomes (Colleman, 1990; Putnam, 1995).

Community social-capital creation is also linked with adoption of sustainable agriculture systems in the literature. Flora's (1995) studies of four Midwest communities found that farmers' adoption of sustainable agriculture contributes to community social capital by enhancing the ability to mobilize resources, to identify problems, and to consider alternatives. A study of farmers' markets by Lyson et al. (1995), for example, found that the social capital generated by them led to adoption of sustainable agriculture methods by the engaged farmers. They saw a link between such practices and the creation of new businesses which benefit the local community. Lyson argues that sustainable agriculture, farmers' markets, community and school gardens, small organic farms, and community-supported agriculture all foster local economic development by providing opportunities for farmers and consumers to unite over common activities, which indirectly strengthens rural community ties (Lyson, 2004; Lyson et al., 2001; Sharp, Imerman & Peters, 2002). Because little of this research looked at rural places devoted to intensive row crop agriculture it is necessary to explore whether alternatives to intensive grain crops have also the potential to strengthen local social connections in the Corn Belt.

In rural places social networks are originated by the combination of formal ties (organizational membership), informal ties (friendship), and sometimes kinship ties. The overlapping of social networks and a shared history, characteristic of small communities, is widely accepted as enhancing trust, cohesion, that contribute to community social and economic well-being (Elder & Conger, 2000; Flora, 2003; Salamon, 2003; Tolbert et al., 2002). Liu, Ryan, Aurbach & Besser (1998) found that participation in local organizations, such as church-based ones, is critical to rural community mobilization. Formal engagement is important because it helps to disseminate information while promoting regular social interactions that help create trust among community members.

Small communities still dependent on agriculture and characterized by tight-knit relationships, trust, and interdependence among its members are becoming relatively rare in rural America (Elder & Conger, 2000; Lobao, 1990; Salamon, 2003). Agricultural

factors, such as, the decline of mid-sized family farmers, the increase of off-farm work especially by women, and the rise of divorce due to the stress among other factors have negative implications for the store of community social resources (Chavez, 2005). For example, Bartlett (1993) found the primary reason farmers worked off-farm was the uncertainty associated with farm income. Working off-farm allows less time or energy for community engagement. In tough times, such as the “Farm Crisis” of the mid-80s, farm families experience increased family conflicts, depression, divorce, substance abuse and domestic violence (Conger & Elder, 1994, Johnson & Booth, 1990). Stressed farm families, whatever the source of strain, are less likely to initiate community participation.

Community values and norms are important determinants of people’s behavior in social networks, as well as underlying unwritten social controls that prevent resorting to formal, legal sanctions for conflict among neighbors. In general, these norms are based on customary understandings about what behavior is acceptable in a given social context (Coleman, 1993; Putnam, 1993). Studies about rural people’s character and beliefs find that farmers in particular, hold values that differ substantively from those of the general population. In general, farm families are stable, religious, conservative, satisfied with their lifestyle and more concerned about others’ opinions than the general population (Drury & Tweeten, 1997; Howard, Brinkman & Lambert, 1996; Jose & Crumly 1993). Being at least a decade old, however, these studies lack insight about consequences of recent structural changes in agriculture and the farm population’s rapid decrease on community values, cohesiveness, predictability, or trust.

Tension among farmers is well documented by Dudley (2000). In *Debt and Dispossession*, she exposes how farmers isolated themselves during the Farm Crisis of the 1980s. In those difficult times, rather than cooperating farmers were competing among themselves. Instead of sharing problems with neighbors they chose to hide and isolate themselves from the community. Dudley found that the economic failure due to loss of a family farm was less bearable than feelings of betrayal by family and neighbors, humiliation and shame. Ramirez-Ferrero (2005) argues the continuous expansion and incorporation of mechanization and technology in rural areas are associated with the widely held “bigger is better” belief, explored initially. He finds this dominant idea contributes to a loosening of social ties by decreasing needs for labor exchanges and by

weakening motivations for community engagement. This belief, he points out also has led to the increased isolation of farm families and greater competitiveness among neighbors, because enhanced individualism is basic to “bigger is better”. However, in general, the extended family network as a whole is largely overlooked in these findings of greater household isolation. It may be that while industrialized farmers remain socially embedded in the extended family their agricultural focus shifts to outside the community because they are less dependent on local resources or support than are other farmers. A loss of community dependency thus may liberate some farmers from the coerciveness of local social controls.

Increased use of personal computers, the internet and other communication devices have modified local values and practices by decreasing the traditional preference for face-to-face interactions, much as happened in urban areas (Allen & Dillman, 1994). This transformation of small towns was noted more than 50 years ago by the authors of *Small Town in Mass Society*. Small towns and metropolitan areas becoming more enmeshed, is another outcome of both the agricultural and economic sectors being restructured, and correspondingly negatively affecting rural community social capital (Goldschmidt, 1998; Salamon, 2003). Goldschmidt (1998) argues that industrial farming fosters the urbanization of rural communities with farming industrialization allegiance to the market’s profit orientation and media-driven urban values replacing traditional rural community customary practices and face-to-face interactions with impersonal laws and business arrangements (such as cash-rent leases). Social interactions become shaped more by economic rather than social values in this reshaped community context. It is a process that potentially erodes the sense of community, neighborliness, and trust in a small town. Therefore, it is important to understand whether farmers and communities have developed greater social distancing as farmers’ and townspeople’ involvement in community affairs declines, in association with Midwestern agriculture becoming industrialized and less family-oriented.

The last decades of the twentieth century witnessed a renaissance of rural populations in the U.S.A. and Europe that brought urban newcomers in large numbers to rural places, where people had outmigrated for much of the previous century (Johnson & Beale, 1998). These newcomers provoked social and economic changes that

corresponded with the decline in agriculture's importance to rural economies. Newcomers came to formerly agrarian communities, settling in adjacent often upscale subdivisions, or in scattered sites across the countryside, both as full-time residents or as occasional second-home occupants. These new populations are described for England by Bell (1992) and for the U.S. by Herbers (1986), and ethnographically in the U.S. by Fitchen in the Northeast (1991) and Salamon in the Midwest (2003). Changes to the stock of social capital are already documented in rural places not dominated by farming in the above studies. Salamon (2003) investigated the changes in social relations in Midwestern communities facing in-migration of urbanites and rapid agricultural restructuring. She suggests that rural communities are replacing closely connected social networks with more loose-knit ones. Urban people have moved to rural areas whether due to white flight, or the desire for a small town way of life or affordable housing. But they still commute to urban places for work, shopping, services and entertainment. At the same time even oldtimers now look beyond the local community for work, goods or services. Their commuting has implications for community cohesion and structure due to less time for personal, family, community activities, or local shopping (Allen & Dillman, 1994; Putnam, 2000; Salamon, 2003; Tigges & Fuguitt, 2003).

More locals shopping away from the community negatively affects the local economy. For example, Green (2001) found that commuters in rural Wisconsin spend on average seventy-five dollars per week on retail shopping outside their local community. As rural households continue shifting their regular shopping to central places it reduces local and county tax revenues and devastates local commerce. Losing main street businesses means communities experience a reduction in public spaces for people to meet and build community which means a loss of unique "Third Place" institutions that provide a community's identity (Oldenburg, 2003). Tolbert et al. (2002) suggest that communities with more third places (coffee shop, grocery store, barber shop, etc) benefit from the interaction and connectedness among members which is fundamental to social well-being. Furthermore, local entrepreneurs historically are highly engaged in the local community, because it is good for business.

As seen above, diminished effectiveness of neighborliness, community engagement, and social control mechanisms are likely to be unintended consequence of structural

changes in agriculture. Thus, farm changes have directly and indirectly led to the loss of local jobs (in town and on farms) and the decline of rural economic, social, and environmental well-being (Albrecht, 2006; Fuguitt & Beale, 1996). Goldschmidt's (1978) prediction that family farmers would be replaced by industrialized farms throughout America is becoming a reality, even in the Corn Belt a region historically dominated by family farms. In a 1995 visit to rural Iowa, Goldschmidt found validation for his predictions about agricultural industrialization and its impacts on farm size and local communities: long monocrop fields, few farmsteads, loss of local businesses, churches and schools. And he noted that outsiders and larger farmers greed for wealth comes at the expense of a sense of community (Thu & Durrenberger, 1998).

The disappearance of family farms and the view that "bigger is better" have potentially devastating effects on the well-being of rural communities. We should expect the process of concentration to continue. The vital question is whether agrarian communities should expect bigger farmers to be as committed to their well being by providing the same community engagement that we know mid-sized and small family farms did and do (Elder & Conger 2000; Ramirez-Ferrero, 2005; Salamon, 1992).

According to Goldschmidt (1998), when short-term profits are the dominant business motivation for farming, long term social and human well-being concerns may be affected. The Illinois small community which is the object of this study is now poised between the dominance by midsized family farms being replaced by industrial-sized farms. Thus we can view this community in flux and crystallizing regional trends important to describe, and examine. In particular, whether the change due to conventional thinking that "bigger is better" threatens the historic attachment of Midwestern farmers to their local community is a topic ideally suited to an ethnographic study.

Conclusion and Research Questions

Given the importance of the farmland market to a place where many families remain engaged in agriculture, it is critical to investigate whether the changing dynamics of the land market are reweaving the social fabric of Midwestern rural community life. An understanding of the emerging social dynamics among landlords, tenants, and community is critical to a better comprehension of how these factors affect the social and economic sustainability of small rural communities (Robson et al., 2002; Strange, 1988).

It is important to understand whether community practices and beliefs, family reputation, and the store of trust may decline in relevance, particularly in the scenario of increased competition for acquisition of rental land, the concentration of farmland, and other restructuring outcomes. Also whether farmers still react to social control pressures from the community in which they live is reflected in their management behavior, or whether they are still influenced by the rules of engagement and norms of reciprocity that traditionally shaped community social life is important to explore. Whether these long-held social norms and community controls will continue to shape farmer strategies to acquire land in a more competitive and regionalized farmland market is the focus of this dissertation.

Based on the gaps noted in the review of literature, this study raises four relevant questions about change in one Midwestern agrarian community representative of the wider Corn Belt.

1: Does the “bigger is better” mindset continue to be viewed by farmers as the best and only strategy for survival in agriculture today;

2: How does the farmland market work in a context shaped by increasing competition for land and whether farmer strategies adopted for expansion affect general trust and neighborliness among farmers in general ;

3: What are the implications of 1 and 2 for the local community’s store of social capital, specifically farmers’ community engagement, from a local land market shaped by an ideology of growth; and

4: What are the implications of the previous questions for the future sustainability of an agrarian community that represents continuity with a tradition that began with the first settlers in 1800’s?

Answering whether the farmland market restructuring produces a community effect is complex. For farmers, the community and farming contexts are relevant and often affect their decision-making. Because the contexts of farm and community are interrelated, it is important to show how agricultural change has impacted farmers, consequently, whether these changes affect their connections with the local community. The existent literature fails in explaining the impacts of agricultural change at the community level. A qualitative study is particularly suited to answer these questions

because only through long term involvement with a single community may subtle behaviors, such as, social norms and pressure can be detected and change analyzed by observing their relevance, irrelevance or violation in daily life.

Chapter Three: Research Design and Field Study Methods

This study is focused on a single Corn Belt, agrarian community in central Illinois. Agriculture is a key part of the economic and cultural importance of central Illinois, and the state as a whole. The Prairie and its fertile land attracted immigrants (Americans and Europeans) from its opening for settlement in the early 19th century. Today Illinois ranks among the nation's leaders in production of corn, soybeans, and swine. The Midwestern farming community is rich in ethnic and agrarian culture and heritage of over a century since Illinois was the frontier, and tends to serve as a national icon of deep connections to a rural way of life. Therefore, Illinois is a well chosen representative location for studying agrarian community life in the American Midwest in a period of rapid change.

This chapter describes the process of data collection and how the study was designed to respond to the research questions raised in the previous chapter. Particular issues which drove the ethnographic study are the impacts on rural communities from the well-recognized regional restructuring of agriculture in the past decade, specifically by the rapid concentration of farm operations, changes in farmland leasing practices, and a local land market shaped by a shared ideology of growth.

The Study Location

The town, focus of this community study, is called by the fictitious name "Farmington" to preserve the confidentiality promised to informants. It is a community with a population just over 1,000 located in Central Illinois, an important agricultural area of the Corn Belt Prairie. It is located about 45 miles south of the state's capital Springfield (population: 111,000) in Christian County whose county seat is Taylorville (population: 11,400).

The community was chosen, with the assistance of the University of Illinois Extension specialists based in Taylorville, to be representative of Christian County because of its size (approximately 1,000 inhabitants), soil types (typical for the Black Prairie), and as a place where agriculture remains important to community identity (Fitchen, 1991). Despite much agricultural change, unlike other small towns in the county, Farmington retains a relatively stable population, a lively main street, multiple active churches, local schools and fair civic engagement. A detailed description of the community is presented in Chapter Four.

Research Design

Participant-observation is the predominant qualitative methodology employed in this ethnographic community study. Qualitative research is typically used to explain the questions “how and why” processes, events and outcomes occur. The approach allows us to increase our understanding phenomena by describing and learning about it from the participants’ point of view. Creswell (1994) defined a qualitative study as ‘inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting’. Denzin and Lincoln (1998:3) added that: “Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter.” This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. As a form of qualitative research, participant-observation provides a close and intimate experience with a given group of individuals (or a particular community) through an intensive participation in their daily lives and in their natural environment. In general, participant-observation research is carried out for extended periods of time. It is particularly useful for gaining an understanding of local norms, beliefs, and civic engagement. This approach emphasizes the importance of looking at behavior in the context of the setting in which it takes place (Neuman, 1997).

My study of the central Illinois community was carried out over almost two years between 2005 and 2006. I used a combination of participant-observation, interviews, and survey instruments, and drew on local archival documents (newspapers, histories, books, records), over the course of the fieldwork. During that time I interviewed, interacted with and observed the community while living with an 80+ year old widow and retired high school teacher. She drew me into her complex and rich social life structured by her active community engagement across a variety of service-club affiliations, and her regular attendance at local activities such as weekly Bingo games, church services, and club meetings. I found my landlady through my first three informants who suggested I talked to her because she previously had renters and lived alone in a big house. When I approached her with my request she was happy to rent me a room full time in the summer and on and off during the school year, and essentially adopted me as a daughter.

The research design had two phases:

- 1 - Over the approximately first eight months this stage involved the goals were to learn about the restructured farm sector, to collect information about the community, and to document community engagement. Community culture was accessed through face-to-face interviews, community observations, newspapers, participation in community clubs, and document analysis in the local library and University of Illinois archives.
- 2 - In the second stage farmer-operators and farm landlords were the major focus, although my participant-observation alone and with my landlady in community activities continued throughout the study. Interviews focused specifically on learning about perceptions of farm change and community engagement and cultural change. A face-to-face interview of operators and landlords provided a profile of farms, the extent of shift from crop-share to cash-rent leases in the past decade, a brief history of the family farm – how it changed in size and operation over time, and the community engagement of farm household members. In addition, informal talks, community observation and newspapers helped to understand the social world of local farmers and landlords.

Data Collection Procedure

Before starting the fieldwork in Christian County, research methods were reviewed by the University of Illinois, Internal Review Board (IRB) and consent granted in 2005 (and subsequent annual renewals). To facilitate entrance to the community, a news release introducing the project was published in the local and county seat newspapers three weeks prior to starting interviews. This mechanism assured that residents would be aware of the study. In fact, many people contacted reported reading about the study in the newspaper, which indicated that the community continued to be cohesive and engaged. A pilot questionnaire was performed with four community members before the initial interviews began. Their names were suggested by the Taylorville Extension office specialists. The pilot test allowed me to time the questionnaire and correct ambiguous questions. In addition to the formal community survey interviews, data were obtained from varied sources: face-to-face interviews with farmers, landowners and townspeople; observations of community life, informal talk, and archival documents (Centennial Book, Farmington 1986 Planning Book, newspapers, plat books, Population Census, Agricultural Census, Commodity Payment recipients from

web sources). Archival documents were used to provide additional background information on the socioeconomic characteristics of Farmington and understanding of contexts in which to place social impacts related to agricultural restructuring.

Triangulation, characteristic of qualitative research, uses different methods of data collection, analysis, data sources or theories to double check the validity of the results. It is a research strategy that adds rigor, and allows associations to be drawn (Denzin, 1992). The use of different sources is essential to improve validation of data gained from intensive study focused on only one community. Due to the nature of a single case study, findings cannot be generalized but rather relationships can be drawn to other places for which the targeted community serves as a representative.

In the summer of 2005 I rented a room in the house of the retired local high school teacher. My living in the community made possible daily participant-observation and getting to know many residents well. During my stay in the community (two to three months in the summers of 2005 and 2006, and two to three days a week throughout the academic year) I attended the local Catholic Church and helped prepare the weekly worship bulletins for the Presbyterian Church with my landlady. Almost weekly I attended local events with her such as: charitable dinners, service organization meetings (Kiwans and American Auxiliary), Bingo night at the American Legion Hall, and social gatherings in private homes. I helped my landlady run two community festivals by: making floats, selling raffle tickets (e.g. for the Homecoming Celebration), helping with pageant rehearsals and contest as well as attending fund raising events, high school basketball games, dances and other school events. My participation in varied settings provided opportunities to observe how local residents interact with each other and the nature of their community engagement. Key informants, such as, the mayor, a pastor, business people, school principal, and grain elevator manager were interviewed to gain understanding of the recent challenges faced by the local community. I also followed news about the community through the local weekly newspaper. My acceptance in the community was facilitated by my being Brazilian (this farming community is well aware of the increasing competitive importance of Brazilian agriculture), educational background (Masters' in Agricultural Economics and a student at the University of Illinois) and my landlady, as a retired high school teacher of 40 years, knowing everyone

in town. With time people came to know me and would chat informally when we met out in the community without my landlady's presence.

Concomitantly with participant-observation and exploring archival documents (such as a community history book and census data), I conducted a total of 124 interviews of both farmers and non-farmers in the community. A community survey interview instrument was used, and in addition to it a more general and flexible interview guide that included open-ended questions covering a range of topics focused on community life and farming (see Appendices A, B, C). As per IRB rules an informed consent was obtained from all participants. In the first stage the survey instrument concentrated on questions about community change, social engagement, activities and supportive exchanges with friends and families, and personal and family demographic information (age, marital status, type of residence, work, income) as well a few questions related to agricultural change (to those related to farming or willing to talk about it). In the second stage of the research only farmers and landlords were interviewed. In this phase, questions centered on agricultural changes in the past decade, community engagement, and competition in the farmland market. When necessary I employed probes as follow-up questions to clarify the meaning of terms they used or to stimulate more comments about subjects under discussion or interest. Topics of interest emerged inductively from the analysis in the course of the fieldwork and became the source of probes.

Due to my language limitations, all interviews were tape recorded with permission obtained from the informant, and transcribed to fieldnotes, as soon as possible. After an interview was completed I would record detailed notes about the location, emotional quality, and other characteristics of the informant and interview process. Likewise a field journal was kept to record my participation and observations of community events, social gatherings, informal conversations, and so on. Data obtained through these multiple methods are rich and deep for a small, although carefully constructed sample who was interviewed and observed, in depth and in their natural setting. My being engaged over a long period of time assured that I gained access to different groups and individuals and obtained comprehensive sense of the entire community.

The Sample

The first phase had the goal of interviewing a cross-section of the community, or about 10-15% of the total population. A sample of 100 households was selected randomly from the county telephone directory, using addresses that distinguished “Farmington” proper and surrounding countryside residents. However, difficulty resulted from the restricted number of available people at home (half the population commutes to work according to the 2000 Census). Because only retired seniors were at home or willing to be interviewed, the sample obtained did not reflect an age cross-section of the community. This fact forced us to adopt a new strategy for expanding the sample to be more representative.

The alternative plan developed included the voluntary assistance of my landlady whose 40 years in classroom brought her into contact with everyone who attended the local high school. In addition, despite being 80 years old, she remains actively involved in community activities and clubs – more so than any other single person I observed. She “adopted” me and took on my research challenges as her own. She facilitated access to most informants I interviewed. Often someone would say, “I’m only doing this because of [her].” She introduced me to (or suggested) additional informants, and thus the sample was enlarged by the “landlady-snowball method”. She included me into her community activities, introduced me to her network explaining I was a University of Illinois graduate student interested in the effects of agricultural change on rural communities in Christian County. Many times she contacted people personally to guarantee their participation when I contacted them.

The first stage of the research, between March and November of 2005, resulted in 87 people interviewed face-to-face including 60 townspeople, 17 farmers and 10 landlords. The previous categories are exclusive – i.e. the landlords are also townspeople but are not double counted. The interviews took place at the informants’ house or in the home of my landlady (her having the largest home in town was of curiosity to many who had not been inside her place) and lasted on average an hour and a half.

The second stage of data collection occurred between January and October of 2006. The farmers and landlords interviewed during the first phase were contacted again for a follow-up interview focusing exclusively on farming. However, five farmers and three

landlords interviewed in the first stage were not contacted for a variety of reasons - refusal, death, sickness, or bankruptcy – and were not considered in the sample⁶. Because our goal was to obtain a sample of at least 30 each of group, to assure statistical validity, I interviewed as many farmers and landlords as possible, until fieldwork had to end. New participants were also asked to complete the questionnaire used in the first stage, to enlarge that sample. In this second stage, 26 new farmers and 16 new landlords were interviewed. Therefore, the final sample obtained was 63 non-farming town households (out of approximately 400 occupied homes according to the census), 38 farmers and 23 landlords. A grain-elevator employee estimated the number of local active farmers: “My guess, I think we have something around 70 active farmers around here, some are fairly small compared to the others.” Of the 38 farmers 35 were grain producers while the remaining three identified themselves respectively as a hobby farmer, a cattle producer and a hog producer. I decided to include them in the study because they had pertinent observations about the farmland market and because their operations represent an outcome of this competitive farmland market. This decision proved to be wise because farmers from this subsample provided an interesting contrast to the mainstream farmers, as described in Chapter Five. Again, most interviews took place at the informants’ home or at my landlady’s home, depending on the informant’s wish and availability. These interviews ranged from two to three hours, particularly because I became better at the process with time.

Despite my efforts to get a good cross-section of the community the sample is skewed toward oldtimers and local landlords. Only 2 newcomers (who have lived in the community for less than five years) participated in the study. Within the category oldtimers are included five informants who lived elsewhere for many years to pursue a career but eventually chose to return. I decided to consider them as oldtimers because other oldtimers know them and their reputation and they are well linked to the community through kinship and friendship connections. Most interviewees (56.5%) say they used to know more people in Farmington than they know now. A frequently cited reason for not knowing as many people as previously, is the arrival of “many”

⁶ The three landlords not considered for the second phase’s Landlord Interview were considered in the townspeople sample.

newcomers. However, because oldtimers do not know the newcomers they categorize them as transients and not engaged in the community. Their lack of information may explain why the newcomers are also frequently labeled drug dealers, “welfare people”, or drunkards depending on how many visitors they have or whether their daily routines diverges from that of oldtimers. For example, I asked a retired female teacher if she could suggest any newcomers to be interviewed. She pointed out across the street to the house of a divorced man who just had moved to Farmington and said: “I heard that he moved here to stay closer to his daughter, but nobody knows anything about him, what he does, how he lives. He always has company, cars parked outside his garage, mostly kids. You should interview him. People say he is dealing drugs”. However, when I tried to contact him he refused participation in the study. I still knocked on the door of four different newcomer households but I met with no success. Sometimes we even scheduled a meeting but for many reasons (illness, refusal, and unexpected events) the individual did not show up. Only one of the newcomers interviewed moved to town recently (less than 2 years ago). Thus, my inability to interview more newcomers says something about newcomer/oldtimer lack of relationships or the absence of engagement of newcomers in this tight-knit community.

The other potential bias in the sample is the lack of inclusion of absentee landlords. I expected to obtain names of local and absentee landlords from their tenants, for my initial research strategy of using matched pairs of tenants and landlords. Their landlords turned out to be a very sensitive subject issue for farmers shown in their unwillingness to share names, even in the case of local or kin landlords. I was only able to obtain a few names of kin landlords, mostly local rather than absentee. A midsized farmer explained his refusal to disclose his absentee landlords’ names:

I don’t think it would be a good idea (to give the name or phone of the landlords) (laughing). The ones that I cash rent from don’t live around here. I wouldn’t feel comfortable with you calling them because I don’t know them very well. And I am not sure if they would be willing to participate. The ones I crop share are those that their mom passed away last year and I really don’t know them enough to recommend them. You can call my cousin who lives close to here if you want to.

The fact that no farmer was anxious to disclose a landlord’s name highlights the lack of trust and/or insecurity in the landlord/tenant relationship (which became an

indicator of the decline of community trust more generally). Their hesitation to name names also indicates that the tenants may know little about their absentee landlords, and that because they lack a reputation to rely on a landlord's reaction is unpredictable and potentially dangerous. Farmers are therefore unwilling to test the tie for something unnecessary to their working relationship with a valuable landlord. If a landlord chooses a cash-rent lease it is probable that they do not want to be bothered, and therefore a tenant is reluctant to bother them (Barry et al., 2000). The majority of the 23 landlords interviewed was met during my attendance at community Bingo nights or were introduced to me by my landlady. I only was able to interview two absentee landlords. Even so these "absentee" landlords maintained close ties to Farmington because they live in neighboring towns and one was a former Farmington resident (who left 10 years ago at the time of his retirement). Thus, these two "absentee" landlords knew about the tenants' reputation as well as local landlords and more than would a landlord that lived out of state or had no previous connection to the community. Although I was able to interview several landlords, the farmers themselves were not responsible for my making the contact.

