

## **Rural Sociology in New Zealand: Companion planting?**

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### **Abstract**

Rural sociology in New Zealand has been associated with some of New Zealand's most famous early social analysis: Somerset's Littledene and Doig's survey of dairy farmers. These exemplify its uncertain and changing relationship with government policy and funding. Over the years rural sociology has been funded from a variety of sources, sometimes unexpected, sometimes generously. Its peak moments have been related to both important developments in rural life, such as the 1930s Depression, or the reconfiguration of farming that took place after the restructuring instigated by the Fourth labour Government in the 1980s. Linkages with both overseas sociologists and those within other disciplines with common agendas are crucial to sociological analysis of rural trends.

**Keywords:** Rural sociology, sociology of agriculture, rural policy research

### **Introduction**

A history of rural sociology in New Zealand is a deceptively simple task. Rural sociology as a discipline has long encapsulated diverse interests, from community studies to searching out the linkages within and between the increasingly large multinationals that dominate the food chain. The definition of rural has drawn the attention of rural sociologists themselves inwards, as they debate what should be their proper focus. Pahl's famous article on the urban-rural continuum released a round of introspection on the changing nature of rural life and this introspection continues in New Zealand and provides a basis for this review essay (Pahl, 1966). I have identified three periods, each having its share of reviews and commentaries on the nature of rural research, if not of rural sociology. These periods include pre-sociological and early rural sociology, the government oriented work of the 1980s-1990s, and the birth of the Australasian Agri-food connection which is linked to the period between 2000-2015 in which rural research has been dominated by multi-million dollar research projects, especially those hosted by The Centre for the Study

of Agriculture, Food and Environment (CSAFE)<sup>1</sup>. Whether they have addressed themselves to rural sociology, the sociology of agriculture, or social science related to rural issues, they all contribute to setting an agenda for reflection.

### **Methods for review**

A common strategy in earlier reviews has been to survey the major journals whose editorial policy claims rural sociology, or those in which rural sociologists are known to publish (Fairweather and Gilles, 1982; Friedland, 2010; Zablocki, 2013). Given that the key journals are linked to different cultural/geographic divisions – *Rural Sociology* with its United States focus, *Sociologia Ruralis* its European one, this has