In both stages of the research, once people agreed to be interviewed they were receptive to generously taking part. Refusals to be interviewed, however, did occur. Even after the intervention of my landlady around 17 people declined to participate in both stages. Some people refused to participate because of time restriction although I tried to accommodate them by scheduling a time that suited their needs. Farmers were particularly difficult to accommodate because of their busy work schedule. Some of them agreed to participate but scheduling an interview required several phone calls and sometimes more than one visit. Table 1 describes the characteristics of the participants.

Table 1

Community Sample' Socio-Demographic Characteristics (total N = 124)

	Townsppeople (includes landlords)	Farmers
Total (n)	86	38
Gender		
Male	58.1%	71.1%
Female	38.1%	28.9%
Average Age	54	51
Age (years)		
15-29	6.0%	5.3%
30-59	39.7%	71.0%
60+	54.3%	23.7%
Household status		
Single	9.3%	2.6%
Married	64.0%	78.9%
Divorced	7.0%	13.2%
Widow	19.8%	5.3%
Education Obtained		
High School graduate or higher	100.0%	100.0%
Bachelor's degree or higher	38.4%	31.5%
Income		
Under \$25,000	12.9%	5.3%
\$ 25-44,900	28.2%	13.2%
\$ 45-64,999	25.9%	42.1%
\$ 65-84,999	22.4%	23.7%
\$ 85,000 or more	10.6%	15.8%

Source: Community Survey

According to Census 2000, the sample is formed by approximately 12% of the community population or represented by 42% of the local households. IRB required participants to be over 18 years-of age which explains the high education level of informants (83% of the community obtained high school diplomas or higher (U.S. Census, 2000)).

Data Analysis

Inductive analysis was used to determine associations among the factors of agriculture, concentration of farm operations, competitive cash leasing, increased absentee ownership, and Farmington community social life and social capital resources. Inductive analysis means themes "emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis" (Patton, 1990:390). Dr. Salamon and I met weekly when I was on campus or by phone when I was in the field. I emailed her my

fieldnotes, she read them and made comments, and we discussed them thoroughly. These sessions were the initial inductive analysis process that was the source for probe questions, redirection or addition of some questions or topics in my research plan. These discussions during the first phase allowed me to determine my focus for the second phase centered on farmers. Transcripts of interviews and fieldnotes were compared to inductively identify trends or whether overlapping patterns emerged (Patton, 1990). Comments about how the farming restructuring was affecting community were consistently mentioned by farmers during interviews, spontaneously and in response to probes. Thus, this issue came inductively to be the focus of the fieldwork and the analysis. I then tried to assess the validity of my interpretations, by summarizing what I was seeing, and recounting it in the course of subsequent participant observation or interviews. In this way continually refining my hypotheses by this process. Therefore, I tested inductively the results obtained by posing the findings to informants for their comments.

Then, data were organized according to their content. Goetz and LeCompte (1981) say this method "combines inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all social events observed (p. 58)". As topics were identified and classified, they were compared by looking continually for similarities and contrasts between and among the recorded observations and interviews. In this way individual data are aggregated at the community level and thereby inherent patterns and trends are revealed. For example, core issues that arose and were validated by informants' concerns about changes in church participation, farmland competition, farmland rental prices, and community engagement.

Descriptive statistical analysis based on the frequency of questionnaire answers and secondary data is used to describe the characteristics of Farmington's agriculture and community-related behaviors. The SPSS, version 15.0, was used to analyze the data. Incomplete responses were treated as missing values, and were not included in the analysis. When possible I tested statistically those patterns and trends that I identified inductively in the interview and observational data. Chi-square statistical test was used to compare observed data with data I would expect to obtain according to a specific hypothesis.

For example, research questions were addressed through the comparative analyses of the fieldnotes and interview transcriptions from phases I and II. The frequency of times similar opinions were expressed determines if it characterizes a pattern or trend (minimum of 3 times accounts for a pattern and more than half the total sample characterize a trend). Also the statistical frequencies of data gathered in response to key interview questions were determined. When possible Census data and archival documents were used to compare with the conclusions reached through qualitative analysis and thereby increases validity.

Farmers' engagement in community is also answered with data provided by participant observation of farmers' attendance at community social activities during the course of my fieldwork. At one event I sold tickets and was able to count how many farm families, who were part of the study, attended the event. At another event organized by the Catholic Church I also was able to observe the presence of the farmers involved in the study. The combination of qualitative and descriptive statistics helps to increase the validity of the findings and overcome intrinsic biases and the problems that come from single method and single-observer (Denzin, 1992).

To better understand how the restructuring dynamics play out in the local land market, farm operations were divided into three scale categories when necessary: small farms, mid-sized farms, and large farms. Local farmers say they have a small operation if it is 700 acres or smaller. A 48 years old farmer who farms 550 acres commented: "I'm a small farmer by today's standards, pretty small around here. I used to be big not too long ago. I have an extra business. I cannot make a living on 550 acres. The farm competition is tough in this area and everybody wants some more (land). But you think that there should be a place for enough is enough." Similarly, farmers commonly describe the "big guys" as those operating on larger than 2,500 acres. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, I consider small farmers those farming up to 799 acres (19 farmers), middle farmers those operating from 800 to 2,499 acres (13 farmers), and large farmers those farming more than 2,500 acres (6 farmers).

Although the research process did not always proceed without difficulties, the challenges helped me to understand how rural communities manage daily responsibilities and commitments. Dealing with farmers showed me that their participation was

conditional due to their work schedules, for example, interviews with farmers were scarce around busy times like harvest. This observation is consistent with survey information that community festivals, meetings are set around farmers' schedule.

Chapter Four: The Community and Its Agricultural Context

This chapter provides the local community context for understanding the relationship between the ongoing agricultural restructuring and the local social fabric. The focus is on place – where community members reside and interact with one another. Place is described by drawing on findings from the face-to-face survey interviews of townspeople and farm operators, as well as from agricultural and population census data to highlight local farming patterns and the targeted community.

Unlike other American regions where rural community economies depend on tourism, manufacturing, or other industries, Illinois' smaller rural communities are mostly dependent on agriculture. An initial description of the state agricultural context is provided to illustrate the importance of farming to Corn Belt small communities. Because farming fundamentally underlies the economic and social aspects of rural community life, any changes in farming hold important consequences for the well-being of the communities. Interviews and informal conversations with local people, even non-farmers, showed preoccupation with the weather, commodity prices, or other agricultural related topics. "I heard the heat is already taking its toll on crops. I really feel sorry for my neighbors (who are farmers)", said a resident woman. Farming permeates the social fabric of small Midwest communities. It is what people talk about, gossip about, and worry about on a daily basis. Farmers and townspeople share more than fences, they share a rural lifestyle and a worldview shaped by their common farming culture (Fitchen 1991). Farmington illustrates how this small community is representative of and embedded in this wider Midwestern regional farming context.

Illinois Agriculture

Illinois agriculture is sophisticated, specialized, concentrated, and competitive. In 2005, Illinois agriculture contributed about seven percent of the nation's agricultural exports and covered around 80 percent of the state's total land area. Much of the state, including central Illinois, is comprised of prime farmland, utilized mainly to raise corn and soybeans. Despite the importance of the agriculture and food industries to the Illinois economy, its number of farms has declined consistently since 1910 (as have farm numbers in the Corn Belt as a whole). Currently there are approximately 75,000 farm operators in Illinois, down from 89,000 in the early 2000's – a decrease of 18%. Table 1

describes the state farms' characteristics. It shows an increase in the average acreage of the remaining farms due to the concentration process. In 1987 farms averaged 321 acres versus 375 acres in 2002, an increase of 17%.

In general, Illinois is a top recipient of government agricultural subsidies, due to the national policy bias toward grain commodities. Because commodity payments are proportional to production of corn and soybeans, payments have shifted to the larger farms as these farms expanded production on the concentrated farmland base (Bell, 2004; Ramirez-Ferrero, 2005). The American top 10% farm subsidy recipients receive two-thirds of the total payments, and the bottom 80% get just one-sixth (Mittal, 2002). In 2005, Illinois farmers were paid nearly \$2 billion through price support programs, conservation programs, and disaster payments for crop loss⁷. According to the Farm Subsidy Database, Illinois' Christian County grain farmers (focus of study) collected approximately \$35 million in 2005. As seen in Table 2, government payments recently grew by 34% over 15 years contributing indirectly to increased farmland values and rents (Goodwin, Mishra & Ortalo-Magne, 2003; Roberts, Kirwan & Hopkins, 2003).

Table 2

Illinois Farm Characteristics – 1987-2002

	1987	1992	1997	2002
Total number of farms	88,786	77,610	79,112	73,025
Total farm acreage	28,527	27,250	27,673	27,311
Average farm size (acres)	321	351	350	375
Total government payments to Illinois farms (\$ thousand)	308,389	320,532	372,268	412,636
Number of farms with corn crops	66,600	55,685	53,288	44,303
Number of farms with soybean crops	61,547	52,339	47,938	41,571

Source: USDA Census of Agriculture 1987, 1992, 1997, 2002.

Corn Belt farms, as a whole, tend to be specialized rather than diversified. Table 1 and Table 2 show that Illinois farms became more specialized over the last three decades. Farm numbers for mixed grains and livestock production decreased, livestock production,

⁷See Illinois Agrinews: State's farmers received nearly \$2 billion in federal payments. Feb., 2006.

in particular, declined. The number of farms dropped by 60% for cattle and 90% for hog production between 1980 and 2005. Correspondingly the number of farms dropped approximately 33% for corn and soybean production between 1987 and 2002, according to the Census of Agriculture. However, the average grain and livestock production per farm grew (see yields and average inventory in Table 3), which points to a trend of increasing land concentration and commodity specialization in the state.

Table 3

Illinois Selected Crops and Livestock Production

	1980	1990	2000	2005
Soybeans				
production (MM bu)	313	355	460	444
acreage (1,000)	9,350	9,100	10,450	9,450
yield (bu/acre)	33.5	39.0	44.0	47.0
Corn				
production (MM bu)	1,064	1,321	1,669	1,781
acreage (1,000)	11,440	10,400	11,050	11,950
yield (bu/acre)	93.0	127.0	151.0	143.0
Cattle				
number of farms	50,000	33,000	25,000	19,800
inventory (1,000 head)	3,399	2,243	1,990	1,786
avg inventory (head/farm)	67.98	67.97	79.60	90.20
Hogs				
number of farms	30,000	15,300	5,100	3,100
inventory (1,000 head)	6,950	5,700	4,050	4,000
avg inventory (head/farm)	231.7	372.5	794.2	1,290.3

Source: USDA, NASS, Illinois Field Office – 1980, 1990, 2000, 2005.

To produce agricultural products farmers need access to land. Access is obtained through ownership as well as rental of farmland. According to Table 4, there were 88,786 operators in Illinois in 1987, 39,060 were full-owners (own all the land they operate), 32,503 were part-owners (who own part of the land and rent the rest) and 17,223 were tenants (who rent all the land they operate). Thus full-owners represented 44% of total operators, part-owners 37%, and tenants 19%, in 1987. Over the years full-owner numbers increased until by 2002 they accounted for 54% of total farmland, while, part-owners accounted for 35% and tenants 11%. However, in part, the increasing proportion of full-owners is due to growth in the small farm group (farms with sales less than \$10,000 have increased over the years), who are more likely to work at least part-time off-farm, and are less likely to be full-time farmers (Hoppe & Korb, 2004).

Table 4

<i>Illinois Farm Operator Characteristics</i>				
	1987	1992	1997	2002
Full owners				
number of farmers	39,060	34,158	39,332	39,565
acreage (thousand)	5,500	4,759	5,161	5,908
Part owners				
number of farmers	32,503	29,217	27,956	25,334
acreage (thousand)	17,224	17,196	17,569	17,943
Tenants				
number of farmers	17,223	14,235	11,824	8,128
acreage (thousand)	5,803	5,295	4,476	3,460
Owned land				
number of farms	71,563	63,375	67,288	64,899
acreage (thousand)	11,497	10,455	11,076	11,570
Rented land				
number of farms	49,726	43,452	33,462	39,780
acreage (thousand)	17,030	16,796	15,741	16,597

Source: USDA Census of Agriculture, 1987, 1992, 1997, 2002.

Farmers typically want to own the land where they live, or at least some land they farm because ownership provides security, status, and validation for their being a good farmer (Salamon, 1992). As seen in Table 5, farmland values at record highs makes landownership more difficult for farmers, especially young farmers (Edwards, 2003; Kloppenberg & Geisler, 1985; Wunderlich, 1994). Higher farmland values are attractive to non-local buyers like investors. Increased land values also stimulate more land transferring via the real estate market rather than via inter-family transfers (Duffy, 2004). Even in a rural Christian County, local farmland market is now contested by farmers, investors and real estate developers. According to the Illinois Society of Professional Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers (2006), 36% of Illinois farmland buyers are non-local investors, 31% are local farmers, 10% are relocating farmers, 10% local investors, 10% recreational buyers, 2% others and 1% institutions.

Table 5

<i>Illinois Farm Real Estate Values, 1995-2006</i>				
Year	Avg. rent/acre (\$)	Change in rental price	Avg. land value/acre (\$)	Change in land value
1996	106	-	2,064	-
2000	119	12%	2,260	9%
2006	132	11%	3,800	68%

Source: USDA Agricultural Land Values and Cash Rents Statistical Summary.

Leased acreage is greater in areas characterized by crop-intensive agriculture and high land prices, typical for Illinois and other Midwestern states (Salamon, 1992). It follows that in Illinois, about 61% of farmland was rental acreage in 2002 (as seen in Table 4). With land in Christian County selling for over \$4000 per acre (personal communication with several farmers), leasing is the alternative found by farmers to expand their operations.

Farmington is situated in the Corn Belt - in the best Black Prairie soils - where agriculture has an important function in the socio-economic fabric of small communities. The expected long-term trends are for farm numbers to continue to decline, for farmland values, rents, and absentee landlords to increase, and for the average acres operated per farm to grow over time (Lyson, 2004, Marsden, 1998). As farming changes, so does a farming community. The next section provides information on the community – the place where Farmington people reside.

The Farmington Community

Farmington is located in Central Illinois, an important agricultural area of the Cornbelt Prairie. The town's perimeters are lined by fields of corn and soybeans, the main row crops that cover its rural landscape. It is located in Christian County whose county seat is Taylorville (population: 11,400). Christian County is considered a rural county due to its population and size of the county seat⁸. With a state highway passing right through the town and a location close to Interstate 55, people who live in Farmington can easily travel to Springfield, Taylorville, Decatur, Litchfield or other relatively nearby larger places where more jobs and services are found than offered locally. Farmington's location is considered "good" by approximately 26% residents. "We are just a short drive from hospitals, shopping, and fast food restaurants without the hustle and bustle of bigger towns", said a retired farmer.

Farmington was founded in 1872 and became a development-driven village after the construction of the railroad, which turned the community into a regular stopping place for trains and passengers. Farmington's prosperity, like the typical rural town in Midwest, depended largely of the presence of the rail line (Hudson, 1985). It lost some of its

⁸ According to 2003 Rural-Urban Continuum Code (USDA), Christian County is considered a nonmetro county with urban population of 2,500-19,999, adjacent to a metro area.

economic vigor once the railroads shifted from steam to diesel and no longer needed to stop for fuel and water (Cottrell, 1951). The railroad's traffic promoted the growth of both the population and main street businesses (Farmington Centennial Book 1972⁹). Railroads remain important to the local economy mainly for hauling grain from Farmington's grain elevator to mills and shipping ports and related farming traffic (Christian County Farm Bureau - <http://www.farmbureaunews.com/> 12/09/ 2011). By the opening of 20th century, as new residents arrived, agriculture was the major economic activity, although in the beginning coal mining was also important to the local economy. Even though the mines in the Farmington area were exhausted by the 1970's (interview data), mining in neighboring counties is still a job source for some local working-class residents. Farm families today raise corn, soybeans, and hogs on the surrounding landscape.

In general, Farmington's streets are narrow, and unpaved with few trees. In the center of town, with a few exceptions, most homes are old but well kept. Two story wood-sided houses with a small porch and front yard are the typical architectural style for downtown homes. A little farther from the business area, toward the edge of town, ranch style homes with larger yards become more common. New brick homes recently were built near the road to Springfield, highlighting the growing importance of commuting to town residents. In the summer well-cared gardens growing tomatoes, peppers, zucchini, and green beans are a common sight. The town is typically quiet during the day, with only few cars parked in front of some downtown businesses. In contrast, during commuting hours Farmington's streets and roads are quite busy as cars leave in early morning and then return at dusk. Approximately 50% of the local population commutes to work (U.S. Census, 2000).

Figure 1 shows that Farmington's downtown area forms a right triangle with one side facing the state highway. Most businesses are concentrated in three paved blocks parallel to the highway. Planters with colorful flowers decorate each downtown corner giving much color to the streets during the summer and reflect the dedication of businesses to attracting customers. Older commercial buildings are typically a single or two stories high with big front windows. Although the downtown has many stable

⁹ Farmington is a fictitious name and is used because of the confidentiality promised to informants.

businesses in well maintained charming buildings, a number of vacant or partially vacant buildings indicate the community's economic decay. Long-time local businesses and services such as the post office and coffee shop function as social gathering places where people meet and talk on a regular basis, especially retired residents who have daily lunch at the local Senior Center. Retired farmers and townspeople are always found at the local coffee shop, three times daily at: 6 am, 9 am and again around 2 pm.



Figure 1: Aerial photo of Farmington

Farmington's downtown holds a small historical museum and public library, the two main cultural activities in town (the museum is under renovation and it is not opened regularly to the public). One of the Farmington Historical Society directors took me to a visit to the museum, she explained: "This is a bit of our history that we want to preserve for our future generations". It holds well-kept objects such as old clothing, dolls and doll furniture, a collection of typewriters, old school and business pictures, sports souvenirs, and Farmington's first jail cell. Downtown also houses a Mason Lodge and a memorial to honor the Veterans of the I and II Wars which is decorated with flowers and American flags throughout the year. Just across the highway and railroad tracks stands the grain elevator, symbol of the town's main industry, composed of eleven large, circular aligned grain silos. Visually Farmington has no one special feature distinguishing it from other small Midwestern railroad towns. But the often repeated sentiment is that the community is a unique and special place. A retired salesman, father of three, explained: "What I like

more about living here is the closeness of the community, to be able to attend my church on Sundays, look around and know everybody in there, just be able to have a personal relationship with most everybody. I wouldn't be happier anywhere else". Farmington's typicality is what makes it useful for the study.

Farmington faces problems common to any Midwestern agrarian town: low home values and a deteriorating local non-agricultural economy (Albrecht, 2006; Fuguitt, Brown & Beale, 1989). Of particular impact are the economic and demographic consequences of declining agricultural commodity prices and continuing farm concentration seen in Table 2. The drop in farming population, loss of local businesses and jobs, and centralization of shopping in larger towns nearby depressed the local economy. For example, in the 1980s and 1990s the town lost vital businesses and services including a drugstore, a medical clinic, an electronic repair shop, a grocery store, and gas stations. The few small businesses still standing on the main street are: banks, an insurance office, a hardware store, a furniture store, a beauty shop, a clothing store, a grocery store, a new photography business, a convenience store, a gas station, a restaurant and two taverns, and a lumber company.

Figure 2 shows that Farmington's population level remained relatively stable throughout most of the last century. According to the Census of 2000, around 1,000 people, 400 households, and 295 families reside in this small town¹⁰. The town has an even age distribution with 25.5% under the age of 18, 7.5% from 18 to 24, 25.8% from 25 to 44, 23.5% from 45 to 64, and 17.7% who are 65 years of age or older. The median age is 40 years. Thus, Farmington has proportionately more young people than older people (unlike many Illinois rural communities which have a skewed 25% or more people over 65), indicating an ability to attract and/or keep its younger families. The local median household income is \$36,000 while national median income is \$41,994. About 3.5% of families and 6.2% of the population live below the poverty line. The population is predominantly white non-Hispanic (98%). In Farmington, the proportion of married couples (60%) is above the national average (51%) reflecting the centrality of family for this community (U.S. Census, 2000).

¹⁰ Numbers related to Farmington throughout this study are rounded to protect confidentiality.

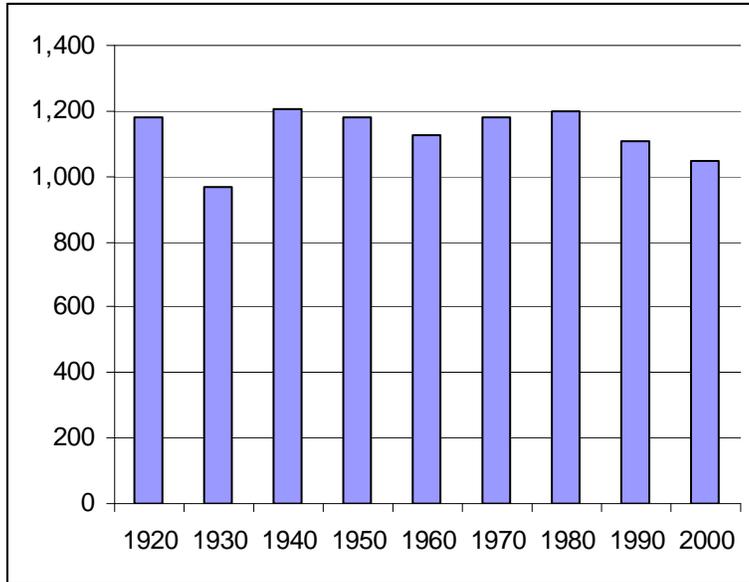


Figure 2: Farmington’s Population 1920-2000. Source: U.S. Population and Housing Census.

Some similarities and differences exist in the demographic characteristics of Farmington when compared to Christian County. Using 1990 and 2000 Census data, Table 6 shows some relevant demographic characteristics for Farmington and Christian County. While Christian County lost 30% of its population between 1990 and 2000, Farmington’s population decreased by only 6% in the same period. The median age of Farmington's population in 1990 and 2000 closely mirrors the county pattern. The average value of homes in Farmington for both years is below the average home values of the county. The median income for a household in Farmington is similar to Christian County. Farmington has fewer families living below the poverty level when compared to Christian County as a whole for both 1990 and 2000.

Table 6

Farmington and Christian County Demographic Profile, 1990 and 2000

	Farmington		Christian County	
	1990	2000	1990	2000
Total population	1,100	1,000	34,418	24,202
Average age (years)	38	40	39	39.4
Median value of owned homes	\$35,000	\$55,000	\$37,200	\$61,700
Median household income	\$25,000	\$36,000	\$24,506	\$36,561
% families below poverty level	9	4	9.5	6.5
% people living in same home as in the last 5 years	67	70	61	63

Source: US Census Bureau – Fact Finder, 2000.

Note: Numbers related to Farmington throughout this study are rounded to protect confidentiality.

A core, stable group of families has lived in Farmington for over 100 years, while a smaller number are more recent newcomers¹¹. I visited 6 newcomers’ houses, three were not found, one refused and two agreed to be interviewed. Farmington’s current mayor, for example, moved to town seven years ago after marrying a local woman and getting a job nearby. Although he was easily accepted by the community he was identified by seven people as a newcomer. Residents not born here are considered newcomers by oldtimer families, even after living as many as 12 years in Farmington (this theme will be explored in Chapter Six). A 49 year old town-housewife, member of a large and oldtimer family explained:

My neighbor is a newcomer. He moved here maybe 10 years ago with his wife. He is very active in this community. He does a lot of stuff for the community. He even ran for mayor once. They came from Chicago area looking for some peace in his retirement. They are very nice people, but they are not one of us. I mean, we don’t know them, I mean their past.

Despite Farmington’s small size, four churches thrive in town: Baptist, Presbyterian, Catholic, and Methodist. The Methodist and Presbyterian churches are located in downtown, the Baptist church stands a few streets over. The Catholic Church, its parochial school (closed recently according to Taylorville local newspaper) and the Knights of Columbus (KC) Hall are located near the east edge of town. The Methodists and Presbyterians collaborate for community activities like a children’s summer Bible School while Catholics and Baptists manage their activities separately. Roman Catholic is

¹¹ For this study, newcomers are people residing less than 5 years in the community.

the largest single faith group in the community survey sample, accounting for 53.7%, followed by Methodists (23.6%), Presbyterians (15.4%), Lutheran (2.4%), Baptist (1.6%) and other denominations (2.4%). Five residents spontaneously reported that Catholics are the most active church in town. Catholics hold several annual fund-raising dinners and, a weekly Bingo Night, important to the social life of Farmington. Another example of a community mobilization by the Catholics is the recent construction of a new and larger Knights of Columbus Hall, to replace the original that burned down in the 1990's.

Farmington has an elementary, middle and high school (approximately 350 students in the whole system). These schools give the downtown a steady flow of visitors/consumers. It also had an elementary parochial school affiliated with the Catholic Church located at east side of town which closed in 2010. The Catholic school dated from the 1920s when Farmington was growing but lately had struggled from declining student enrollment. In 2006 it had fewer than 30 students registered. The parochial school was supported by parents, church donations and the community in general who attended the money-raising activities held by the Catholic Church. One of the private school board members commented:

We've been struggling for years. A few families are committed to keep it but things aren't going well. Last year we got fewer students. That school is part of my childhood memories and important to this community as well. I went to it for my first 8 years in school. So, it's nice we have this choice of schools and my parents chose to educate me there because of the quality and the religious values involved in the education. I can fairly agree that it was a good decision because we were (students from Catholic school), I really do believe, a little bit more ahead than the other kids in mathematics and science when I got into the public high school.

Farmington lacks social places or activities dedicated to youth excepting high school athletic events and dances. During summer nights youth park their trucks and gather outside the Village Hall. As expressed by a senior high school student: "There is nothing much to do in town. We basically hang out at each others' houses and get to play school sports. If we want to go to the movies, or an ice-cream we go to Taylorville or Springfield". But, adults and seniors have their fun guaranteed by the weekly Bingo Night at both the American Legion and the Knights of Columbus Halls. Every Friday the Legion opens its doors at 4:30 pm for families and friends to eat and chat before the game starts promptly at 7 pm. In general 100 to 150 people, especially older residents, attend Bingo night. They socialize while contributing to a good cause - raising money for

schools' educational scholarships, and financial assistance for needy community members and causes.

Farmington benefits from the support of voluntary social and service organizations such as Kiwanis, Masons, American Legion, Future Farmers of America (FFA), Civic Jane (local) and other women's clubs. These organizations involve community engagement by Farmington citizens, although many of the same faces are seen at all meetings. While limited engagement, Farmington's active civic life generates valuable social resources that benefit the entire community, as the rebuilding of Knights of Columbus building after the fire in 1990's.

Unlike other small towns in the county, Farmington retains a relatively stable population, an active main street, multiple churches and local schools despite its farming population declining over the last decade, in particular. In sum, life is still predictable in Farmington. Everyone knows everyone else by family reputation and community status. Farming is part of the personal and community identity. Local people cling to farming as a basis for identity because of agriculture importance to the local economy since the first settlers (Fitch, 1991). The emergence of a more competitive farmland market, fueled by continuous farm concentration, new rules (e.g. government subsidies), the shift from crop-share to competitive cash-rent leases, increases in absentee landlords and non-local operators, potentially has dismal consequences for the resilience of the community's social fabric.

Chapter Five: Bigger is Better: Farmers' Perceived Lack of Alternatives to Conventional Agriculture

Before the 1960's Farmington farms typically produced diversified commodities ranging from vegetables to grains and livestock, according to 11 farmers. Nowadays, like Corn Belt more generally, almost all Farmington farms focus production on two products (corn and beans), highly dependent on scale and technology to generate revenues needed for continuance. "Everybody wants to get bigger" is the typical production rationale voiced by Farmington's farmers. "Bigger is better" is a world view espoused by 84% (n = 32) of Farmington farmers regardless of operation size. What is implied by this rationale is that family farmers perceive a lack of alternative of economic options, which suggests that they are entrapped in a single production system assumed to lead toward prosperity. "Bigger is better" defines success for them and is what drives the land market and commitment to intensive, industrial type row grain crop agriculture. The "bigger is better" belief entails intensive production, a constantly addition to the land base, adoption of new technology (such as machinery, pesticides, and fertilizers), and success defined by farm size. To be considered successful, an operator needs to get bigger which is what compels them to grow just to maintain their status in the community. Importantly, the bigger the operation size, the greater a farmer's prestige in the local community as will be shown below. Commitment to the "bigger is better" idea drives demand in the farmland market which has the unintended consequence of leading to the decline of smaller farms operated by more community-oriented farmers (see Chapter Seven).

Among all Farmington farmers, small producers (those who farm up to 799 acres)¹² are the group who would benefit most from adopting alternative systems. The dramatic expansion of industrial agriculture dependent on scale and specialization makes it increasingly difficult for small family farmers in the Corn Belt to stay in business. However, 73% (14 of 19) of Farmington small farmers are exclusively row crop grain operators who grow mainly corn and soybeans. They do not report considering alternative production systems that might allow them to escape the "land treadmill" (the constant need for land expansion to keep farming) imposed by Midwestern conventional agriculture dominated by larger farms (Levins & Cochrane, 1996). Sometimes these small

¹² Farmers' operation size, categories used: small farmers: up to 799 acres; mid-sized: from 800 to 2,499 acres; large: over 2,500 discussed in Chapter Three.

farmers must accept losses or are forced to get side jobs just to keep farming according to the “bigger is better” ideal. They justify their choices by saying “this is all I know to do” or “I spent my whole life doing that. It is hard to do anything differently”. Most continue farming in the way they always have with little curiosity for exploring different agricultural systems. In contrast is a minority of five Farmington small farmers who discovered that by adopting alternative or diversified production they need not continually get bigger by expanding their land base. This chapter will discuss how and why most Farmington small farmers cling to getting bigger as their only option in agriculture despite this strategy potentially dooming them to failure and not farming at all.

Small Farmers’ Commitment to Bigger is Better

Early in the study my landlady (uninvolved in farming) introduced me to a few local farmers during a Farmington high-school basketball game. Before each introduction she would fill me in on the farmer’s current situation. She would say: “He is fairly small, but a hard worker”, “He is a good farmer, he just bought a new ground” or “He is doing very well, word is that he is farming over 2000 acres”. Likewise, another town resident reflecting the same criteria for evaluation advised whom I should contact: “You should talk to [him], he is a big farmer. Most big farmers rent their land but he owns most of it. I can tell you without a doubt that he is a self-made man because I’ve known him since high school, and I know his family. He is a good farmer. He wouldn’t be so big if he was not a good farmer”. A retired large farmer, father of a local large farmer commented on what he considers a successful farmer to be: “I consider myself successful because I was able to raise my family comfortably out of farming. I worked hard to expand the 120 acres I inherited to a degree that my sons would have a good start in life. In my opinion that’s made me successful”. To a large degree, these casual comments reveal the importance placed on farm size and land ownership by both farmers and the community, while casting light on the community’s culture.

“Bigger is better” is a viewpoint not limited to Farmington (Gibbon & Ponte, 2005). It is an ambition directly connected to beliefs inspired by the historic American Dream of individual success and wealth deeply ingrained in the farming population (Salamon, 1992). Americans’ desire that any endeavor grow “bigger and better” began as

early as the nation's Westward expansion in the 19th century. In 1933 Truslow Adams wrote in a widely popular book, which described the history of the American Dream, that the ideal of "bigger is better" drives citizens in most endeavors: "It was largely in the period from 1830 to 1850, when the nation was growing like a weed, that this conception took its deep root among us, although the germ had always been present" (p. 217). During fieldwork I heard stories about "successful" farmers who were growing their operations despite the struggle of others to hold on to land. One of these stories was told by a farmer who started from nothing and today is a proud large farmer.

My dad never farmed but a close relative farmed. And that was where I started with 120 acres that he had. And after that I bought another 40 acres. I grew up out in the country by my cousin's farm and I hung out with him all the time. He was the kind of person that he'd just lay back and say 'if you want to ride the tractor, go ahead'. (laughs) I could do it better than he could. So, he just let me do it. Eventually, when I got out of school he retired and I thought that was what I had to do. Today I farm close to 3,000 acres.

The farmers' linking success with operation size is closely rooted in the American Dream idea. Truslow Adams writes: "Size, like wealth, came to be a mere symbol of 'success,' and sense of qualitative values was lost in the quantitative, the spiritual in the material" (1933:216). Because central Illinois land has always been expensive the amount of land farmed translates into a measure of a farmer's financial and managerial status (Bogue, 1963). Thus, operation size was always an important criterion for judging success and prestige among farmers (Kimbrell, 2003; Salamon, 1992). Everyone prefers to be seen as a successful farmer, according to accepted criteria. A justification often offered by small farmers for accepting the "bigger is better" rationale is that growing in size is the only way to survive in a farming system based on grain crops. "If you want to continue farming you have to expand... There is only a certain distance you can go without being lucrative", said a small farmer.

In truth, small farmers fear judgment that their operation size, dooms them to be viewed as a failure because only "bigger" is defined as success. Farmington farmers are proud of coming from a long line of farmers and they want to continue the family tradition. They learned everything about farming from fathers and grandfathers who were considered successful because they made a living from the land and passed it down to their children. Farmers tend to believe family and friends will see them as successful if

they are able to increase the farm operation size as did their ancestors – to expand what they inherited assuring that their children can farm. Table 7 shows that without regard of size more than 80% of local farmers of all sizes intend to grow operations in the next 5-10 years.

Table 7

Operation size expectations for the next 5-10 years by percentage of Farmington Farmers, according to current size

Total N = 38	Increase (n = 32)	Decrease (n = 2)	Same size (n = 4)
Small (n = 19)	88	0	0
Midsized (n = 13)	81	13	6
Large (n = 6)	83	0	17

Source: Community Survey

Profit is not the only motive driving farmers’ behavior in the farmland market. Farmers generally say farming is a business, but for Farmington small family-farmers it is more than that. They view farming as a way of life, as a family tradition (Rosenblatt, 1990). “Farming is in my blood” they repeat. Frequently these small farmers voice a sentimental attachment to family land. However, the possibility of losing the family-farm is not enough to divert farmers from the ideal of getting bigger. A small farmer said:

This land has been in my family for three generations. I have lived here my whole life...I raised my kids here. I was born in that room right there. My father raised three kids on 310 acres. I can’t do the same... the margins are so tight that you need more acres to farm to keep everything running. It’s this way for everybody...every farmer is trying to expand their operation. There is no other choice.

A small farmer’s wife who works in the local school shares her husband’s strong attachment to their land and farming. She too believes that the struggle to keep the farm is worth it:

We thought about selling it once and doing something else. Things were bad back then. I knew this thought was killing him (husband). He was born and raised on this ground. We live in the same house his father built and now we are raising our kids. So, we had to find ways to continue. I got a job and we rented new ground from a close relative... I had to get used to a new job but we kept farming.

This family’s financial strategy mirrors that when faced by financial difficulty small Farmington’s farmers and farmers’ wives tend to seek off-farm jobs to supplement their farming income (Barlett, 1993). Table 8 shows that 40% of small farmers and 70% of their wives work off the farm. Their goals are to reduce risk and assure keeping the

family ground. However, this survival strategy is not always an option for Farmington farm-families. Although farmers are rather versatile, possessing many useful skills and a work ethic, employment opportunities are rare in this farming-dependent area. A small farmer said: “I do whatever I have to make ends meet. I do small jobs for the furniture store, I help a friend with his pesticide business. There aren’t many jobs I can’t do”. In addition, their wives work off-farm, which often provides medical and retirement benefits to these small operations.

Table 8

Primary occupation of small farm-families

	Husband (n = 17)	Wives (n = 16)
Farming	10	5
Off-farm job	7	11

Source: Community Survey

In contrast to the smaller operators’ survival strategies for maintaining family land ownership, a larger Farmington farmer revealed that the land owned by his family is more a commodity than a sentimental treasure (Flinn & Buttel, 1980, Salamon, 1992): “I’ve told my sons that land is an asset. I advise them not to become attached to it... If they receive a good offer for one of our tracts they should sell it and reinvest the money”.

Agricultural Treadmills and Farm Size

Another distinction from the past agriculture is the lack of diversification as farms grew bigger. Prior to the late 1950s, farms in the American “Corn Belt” grew diversified crops in addition to corn and soybeans, such as other grains, hay, pasture, and vegetables. Grain, hay, and pasture on the farm typically were often not commercialized but used to feed farm animals (Jackson, 2008). Among Farmington farmers, only one large sized operation bears some similarity to the past farm structures:

I started farming 40 years ago. We were pretty small and we did it at the old way. We had one milk cow. We didn’t go to the store to buy milk. My wife milked the cow and made home-made butter, ice-cream, cheese. We ate out of the garden, we didn’t buy groceries. We still have a cow... we raised our own chickens and hogs, we had our own eggs and we still do nowadays. We are the exception rather than a rule in this area. We are probably the only ones who do that in our community... We do it at home for ourselves.

In addition to the social pressure to farm conventionally, technological advances and governmental policies push farmers to specialize on single commodities and depend

on farm expansion for profitability (Levins & Cochrane, 1996). Figure 3 shows that Illinois soybeans and corn yields increased substantially in the last 50 years. According to almost half (8 of 19) of small farmers, the typical diversified Midwestern family farm of a few decades ago is becoming extinct. A small farmer pointed to the change he experienced from growing up on a diversified farm and how all farm now:

It used to be kind of fun to farming, but it's not really fun anymore. Everybody used to have livestock. When you have livestock that came first and your crops came second. You had to get everything fed before you went to the field. Now nobody does that. It's like a rat race... the work [back then] was more diversified. Some of the older people still have gardens and stuff, but not many young people do. You still see some sweet corn, but full gardens you don't see that anymore. My grandpa gardened by his house and across the road his neighbor had a garden - green peppers, some tomatoes and everything. Of course, he loved that...he went there every night.

Cochrane's agricultural treadmill theory explains the production challenges faced by small farmers like those in Farmington (Cochrane, 1958). When a large number of farmers produce the same commodity, they all operate as price takers as opposed to price makers. The going price is defined by the law of supply and demand, and supply in turn is a function of the average productivity of all farmers engaged in that market. Only a small number of farmers, who are early adopters of productivity-enhancing technologies, can make a profit. Eventually, most farmers adopt the new technologies, leading to higher average productivity and hence lower prices.

A midsized female farmer explained the impacts of technological advances in agriculture experienced by most local farmers:

The changes in farming have been so dramatic. The use of seed hybridization has increased the yield three to four times...that's major. The size of our equipment has exploded. The scientific knowledge has improved fertilizers, chemicals and our ability to control insects. It's wonderful that you don't have to worry with crop devastation anymore. Corn now is drought resistant...that's unreal. It's not risk free, but it's so much easier. Air conditioning made all kinds of improvements in our working conditions. Working during the summer was almost a torture... [air conditioning] helped your breathing and to get away from the dust.

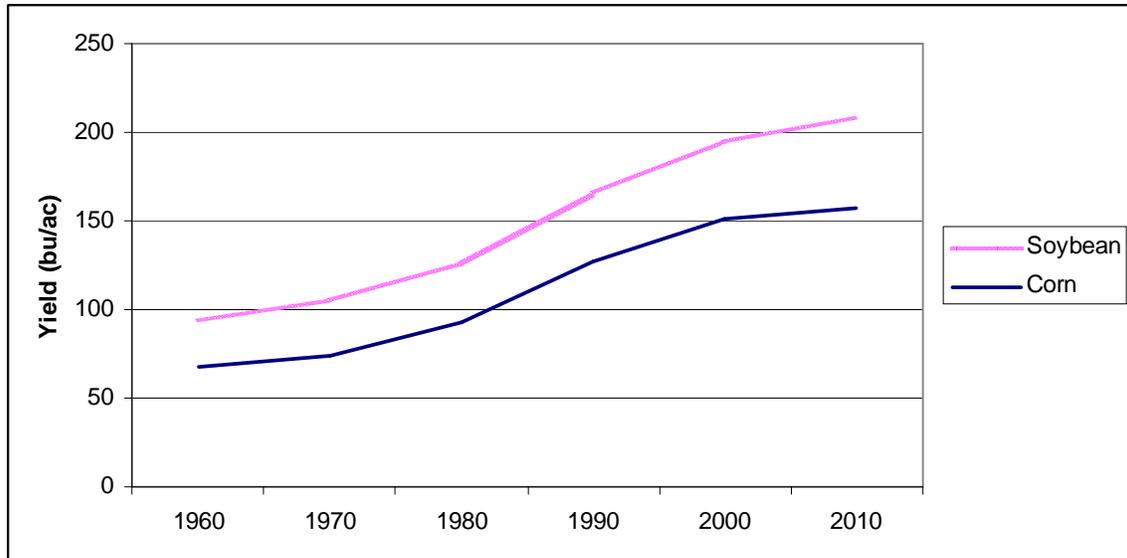


Figure 3: Illinois Soybeans and Corn Yields 1960-2010. USDA, NASS 2010.

The treadmill cycle starts again and repeats as new technologies reach the market. As emphasized by a midsized farmer: “small farmers lack the financial resources to adopt new technology, so they lose the fight when the others adopt it. It’s hard. We lost some farmers in the last 20 years. They simply couldn’t make it”. In general, small operators use the same techniques as large farmers but often lag on innovation because they lack incentives for timely acquisition of costly technology able to improve efficiency (Tweeten & Amponsah, 1996). Those farmers who lag behind in the continuous adoption of new technologies are unable to compete and are eventually forced out of the market, while resources are concentrated in the hands of the few who constantly lead the race. Once a farmer gets on the treadmill, he needs to keep adopting new technologies and growing in size to remain profitable. “Bigger is better” became the cultural mindset underlying the trends of concentration and technological/ farmland treadmill in this community. A large farmer understands how the treadmill affects small farmers in Farmington:

Illinois agriculture has become hostile to small farmers. For small farmers trying to survive or grow by increase income and production, while looking for capital to do so, and looking for help to maintain all the new work, I don’t know, I think it’s impossible. Small farmers cannot compete with big farmers. When you grow grains you need scale to make a profit. The margin is very narrow because grain prices are low while the input prices are getting higher. If you are a big farmer you have bargaining power. You can also keep up with technology because you can spread its cost over more acres and get loans to pay for it. And I think

technology makes a huge difference. I always believed that. We don't wait for our neighbors to get a new combine or planter...we go and get the most recent technology. It's worth it... we gain in efficiency.

Larger farms have a competitive advantage over smaller farms in most commodities because the average cost of production per unit declines as the size of the operation grows. The adoption of new technology, such as the development of larger and faster equipment, information and Global Positioning System technologies, and more routine pest control through genetically modified seeds, expanded the crop acreage that producers can effectively control.

Recently, the notion of technological-induced treadmill was expanded to include a land-market treadmill (Levins & Cochrane, 1996). Levins and Cochrane found that technological treadmill effects are attenuated by government price support programs, which guarantee fixed prices to commodities such as corn and soybean. In this way the advantage of early adoption of technology is weakened. Accordingly, the technologically induced treadmill drives land prices up instead. In addition to the technological treadmill notion, urban expansion and federal tax rules also affect land and cash-rent prices by negatively impacting local farmers' profitability (Cochrane, 1958). Another large farmer in Farmington describes the endless land treadmill effects on farmers and why he plans to expand his operation:

Today you have to work more land just to keep up with the lifestyle. In the 80's I remember telling my dad, 'Dad, I've got 100 acres, if I could just get another 150 I will never want no more' (laughs). By the time I got it, I realized I needed more. Everything just keeps getting bigger plus I got married and that costs more money. I think if my son decides to farm the two of us could not make a living off of the 2,500 that I have now.You keep running to expand your operation, to adopt the newest technology, to try making some money out of it. I can remember the oldtimers, back in the 50's and 60's... they could increase the farm, but they just didn't have the equipment with the ability to do much more that they had. Now, the tractors got bigger and you can do more. They cost more and you want to do more to be able to pay for it. My first new tractor in 1983 cost \$30,000 dollars and that same kind of tractor would cost \$150,000 today. So you've got to run across more acres to be able to pay for it because the price of grain hasn't actually gone up a lot. We raise more bushels per acre than back then, maybe 25% more, but still nothing like the price of the machinery and other inputs.

The early adopters of technology and aggressive farmers are not necessarily better off in reality. According to a midsized farmer: "From farmers' standpoint, there are no

winner in this game, the small (farmer) is being squeezed out and the big farmers are always trying to stay ahead the falling prices by adopting innovation and expanding their operations. No one is safe, I keep doing it, I guess, because I like the challenge”.

To preserve their way of life for the future generations Farmington farmers feel driven by the need to survive through expansion. Among the small farmers, about half (9 of 19) spontaneously offered that they had to get bigger because their sons want to farm. A small farmer said:

I intend to buy some farmland and also to rent more ground and the particular reason is that my son, who is still going to school, still loves farming. He wants to be involved in the farm, but he knows that we don't have enough for both of us. So, he'll have to work off the farm and while he works he can also come back and farm too. So, by working off the farm he can also buy some land.

For the smaller farmer, however, the consequence of this vicious cycle is little chance for success. They hold few or no comparative advantage in the production of corn or soybeans, the major local commodities. Land expansion for the small sized family farm is complex and sometimes impossible. Although these farmers complain about production costs and financial difficulties they seem not to consider alternative systems of production as viable. Echoing the voice of several farmers, a small farmer said: “This type of production is becoming more and more costly. Farms are getting bigger only to sustain the expenses”.

The actual market conditions faced by the small farmer in the American Corn Belt require getting bigger to keep farming. The resistance to alternatives is influenced by a fear of the unknown and a strong mindset that links success to scale. A young farmer summarized the local farming strong belief in survival by sticking to standard farming practices: “I say to my dad that farmers must be the most optimistic people in the world. Because after all that we've seen about our income over the past few years, the increase in competition and in the price of inputs, we are still able to say - ok, let's go on one more year - and this keeps you going...”.

Small Farmers and Unconventional¹³ Agricultural Systems

Despite the mindset of Farmington farmers other production systems exist, as alternatives to the dominant grain and bean commodity crops, and getting bigger. One

¹³ Other than the traditional corn, soybean or wheat production commonly found locally.

option is generally called “alternative agriculture” and refers to value-adding activities in crop and livestock production, such as organic horticulture, specialty grains, seed production, and food-grade grains (Lyson, 2004). Another option is diversification, which essentially means producing a diversified range of crops and/or livestock that reduces risks involved in agriculture (Goldsmith & Silva, 2006), a strategy cited by farmers practiced as recently as a generation ago.¹⁴ These are two broad examples of farming strategies which when used on a small acreage size potentially produce sufficient income for the enterprise to be a viable and profitable business. These systems are adopted to replace or added to conventional grain production.

While small Farmington farmers affirm that raising grain crops is all they know, this knowledge may be insufficient to secure their future in an environment where margins are slim and scale is how one keeps up with increasing production costs (Lyson, 2004). Adoption of alternative farming systems or diversified production is rare in Farmington. Nine (1 large, 2 midsized, and 6 small) of Farmington’s 38 farmers mentioned some experience with alternative farming, growing specialty crops or raising livestock, in the last five years. Two (a midsized and a small farmer) reported quitting alternative systems after few years and returning to conventional farming. The fact that only 18% (7 of 38) of the total farmers reported the current use of unconventional agriculture systems highlights that it is not popular enterprise among Farmington farmers. Besides the challenges raised to adopting differentiated practices and crops above in the previous section, the intimacy and strong social controls characteristic of small communities also raise barriers to farmers’ adopting any alternatives to mainstream agriculture (Fitchen, 1991; Salamon, Farnsworth, Bullock & Yusuf, 1997).

Because the community is the main farmland source for local farmers, especially land rentals, opinions, obligations and a watchful eye on farmers’ public behavior come with tenancy (Salamon, 1992; Salamon et al., 1997). According to three small farmers, the community is very critical of farming practices other than the conventional way. A local landlord said about his kin-tenant: “I don’t like to interfere with his (tenant’s) work but the weeds got so bad last year that I had to talk to him. My father would have done the same. If he can’t do a decent job I will find somebody else”. Farmers fearing

¹⁴ Note that “alternative agriculture” and diversification can be adopted simultaneously by a farmer.

community criticism and local traditions are mistrustful about alternative ways of farming. One small operator commented:

By the same token that knowing everybody is good, it can be bad too...everybody knows your business because if you're a farmer your work is out there for everybody to see. Sometimes they can be really cruel behind your back. For instance, if you try something different they think you're crazy. They always have to talk about somebody...you know...coffee shop talk. It doesn't matter if it's exactly true or not.

In the last few years, consumer demand for differentiated agricultural products has increased nation-wide. Demand is growing for products that provide consumer safety along with low environmental impacts (Dimitri & Oberholtzer, 2009). Following this trend the soybean and corn industry developed specialty grains to meet the emerging demands of consumers. Although Illinois is among the biggest grain producers in America, specialty crops are sub-utilized by farmers. According to Goldsmith and Silva (2006), only 10% of the total area dedicated to soybeans and corn is used to grow grain specialty crops.

Higher prices for specialty crops emerged as a great incentive for farmers' adoption of them. As stated in Goldsmith and Silva (2006), the more differentiated the activity, such as organic production, the bigger the premium paid. However, the higher premium paid by value-enhanced grains is not always enough to attract small farmers because, in addition to intensive labor and management, such crops require new technologies to be profitable. One midsized and two small local farmers, who ventured into the value-enhanced crops' production, complain that specialties require different production techniques and quality considerations compared to commodity grain agriculture. The quality attributes and standards are specified in contracts by larger corporations (for example, Dekalb and ADM) limiting the control of the farmer. Furthermore, the local specialization in row crops limits access to agricultural professional help or exchange of knowledge with other farmers about unconventional agriculture. One farmer described problems with specialty grains:

Five years ago I got a good contract for seed corn. I thought my profits would increase. The seed corn had to be grown and harvested following the contract specification. Quality specifications included concerns about moisture, cleanliness, and cracks. In the end, I don't think it was worth it. Production costs are too high and it is very time consuming.

Diversification of production similarly is often not a viable option, according to local operators. A small grain farmer who attempted to diversify his activities with livestock described his disappointing experience:

My father raised pigs back 30 years ago, so it seemed natural to me to try it. We put lots of money in equipments and it didn't work out well. You know, I was wiggling between the farm and another job, I had no experience and things changed from the time dad raised them. Pigs are very demanding and require lots of skills. We tried to do it by ourselves (without integration) and it didn't work... I guess I learned my lesson.

After spending a lifetime dealing with commodity grains, the introduction of a new activity - more labor and knowledge intensive - is a big challenge for a small farmer who lacks skills and time to devote to a demanding new production system. Trying to return to past ways of farming is complex because traditional resources and skills often get lost. In general, unconventional agriculture is capital, labor, and management intensive, and all are high risk with few accessible markets (Netting, 1993). A midsized farmer described some difficulties involved with raising animals: "My mother was raised on a grain and dairy family farm... Not many are around here anymore. We're kind of getting away from livestock, I suspect. Mainly because it's such a labor intensive production...people now like to get away from the farm, go to town ...and some animals need to be watched all the time. They can be very demanding".

A local large farmer explained that growing new crops or raising animals may not be appropriate for many farmers due to constraints on their land, labor and capital resources. He predicts that alternative agriculture will not save small farmers from the reality of today's aggressive farming competition:

I don't believe so. This kind of agriculture is very expensive . . . The weather here is not appropriate, the technology used is different, and there are no incentives. ADM in Decatur has a beautiful hydroponics garden, but they've got an electricity plant to heat the greenhouses. I don't think it is feasible for small farms to do something similar.

Since the 1960's, soybean and corn prices increased almost continuously. Figure 4 shows price variations for soybean and corn in the last 10 years. Although, prices have dropped recently they are still 50% higher than in the beginning of the decade.

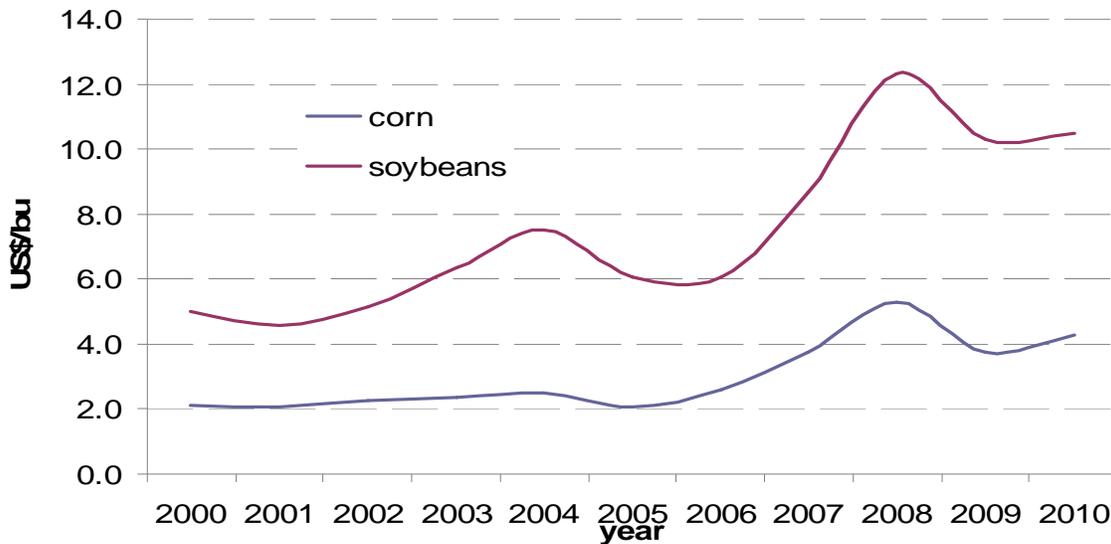


Figure 4: Illinois Average Prices for Corn and Soybeans 2000-2010. Source: Commodity Research Bureau 2010.

The recent high prices for commodity grains triggered by increased demand are making alternative agriculture and diversification relatively less attractive to farmers. Specialty prices are usually set as a premium over conventional prices. Conventional grain prices of corn and soybeans prices more than doubled in the last 10 years overshadowing the gains created by either growing specialty crops or other types of production. This demand-increase and consequent higher prices are enough to give hope to a small Farmington farmer to keep farming conventionally: “Things are getting better. Corn prices are spiking because of the rumors about ethanol. It will give us some room to breath. But if we want to keep farming we have to expand”.

Alternative agriculture and diversification are potential options for small farmers to increase income and decrease the agricultural risks from the markets and the weather. However, for Farmington farmers, several factors influence their production decision-making. Social pressure from family and community along with the skills and technological requirements of alternative and diversified agriculture tend to limit adoption of anything but conventional systems. Local small farmers also believe that the premiums made from specialty production are not high enough to motivate their making major changes. Furthermore, the recent high prices for conventional commodities have substantially reduced the attractiveness of alternative agriculture. Although unconventional agriculture is not popular in central Illinois, small farmers are more likely

to find more advantages adopting unconventional systems with low volume, niche markets that require specialized production and marketing activities (Lyson, 2004). Three examples of this strategy actually adopted by Farmington small operators are discussed below.

Escaping the Bigger is Better Paradox

Farm concentration allied to limited land and fiscally tighter land lease arrangements (cash-rent) make survival in farming increasingly difficult for conventional small-grain producers. Three small Farmington farmers individually found alternative ways to develop profitable and innovative enterprises that allow them to begin or continue farming on a restricted land base. They are innovating on their own because professional support and information for these endeavors is rare locally.

The Internet has proven to be an important tool for innovators access to information and knowledge. Three large, nine midsized, and six small farmers spontaneously mentioned drawing on the web for information and contacts. Web access means that farmers are not exclusively dependent on locals or nearby professionals for information. Although the use of computers and internet decreases face-to-face interaction within the community (Allen & Dilman, 1994), they are cheap ways for farmers to reach a huge amount of specialized information not available locally. A female midsized farmer said: “The main thing that has kind of enlightened the farming community has a lot of to do with communication and the internet, cell phones and technology. We can have access to what is happening in any part of the world. We can know what it’s like communicate with people everywhere, see pictures, how they live and farm, and things like that”. The three small farmers described here have pulled information and resource from several non-local sources - university, conferences, extension, and internet - are examples of the resources available to farmers for learning about different farming alternatives. A midsized farmer commented: “Farmers nowadays are not hick people anymore. They are very sophisticated and they see new opportunities coming in. There are many additional uses for agricultural products and probably will be a lot more. You have to keep updated.”

The cattle small farmer. The cattle farmer moved with his family to Farmington in the early 70’s to work for an agribusiness company in a nearby town.

He always wanted to farm and his wife has a farm background. After he retired a few years ago, they bought a small farm (around 50 acres) and started raising animals, as a hobby. “I don’t know if you can call that a farm. There’s nothing there, besides cows and a corral. It’s been so much work...”. In addition, they rent a few more acres from a retired neighbor. The wife explained the rationale behind their cattle production choice:

As I said (my husband) has always liked animals. First we tried to raise some cattle, and then we raised (birds). They were pretty wild, but the kids loved them. We did that mostly for fun, because he really liked it. But now we’re interested in making some money out of it. The farm we bought is too small to raise corn or soybeans and when we bought it, it had 15 acres of pasture already. With the price of cattle right now we can make more money raising cattle than raising crops in that small area. Besides we don’t have any machinery or tractors. If we wanted to farm we’d need to buy it at all. Plus that ground is better for cattle, it is hilly I believe careful planning, cattle in good health and good management will give us an extra income and lots of satisfaction. We’re learning, talking to specialists, attending workshops. In the beginning we did it mostly for fun or hobby. But now it’s business. We intend to market our production more locally (Christian County). With the price of the oil reaching \$4/gallon delivering food around here makes us more competitive.

Both husband and wife are actively engaged in community life. They know about half of local residents including the mayor, school- and town- board members, main street business people, and most local farmers. “I am a member of the Civic Janes. I mostly work during the blood drives. We’ve got three of them every year. That’s the most that they can get from me nowadays. My husband belongs to American Legion and he is also a Mason. He volunteered for two years in summer school. I donate money to church art classes every year, not sports...sports get enough already. We’re members of the Farm Bureau, cattle associations and things like that, but we don’t go to the meetings”, the wife said.

The specialty corn small farmer. A town resident suggested interviewing him: “He used to be a big farmer. Now he is big in corn to make snacks”. Gossip has it that the specialty corn farmer was formerly a big farmer but lost part of his ground during the 80’s and is still struggling to pay debts.

He owns approximately 100 acres and from relatives rents another 300 acres. “This land has been in my family for three generations. I’ve lived here my whole life. I raised my kids here”, he said. Frustrated by the competition for farmland he decided to look for an alternative that allowed him to live on his own ground instead of competing

head-to-head with the big farmers for more ground. His strategy is to produce more valuable crops on smaller acreage – a niche operation. He explained:

Some years ago I farmed up to 2,000 acres, I once had seven landlords, all people that I know well. Then I realized that I was working... working very hard without the rewards...you know, I was working just to pay debts. Some landlords went to cash rent, then all this competition for land started...You cannot compete with the big farmers. People needed to go over to more and more land in order to keep going...Then I thought 'I don't want this for me, I don't need that.' Do you understand? I just see things happening with the community and I don't wanna be part of that. I love what I am doing. And I decided to survive with what I have. I went to several workshops around the country I found that maybe it would be good to go in a different direction...I found these people in Florida and they needed a different kind of corn to make chips. Now I produce and process specialty corn here.

He described his operation of a specialty corn for snacks and animal food with pride:

I built everything on this farm. I had no blueprints. I own the electricity that we use. I built the elevator and constructed it all myself. I employ four local kids, including my son, who lives nearby. I am gonna show you everything before you leave, kiddo. I take the beans out of the field, I process them, I ship it to these people interested in the commodity. You've got to specialize...You cannot just go out there beating everybody to make \$3 more.... This doesn't work for me. You got to specialize in what you're doing. This is what I am doing... I send specialty corn from Chicago to Florida, San Francisco and Pennsylvania...

He knows 75% of local residents and can be easily seen in community events. "I help to raise money for hospitals around here . . . I'm not very involved in many local organizations but I help them when it's needed. I try to support most local events. I don't bank in town. I go to Farmington just for the essential things. I go there for my grandkids' baseball games", he said.

The hog small farmer. The hog farmer is unique because he works with his father, an established midsized farmer. He says he always knew what he had to do to get into farming. "We don't have enough land to feed two families. So, I knew I had to do something different". His family has grown crops and raised hog in the traditional way for two generations, but on a small scale. He graduated college with a degree in farm management. While there he learned all he could about hog production to introduce innovations into the family business. After he graduated and joined the family business,

they intensified their hog production by adopting new technologies and production styles. Nowadays, he is a 50-50 partner with the operation, which raises about 4,000 hogs.

His farm management training is evident when he observes that their new operation would “enhance the local economy by consuming extra bushels of grain per year and add in tax revenue to the county.” The development of the new barn was accomplished with the support of governmental grants and agencies. “There is help out there. You just have to look for it. I applied for grants and it was worth the time spent on applications. We had lots of help, not only financially. Now we have an efficient, productive and environmentally engaged production. Some farmers don’t know how to do that or they think it is too much work”. His sophistication at tapping new resources, gained at the university, made the family’s investment in his education worthwhile.

His family is customarily involved in community affairs creating intergenerational continuity in both businesses and voluntary organizations (Chan & Elder, 2001). “We are very active in all the local clubs and organizations because we have to be, because there are not enough people to do the work, so everybody has to do something. Even in school or in the community everybody has to help out”, he said.

During an informal talk (initiated by my landlady) at Kiwanis meeting, the hog producer said:

We’ve lost many young people who left for college and never came back. I always knew I wanted to farm. Hog production has offered me another opportunity to be a partner in my family's farm and remain in this community. Grains and hog production are a perfect combination. Grains are gonna feed the hog. The integration with grain cropping provides animal compost and better forages are produced. It’s a win-win situation.

During a Kiwanis meeting, a member commented on the opening of the family’s new barn: “He put a lot of time and work in that building. I heard it is a state-of- the-art facility; the newest environmentally friendly technology was used. He is a very gifted young man”.

The maintenance of community engagement by these three alternative operators generates more community approval than given to successful large farmers, who are not engaged. For example, when the family above held an open-house for their new hog facility the event was crowded with community residents and high school students. During one bingo evening, three women (one a landowner) expressed concerns about the

specialty corn farmer: “I really hope this is not going to affect him. He is doing well. And he is just the type of guy who can boast a smile on anyone’s face. It’s just the way he is. I’d hate to see him in trouble again.” The cattle farmer has a pond in his property that he wishes to turn in a camping area to share with the community: “It would be a wonderful option of entertainment for our families”.

These three cases demonstrate that it is possible for a small farmer to be profitable in Farmington without being dependent on increasing the operation’s land base. In addition, the profiles of this small minority of farmers reveal they are relatively more focused on the well-being of their family and community, in contrast to large operators who have a “bigger is better” mindset and correspondingly treat land as a commodity and farming as only a business. Alternative agricultural systems and diversification also help small farm holders to integrate the farm business into community economy and life, generating employment, stimulating related businesses and being active in community organizations. Based on the comments of town residents the community seems supportive of their innovation particularly because each sees local resources and community engagement as important. Their results demonstrate that small can work, if farming full time is the definition of success, not simply being bigger. The “bigger is better” belief chased by local farmers does not foster the higher levels of community well-being associated with farms using sustainable or alternative agricultural systems.

Because almost all Farmington farmers share a belief in the “bigger is better” rationale, and local land is a limited resource, it is a situation that produces a highly competitive community land market. The next chapter addresses the recent changes in the Farmington local farmland market and how it affects local farmers.

Chapter Six: The Decline of Localism in the Farmland Market

Recent changes in Farmington farmland market, affect not only the community's farmers and landowners but townspeople as well. Restructuring of the land market was shaped by the increased use of competitive cash leasing and the entry by greater numbers of non-local farmland owners and operators. Events described reflect the market dynamics between 2005 and 2007. Farmers during this time faced high production costs due to high oil prices but were hopeful that a possible national shift to more corn useage, driven by more ethanol production, would improve the general agricultural economy.

Midwestern farmland market dynamics suggest that community membership tends to benefit indigenous farmers (Allen & Lueck, 1992; Salamon, 1992). However, this advantage is being eroded as outside players such as absentee landlord/investors and more recently non-local operators expand into the local farmland market. As a new farmland market emerges its character indicates that localism is weakening. By localism I refer to traditional advantage Farmington's farmers held in the local farmland market by virtue of being embedded in community social networks and by being civic-minded citizens complying with local customs and rules. Until recently landlords and farmers, because they lived in the same community, shared social networks and intimately knew one another's affairs (Salamon, 1992). Landlord's decisions in the local land market were influenced by a farmer's reputation and performance, and that of his family (Allen & Lueck, 1992; Salamon, 1992). This chapter highlights new patterns and strategies adopted by farmers and landlords in a farmland market shaped by declining localism. Because the size of operation seemed an important determinant of market behavior, the farmer sample is divided by the criterions defined in chapter three: small, midsized and large farms. Although all the farmers and landlords represented were born in Farmington or are life-long residents, the presence of new land-market players (both landlords and operators) was a salient concern raised by all farmers and landlords.

New Players in the Local Land Market

For years farmland markets were recognized as being local or regional, because of the inherently varied characteristics of soils, climate and location (Raup, 2003). Furthermore, moving cumbersome machinery and related factors reduced the range of travel to be farmed. Additionally, farmers and landlords (both buyers and sellers/tenants

and landowners) were historically members of the same local Midwestern community. Being a community member used to give local farmers a favored position in the farmland market due to their proximity to the land, knowledge of its productivity, and social connections to the landowners (Allen & Lueck, 1992, Raup, 2003; Salamon, 1992). However, for various reasons absentee owners are in the increase along with land prices.

Non-local landowners are not exactly a recent trend in local Midwestern farmland market, they were common as early as the 19th century (Bogue, 1963). However, nowadays such players have identified a new pathway to enter tight-knit Corn Belt's farming communities that does not require their presence or engagement. A tax law known as the 1031 Exchange, described in chapter two, is pointed to by seven farmers (18% out of 38) and three landlords (13% out of 23) as the critical new factor shaping the current local farmland market. Their observations are confirmed by a survey released by the Illinois Society of Professional Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers which found that more than half of farmland sales in Illinois in 2005 used the mechanism of 1031 Exchanges to avoid federal financial-gain taxes (Schnitkey, 2007).

Transactions via 1031 Exchanges modified local land ownership structures by increasing the presence of non-local owners without ties to the community. Widespread use of exchanges also resulted in driving up land market prices beyond the production value of land (www.usda.gov/documents/LandValues_and_Rental_Rates.pdf). Local farmers recognize that the 1031 investors affect their financial bottom-line. A 37 year-old midsized farmer reflects the opinions of five other farmers when he complained about 1031 Exchanges. Although he is able to expand his farm operation his future position is fragile, he believes:

It's just these 1031 people coming in and screwing everything up. I don't blame the owners because they want the best return. But these people own ground outside big cities. And they sell that ground for huge money and come down here and buy for whatever price you want because they've got the money. We just had a farm sale this past month and there was a local farmer who wanted this ground. He kept bidding up, but because investors were there bidding on it, they ended up getting it... There is no limit. That piece of ground went for \$4,950/acre... Last year we bought about the same quality of ground for \$3,200. . . . it's increased that much basically because of the 1031s.

The price of high quality Central Illinois land increased by 17% in 2007, according to the Illinois Society of Professional Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers. High land

values erect barriers for new farmers seeking entry via purchased land (Wunderlich, 1993). Beginning farmers, in particular, are frustrated because inflated land prices make purchases inaccessible for them. Four farmers complained that the land values in Farmington do not pay agriculturally, given current low commodity prices (due to increased production and larger stocks of grains). One young mid-sized farmer expressed how 1031 investors inflate the competition for farmland:

It [competition] is tough for local farmers. We are not going against a neighbor farmer who's in a similar situation. We are going against people who have the money in hand. They don't care what the price is. They just want to put [funds] in an investment where they don't have to worry about paying taxes. Many times they're not even farmers. ... We have a lot of farmers anxious in this area that feel they were not given the chance to buy extra farmland because somebody who lives 100 miles away can pay \$5,000/acre.

Before the advent of 1031 investors the local land market was more predictable. Local farmers and owners knew their potential competitors' financial situation and thus their possible action in the land market. Now farmers are not likely to know the potential competitors who might bid against them. Thus, local farmers more often are effectively being excluded from the competition for the small amount of community land that annually becomes available in the public land market.

A second source of increasing absentee landlord ownership is the intergenerational transfer of land in the context of the continued out-migration of farm youth (Elder, 1996; Salamon, 1992). What happens to a farm family estate is often decided by heirs who left the community, are disengaged from farming and out of touch with the community's ways of life (Salamon, 1992). Farm youth out-migration represents an occupational shift due to the lack of farmland and local jobs, as cited by six landlords and two farmers. A young mid-sized farmer explained: "If you aren't a farmer there is not much you can do around here". Eight farmers (21% of 38 total) pointed out that when land is passed to non-residents, if they lack any personal attachment locally, it becomes treated as a commodity. Because the local landowners' average age is 70, much community acreage is expected to change hands in the coming decade. Figure 5 shows that more than 10,000 acres are owned by local landlords 65 years old and over (19 out of 23 or 83%) who were surveyed. Since most landlords included in this research own land within a six-mile radius from Farmington (thus a 70,000-acre area), the 10,000 acres

owned by 65+ landlords corresponds to 14% of the total acreage of the area.

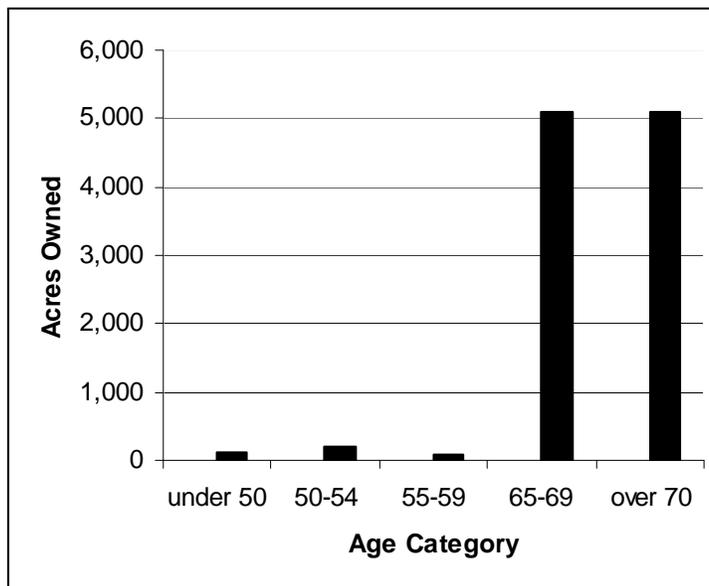


Figure 5: Farmland Owned by Local Landlords, by age. Source: Community Survey.

More intergenerational transfers of land to non-locals heighten the vulnerability of local farmers. Because non-local owners have less commitment to the community than resident landowners, they may sell whenever they want and to whomever they want, without regard for the local ramifications. This situation raises the level of uncertainty for farmers who are less able to predict how absentee landlords will behave or think. As explained by a midsized farmer: “The majority of old-line farmers (local landlords) still deal with local guys. When you have the generational change to the sons and daughters or grandsons and granddaughters of farmers, who don’t even live around here, that’s when they will look for the highest bidder”. Local farmers do not expect loyalty from landlords who are not part of the local community because they are not controlled by social standards and customs usually accepted among Farmingtonites.

A third recent trend identified in the emerging composition of the Farmington land market results from the increasing presence of non-local mega-farmers¹⁵ operating in the community. While their numbers are not great, these players intensify the competition for farmland in the community, which in turn drives up rent prices on leases. Concerns about these mega-farmers reach beyond the farm gate to the community as a

¹⁵ Large corporations farming more than 10,000 acres.

whole. Criticisms of these outside, large operators farming in the community came from every quarter of Farmington. Over 40% of farmers, 22 % of landlords and 9% of townspeople expressed concerns about the recent phenomena of mega-farms in central Illinois, a region formerly dominated by family farmers who provided all the labor and decision-making on the farm and were active in the local community (Bogue, 1963).

Farmland is considered a shared heritage in rural communities (Salamon, 1992). Farming issues in Farmington, is the main topic of coffee shops and tavern discussions. As a retired farmer explained: “Everybody in this community likes to think they have a say in what happens in farming. In a certain way, everybody is connected to farming around here. It’s just part of life and of who you are. For example, the dates for some social events are chosen not to interfere with the periods when farmers are busy in the fields”.

Historically local farmland was mainly controlled by local families who lived and worked in the community. The community fears that the invasion by outside operators is “taking” land from local farmers. A local citizen in his late 50’s describes how such farmers behave:

Right outside of town here, there are people from [town west of Farmington] which is probably 50 miles from here. They’re traveling that far to rent land here. They’re very aggressive...can outbid any offer. They probably farm 10,000 acres. They target people who don’t own a lot of land ...they offer them a pretty good check that a lot of times local farmers can’t afford to pay. There are bigger guys than that. They come in with five or six big tractors and likely do all their work in a half of a day or so. In the fall they come here with five or six combines and by the end of the day everything is gone. You don’t know them. You don’t see them around, they just come and go.

Usually non-local farmers are viewed unfavorably by people in Farmington. Locals claim these outsiders are aggressive farmers who take land from those who need it most, target old landlords and widows, are poor stewards of the land, and give nothing back to the community. A small farmer who personally experienced fierce competition from these outsiders explained: “The big guys prey on older people. They use their financial power to get what they need. There’s nothing we can do”. Mega-farmers are viewed as norm violators. In their ceaseless drive for additional farmland they break local customs and rules that formerly controlled the local farmland market. One midsized

farmer in his late 50's describes how customary practices can be ignored by these outsiders, who wield great financial power:

There is a practice that when local farmers retire, if they don't have anybody to pass land on to, they offer the land to neighbors. But, nowadays neighbors cannot compete with outsiders. Some farmers live 50 miles from here and even so they've got land here. They're big operators and offer higher cash rents. I heard that there are people getting \$200-\$220 per acre for their land.

Non-local operators' penetration into land markets far from their base is facilitated by the expansion of cash-rent leases competed for in public "auctions". The land goes to whoever bids the highest per acre in cash rent regardless of where they live or how they work. It is in this way that cash leasing is another factor leading to the decline of localism in the local farmland market. "It's all about money" commented a midsized farmer about the expansion of cash leasing in the area.

Cash-Rent Leases and the Decline of Localism

As recently as the 1990s, crop-share leasing agreements dominated this land market. The leasing was an arrangement between parties who knew one another and sealed the deal with a handshake. A landlord chose a tenant according to his or her evaluation of the potential tenant's farming skills, community reputation, or a personal relationship (Allen & Duek, 1992, Salamon, 1992). Crop-share agreements are still used when landlord and tenant have a close cooperative relationship, typically based on kinship, which makes sharing the risks of production and profits a reasonable arrangement (Baron, 1982; Salamon, 1992; Reiss, 1983). The increasing adoption of cash leases replacing crop share leases contributes to the decline of localism in Farmington's land market as well as in the whole Corn Belt.

Farmington's farmers unanimously consider that "cash-rent has opened the doors" for non-local farmers to invade what was previously their local land market. According to almost two-thirds (n = 22 of 38) of Farmington's farmers the advance of cash leases is driven by absentee landlords' preference for more business-like arrangements, considered simpler to manage and more profitable (Barry et al., 2000). "The bid process is becoming more popular among landowners for choosing a tenant and determining top-dollars cash rental rates. In general, landowners call bids from preferred farmers or may open the bidding to any operator willing to participate", explained a small part-time farmer. When cash leases are publicly advertised, outsider-operators seize the opportunity to expand

operations, and thereby gain entry to a new land market. A 56 year-old mid-sized farmer explains how the impersonal cash-rent leases have altered the local land market:

I grew up seven miles from Farmington. I knew all the kids living in the area. Our parents all knew each other. Now I have neighbors I never see. I wouldn't know him or his dad. Cash rent leases brought guys here from 40-50 miles away. I have a distant cousin who farms around here who is based three counties away. He is really big and needs the land to spread the costs of his operation. He doesn't care how he gets the land as long as he gets it. With cash-rent the landlord doesn't have to know him (farmer), you don't have to see him. Your lawyer can do it, or you can do it over the phone.

Those landlords, with no interest in personally dealing with farmers, hire professional farm-managers who are said to push cash-rent leases because such arrangements potentially yield higher profits, according to three farmers. Farm managers publicly advertise in local and regional newspapers to solicit bids of rents per acre on particular farms. Consequently, non-local mega-operators take advantage of the processes of winning leases with high bids that can only make sense if the loss per acre is balanced by economies of scale. A large local operator in his 40's whose goal is growing the operation before his 12 year-old son turns 18 years old and wants to enter farming, describes his experience with a farm-manager middle-man hoping to generate the most income on acreage:

I've got one farm manager, who manages for a guy in California. When the tenant who farmed this land quit I asked him to farm it and he said yes. But he said I'd have to cash-rent. The manager called the owners in California and told them that I'd only take the ground if we cash-rented it. Then the owner called me and asked me 'how come I didn't want to crop-share? I told him I didn't say that, that I prefer crop-share. There was a discussion and they kept the manager, but we crop-share. I still continue to crop-share it now. The owner didn't know me, but I farm some ground for his cousins who live in Chicago and I crop-share theirs ... If I didn't have that close relationship with the cousins, it would have gone to cash-rent. I would have taken it anyway because I needed the land. But fortunately it's crop-share.

More cash-rent leases and more outside players build the competition for farmland, and threaten local control of a farm community's most precious resource. A farmer's reputation, community ties, shared risk, and conformity to community social norms and practices were critical factors that shaped traditional aspects of locality in the

Midwestern farmland market¹⁶. These factors served communities well to regulate and to promote good practices by local farmers but are lost when outsiders with no attachment to the land or connection to the community enter the market. The effects of this ongoing decline of localism on Farmington's local farmers are examined next.

Consequences of Declining Localism in Farming: "It's a dog eat dog world"

Because of the high value of and demand for land, Farmington farmers depend heavily on leased land (68% of the land operated by Farmington's farmers is leased according to the community survey). This percentage is not higher because one local farmer owns approximately 3,000 acres. In 2005, Illinois FBFM Association and the University of Illinois found that 85% of the farmland is rented on Central Illinois farms¹⁷. Leases are so critical to the farm business that farmers use lease-types as verbs in regular conversation. Farmers usually say "I crop share..." or "I cash rent..." to refer to the arrangement used on their rental land. Farm management in Farmington has been profoundly changed by a greater reliance on cash-rent leasing and outsider-players' entry in the local land market, leading to the decline of localism in the land market described above.

In places where localism in the farmland market prevails crop-share leases are sealed by a handshake between operators and landlords who trust one another. No contracts are necessary. However, two-thirds of Farmington farmers operate with both crop-share and cash-rent leases (61% of 38 total farmers). Of the remaining operators 8% are full owners, 21% use all crop-share leases, and 11% only work with cash-rent agreements. Gradually, crop-share leasing, now considered old-fashioned by Farmington farmers, is giving way to cash-rent. A midsized farmer notes that: "When I started farming in '88 it used to be all 50-50 [crop-share agreements]. The landlord would pay for half of the inputs and I would pay the other half. He would provide the land I would provide the machinery and labor to do it. That is the old way. Back then my ground was a 100% crop-share. That's about flip-flopped now." Although the trend towards cash-rent leases accelerated in the past two decades, Farmington's farmers show a strong

¹⁶ No or low till production systems also made mega-farming possible. However, actual production systems are not the focus of this study.

¹⁷ Data is from Central Illinois commercial grain farmers enrolled in Illinois Farm Business Farm Management Association.

preference for crop-share arrangements and sound nostalgic about the time when “you gained any ground you rented by the quality of your work and the quality of you as an individual”, as put by a midsized farmer in his 50’s. As shown in Table 9, only 26% of farmers prefer cash-rent to crop-share leases while 11% have no preference. Thus, it is clear that most farmers still favor the crop-share lease.

Table 9

Leasing Preferences among Farmington’s Farmers by Size (n = 38)

Percentage of preference	Small (n = 19)	Midsized (n = 13)	Large (n = 6)	Total (N = 38)
Crop-share	78	62	17	63
Cash-rent	11	38	50	26
No preference	11	0	33	11

Source: Community Survey

Notes: $\chi^2 = 10.950$, Pearson’s R: 0.378 df: 4, $p < .0027$.

A Chi-square test suggests that the variables “farm size groups” and “preferred leasing” are associated. There is a positive correlation between these two variables, showing that large operations prefer cash-rent leases. One explanation for large operators’ preference for cash-rent leases is that they favor less management interference over the assurance of less risk provided by crop share leases (Barry et al., 2000). Six small farmers believe the larger farmers’ ability to pay higher cash-rent rates to expand their operations is what dominates their decision-making. Small and midsized farmers resent that cash leases are becoming standard practice. They prefer a crop-share arrangement because of its shared risk aspect, in which each partner receives a share of the crop appropriate to their contributions of land, labor and inputs. Share proportions typically vary according to soil productivity (Reiss, 1983). Farmington’s fertile soils are mostly farmed by 50-50 splits. Only two Farmington farmers (out of 26 share leases’ users) hold arrangements different from the 50-50 customary split for this area. One small-sized farmer, who entered farming recently (after retiring from a government job), shares the opinion of about two thirds (63%) of Farmington’s farmers: “My preferred leasing form is crop-share 50-50. I think it is fair in the good and bad times. It is more work to keep the divides right, to make sure that the tickets are exactly right. But I think that is more equitable...”

Another reason smaller farmers say they value crop-share leases is that such agreements convey the understanding that a landlord trusts the tenant. Thus, when a landlord chooses a crop-share leasing arrangement it validates the tenant's personal and professional worth. As explained a midsized farmer (44 yrs old), the third generation of farmers in his family: "My landlords are people that I've known for a long time. I've worked for more than 20 years for one of my landlords. They are satisfied with the way I work. They know they can trust me. I believe I've never disappointed them. Otherwise I wouldn't carry more than ten crop-share leases". He spoke with pride about this measure of his worth as a farmer.

Very few young people become farmers today. According to the 2002 USDA Census of Agriculture, only 6% of all U.S. farmers are under the age of 35 while half of them are between the ages of 45 and 65. As described previously, it is small and young farmers most strongly affected by the decline of localism and dominance of cash-rent leasing in the land market. The community survey found that the average cash-rent in Farmington in 2006 was \$167 an acre while in 2000 the average cash-rent paid by Central Illinois' farmers linked with Illinois Farm Business Farm Management Association was \$132 (www.farmdoc.illinois.edu/manage/cash_rents_text.html). Such a high value for cash-rent leases makes it difficult or even impossible for entry-level, smaller farmers to compete for the land that becomes available in the public land market (cash-lease prices practiced in Central Illinois are described in Chapter Four: Table 5). Smaller operators tend to lack the capital for the costs involved in paying up front both rent and production costs when entering farming. The life-stories of three small-sized Farmington farmers in their late 20's sound almost identical. Each grew up in the farm founded by a great-grandfather and each wanted to be a farmer since childhood. One summarized the fatalism about the future small operators face due to land market changes: "There're people that used to farm in this community that have been run out of business of farming because of cash-rent. I mean, that's where we'll be... that's the same way we'll all be. In ten years we won't be farming and that'll be because of cash-rent". A female farmer recalled: "Farming got so competitive that drove a lot of them (small farmers) away because they couldn't make it. There was not enough ground and cash-rent just worsened the situation. My husband also went to school here. The other day we

figured that out of all the boys that were in our high school class (around 16 boys), I think, only 2 still farm and they were basically all farm boys”. A young farmer from an established farm family who just started farming with his father described his fragile position:

Cash-rent has attracted more people lately. It is a trend that I hate to see, because as a young agriculturalist I don't want it to come to that. We're already dealing with the increase in inputs' prices. This makes our budget very tight. The problem is that I don't have the ability to stop them (large farmers) because I can't outbid them. I don't have the capital or the equity built yet to do that. So, I am in the kind of position that I prefer to step back and watch what happens. Too many times it's taken out lot of small farmers...they have to give up farming because they can't afford it. The larger farmers are taking away the land on bidding that is more like an auction ..., on land that you're going to keep just for a year or the next until other big farmer offers a better deal to the landlord.

Three large and five midsized farmers (21% of total) agree that young and small farmers cannot survive the emerging land market competition, although they are less likely to blame cash-rent leases as explicitly. A large farmer echoes the standard view of the inevitable technological treadmill of industrialized agriculture making bigger as better (Cochrane, 1958):

Competition has increased in the last years...I see the future with fewer and fewer farmers. A young person cannot start farming nowadays unless his family is already in business or he has a million dollars to invest in some land and machinery. Small farmers cannot compete with big farmers. When you grow grains you need scale to make a profit. That's the way it is.

Local larger operators, both local and outsider mega-farmers, appear favored by the increasing use of cash-rent leases. Both operator types are criticized by community members for being more aggressive in the land market. The success of the larger farmers at the expense of the other farmers is considered heartless by (seven) townspeople (13%) as well as (six) farmers (16%). A retired farm wife described a local large operator as “a terrible person who takes land from people who need it. Because he's got money nobody can outbid him. He is greedy, he is a greedy person”, she said. A small farmer agreed that this same large farmer operates in ways that violate community customs: “They're backstabbing their own people. We can't compete. It's a dog eat dog world. That's the way it is. That's the way it's become, I guess”. Because non-local landlords have little or no access to information about their tenants, except what a farm manager tells them, the safe business decision is to always rent ground to the highest bidder. With the cash-rent

lease the landlord's income is guaranteed, and a tenant's character is a secondary consideration. Short-term financial returns therefore are put ahead of forging a longer-term relationship. Farmers in small communities like Farmington know their competitors well. They may be linked by kinship, neighbor, or friendship ties. Given these bonds farmers hold the ideal expectation for fair treatment - that neighbors do not violate close social ties in the competitive land market (Barber, 1983; Salamon, 1992). A midsized farmer in his 50's summarized the seismic change leasing and financial trends have wrought: "My opinion is that family ties, or community ties, do not matter anymore. It just seems like that everything revolves around money. Everybody is out for what they can get. That's the way it is".

The decline of localism and the increasing demand for farmland have reduced the importance of personal connections relative to purely business relationships in land acquisition. Consequently, local large farmers feel little pressure to abide by customary social control mechanisms that prioritize neighborliness and fairness for establishing a good reputation in the community of Farmington. During the study a small farmer in his late 40's lost a rented tract after the absentee landlord decided to shift to cash-rent. The ground he farmed went to a local large farmer who outbid his smaller neighbor's offer. For weeks this case was the subject of most conversations in the tavern, at the coffee shop and at bingo nights. In general, townspeople sympathized with the small farmer and were harshly critical of the large farmer. But these local sentiments did not change the outcome. The small farmer involved in this episode explained that peoples' opinions, in the form of gossip or social pressures, have lost importance in governing behavior:

They (large farmers) don't care anymore about what people say about them. I am a Christian and the Bible says that a good reputation is to be held more than richness is. Nowadays, farmers don't care about reputation...they care about the money. The mentality is changing from what it used to be. Some people say that farmers in the past were greedy too, but that it isn't true... We used to help each other and looked out for each other. Farmers are getting so big that they aren't concerned with what the community will think about them. They got the big money and that changes everything. They just have to offer a good rental check and that's all.

Rivalry among farmers has always been part of the farming game (Dudley, 2000; Salamon, 1992). "It is business for those able to consolidate or a conspiracy of "haves" against the "have-nots", who also aim to consolidate" (Salamon, 1992:218). However,

according to almost three-quarters of Farmington farmers the competition for farmland nowadays is stiffer than it was not long ago. A competitive land market has intensified the use of actions considered a violation of customary behavior. One large farmer described his own experience:

Fifteen years ago my father passed away and we had ground, good ground. Before we buried my dad they (neighboring farmers) were talking to my landlords and tried to rent the ground out. I was going to take over the operation. They said I was too young. And there is more of that today- people calling people's landlords on the phone and trying to offer them more cash rent for the piece of ground. They'll offer \$2 more per acre just to get the land their neighbors are farming.

A competitive land market has intensified the use of behavior previously frowned on because of the ruthless competition to expand farm size, chasing "bigger is better" success. None of the six local large farmers admitted that they "take land from other farmers," as suggested by other farmers and some townspeople. They claim they are offered land by landlords because of the quality and efficiency of their work. However, they admit to paying higher rents to secure leased acreage:

I've never called up or knocked on any landlord's door...They know my reputation. They trust my word and they know how seriously I take my work. ...I pay an average of \$180 per acre. Sometimes I pay a higher price because I need to spread my costs. Also, higher cash rent may be an investment...the owner might decide to sell the land and he's going to offer it first to the tenant.

Operation size, as seen in the previous chapter, is an important indicator of success among farmers and is wielded to gain advantage over competitors (Salamon, 1992). In the farmland market, as a large farmer explained, operation size is a feature that attracts "new ground":

People know that I am interested in more ground, they know that because I am big, I can give them better deals. Because I am big I can get better prices for inputs and fuel. I'm also responsible for the transportation of the grain to St. Louis. I can do it cheaper because I own five trucks. There are days that my trucks go back and forth twice to St. Louis. I have access to the Farmington's grain elevator, and to [three other towns in neighboring counties] grain elevators. I own fourteen bins in case we need to stock the grain. I am also responsible for the marketing. So, all of this gives me a comparative advantage over the smaller farmers.

Larger farmers are in general up-to-date technologically because economy of scale allows them decrease their costs. New and shining equipment is associated with

successful farmers. Therefore, large farmers do not follow the expected agricultural norms common to the farmland market but they expect to benefit from them.

Operators and Landowners' Relationships

In the opinion of small and mid-sized farmers landlords and large operators are responsible for the dramatic increase in lease prices. A small farmer in his 50's reveals: "[cash-rent] prices are getting ridiculous in this area. The range of my cash-rent is between \$152 and \$170. But the range out there, of the people that I know, is somewhere between \$120 and \$240. The \$240 is more so these bigger people coming in". Another small farmer who recently lost a tract, which he leased for 20 years, to a larger local operator defined cash-rent leases as a deal between two greedy players: "You've got a greedy farmer and a greedy landlord. The former gobbles up land and the latter gobbles up cash". He represents the nostalgic farmers who miss the old days when Farmington farmers, landowners and community members valued loyalty to one another.

Cash-rent lease benefits are largely biased toward the landlord, according to about one-third of the farmers (n = 14). One midsized farmer, who strongly opposes cash-rent leases, considers himself fortunate because all his lease arrangements are crop-share. "For the landlord cash-rent is a guarantee. No matter what happens to us he is still going to make the same amount of dollars. Cash-rent becomes nothing more than a business proposition", he said. Traditionally, crop-share tenants provided "extra" benefits to their landlords, especially when the landlord is a relative. In cash-rent arrangements, theoretically, a farmer should not have any obligations to the landlord beyond the rent. But because of the fierce land competition in Farmington tenants do feel obligations, particularly small and midsized operators. To survive in the context of an intensely competitive land market farmers feel compelled to provide cash-rent landlords the extras similar to those they supply a kin-landlord in a crop-share partnership to keep them "happy", and their lease secure.

Landlords mentioned extras they expected from tenants, such as market information (20%), crop reports during the growing season (62%), crop pictures (12%), soil fertility treatment (32%) and a personal relationship (72%). A personal relationship involves sharing family pictures, sending a Christmas card, and providing favors such as fixing a fence or shoveling snow from a driveway. These extra obligations are

expectations by the landlords that tenants must meet or they risk losing the land to another farmer who will offer them, or more.

Farmers leasing land from kin are more inclined to provide extra-services, and probably always have (see Table 10). Cooperation towards kin was a commitment felt prior to the changes in the land market because elderly relatives, especially widows always depended on their tenants for support (Salamon & Keim, 1979, Salamon, 1992). However, now they have the competitive land market’s pressure to add to their concerns. Only 20% of the farmers renting from kin-landlords provide no extras to their landlords other than receipts for production costs. These reports are supported by Table 10. The Chi-Square test found that the variables “Kinship” and “Extra-Obligations to Landlords” are significantly associated. If they do not meet all expectations from the landlord farmers feel threatened with the loss of the rented land.

Table 10

Tenants providing “extras” to landlords (n = 35)*

	Provide extras	Do not provide extras
Kin-landlords	77%	23%
No kin-landlords	25%	75%
Total	71%	29%

Source: Community Survey

Notes: $\chi^2 = 4.770$, df: 1, $p > .02$;

* 3 farmers are full owners.

Being able to offer extra benefits to their landlords to secure the land they farm is based on having a personal relationship, giving small and midsized farmers an advantage over the larger farmers. They feel constantly threatened by the loss of ground and/or cash-rent increases, because landlords relentlessly compare their leasing arrangement with those made by larger farmers they hear about in the community. One young midsized farmer, who expanded his operation by 600 acres in the last 10 years, explained his treatment of crop-share versus cash-rent landlords:

They (landlords) expect the best of me and I make sure to satisfy all their needs. I talk to them if there is something that interests them. I offer reports for both landlords (crop-share and cash- rent). I basically treat both the same way. I have to...I depend on their assets to make a living. If they ask for something ...well, I don’t have to do it, but next year they might have somebody else farming their ground ... you’re kind of at their mercy.

Several farmers and townspeople suggested that competitive cash-rent agreements with non-local operators carry environmental implications. A midsized farmer revealed some reasons why this newer system has implications for soil quality, as an example:

You're not gonna invest in a lot of fertilizer if you are not sure you're gonna farm this ground in four years. Cash-rent's not a long term benefit to any ground. We got people paying \$203 to \$215 an acre to get some ground. They can pay that for three or four years, the problem is what he is using in that soil. The biggest fear that I have about cash-rent is that the landlords do not really know how the land has been treated, maintained and cared for. These people (non-local farmers) just come in, but they don't take the same care about the essential nutrients, nitrogen and potash and that sort of macronutrients as the owner would do or a local farmer who the owner trusts would do. They just farm it and then leave. They don't pay attention to the soil. That's the terrifying part of cash rent to me. In the old crop-share rent, the landlord should be more involved and the tenant should take care of his ground like it was family land.

The implication of his perspective is that local farmers, who use cash-rent leases, are less inclined to neglect soil fertility because of having a closer relationship with a landlord and a community reputation to maintain. Similarly, an absentee landlords' farmland is at greater risk of fertility depletion because of their being less involved in farm management and less likely to know their tenant. The absentee landlord is at greatest risk when he leases cash-rent to non-local operators.

Local landlords, however, are aware of these management concerns. All but a single¹⁸ landlord, who used cash-rent agreements, reported requiring a periodic fertility test to assure their fields were farmed with good practices. In addition, all tenants but one admitted treating the land they cash-rent in the same way they treat tracts they crop share. "My primary problem with cash-rent is you lose the two things that you got in the crop-share lease: trust and character. How would you do your job if you knew that it doesn't matter what you do now, in five years you're gonna lose your job? Now, if somebody hires you to do a job until you retire, this job is based on performance, care and trust. That's what we lose with cash rent", the midsized farmer said. In reality, 20% of tenants emphasized they treat all rented land as if they owned it. A midsized operator in his middle 40's explained:

I am a young guy. I have a family to raise. I want to farm for a long time to come yet. If you mistreat the land not only would the landlord eventually say 'I don't

¹⁸ This landlord leases his ground to his son and trusts him to maintain soil productivity.

like what is happening here' and take it from me but you've got competition for ground. You've got neighbors that are fellow farmers and they can say: 'I can do a better job than that'. And I am sure some of them will go to the landlord and say: 'Hey, your guy messed that up, I can fix that'. So, I have to guarantee myself doing the best I can.

Therefore, the current suspicion that cash-rent leases mine soil fertility does not necessarily occur, at least in the short term. What is clear is that Farmington's local farmers, because of the intensely competitive farmland market, hope that landlords depend on their stewardship as well as their profits to assure continuation of leasing arrangements.

Agricultural economists suggest that land productivity and land value should be used to calculate cash-rent prices (Barry et al., 2000). However, the great demand for land with farm concentration has led some tenants to accept cash-rent arrangement without knowing about the tract's productivity. Although most tenants still consider soil fertility in the cash-rent price negotiation, four tenants who lease cash-rent confirmed they do not take it into account. "When a piece of ground shows up for me I do not ask too many questions, I just take it", one of them said. Desperation causes some farmers to acquire more land at any cost, although this strategy can lead to higher production costs and, consequently, a smaller profit.

Cash-rent leasing practices have greatly altered how the local farmland market now works in the Corn Belt. An increased competition for land and new strategies for land acquisition have emerged. These trends are intensified as more new, non-local landowners and operators enter a local farmland market.

As new players penetrate the local land market and cash leasing becomes more widespread, prices of farmland and cash-rent tend to increase. As a consequence, larger farmers more often win the competition for land against smaller farmers in the emerging local farmland market. In this way farm consolidation is expanded. Additionally, the decline in localism contributes to the break-down of local customs that formerly guided social life and farming practices in rural areas. Thus, changes in the local farmland market inevitably have implications for the quality of life in rural communities. In the next chapter the impact of changes in farm structure on the community of Farmington is explored.

Chapter Seven: Community Effects of the Emerging Farmland Market

Farmington may resemble most other Midwestern rural communities, but in the eyes of its citizens, it “is the best place in the world”. The idea that “everybody knows and cares about everybody” shared and cherished by oldtimers, is a consequence of dense social networks that link families, town and farm, over multiple generations (Freudenberg, 1986; Salamon, 2003). Like rural communities more generally, Farmington is distinctively integrated by relationships that foster reciprocity, promote social engagement, and reduce incentives for selfishness and misconduct (Putnam, 1993, 2000; Salamon, 1992). These social relations shape rural community engagement motivated by the attachment of members to a place with a unique identity, viewed as better than other places. But the social world and identity in Farmington is undergoing change.

Historically, farmers and rural communities were closely connected, with farmers relying on town businesses for machinery, seed, fertilizers, chemicals, feed and services, such as, bank, shopping, school and church. And rural communities were oriented socially and economically toward agriculture meeting farmers’ needs. As a consequence, farm and community were unified by interests, shared expectations and mutual understandings. This chapter examines the effects of change in the farmland market on the local community’s store of social capital, specifically farmers’ and townspeople’s participation in community life and the overall sense of community that results. Competition in the farmland market, it will be shown, spills over into community social relationships with the potential for a direct impact on farmers visible in whether they disengage from the community in which they were previously engaged and felt loyal.

Trends in Rural Community Life

Local stores, churches, schools – those things that give a town its particular and distinctive character have undergone considerable change over the recent decades, according to community members. Like many Midwestern small towns Farmington faced various challenges and struggles to maintain its unique identity. Table 11 shows the major changes both positive and negative in the last 10 years, as identified by local people. They mostly relate to the loss of community services, along with demographic

and infrastructure (new school, new fire station, and increase in grain elevator’s capacity) change compared to the recent past.

Table 11

Change Observed by Community Members in the past 10 years (N = 124)*

Change factors	% of answers
Loss of local businesses/farms	87%
Increase newcomers/new houses	62%
New school	70%
New fire station	23%
Grain elevator increased capacity	13%
Increase in drugs/crimes	9%

Source: Community Survey

Note: * both farmers and town residents.

The 1940’s and 50’s were prosperous for Farmington, but since then its business and services have not fared well. According to 87% of community members, Farmington lost core main street businesses and services over the recent decades, despite maintaining about the same population of approximately 1,000. Businesses that closed are nostalgically recalled by oldtimers because they represent what was formerly a self-sufficient community. A retired town-resident describes the Main Street decline:

Over the past 10 years the business district has deteriorated. We have lost many businesses; if you go back 20-30 years ago we must have lost 25 to 30 businesses. We used to have six filling stations and now we have just one. There were two grocery stores, a drugstore, two hardware stores, three restaurants, a machinery dealer and we lost most of it. We have fewer businesses, fewer farmers, most people work outside town, everybody drives elsewhere to shop, and kids don’t stay anymore.

Although fewer businesses are open, Farmington has kept its main street vital longer than many small towns of its size. Trucks and cars can still be seen parked in front of the surviving businesses. Farmington’s residents, including farmers, recognize the importance of keeping alive its small businesses. A local woman related: “I buy local as much as I can because it supports local business and services”. The only grocery store in town is always busy because it reinvented itself. Its continued existence is based on the variety of services and flexible hours offered to serve the elderly population and younger commuters. It has diversified its services to include dry-cleaning, a restaurant, and a coffee shop. It also delivers groceries and meals to elderly citizens incapable of coming to the store. Following the same strategy, the furniture store offers a catalogue to give

local consumers more options in addition to the sofas, dinner tables, bedroom sets displayed in the big show-room of its downtown store.

These strategies are last-ditch efforts to reverse the robust trend towards non-local shopping by Farmington’s residents. Emergent shopping behaviors of Farmington’s farmers and townspeople are showed in Figure 6. Compared to townspeople, farmers’ local shopping only exceeds shopping patterns of townspeople in their buying gas and insurance locally, which represent two key factors for farm businesses. However, it is important to note that farmers buy gas (and other farming inputs) from the local branch of the Christian County Farmers Supply (CCFS), the main gas and agricultural inputs supplier, where they purchase large amounts at a discount price. Figure 6 also shows that over 40% of community members utilize the services of local banks, the furniture store, insurance companies, and gas station¹⁹. While some local support is evident for the furniture and insurance businesses owned by local people only a small percent of the farm and town population support the locally owned single food store in town. The grocery store is primarily used by elderly people – more dependent on local services and businesses. According to U.S. Census 2010, 17% of the local residents are 65+.

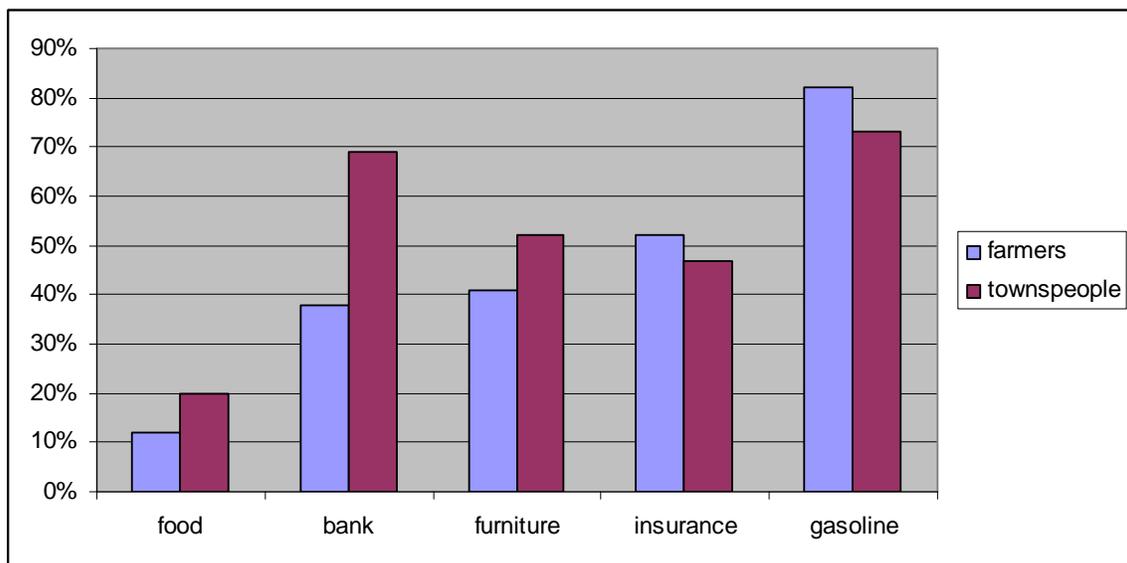


Figure 6: Farmers’ (N = 38) and Townspeople’s (N = 86) Local Shopping. Source: Community Survey.

¹⁹ Banks and gas station are not locally owned.

A visible contradiction in the shopping behavior of Farmington's residents exists, however. While all report it is important to keep businesses in town in principle, they mainly shop locally for emergency or pick-up goods, rather than as a routine. Major shopping is typically done elsewhere, contributing to the local businesses' slow decline. A midsized farmer's comment on his family shopping summarizes the majority view of Farmington's citizens: "We shop here only if we need something quickly, otherwise we go to Wal-Mart in Taylorville (county seat). It is cheaper and they have everything in the same place – meat, vegetables, tools, clothes, pharmacy, and all kinds of things".

The paradox of main street loyalty is thus given lip-service but not acted on, which reinforces its erosion process. In 2005 Farmington's main street held about 12 family-owned businesses, including a furniture store, a hardware store, a grocery store, an insurance agency, a clothing store, a weekly newspaper, a photo studio, a beauty shop, and a few others. Some had operated for over 30 years, while others spanned multiple generations. Among the obstacles faced by the remaining local businesses hanging on is owner succession. As owners approach retirement age they lack heirs interested in taking over the business. A female business owner observed: "When we go, who is going to operate these businesses? Young people do not have money or the will to invest in the inventory. I am afraid they will be gone", she said signaling the town's future with a more diminished downtown. The loss of local business on the main street contributes to a decay of community leadership and engagement. Small businesses managers and owners are typically community leaders, or active supporters of local civic organizations (Lyson et al., 2001; Tolbert et al., 2002).

Another town-decline issue is that some services offered are no longer locally owned, for example the two banks are branches of banks headquartered in different counties. The loss of any locally owned bank is a particularly misfortune for a small community. A locally owned bank is more likely to be flexible in its sensitivity to a customer's past history or family reputation (Berry, 1996). Such banks are accustomed to dealing with people they know and care about in ways a branch of a larger bank might not be. A further issue eroding main street vitality is community dissatisfaction with the selection and prices offered by local businesses. The lack of choice and high prices are complaints raised by 45% of farmers and 62% of townspeople. Of course, Farmington's

small size reduces its competitiveness with large chain stores in the county seat due to the limited options for product diversity and services found locally.

Loss of community businesses is reflected in the local job market (Albrecht, 2006; Goldschmidt, 1978). Farmington holds few jobs, aside from those associated with the farms, the schools and the family-businesses that remain in town. Commuting is natural to local people. A recent high-school graduate explained how commuting directly affects local businesses and therefore negatively community well-being:

Isn't easy to raise a family these days. Some people have to work extra jobs to make a living. And we don't have jobs here. Their wives get a job too. This is bad for the community; they don't have time to be involved in community stuff anymore. It's bad for local business too. They will shop where they work because once they get home they don't wanna rush to the store before it closes its doors. They wanna rest. I don't blame them.

As local businesses disappear, the community loses not only stores but the critical “third places” where people can interact regularly, exchange information, and nourish local norms of social control through gossip and support (Oldenburg, 1999; Salamon, 2003). With the U.S. economy in recession there is talk of closing rural post offices which serve as an important third place for small towns. Indeed the village post office is where Farmington locals are seen meeting and greeting one another when picking up mail or packages.

Contradicting a Midwestern trend of aging communities, Table 12 shows that Farmington's total population and the population of those over 65 years of age have changed little over the last decades (Salamon, 1992). But maintaining the same population profile depended on a substantial influx of new people moving into town. According to U.S. Census, 93,6% of Farmington's population lived at the same address in the last five year in 2000. This figure falls to 82.5% in 2009.

Table 12

Farmington's stable elderly population

	1990	2000	2010
Median age	39	40	40
Population over 65 years	188	189	177
% of total population	16.8%	17.7%	16.8%

Source: U.S Census of Population and Housing 1990, 2000. U.S. Census Bureau, 2010

What brings newcomers to Farmington? Approximately 64% of the community members say the town's appeal to newcomers derives from its small-town way-of-life and good schools combined with its easy access to basic services. “We have a well-known school. We are a safe community. We have the basic business and services – police, ambulance, and fire department. There is this small community atmosphere, a closeness among people”, explained a retired teacher. The remaining 36% believe newcomers are attracted by the availability of low-cost surplus housing. When compared to housing costs elsewhere in Illinois Farmington houses cost on average 30% less than the state average as seen in Table 13.

Table 13

Farmington and Illinois Housing Characteristics – 2000 and 2010

	Farmington		Illinois	
	2000	2010	2000	2010
Housing units	474	484	4,885,615	5,296,715
Homeownership rate	83,7%	88%	66,2%	67,5%
Median value of housing units	\$57,100	\$74,900	\$130,800	\$202,200

Source: U.S Census of Population and Housing 2000 and U.S. Census Bureau 2010.

Although newcomers are responsible for the town’s population stability, it was not easy to find them. This fact shows that newcomers are not easily absorbed by the community (Salamon, 2003). During my study of Farmington I struggled to identify and interview newcomers. Five newcomers suggested by oldtimers were not exactly new in town. All had lived in the community for more than five years, were well known, and highly engaged in community life. For example, a former Chicago resident retired to Farmington almost twelve years ago. Since arriving he has served twice as a town trustee, been Kiwanis local chapter’s president, and is also involved in many other local organizations. But despite his broad and deep civic engagement he was introduced to me as a newcomer. He said: “If they don’t know your family and your past, you will always be called a newcomer, I guess”, he said. The present mayor represents another inclusion example, although he is also considered as a newcomer. He moved to town seven years ago after marrying a local woman. “People here are very open-minded. They don’t mind that you are an outsider, once they get to know you they don’t mind”, he explained. However, his inclusion was no doubt facilitated by his wife’s community connections as a native. All five “newcomers” described their life in Farmington positively.

While Table 14 verifies that the community has an inclusive self-image, it is not always viewed as warm and friendly by newcomers. That newcomers moving into town are frequently labeled as transients, drug-dealers, and living on welfare might account for this discrepancy. A single-mother of two who moved in two years ago said: “Things get better after a while. My kids are active in sports; this has helped us to get acquainted with other parents and families. But most of my friends, the ones I can count on, are up in Taylorville (where she works)”. A single middle-age man who moved recently to Farmington declined to be interviewed because he felt he could not answer questions about the community: “I moved here 8 months ago. I don’t know anybody. I don’t have much to say about it”, he said. A small farmer shared the opinion expressed by other 12 community members:

It seems that some of the people moving into town, they’re transients. I don’t know how to say this, but they are low income, not educated and have a tendency of getting into trouble. They kind of come and go. They don’t really become part of the community and nobody really knows where they come from or where are they going. I really don’t know anything about them. I really don’t know them.

Table 14

How Community Members Self-report Treating Newcomers

	Percentage (%)
Warm and friendly	44
Takes time to warm up	28
Suspicious	10
Well, if the newcomers resemble oldtimers	6
Fine, if they don’t try to change things	9
New people are not easily accepted	3

Source: Community Survey

Note: N = 124

Farmington recently experienced some new homes being built out in the countryside or new families moving into empty old farmhouses. The location chosen by these newcomers indicates a priority for privacy and rurality, a lack of interest in community life, and a preference for easy access to other towns. Like the newcomers moving into town, those moving into the countryside only live there. They work, shop, and attend church elsewhere. While driving with my landlady, the retired teacher, to a nearby community “to try a different place to eat”, she pointed to several farmhouses around town now inhabited for non-locals. “Some of these houses used to be Farmington

people. They (newcomers) move here because they want to raise their kids closer to the nature – in a quiet and safe place. They can't have that in Springfield anymore", she related. The owner of a construction business echoed this view:

There are a few new homes been built out there (in the country). These people own just a small piece of land. They don't even farm [it]. Some of them are retired people coming back to the community; some are people from Springfield who are tired of the city lifestyle. They don't make much difference here ...sometimes they come to town, but they don't get involved.

Approximately half of the community reports knowing fewer people now compared to 10 years ago. Due to locals out-migrating and newcomers moving in, Farmington is no longer seen as socially homogeneous and uniformly oriented toward the common good. When neighbors remain strangers oldtimers cannot predict what they will do or think. To a greater extent traditional norms of reciprocity (one gives now but expects a return later), basic to a sense of trust among neighbors, are no longer effective (Coleman, 1990). However, almost two-thirds (62%) of the community recognizes that Farmington needs newcomers: "We need them to grow. We need more tax payers, more kids in our schools", a female town-resident said. As noticed by 26% of residents Farmington is evolving into a bedroom community from the former vital farming community.

The community values as positive indicators of Farmington's continuity, despite the decline of other towns, the construction of a new high-school, a new fire station and the local grain elevator increasing its capacity. Thought basic to its uniqueness, the community takes pride in the preservation of its local school. Unlike many Illinois small towns that were forced to consolidate local schools with nearby school districts, following a state policy, Farmington high school survives as a consequence of its community mobilization.

Recently the community had to make the decision of whether to upgrade the 80 year-old local high school to meet federal and state guidelines, or simply abandon it, and consolidate with a neighboring district. Built originally in 1924 the old high school lacked air conditioning or handicapped access. Reconstruction of the high school and its maintenance meant higher local property taxes, however. Although not all taxpayers were happy, the community decided to build a new high school in 2004. "It was concluded that

it was cheaper build a new one than restore the old building”, related a retired school secretary.

A retired large farmer, not active in community life, had a pivotal role in the retention of the local high school. He explains the episode from his perspective:

Few years ago we had to decide about the future of the Farmington high school. A lot of people wanted consolidation with other school. I voted for the school. A lot of people told me that I made a mistake about that. They said it would be better for our kids to go to a bigger school where they have more options for courses and sports. They think that kind of school would prepare them to be more competitive if they wanted to go to U of I or other schools or for getting a job. I voted against the consolidation for many reasons: I think we can have a competitive curriculum here. And we can teach them what we think is important. Besides, the school is the biggest employer in the community. A lot of people live here because they work in the school. Also, I think the school is part of this community. I remember this school from when I was a little kid. It is part of everybody’s memory. It was there that I met my wife, for instance. A lot of people didn’t understand my reasons, but my vote had a great weight because I am the biggest tax payer in this community. But I thought it was nice to keep the school hoping the community will stay.

In small towns like Farmington schools are the main source of recreational and cultural activities, as well for employment. High school sports, such as basketball and baseball have a strong tradition here. Game nights are enjoyed by whole families and everybody shares opinions about the local team’s performance. “Sports are a big deal to this community. We’re not as good as we used to be in the past but it’s part of our lives. Win or lose we all support our teams”, said the father of a high school basketball player. In 2004 the community worked together on a project to replace the centerfield scoreboard and to build a centerfield wall for the high school baseball diamond. According to a town-resident the entire project was executed with volunteer work and donations. The large farmer views the school as the heart of the community - a symbol of a sense of community. After losing key main street businesses, banks, and public places the school became the essential focus of community identity. If they lose their school, people would have little reason for attachment to Farmington as a place.

The summer razing of the old high school turned into a large community social event as shown by Figure 7. People of all ages brought chairs, coolers stuffed with sandwiches and sodas, and cameras for the show. They sat across the street for three days watching the old building come down. A retired teacher observed one classroom coming

down with tears in her eyes: “I taught for many years in that classroom (pointing to a window). So many memories”, she said. Some people took bricks from the construction site to keep as a memorabilia. The demolition took several days because of the bad weather. My landlady and I visited it daily during our town night cruises by car to check on the status of the work.



Figure 7: Demolition of the local high school: A major social event

To raise funds for finishing the new school the school board created a sidewalk at the school’s main entrance where personalized bricks could be purchased for \$60. The day of the dedication ceremony there were approximately 100 named bricks honoring former and current teachers, school staff, former students, classes, organizations and community leaders. My landlady bought two bricks, one with her name and the years of her teaching engraved and other in memory of her husband, also a high-school teacher. The opening ceremony took place with approximately 40 people attending. The new school principal, a native and former student of the high school, said: “It is a mix of sadness and joy. Sadness for the demolition of the old school, in which many of us spent the most important years of our lives. Joy because we are building the certainty of a better future for all our children”.

Although the community has not been as effective in the retention of local businesses and services, the support that maintained Farmington High School is an example of place attachment by citizens still able to generate social capital resources available for use in the upkeep and improvement for activities that continue to keep the town viable. Farmington drew on its social capital to retain the local school. However, Farmington's identity is gradually becoming that of a bedroom community as a consequence of the gradual loss of local owned businesses (third places), decline of local jobs, and increase in commuters and newcomers. These demographic and commercial changes threaten the historic way people relate to one another, and consequently, the sustainability of the community, at least in its cherished, historical form in which everybody knows and helps each other. The next section examines involvement of community members in social activities and local organizations.

Community Engagement: Social Capital Issues

Strength of a small community, its social fabric is seen in the extent to which citizens participate in church, volunteer or other activities - what is more generally called civic engagement (Conger & Elder, 1994; Putnam, 2000). As discussed in Chapter Two a small town's overlapping social networks facilitate mobilization for cooperative efforts to benefit the common good (Flora, 2003). A small population often feels a strong sense of community and identity, which both facilitates problem solving and potentially accounts for resilience. On the other hand, small communities face challenges because of their limited talent capacity as compared to larger communities. If experienced workers and volunteers decrease their participation the available pool of community leaders and volunteers decreases. As suggested by Putnam (1993), the potential for community development or mobilization (such as for the high school maintenance) is enhanced when a robust store of social capital exists.

In general, community social capital is generated by citizens committed to making and sustaining their community as a good place to live. Farmington has a good deal of social capital concentrated in the hands of a small minority who are devoted to civic activities that sustain local traditions and consequently a sense of community. Two players in particular are specially committed to sustain and enhance the community. Their unique level of engagement was widely understood by community members as critical to the continuity of

local traditions. Their names were spontaneously cited as active community leaders by 11% of those surveyed. Over the years, a retired high-school teacher in her 80's played a key role in initiating and producing key local activities. She fulfilled several functions in the local Kiwanis Club since its founding in the 1970's. Despite her age, she is adviser to the high school Key Club as well as the junior-high's Builders Club. She also chaperones school dances and trips. She serves as president of her church's Ladies Circle and vice president of the library board. She is also a member of the Lady Red Hats, American Legion Auxiliary, and a local women's group that plants trees and flowers around town and other projects to beautify Farmington.

She plays a critical part behind the scenes in the major community event – the summer Annual Homecoming Picnic. She coordinates high-school students building parade floats sponsored by local businesses and institutions, and helps organize the Homecoming Pageant Contest. At her home she hosts club meetings and activities such as baking cookies, recycling volunteer program's schedule design and float decoration planning. "I've always liked to work with kids. They have big dreams and lots of energy. These are really nice kids, hard workers ... We're just planting the seeds needed for the future", she said hoping that once involved they will keep engaged in community life after graduation.

Echoing the opinion of 11% of community members a retired state worker summarized the retired teacher's importance to the community: "She was my teacher in high school and my daughter's teacher. Teaching was her passion. ... We're lucky to have her. She is so full of life at her age and has dedicated so much to this community". That she is widely respected is evident in the words of one farmer with a large operation who agreed to an interview only after her intervention: "I am doing this because you are staying with the best person in this community, the only person that I cannot say no to. She is a saint in my opinion and in the opinion of 99% of the people from this community", he said. The community holds her in high regard because she represents what is best about the past when people are seen as caring more about the greater good than they do now.

The other highly engaged person is a recent college graduate and soon-to-be married young farmer. Besides being a full-time farmer, he is an active member of the Kiwanis Club, the school-board, his church, and several farm-related organizations. He

explains his engagement as carrying on a family tradition: “My parents have always been involved in the community and boards, clubs, and active in church. So, it’s something I grew up with”. Five community members, including the engaged retired teacher described above, praised his engagement. She observed: “He is an asset to this community and we are really lucky to have him back (after college)”.

During a Red Hat Ladies get-together, his mother proudly related his contribution to the upcoming Homecoming Celebration: “My son has a tight schedule for the picnic, he will help five groups. He is doing his best to help them all. He is scheduled to work with the American Legion and he is not even a member of it. He told me this morning: ‘Mom, they helped to pay for my school. Now it is my turn to do something for them’”²⁰, she said. During community events he was easily spotted selling bingo cards and raffle tickets, making pancakes, serving patrons, cooking pork chops, decorating and driving a float.

Together the engagement and leadership of these two citizens are essential to the preservation of core events that personify Farmington: the homecoming celebration, school dances, field trips, sports, and fundraisers. Together, with the help of a few other community members, they are responsible for generating the most community social capital. It is their work that makes possible opportunities for local people to bond and create collective accomplishments. They both represent townspeople’s and farmers’ participation in community voluntary organizations and social activities. Each group is examined separately in the following section.

Farmers’ Community Engagement

Farm families have a long tradition of engagement in local social and political life (Flora, Ratner, Kinsley & Odell, 1999). With respect to farmers’ participation in community activities most agree (73%) their participation has decreased in the last five years. Farmers’ involvement in community organizations is summarized in Table 15.

²⁰ Some town organizations, such as American Legion and Kiwanis Club, award fellowships to high school and college students based on academics and community service.

Table 15

Farmers' reported participation in community activities in the last 5 years, by farm size – percentage of farmers' membership (%)

Activities	Total (n = 38)	Small (n = 19)	Midsized (n = 13)	Large (n = 6)
Farmer organizations (Farm Bureau, Il. Corn growers Ass., Il. Pork Producers Ass.)	94	88.2	93.8	100
Religious organizations	68	52.9	81.3	60
Farm Organiz., Cooperatives	61	88.2	100	80
Educ., school organizations	32	35.2	31.3	40
4H, boy scouts, Little League	26	41.2	37.5	40
Veterans organizations	26	35.3	12.5	0
Other	23	17.6	12.5	20
Social groups	13	23	25	20
Athletic leagues	10	17.6	12.5	20
Comm. service organizations	10	17.6	18.8	0
Local business organizations	3	5.9	0	0
Village government	3	5.9	0	0

Source: Community Survey

Table 15 shows that Farmington's farmers on the whole are not actively engaged in community activities with the exception of farm organizations, in which 94% of farmers participate (or at least are members), and to lesser extent religious organizations and cooperatives, with 68% and 61% participation respectively. High participation in farm organizations and coops is not surprising for these are farm-oriented associations, and farmers have a self-interest motivation. Because Illinois school budgets are dependent on local property taxes, farmers are interested in having a say on the educational budget so they are involved in school organizations. But for all other community organizations farmer's participation is below one-third. Large farmers are more active in Farmers Organization, Cooperatives and Religious Organizations and are less interested in activities such as Community Service Organizations, Veterans Organizations, Businesses Organizations and Village Government.

Although most farmers belong to agricultural organizations, 18.4% (2 large and 5 midsized) described themselves as non-active members. A midsized farmer explained his participation:

I'm not personally involved in any community organization or activity. I've never been a joiner. I think that's more a personal attitude. My wife is active in 4H, she is a member of the "Lady Landowners" group. My wife is more active than I am.

I belong to Farm Bureau, to the local grain elevator coop, but as far as being an active member, I am not.

Some farmers (13%) see farmers as a group becoming more selective about their community engagement. The trend is to do only what is minimally necessary for sustaining the community as a good place to live. But farmers no longer do or are reluctant to do what might be considered optional or perhaps activities peripheral to the farm business. For example, in the two weeks preceding the Annual Homecoming Celebration in 2006 only one young farmer showed up to help the members of Key Club build the planned seven floats. One of the float construction's supervisors noticed: "A few years ago we'd not have to worry about getting wagons, tools, and other supplies (for the float building). They (farmers) took care of everything. This year we are still short of two wagons. I will have to make some more calls". A female farmer explained farmers' limited community engagement:

Even if farmers do not do as much, they are still committed to the community and they will step up if they are needed, mainly in activities they can benefit from. Farmers are doing so much already. . . . For example, our son who farms with us is not really involved in community things. But last year there was a concern that they needed some people to be trained as firemen and he offered to do it. . . . They didn't have to use him, but he was willing to do that. . . . I know that some farmers are on ambulance crews. They do the things they feel are important.

Fewer local farmers due to farm consolidation, is pointed out by 37% of farmers as the main reason farmers' community engagement decline. Fewer farmers is also an explanation for change in the social lives of farm families. On the one hand, farming more acres and adopting new technologies means more working hours and greater stress for farmers (Harper, 2000). A midsized farmer in his 50's described how farm consolidation affects farmers' engagement in community life:

In the past farmers was the engine that connected rural communities. We have fewer farmers, fewer people and the ones who are farming are not doing as much as they used to do. They've got bigger machinery, GPS and stuff, but they're farming more ground. Farming has always been very demanding and now they have [even] more demands on them. They have to go over more acres. The community loses when it loses farmers.

On the other hand, small farmers in particular, are stretched by needing alternative income sources to keep farming (Mishra, El-Osta, Morehart, Johnson, & Hopkins, 2002). Table 16 shows the percentage of farmers and farmer-wives who work off-farm according to

size of operation. Over one third (37%) of small farmers and 40% of their wives work outside the farm. Farmington’s farmers hold additional-jobs as road commissioner, contractor, handyman, truck driver, insurance agent, farm machinery mechanic, or seed salesman. This strategy has allowed farmers to remain economically viable even in the face of increased competition and financial stress. A midsized farmer engaged in church and farming organizations described how non-farm jobs interfere with farm families’ social life:

This (declining engagement) is happening because there isn’t enough income from farming. So, husbands take part-time jobs, and wives take part-time jobs or full-time jobs. They can’t devote the same amount of time to family and community activities as they did before. Some people prefer to socialize where they work, they get new friends there, they shop there, and they have a life outside Farmington.

Table 16

*Percentage of farmers and wives working on- and off- farm by operation size **

Operation size**	on-farm only	on- and off-farm
	farmers (n = 38)	
Small	13%	37%
Midsized	11%	24%
Large	5%	11%
	Farm wives (n = 30 ***)	
Small	10%	40%
Midsized	7%	27%
Large	7%	10%

Source: Community Survey

Notes: * Percentages for farmers are calculated with respect to total number of farmers, and percentages for wives are calculated with respect to total number of wives;

** Small farmers: up to 700 acres; Midsized: from 701 to 2,000 acres; large: over 2,000;

*** Among the 38 farmers 8 were single, divorced or widowed.

The fringe benefits –medical and retirement plans– that off-farm jobs bring might also account for the move into off-farm work by wives, in particular. Such benefits might support a more marginal operation.

In addition, according to about one quarter of farmers, the competitiveness of the farmland market contributes to farmers’ distancing themselves from engagement in the community. A midsized farmer explains: “Competitiveness has thrown people against each other; they just aren’t as open as they used to be before the competition. I think that the farmers’ participation in the community has decreased because of the competition. They are so centered on themselves that they don’t have time to visit friends, to go to church and so forth”.

I attended social gatherings, meetings and events during the course of the study. At one event, the annual Pancake & Sausage Breakfast fundraiser organized by the local Kiwanis Club, I worked as the ticket person. Approximately 200 people attended the event and paid \$5 for breakfast that included sausage, pancakes and coffee. Only one-quarter of farmers (9 out of 38) showed up. Held on an election morning, the Breakfast took place in the same building where voting occurred, which meant farmers were likely to be there anyhow. Obviously, farmers were untroubled by the possibility of others noticing their absence.

Townpeople’s Community Engagement

Town residents’ participation in social life is not robust either, as seen in Table 17. Only 15% of townspeople reported increased participation in the last five years. Among townspeople, 20% emphasized they are not actively involved in community organizations, social or religious groups although they are members. Growing older, youth out-migration, and daily commutes were the main reasons given by 82% of them for their declining social engagement.

Table 17

Percentage of Townspeople Engagement in Community by Age Group (N = 86)

	Young adult (18-34)	Middle age (35-54)	Older (65+)	Total
Service organizations	5	13	16	34
Social Groups	2	7	28	38
School Organizations	1	20	14	35
Veteran Organizations	1	13	24	38
Farmers Organizations	5	19	32	55
Religious Organizations	7	13	47	67
Cooperative/UofI Extension	4	16	25	45
Athletic leagues,	4	9	4	16
Boy/Girl scouts,	5	25	5	34
Village Government	0	8	8	16
Lady Landowner Club	0	2	2	5

Source: Community Survey

A retired state worker, who is “slowing down” his community engagement due to his advancing age, voiced how local engagement has evolved in the past decades:

The community was much more active 30 years ago. We did a beautiful celebration in the Village Centennial Year (in the 1970’s). I was in the board of the Community Club. At that time we had more farmers and more people in town.

. . . We easily got 200 people to these parties. Nowadays the Community club gatherings are at the local bars and they get just 8 to 10 people.

An elderly female thinks more commuting hinders community engagement:

Most people in town don't have time to commit to community work. Either they have to commute to work every day or they are retired and tired like me (laughs). Their kids grew up in a house where parents worked outside ...they didn't learn to value community work as we did. They rarely stay here in the community...they finish high school and move to Taylorville, Springfield or further away...there are no jobs here. Even farmers' sons are moving away because there isn't enough ground for everybody.

A constant complaint made by engaged residents is the lack of replacement of old by younger volunteers in community activities. Older people' lopsided engagement is showed in Table 17. The average ratio of elderly participation is 19% while the average ratio of the other two groups combined is 16%. Senior's participation is massive in social groups, cooperatives, and veteran, farmers, and religious organizations. One resident comment on the lack of interest on the part of younger residents: "... My wife and I have been doing the hot-dog tent for the Church Parent Club since it started...Boy, in over 15 years we haven't gotten any additional people to help...They're always the same ones. And a lot of them are getting older", he said. This situation is similar to the decline of civil engagement in the last decades in the U.S. as a whole described by Putnam (2000).

Farmington's social resources are now almost solely created by those who are elderly (65 and older), despite their proportion of the population remaining the same. For example, the bi-weekly meetings of Kiwanis Club were attended by 14 people on average, two-thirds of them are more than 65 years of age. They are mostly retired people (n = 9), two farm couples from the same family, and three women who work out-of-town. After two years, at study's end, participation had decreased to 10 despite a concerted effort to get new people involved. Knowing how recruitment works, Kiwanis oldtimers were particularly interested in enlisting the mayor (a relative newcomer) and the new school superintendent because their presence might inspire participation by others. Although these key individuals became members they never attended meetings.

The high participation of Farmington elderly in community organizations and events suggests the prevalence of a past norm for civic engagement. The dominance of the elderly in community institutions also signals a decline in future reservoirs of resources because younger residents already have minimal engagement (Table 17). Past social control norms

that maintained engagement (e.g. gossip, shame, and family reputation) are no longer effective at assuring the vitality of community institutions.

Nostalgia about how the community functioned in the past was clear when five people recalled big events attended while growing up, that no longer exist. For example, the Community Dance and The Irish Days were past annual celebrations when the community was more tight-knit and broadly participative. A town resident who grew up on a farm recalled:

It (the community) was tighter years ago. I mean, it just seems it's getting harder to make a living, you know. You gotta work more hours and do more things to make the same amount of money. And people just don't have time to (he stopped)... Years ago we used to have what they called the North End Dance. It was great. They got together once a year and we all met at the American Legion in Farmington. And they don't have that anymore. ...It used to be a tighter community years ago.

This recollection of past activity that no longer exists is related in terms of how “they” organized the dance. It does not occur to the informant that he could takeover something and provides management – be part of the “they” (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998). His lack of initiative is a key contrast to the past – the younger people just complain about losing things but are unwilling to carry on the work involved in maintaining the old traditions. The farmer's complaints and unwillingness to take over from his elders is a mark of what Putnam calls the decline of social capital (Putnam, 1993, 2000). This part-time farmer represents the present generation, who are free-loaders because they want the activities but are unwilling to provide any engagement to make them happen.

Although some traditional events are gone, Farmington still hosts annual community celebrations, such as the Homecoming Picnic featuring parades, carnival, pageant contests, games, and antique car show (see Figures 8 and 9). Other examples of community celebrations²¹ are Main Street Festival where local businesses offer special discounts and community organizations sell ice-cream, and Christmas Lights in which participants decorate their houses, light their trees and offer traditional food to share with friends and family.

²¹ Names of community celebrations and events used throughout this study are fictitious.



Figure 8: Homecoming float built by local high-school students



Figure 9: Large concentration of people on Main St. watching the Homecoming Parade

Church Participation of Farmers and Community

The rural and small-town church is an important institution that supports community functioning. Churches typically can mobilize members to manage community organizations, coordinate annual celebrations, and raise funds for the needy or local charities (Fitchen, 1991). Farmington churches run several community events each of which raise funds for the church itself and its charity work. The 2005 Barbecue Social, an annual event organized by the Catholic Church, attracted approximately 300 people from the local and neighboring towns, according to an involved volunteer. The Presbyterian Church promoted a picnic in my landlady's house with the goal of bringing the congregation together to get to know each other better and have fun. Close to 40 people, most seniors attended. During the Homecoming celebration three churches were represented by parade floats. Only the Baptist Church was absent, explained a member of this church: "We're a small church and a little more conservative than the others. But we do support local events and help those in need". An oldtimer explained that church events provide an arena where people interact in the general support of the community while reinforcing its own membership:

All the churches are active in the civic and social life of the community. We have Bingo nights, and benefit dinners sponsored by our churches. When a person is sick, the churches put him on the prayer list, people will send cards, they will go to visit him. They will look out for his family and things like that. And they will have a benefit dinner and everybody will come and pay twice what is worth and give the profits to this person. It's always been this way.

Farmington has four different churches and all have suffered membership declines, according to their members and leaders. Farmers and townspeople are evenly divided between Catholics and Protestants (Methodist, Lutheran, or Baptist). According to one minister: "Our church is no different from the other local churches. We're all struggling to keep our churches alive". Table 18 shows that approximately 21% (n = 8) of farmers attend churches outside of Farmington, while 16% (n = 6) do not attend church at all. Townspeople reflect a similar pattern, with 20% attending churches in other communities and 12% not belonging to any church. While still active churches, the decline of participation can compromise the churches' continued functioning in community life (Ellison & George, 1994). A midsized farmer, very active in his church, commented on the individualistic reasons for declining participation:

In the church that I go to, not too long ago, when we had work days at the church we had a crowd. Now we get the same six or seven people who show up to do everything. It's not that the number of people registered to attend church has gone down. It is just that either they don't care anymore, they just don't show up, they are not in town, or they are going somewhere else . . . But we used to not have to count on the same people to do everything. In my opinion, there's been a change in attitude too...they just don't seem to care. They are worried about their little lives and that is it.

During my fieldwork I attended Sunday Mass at the local Catholic Church where I saw many people I knew. During five weeks in the summer of 2006, the Sunday Mass attendance ranged from 80-120 people (parish size is around 300, according to an active church member), with the church approximately half-full. I also regularly helped my landlady print and fold the Presbyterian Church bulletin used in the Sunday services. The Presbyterian Church's attendance was always recorded on a message board and totaled around 40 people weekly. According to one of its members the attendance was going up slowly, with many families returning to the church with the hiring of a new minister making the difference.

Table 18

Where Farmington folk attend church

Percent	Local	Non-local	No church
Non-farmers (n = 86)	68%	20%	12%
Farmers (n = 38)	63%	21%	16%

Source: Community Survey

Although most farm and townspeople still attend church locally, the fact that 33% belong to churches elsewhere (e.g. in the county seat) or do not attend church at all suggests a weakening of ties to this community institutions. Farmers and townspeople's explanations for leaving local churches mainly concern personal and church issues. Six people (including two farmers, one small and one large) whose families belong to non-local churches cited the amenities offered by bigger, nearby towns as explanation for their membership change: ". . . afterwards (after church) you can go to good places to have breakfast, or lunch. Sometimes we go to the movies. You can't do that here", said one midsized farmer. Other's (n = 4) decisions to attend church elsewhere is attributed to friendships developed while working or studying in another town. A small farmer who lived for a year in the county seat stated: "My wife works in Taylorville. My son goes to school there. We lived there for a year before moving to this place. My son and wife got

used to the church there. My wife knows a lot of people there and my son's friends are there too", he said. He felt little loyalty to the local church his family always attended in the past. Church affiliation, it seems, is now regarded as a personal preference not a community responsibility.

Following a national church trend for dealing with declining rural populations, the Farmington Catholic and Methodist churches share clergy with neighboring communities termed "yoked parishes" (Elder & Conger, 2000; Greeley, 1997). Catholics are supportive and grateful because they can have a part-time priest in town. Five Catholics praised the local priest and expressed appreciation for his work. "He's a young priest, very dedicated and we are grateful for having him. You know, it isn't easy for small parishes to survive nowadays", said the owner of a main street business, active in the church. In contrast, the Asian ethnicity of the Methodist minister has eroded church participation, according to three church members. A retired teacher who was previously active in the church before the Asian cleric arrived explained: "I haven't been really good about attendance lately. Our pastor doesn't live here. He doesn't know very much what happens here. But what can we do? It's what we've got". Another elderly member of the Methodist church complained: "I used to go to church every week or so, but now I go just when they hold special services. We've got an Asian pastor that I can hardly understand him (referring to his accent)." The Presbyterian Church, after a few years without a minister, is having success bringing lapsed members back. The Presbyterian minister, a native son of Farmington who became a minister after retirement, is respected by all, not just Presbyterians: "He's doing such a good job bringing people back to his church", said an elderly Catholic woman whose oldest son attended school with the new minister.

Church membership, like most community participation, used to be closely monitored by the community at large. Social control mechanisms liberally used (shame, parental pressure, family reputation) served to make church attendance and membership obligatory rather than voluntary. Apparently, such mechanisms no longer hold power over people because although affiliations and participation have declined no consequences are apparently suffered.

Farmington local church affiliations are higher among Catholics than the other religions. The fact that Catholic Church policy requires a local parish affiliation has

fostered greater attachment for this population. Table 19 shows the percentage of Catholics and Protestants attending church locally. Attendance at local church by Catholics and Protestants was tested using a test of proportions. The null hypothesis is that the proportion of Catholics attending local church (p_c) is equal to the proportion of Protestants attending local church (p_p), so $H_0 : p_c = p_p = 0.5$. The alternative hypothesis is that the proportion of Catholics attending local church (p_c) is greater than the proportion of Protestants attending local church (p_p), so $H_a : p_c > p_p$. The calculated test statistic is 1.626, which is greater than the critical value of 1.282 at 10% significance level. Therefore the null hypothesis can be rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis, suggesting that attendance to local church is proportionally larger among Catholics than among Protestants.

Table 19

Distribution of Catholics and Protestants attending church locally versus non-locally by affiliation

	Catholics	Protestants	Total*	Proportion of (%) **		test statistic
				Catholics	Protestants	
Local church	55	39	94	58.51	41.49	1.626
Non-local church	9	15	24	37.50	62.50	-1.186

Source: Community Survey

Notes: * The total number of people surveyed is 124. However, two farmers and four people declared they do not attend church, so sample size in this table is slightly smaller;

** Proportions are calculated with respect to total number of people attending church locally or non-locally.

The same test was also used to test attendance at non-local church by Catholics and Protestants. The null hypothesis is that the proportion of Catholics attending non-local church (p_c) is equal to the proportion of Protestants attending non-local church (p_p), while the alternative hypothesis is that the proportion of Catholics attending non-local church (p_c) is greater than the proportion of Protestants attending non-local church (p_p). The calculated test statistic is -1.186, which is less than the critical value of 1.282 at 10% significance level. Therefore the null hypothesis cannot be rejected, suggesting that attendance at non-local churches is proportionally the same among Catholics and Protestants.

Taking above results into account, Protestant communities could be expected to lose the loyalties of farmers more quickly than communities dominated by Catholics. The

decrease in farmers' church participation, in particular, illustrates that local churches have lost some of their economic and social functions which made involvement obligatory for past generations. It is evident, however, that rural churches may be increasingly negatively affected by national church policies, as the scarcity of available clergy means further installation of international ministers in already declining congregations. Despite the decline in attendance, according to five townspeople, Farmington's churches, like its main street, have retained vitality when compared with these institutions in towns of similar size.

A general unraveling of the community's social fabric is revealed in the decline of church involvement, voluntary activities and, more generally, social engagement described by Farmington' town and country residents. Farmington's store of social resources remains functional but may become compromised by the gradual erosion of overall participation in community life, aging of the older citizens, and its transformation into a bedroom community. The changes described above combined with the competitiveness of the land market are negatively affecting the previously cohesive relationship between farmers and townspeople.

Norms of Reciprocity between Town Folk and Farmers

A competitive land market and farm consolidation combined with prioritization of personal preferences for shopping, community engagement, and church affiliation contribute to the distancing of farmers from daily Farmington life. However, farmers' declining community engagement is also motivated by their sense of a lack of reciprocity and empathy from the community, mainly the landowners. It is common custom for Midwestern farmers to move into town after retiring from active farming (Salamon, 1992). Their retirement plan involves living on the income provided by leasing their owned farmland. While in the past retired farmers adopted sharecrop leases this practice is changing as landlords, retired farmers, are now shifting or are expecting to shift to cash-rent leases. A retired farmer who has a cash arrangement with a younger neighbor explained such a decision: "We decided years ago that we would move into town from the property simply because it was getting harder to keep it up. Here we live in a smaller house, a block away from my daughters' house. It's nice [with cash-rent] we don't have to worry about management decisions anymore", he said. Among the informants, only

27% of the landlords continue living in a farmhouse or moved to outside the community, i.e., about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the landlords live in town.

The fact that farmland leasing is increasingly handled as a business-only endeavor, that is with cash-rent leasing, has the unintended consequence of the erosion of community cohesiveness. Historically, the relationship between farmers and local towns was based on reciprocity: rural communities provided basic needs and services to farmers. Town folk were a source of land and information about farming and the land market. Through social rules and control mechanisms local farmers were the preferred tenants favored over outsiders. Likewise, farmers were engaged and loyal community members whether living in the countryside or in town. Being involved in community affairs gave local farmers an advantage in the acquisition of farmland by landlords who regarded such service as indicative of a good person and citizen (Salamon, 1992). For example, when loyalty to community members prevailed local farmers were the preferred tenants or buyers for farmland. Preferences were upheld by land moving through private means rather than in an open market, such as a public auction or bidding process. Local farmers could be expected to go the extra distance out of a sense of reciprocity by doing favors for elderly landowners, e.g. plowing roads in winter. Maintaining reciprocity in the land market was viewed as benefiting the community greater good – helping out the next generation to assure their success in farming.

Farmers say this traditional sense of reciprocity no longer supports local operators. If trust among neighbors and family is shaken there is no cooperation. Neighborliness is a consequence of trust. A midsized farmer commented: “you do everything by the book, you are a good farmer, a good citizen but they (landlords) do not value these as in the past. They will give their land to the highest bidder, it doesn’t matter what you do”. Farmers feel alienated or betrayed because they have lost the taken-for-granted loyalty of even kin landlords.

Although, only one-fourth (5 out of 20²²) of the landlords living in town cash lease their properties, active farmers perceive a shift away from crop-share leases as an ongoing trend: “Things are changing. Landlords are not trustworthy as they used to be. They’re just after the big money”, said a midsized farmer who had two kin-landlords shift

²² A total of 23 landlords were interviewed but 3 live in the country or in neighboring towns.

to cash-rent in the last 5 years. “In the past, friendship was enough to guarantee the crop-share (agreement), this has changed. I’ll tell you, it hurts”, said a small farmer.

Nevertheless, three female landowners who share lease their ground to relatives affirmed they have no intention to shift to cash-rent. However, they would consider the shift if, for some reason, their kin tenant leaves farming. According to one widow-landowner: “I am very content with my arrangement (crop-share) but in case my son decides to quit farming I think I would prefer to cash-rent. It is simpler. I know nothing about farming; my son does everything for me”.

Another female landowner who owns 160 and uses a crop-share lease with a friend said: “I know that most people are moving to cash-rent, but I prefer to leave as it is (crop-share) because I do not want to worry about paperwork. My tenant is 67 and he is very close to retiring, probably after that we are going to move to cash-rent because I doubt that my kids will be interested in sharing costs or supervising the farm as I do now”. Therefore, an intensification of the use of cash-rent leases is expected in the next years for reasons as simple as an aging farm population or heir/landowners who live elsewhere.

Although Farmington’s farm operators describe their landlords as trustworthy and conscientious (see Table 20), half complain about the lack of landlords’ loyalty to local farmers. This paradox of trust but not loyalty is also reinforced by the refusal of farm operators to name their landlords to be contacted for an interview. While other factors may explain the lack of success in learning landlords’ identities it was evident that farmers were nervous about identifying landlords, indicating relationships not based on trust and loyalty, which are fundamental to a sense of security.

Table 20

Average ranking of farmer and landlord mutual regard (rated on a scale from 1-5 with 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest score)

Trust factors	Average ranking of regard for other group	
	farmers regard landlords (n = 35*)	landlords regard farmers (n = 23)
Trustworthy and conscientious	4.36	4.55
Trusting of you, the farm operator/land owner	4.80	4.61
Concerned for the environment	4.14	4.44
Up-to-date and knowledgeable	3.58	4.33
Negotiated lease in good faith	4.64	4.66

Source: Community Survey

Note: *35 tenants among 38 farmers in study.

Table 20 shows that regard of farmers and landlords for the other is high on both sides except for being “up to date and knowledgeable” on the part of landlords. Table 21 shows that most landlords are over 71 years of age. This effect is not unexpected. Indicative of this phase of their lives, landlords are likely to slow down and decrease their involvement and interest in agricultural production (Huffman & Fukunaga, 2008).

Table 21

Farmington’s Landlords by Age Group and Gender

Gender	Age		
	40-55	56-70	>71
Male	1	4	5
Female	2	2	9

Source: Community Survey

Landlords’ lack of support and empathy for a tenant’s situation increases the tension and undermines the trust farmers have for them. In the past farmers took for granted that relatives, in particular, were landlords to be counted on. Today even farmers renting from kin, report kin adopting a more business-like as opposed to kinship relationship. A mid-sized farmer commented on the effect of the farmland market competitiveness on tenant and landlord relationships:

My main concern right now is keeping the land I farm. Most of my rented land is from family. But there’s always disputes and bitterness between family members. You cannot make many mistakes, especially with family. You think that it would be simpler, but it’s not. There’s a change of mentality. They don’t care if you are going through a dry spot or whatever. Landowners, family or not, unless they are your parents, don’t really think on farmers’ welfare because they’re all after the big money.

A general decline of trust in others may be a major barrier to farmers' engagement in community life (Putnam, 2000). A small farmer said of competitiveness and the decline in community engagement:

The competitiveness has thrown people - farmers, neighbors, landlords - against each other; they aren't as open as they used to be. When it comes to make money there are no families or friends. It's competition, you understand? I think that the farmers' participation in the community has decreased because of the competition...

Worsening the relationship between farmers and community is how farmers' behavior in the farmland market is often assessed by town residents. Operators considered aggressive "who take other's farmers land" are commonly the subject of gossip in the coffee-shops, at bingo tables, on game nights, and elsewhere. A large farmer, target of frequent community criticism because of his aggressiveness in the farmland market said: "I know they talk (about me) but I don't mind. They like to think they know everything but they don't understand farming", meaning how farming has changed. In contrast, another large farmer, more attached to the community and active in church but also aggressive in the farmland market, is dismayed by the community's bad opinion of him. He was suspicious, uncomfortable, and sometimes emotional while interviewed: "why do you want to talk to me? Did you hear something about me? Is there a specific reason that you want to talk to me?" he asked several times nervously.

Although farmers' actions are scrutinized and criticized by the community there appears little social cost for their taking advantage of the decline of localism in the farmland market. For example, a small farmer who lost a tract to a local large farmer shifted some local activities, such as volunteerism and shopping, out-of-town feeling betrayed not just by the landlord and the winner-farmer but by the whole community.

Everybody in the community knows what happened to me. They didn't like it, but what can they do? The community itself sometimes has a tendency to overlook that and still accept that individual as a member of the community - treat them as if nothing had happened. And that hurts me at the same time. I don't want that person ostracized for the rest of his life, but I think that the community should let him know that it is not an acceptable behavior. But they do accept. It's becoming more and more acceptable. It is sad and I don't feel like being a part of that.

Farmers also complain that local landlords, even kin, take advantage of the competitive farmland market and ask for annual increases in rental rates without regard to soil productivity, for example. Farm operators are put in a difficult position when

landlords demand higher cash-rents based on rumors that large operators (local or not) pay higher cash-rent leases because they need more leased ground. A mid-sized farmer drove me around his property and pointed to the next farm being harvested by a big local farmer at least 12 miles away from their headquarters at the other edge of town: “the enemy is getting to my door”, he commented laughing. Then he pointed to the farmland across the road in front of his house:

I’ve rented that piece for 12 years. Four years ago the landlady decided to move to a nursing home (in a neighboring town) and shifted our agreement to cash-rent. I thought she was right. She had lost her husband and didn’t want anything to do with the business. But since then she became a headache for us. The cash-rent has increased annually and she doesn’t care about the high cost of inputs. Gas prices are ridiculous right now. She goes to bingo, or church and she hears from her friends about farmers who are paying higher cash-rents. I try to explain that her land is not worth what I already pay but she doesn’t listen. It is a terrible situation but I can’t afford to lose the ground.

Inflated cash-rent levels and rising competition from non-local or local farmers are concerns for Illinois farmers and farmers throughout the Corn Belt. These concerns are an increasing source of tension between landlords and tenants. Landlords use the performance of the previous crop year to justify raising leases without regard for increasing input costs or other production expenses. A local landlord who rents 120 acres to a friend justified his second rental increase in the last four years this way: “Last year he (tenant) had a good crop and corn prices went skyrocketing. I think that is good reason enough”.

In the past an implicit agreement existed that farmers would work for the common good in exchange for community support via access to local land (Salamon, 1992, 2003). Farmers were actively involved in community boards, clubs, and organizations and in return expected preferential treatment in the local farmland market. Farmer and town members’ social bonds were important to achieving personal and community social and economic goals (Granovetter, 1985; Salamon, 1992). However, the evolving wider and more competitive local farmland market has contributed at least in part to the proportional decline of farm family numbers in the community and to farmers’ diminished participation in community activities. In addition, landlords’ movement towards a more business-like relationship leads to tenants’ disengagement from the local community because assurances of reciprocity are broken. As seen previously, farmers are

pulling their participation from local churches, local shopping and community organizations and events. As a result, an increasing number of farmers find themselves disengaged from the local community in which they were once firmly rooted. The cynicism and despair that mark today's land market participants are exacerbated by the decline of occasions when farmers and non-farmers interact with one another in ways that acknowledge people' common dependence on each other and places, like their communities.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion: A Rural Community in Transition

In Corn Belt rural communities, nonfarmers, farmers and landlords are parts of close-knit social networks comprised of members with life-long relationships (Allen & Luek, 1992; Salamon, 2003). But such communities are undergoing enormous social upheavals. This study examines social change in a typical small, Corn Belt rural community. Farmington is in the midst of a transition from a social fabric densely woven as an agrarian community dominated by farmers to the loosely woven social fabric of a bedroom community, with fewer farmers less actively engaged than in the past. In the first decade of the 21st century Farmington still provides its citizens with a sense of community due to its cooperative culture and reservoirs of trust, largely generated by a small core group of mainly elderly, actively engaged residents. However, Farmington's community well-being is threatened by a combination of agricultural trends emerging during the past two decades throughout the Corn Belt, and the gradual diminished participation of its remaining farmers and loyal elderly folk.

Corn and soybean production are ubiquitous among Farmington farmers, regardless of operation size. Because these products require scale to be lucrative in today's markets, farmers believe that "bigger is better" is the only pathway to successful farming and, therefore, they continually seek to expand their land base to survive. Farmers speak of taking down old farm-houses or barns to squeeze in a few more crop rows. For Farmington farmers, four factors shape their production decision-making: social pressure, conventional knowledge, government policies, and conventional commodities' high values. These same factors also tend to limit the adoption of alternative or diversified agricultural systems. That is, the conventional ideology of growth inhibits farmers' choosing viable production alternatives (e.g livestock, organic or specialty crops) more suited to survival on what is today considered a small acreage (i.e. 700 acres and smaller). Those operators who remain conventional decision-makers and do not or cannot get bigger either are forced out or live under constant threat of being forced out. They appear blind to or dismissive of alternative ways of surviving in farming.

As farm production transforms with adoption of new technologies, the farmland market is correspondingly transformed by regional trends particularly farm concentration,

1031 exchanges, more non-local landowners and farm operators, and crop-share displaced by cash-rent leases. When combined these trends account for greater amounts of Farmington farmland controlled by players from outside the community. That is, although farmland is immobile and soil types are specific to a region, landlords and operators are now less often local residents and have less commitment to Farmington. Likewise, increased cash-rent leasing and the continual drive for expansion heighten competition among local operators for community farmland. The farmland market is no longer a local market.

In a tight-knit community like Farmington, crop-share leases and verbal agreements between landlord and tenant prevailed until recently for both financial and non-economic reasons such as kinship, friendship, goodwill, neighborliness, or trust. A commitment to sharing both risk and profits equally between owner and tenant fundamental to crop-share agreements shaped community relationships (Allen & Luek, 1992; Reiss, 1983). With the onset of cash-rent leasing, 1031 exchanges and absentee landowners coming close to dominating the local farmland market, farming evolved “from a way of life to a business proposition,” observed a local farmer. Associated with the transformation of farming governed by purely business practices is the loss of the effectiveness of unwritten mechanisms of social control, such as family reputation or neighborliness which exerted pressure on farmers to live-up to community cultural ideals.

In the emerging agricultural business context, where a personal relationship between tenant and landlord is unnecessary, and more outside players control local farmland, the entire community is affected by decreased farm-family engagement and a decline of community stores of social capital. For example, because farmland is being treated more as a commodity, and tenant and landlord are strangers, local norms of reciprocity and trust are unenforceable because players rarely meet in a face-to-face setting. As the seemingly limitless Corn Belt farm concentration advances, and farmers are less dependent on their local community for land access, they see little possibility of getting much return from a substantial investment in community service. Local farm families therefore are withdrawing from civic engagement without any social or economic cost for their disengagement. The shift in the agricultural sector from informal agreements based on trust to formal agreements based on contract, as shown in the

Farmington community case study, reflects the shift from more customary relationships to more individualistic and loose interactions, a process observed more generally as emerging in the wider society (Coleman, 1993).

Unintended consequences of the aggregation of arms-length farmland rentals that underlay the emerging farmland market are a threat to Farmington's future vitality. With all farmers driven by expansion goals comes the necessity of aggressively acquiring more land, enhancing an already strong sense of individualism among farmers. It is a pathway fostering family isolation. Heightened competition for scarce farmland is the source of community tension involving hard feelings, depression, and perceptions of unethical behavior, even between neighbors. Enhancing farmers' stress is the instability of tenure (due to shorter leases, non-local landlords and operators) which makes farmers' lives less predictable, especially among those with operations dependent on rental acreage. The undermining of loyalty to local businesses is seen in larger farm operators by-passing local input suppliers and marketing channels. These factors combine to heighten disengagement by large farmers which damages friend and kin relationships that constitute the community's social fabric (Ramirez-Ferrero, 2005). When farmers become large, landowners are not local, and cash-rent is the predominant leasing form, there is an emerging potential for business relationships to become exploitative, and community social controls to be ineffective at censuring the exploiters.

Local farmers still maintain some social ties to the local community, despite the overall diminishment of their community engagement. For example, farmers historically were pillars of the local church, attending regularly and providing crucial services. In Farmington today, 21% of local farmers attend church outside the community and 12% are not members of any church. Those farm families who remain in town churches, however, continue to be active members. Community businesses, residential stability, tight-knit social networks, engagement, and shared beliefs and practices are all slowly being eroded as newcomers move in, and more oldtimers work elsewhere, and engaged citizens are aging (Salamon, 2003). Networks are now looser say oldtimers because the population is more mobile and diverse altering the formerly shared cultural and social norms which were dependent on routine face-to-face interactions and collective loyalty to the town. Local residents have less time, fewer opportunities to meet or get-to-know one

another because they are less likely to devote themselves to community development, organizing social activities, or promoting common interests. Consequently, mechanisms of social control based on mutual trust and reciprocity decrease and contribute to lower civic engagement, a decline of neighborliness, and a fragile sense of community - traits more commonly associated with suburban or urban places.

In general, the trends documented in the Farmington farmland market tend to benefit the larger farmers and landlords at the expense of mid-sized and small operators, who historically were central players in social capital generation for this rural community. The farmland market trends also spur farm concentration and thus result in fewer farm families in the local population. Larger farms thus lead to fewer local businesses, local jobs, and thus more people working outside town. Fewer farmers affect the vitality of community life because it leads to the decrease of activities, services, and social interaction essential to community sustainability. As farm concentration continues, the community itself is caught in a social treadmill of community decline.

Nowadays Farmington has a relatively stable population (with the exit of oldtimers being compensated by the arrival of newcomers), eleven small businesses that provide gathering spots, annual community celebrations, social weekly gatherings, such as, the Kiwanis, Bingo nights, and regular activities requiring mobilization. All these factors contribute to community resilience even as farm numbers decline and the main street withers. However, it will be more difficult to sustain this rural community if the trends of fewer farmers and large farms accelerate. Local residents obtain most goods and services elsewhere now, because of the lack of main street businesses, little variety and higher prices in those that remain, and fewer local jobs. Half those working commute a mean time of 31 minutes (U.S. Census of Population and Housing, 2000). These workers have shifted from obtaining shopping, services, and other activities locally to the county seat or nearby cities offering stores such as Wal-Mart and more recreational options. As a result, community loyalty to local businesses and churches, engagement, and everyday trust - built on familiarity- are all in decline. Only the newly constructed high school represents the town as a whole and integrates both new and oldtimers in a shared interest.

The decline of those institutions critical to a sense of community – farm and town - is transforming the small-town social fabric of Farmington. Because Farmington typifies

rural Midwest communities, its changes reflect a fundamental transformation of rural society more generally across the region. The sense of community that to date made Farmington a tight-knit, good place to live for farmers and non-farmers alike, is endangered as farming becomes more concentrated, industrialized, and increasingly more land is owned by non-farmers, and non-locals, depriving the community control of the farmland that historically symbolized its agrarian identity. Therefore, Farmington in the coming decade is likely to turn into a more loosely-knit suburban or bedroom community, in contrast to its character of a tight-knit, trustful, and loyal agrarian community of the recent past. Oldtimers will mourn the old community as they now mourn the demolished old high school. A sense of community they recognize, is a fragile sentiment which must continually be sustained by work, caring, neighborliness and trust.

This small, intensively studied Illinois community provides a useful window on the transformation ongoing in the rural Midwest. Through it one may view the emerging social fabric of the Corn Belt rural communities resulting from a competitive and restructured land market and the increasing formalization of leasing arrangements. Rich ethnographic detail about how a local farmland market is being transformed allows farmers, landowners and farm managers to become more aware of the community and the wider consequences of their individual decisions about farmland leasing, expansion, and sales. This conclusion addresses directly the goals of the University of Illinois, College of ACES Dudley Smith Initiative, which funded the study. By increasing the understanding of the interactions among the components of the agricultural and community system, we help make agriculture and communities sustainable over the long term. The findings from this study should be useful to the University of Illinois Extension for educational programs and services that would aid farmers and landlords in bolstering in cooperation and trust, which are essential for the development of sustainable communities. The combination of detailed landlord and tenant behaviors provides data to inform partners in leasing arrangements about the community social implications for their choices.

In addition, this study highlights the importance of developing programs that supply real information and tools for supporting sustainable farms on smaller scale that would help small farmers keep their family land legacy and become successful small farmers. From my perspective of international student, today's universities tend to focus

more on industrial agriculture than on sustainable agriculture. They help create the bias of bigger is better, or at least foster it. The student is better prepared to deal with new technologies, machinery, genetic advances, and market information to achieve economies of scale than to work on a small farm with simpler tools and fewer resources. Hence, universities could build academic programs to train students to develop sustainable farming or, at least, to focus on agricultural diversity as a way to make small farmers stronger competitors, as well, more viable economically. E.F. Schumacher, in his book *Small is Beautiful*, talks about economic simplicity and suitable technologies that are believed to empower people more in contrast to the idea of “bigger is better” which renders many powerless to resist it. Small scale agriculture can be more sustainable, socially just and quite profitable. In order to keep small operations economically viable, farmers must nourish a good relationship with the land and with their community and neighbors. Thus, it is more likely that farmers of smaller scale operations are committed to their community with active engagement.

The insights gained from this study also are useful for the development of new ideas that can help to reduce the impact of continuous farming restructuring on rural communities and include farmers as an integral part of successful community development. For example, through the use of grants to stimulate agricultural diversity would benefit the community as a whole, as noted by Tom Lyson’s New York work on *Civic Agriculture*.

This study examines a representative community of the Corn Belt area and is based on evidence from a relatively small sample of 124 people; therefore caution must be taken in generalizing the results to other areas or geographical regions. If progress is to be made in understanding the new complexities of rural social environments, researchers need to verify similar agricultural and social trends and compare how and why these may differ from one region to another. How should those interested in vital rural areas invest their resources - in farming or communities? Up to now that investment has focused on farming with the distribution of massive subsidy and programs directed to farmers, benefiting mainly large farmers while communities where they live and work lack services and entertainment. Will the farming community continue to maintain its stores of social capital? There are signs that Farmington is fighting back even with fewer farmers

keeping alive its festivals and organizations, important to community identity. However, sadly the county seat's newspaper web site reported recently the town losing its small Catholic school. This loss reinforces that it is a constant battle to maintain a small, beloved place.

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Appendix A: Community Survey

1. What do you consider the boundaries of Farmington to be?
2. How long have you lived in Farmington?
3. How do you rate Farmington as a place to live?
 1. Very desirable
 2. Somewhat desirable
 3. Somewhat undesirable
 4. Very undesirable
4. What do you especially like about living here?
5. What do you especially dislike about living here?
6. How would you describe the community of Farmington ten years ago? Please give examples to illustrate your answer.
 1. Very tight-knit/cohesive
 2. Somewhat cohesive
 3. Somewhat non-cohesive
 4. Very loose-knit/non-cohesive
7. How would you describe the community of Farmington now? Please give examples explaining your answer.
 1. Very tight-knit/cohesive
 2. Somewhat cohesive
 3. Somewhat non-cohesive
 4. Very loose-knit/non-cohesive
8. Over the past 10 years, what are the main changes that have occurred in Farmington?

Please give examples.
9. Why do you think the changes occurred? Do you feel the changes are for the better or worse?

Your Community

10. Indicate which, if any, of the following community activities you or any member of your household has been involved in during the past five years.
 1. Community service organizations such as the Jaycees, Lions or Rotary (10.1)
 2. Social groups such as the Elks, Masons, Moose, or other Neighborhood clubs (10.2)

- | | | |
|-----|--|----------|
| 3. | Educational or school organizations | (10.3) |
| 4. | Veterans organizations such as Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion Post, etc. | (10.4) |
| 5. | Farmer organizations such as the Farm Bureau, Farmers Union, etc. | (10.5) |
| 6. | Religious organizations such as church groups | (10.6) |
| 7. | Board of directors or trustees of a bank or member of the Morinsonville Business Council | (10.7) |
| 8. | Cooperatives, Cooperative Extension Groups | (10.8) |
| 9. | Athletic leagues, sports or hunting clubs | (10.9) |
| 10. | 4-H clubs, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Little League | (10.10.) |
| 11. | Village Government | (10.11) |
| 12. | Other (specify) _____ | (10.12) |
- Did your involvement in any of the above organizations take place outside of Farmington? If so, where? (10.13)
11. How would you best describe how people in your community relate to one another? (11)
1. They are concerned about each other's welfare
 2. They help others in an emergency
 3. They mind one another's business
 4. They mind their own business
 5. They cooperate to achieve shared goals
 6. Everybody takes care of themselves
 7. They are out for what they can get
12. From the types of persons listed below, please indicate all you know by name and speak to on a regular conversational basis.
- | | | |
|----|--|--------|
| 1. | Village President or Village Board member | (12.1) |
| 2. | School Board member | (12.2) |
| 3. | Pastor, minister, or priest | (12.3) |
| 4. | Owner or employee of a restaurant, retail shop or automobile dealership | (12.4) |
| 5. | Farm equipment dealer | (12.5) |
| 6. | Farmer (i.e., owner/operator, tenant farmer or farm manager) | (12.6) |
| 7. | Agricultural fertilizer or pesticide dealer | (12.7) |
| 8. | Government employee of an agricultural agency (e.g., Farm Service administration, Soil and Water Conservation District, etc.) Farm laborer (i.e., hired farm worker) | (12.8) |
13. What fraction of all people in your community do you know (at least know by name and speak to on a conversational basis)? (13)

- 1. Less than ten percent
- 2. Ten percent to one-quarter
- 3. One-quarter to one-half
- 4. One-half to three-quarters
- 5. Three-quarters to 100%

Has this changed in the past 10 years?

14. Please choose how often you could depend on your neighbors for the following things:

	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1. Watch over your house when you are away					
2. Water the lawn					
3. Run errands					
4. Take in packages when you're away from home					
5. Baby-sit for a few hours					
6. Lend money if hospitalized for 2 weeks					

15. Do you depend on close relatives (parents, siblings, etc.) rather than neighbors for the above things? (15)

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

16. If your close relatives live outside of Farmington, please indicate where. (16)

- 1. Christian County
- 2. Springfield
- 3. Out of county
- 4. Out of state

17. How do community residents treat new people? Please give examples: (17)

- 1. Warm and friendly
- 2. Takes time to warm up
- 3. Suspicious
- 4. Well, if the newcomers are like the community residents
- 5. Fine, if they don't try to change things
- 6. New people are not easily accepted

18. What, do you see as the advantages or benefits of newcomers moving into Farmington? Please give examples. (18)

19. Who makes the real decisions about Farmington 's future? (19)

- 1. The local government officials
- 2. A few individuals with most of the power
- 5. All residents have a voice in local decision making

- 3. A few families with most of the power
- 4. Landowners outside the community
- 5. The business owners
- 6. The business owners
- 7. Others (specify)

20. The leaders in the community are ... (20)

- 1. The most wealthy
- 2. Those who have lived here for long time
- 3. The elected public officials
- 4. Those who work behind the scenes
- 5. Supported by most residents
- 6. The big landowners
- 7. The business people
- 8. Other (specify)

21. Do you shop in Farmington for the following goods and services? If not, please indicate where.

		<u>Yes</u> (Farmington)	<u>T'ville</u>	<u>Springfield</u>	<u>Somewhere</u> <u>else</u>
<u>21.1</u>	<u>Food</u>				
<u>21.2</u>	<u>Banking</u>				
<u>21.3</u>	<u>Furniture</u>				
<u>21.4</u>	<u>Insurance</u>				
<u>21.5</u>	<u>Appliances</u>				
<u>21.6</u>	<u>Gasoline</u>				
<u>21.7</u>	<u>Doctor</u>				
<u>21.8</u>	<u>Childcare</u>				

22. Here are some statements which might describe your community. Please chose which best shows how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Most people in my community can be trusted					
2. The leadership in my community does not care much about what people like me think					
3. The leadership in my community can be trusted to do what is best for the community					
4. I feel fully accepted as a community member					
5. Conflict is not common in my community					
6. Decisions in my community are made by a small group of people					
7. Residents in my community know each other well					
8. Residents in my community actively participate in community activities					
9. The economic outlook for my community appears poor					
10. My community does a good job planning for the future					
11. Overall, my community has more things going for it than do other communities of similar size					
12. This is a farm community					
13. This community is a good place to raise children					
14. On the whole, I am very satisfied with living in my community					

23. What type of community do you consider Farmington to be?

(23)

1. Rural 2. Small-town 3. Other (specify)

What factors contribute to your answer?

24. What is your ideal community to live in? Please explain why. (24)
 1. Rural 2. Small-town 3. Suburb 4. Small city 5. Large city
25. What is your least preferred community to live in? Please explain why. (25)
 1. Rural 2. Small-town 3. Suburb 4. Small city 5. Large city

Household Information

26. Sex: 1 = Male 2 = Female (26)
27. What is your present marital status? (27)
 1. Single 2. Married 3. Separated 4. Divorced 5. Widowed
28. 1. What is your age? (28.1)
 2. What is you spouse's age? (28.2)
29. Do you have any children? 1 = Yes 2 = No (29)
 If yes, how many? (29.1)
 What are the ages of your child/children? (29.2)
30. How many years of education have you received? (30)
31. How many years of education has your spouse received? (31)
32. What ethnic group do you most identify with? (32)
 1. English, Welsh, Scotch-Irish, Scottish 2. Irish 3. German 4. Dutch
 5. Hispanic 6. Slavic 7. American 8. Scandinavian 9. Black
 10. Other (specify) _____
33. What is your religious affiliation? (33)
34. Where is your church located? (34)
 1. Farmington 2. Taylorville 3. Rosamond 4. Pana 5. Springfield
 6. Other (specify)
35. How actively do you participate in your church? (35)
 1. Once a week 2. Twice a week 3. Occasionally 4. Member only
36. Are you or any other adult household member a native of Farmington? (36)
 1. Yes 2. No
 If not, where were you or they born? (36.1)
37. If you grew up in Farmington, what are the advantages or disadvantages (37)
 of growing up here?
38. If you moved to the community did your family have relatives or friends already (38)
 living here?

- 1 = Yes 2 = No (38)
39. If a relative did live here, which generation moved here? (39)
1 = Parents 2 = Grandparents 3 = Great-grandparents or earlier
40. Do you expect to be living in this community in the future? (40.1)
a. 1 = Yes 2 = No
b. If yes, why? (40.2)
1. I have work here
2. I own my house (or land)
3. My family has always lived here
4. It's a good place to live
5. All of my family is here
6. All my friends are here
7. I have nowhere else to go
8. It's a safe place to live
9. Other (specify)
41. How many people live in your household? (41)
42. What type of home do you live in? (42)
1. Apartment
2. Single family home
3. Townhome
4. Converted store front
5. Other (specify)
43. Do you or a member of your family own the home in which you live?
1 = Yes 2 = No (43)
44. Do you expect any of your children to reside in Farmington as adults?
1 = Yes 2 = No 3 = Maybe (44)
45. Do you subscribe to the local newspaper?
1 = Yes 2 = No
If yes, (45)
() Farmington Times () Breeze-Courier () Pana Palladium
() Other _____
46. Do you have a local library card? (56)
1 = Yes 2 = No
47. Did you vote in the last local election? (47)
1 = Yes 2 = No
48. How many people in your household (including yourself) have at least one paying job? (Include self-employed persons):
1. Household members holding at least one full-time job? (48.1)
2. Household members holding a part-time job? (48.2)
3. Total number of household members holding at least one paying job (48.3)

49. What is the occupation of the principal wage earner(s) of the family? (49)
 A = Earner 1 B = Earner 2 (example A = 2, B = 9)
- | | |
|--|---------------------|
| 1. Farmer | 9. Retired |
| 2. Education | 10. Unemployed |
| 3. Human services, nurse, social worker | 11. Government |
| 4. Business and managerial | 12. Other (specify) |
| 5. White collar (store clerk, secretarial, etc.) | |
| 6. Blue collar (truck driver, laborer, etc.) | |
| 7. Professional (doctor, lawyer, etc.) | |
| 8. Self-employed business | |
50. Please indicate whether the job(s) is full-time or part-time. (50)
 A = Earner 1 B = Earner 2
51. Where is the job(s) located? Town name _____ (51)
 A = Earner 1 B = Earner 2
52. How far do you travel to work (one way)? (52)
- | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Work at home | 2. Less than one mile | 3. 2 - 15 miles |
| 4. 16-30 miles | 5. Over 30 miles | |
53. How long have you worked at this job? (53)
 A = Earner 1 B = Earner 2
54. What is the range of your household income? (54)
- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Under 15,000 | 6. 55,000 - 64,999 |
| 2. 15,000 - 24,999 | 7. 65,000 - 74,999 |
| 3. 25,000 - 34,999 | 8. 75,000 - 84,999 |
| 4. 35,000 - 44,999 | 9. 85,000 - 94,999 |
| 5. 45,000 - 54,999 | 10. 95,000 or more |

QUESTIONS FOR THOSE CONNECTED TO FARMING:

If a landlord (if not skip to #57):

55. Do you own farmland? (55.1)
 1=Yes 2= No
- How many acres? _____ (55.2)
56. Who farms your land? (56)
1. friend
 2. relative
 3. farm manager
 4. other: _____

If an operator:

57. How many acres do you own? _____ (57.1)
How many do you rent? _____ (57.2)
58. (On rental land) What are your leasing arrangements? _____ (58.1)
If crop share, what type you prefer? _____ (58.2)
59. Who are your landlords?
1. friend
2. relative
3. farm manager 4. other: _____ (59)
60. Where does your landlord live?
1. Morrinsonville 2. County 3. Out county 4. Out state (60)
61. Has the competition in the local land market increased in the past 10 years?
Why? (61)
62. In what ways do you think local leasing practices have changed in the past 10 years? (62)

Appendix B: Tenant Interview

1. How does the ratio of your owned land to leased land compare to what you farmed 10 years ago?

_____ % land owned has increased _____ % land owned has decreased

What ratio of owned to leased land do you prefer in your operation?

_____ % land owned _____ % land leased

What type of ratio do you expect to see in the next 5 years (or 10 years)?

_____ % land owned _____ % land leased

2. How many acres would you like to be farming in the next 10 years?

3. Did you face stiff competition in leasing the tracts that you crop share?

4. What things do you offer landlords to assure you continuing to lease the land that you crop share? (For example, do you supply production reports annually? How detailed is it? Do you think that reports make difference in your management relationship?)

5. Did you face stiff competition in leasing the tracts that you cash rent?

6. What things do you offer landlords to assure you continuing to lease the land that you cash rent? (For example, do you supply production reports annually? How detailed is it? Do you think that reports make difference in your management relationship?)

7. What is your preferred leasing form? Why?

8. Do you value the risk sharing characteristics of crop share leases? Explain.

9. Do you farm the land that you crop share differently than the land that you cash rent? Explain. (e.g. inputs, sequence, low or no till)

10. Do you farm the land that you own differently than the land that you lease? Please explain.

11. Do you believe that changes in farmland leasing practices have altered life (e.g. relationships, engagement in volunteerism) in your community?

11. How do you evaluate what price to offer on your cash rented ground?

___ auctions

___ consult farm management

___ trust in the tenant

___ University of Illinois auctions.

12. Do you take soil productivity into consideration when negotiating a lease? Does your landlord?

13. Do you think the University of Illinois has affected the local farmland rental market? How?

14. Using a scale from 1-5 with 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest, rank what you take into account when you negotiate leasing.

	Low				High
Risk	1	2	3	4	5
Landlord involvement	1	2	3	4	5
Relationship with landlord	1	2	3	4	5
Soil productivity	1	2	3	4	5
Price	1	2	3	4	5

TENANT TRACTS

1. What type of lease do you have on this tract?

Crop share _____ Cash rent _____
 Combination of crop share and cash rent _____

2. Which category best describes your relationship with this landlord?

Family member _____ (type of relationship) _____
 Close friend _____
 Friendly acquaintance _____
 Previously unknown to you _____
 Familiar Institution _____
 Unfamiliar Institution _____
 None. Professional manager used. _____

3. How long have you leased this property?

4. How long have you known this landlord?

5. Is the contract written or oral?

For how many years does it run?
 Is the renewal automatic?
 Are you happy with your lease? If not, why?

6. How did you first learn about the opportunity to lease this land?

____ from landlord directly
 ____ from a neighbor or other friend
 ____ from a professional manager
 ____ from a relative
 ____ from newspaper or media advertising
 ____ from a banking/lending institution
 ____ from other source (explain) _____

7. How involved is the landlord in the management of the land?
 ___ Very involved/ contact is often
 ___ Somewhat involved/ contact is occasional
 ___ Rarely involved/contact is little or none

8. Does the landlord live in the community? (If not, where?)
 ___ County ___ State ___ Other state (which)

9. Using a scale from 1-5 with 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest, rank how you regard your landlords on the following items:

	Low				High
Trustworthy and conscientious	1	2	3	4	5
Trusting of you, the farm operator	1	2	3	4	5
Concerned about the environment	1	2	3	4	5
Up to date and knowledgeable	1	2	3	4	5
Negotiated lease in good faith	1	2	3	4	5

10. Do you have a specialty crop contract for the tract?

11. What was your average yield per acre in the last 3 years on this tract?
 Corn ___ Soy beans ___
 Other (specify) ___

12. (If crop share) What proportion of the crop does the landlord receive as rent? ___

13. Are available inputs (e.g. seed, fertilizer, etc) shared in the same proportion? (If no) Could you describe the proportion?

14. (If the lease is cash rent) How much is the rent per acre?

15. If you have rented this tract for at least 10 years, what management or other changes have occurred in this period?

Did ownership change?

Did type of lease change? Who requested the change?

Have the amount of rent? Who requested the change?

Has the amount of landlord input changed? Who requested the change?

Appendix C: Landlord Interview

1. What is your preferred leasing form? Why? (Landlord or tenant choice)
2. Are you concerned about how risk is shared between tenant and landlord?
3. (If cash rent) How do you decide about the price of the cash rent?
 ___ auctions
 ___ consult farm management
 ___ trust in the tenant
 ___ University of Illinois auctions.

4. Using a scale from 1-5 with 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest, rank what you take into account when you negotiate leasing.

	Low				High
Risk	1	2	3	4	5
Landlord involvement	1	2	3	4	5
Relationship with landlord	1	2	3	4	5
Soil productivity	1	2	3	4	5
Price	1	2	3	4	5

5. Do you think the University of Illinois has affected the local farmland rental market? How?
6. Do you believe that recent changes in farmland leasing practices have altered in any way the local community near your land?

LANDLORD TRACT

1. I want to ask you some questions about a tract you rent to _____:
 Acreage of the tract: _____
2. What type of lease do you use?
 Crop share _____ Cash rent _____
 Combination of crop share and cash rent _____
3. Does the tenant have a specialty crop contract? If yes, what kind?
4. (If crop share) What proportion of the crop do you receive as rent? _____
 Are available inputs (e.g. seed, fertilizer, etc) shared in the same proportion? (If no)
 Could you describe the proportion? _____
5. What was your average yield per acre in the last 3 years on this tract?
 Corn _____ Soy beans _____
 Other (specify) _____

6. Which category best describes your relationship with this tenant?
 Family member _____ (type of relationship) _____
 Close friend _____
 Friendly acquaintance _____
 Previously unknown to you _____
 None. Professional manager used. _____

7. How long have you leased this property out?

8. How long have you known this tenant?

9. How long has this tenant rented the property?

10. Is the contract written or oral?
 How long does it last?
 Is the renewal automatic?
 Why did you choose this arrangement?

11. How did you first learn about the tenant's interest in this land?
 ___ from tenant directly
 ___ from a neighbor or other friend
 ___ from a professional manager
 ___ from a relative
 ___ from newspaper or media advertising
 ___ from a banking/lending institution
 ___ from other source (explain) _____

12. As a landlord, how involved are you in the management of the land?
 ___ Very involved/ contact is often
 ___ Somewhat involved/ contact is occasional
 ___ Rarely involved/contact is little or none

13. Using a scale from 1-5 with 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest, rank how you regard your tenant on the following items:

	Low				High
Trustworthy and conscientious	1	2	3	4	5
Trusting of you, the farm owner	1	2	3	4	5
Concerned about the environment	1	2	3	4	5
Up to date and knowledgeable	1	2	3	4	5
Negotiated lease in good faith	1	2	3	4	5

14. (If the lease is cash rent) How much is the rent per acre?

15. If you have rented this tract for at least 10 years, what changes in the arrangement with tenants have you made in this period?
 Changed tenant?

Changed type of lease? Who requested the change?

Changed the amount of rent? Who requested the change?

Changed the amount of landlord input? Who requested the change?

16. . How did you acquire this land?

inherited from _____

purchased

given by

17. Are you happy with the terms of your rental arrangement?

18. If not, do you plan to change that arrangement when the lease is up?

19. Do you take soil productivity into consideration when negotiating a lease?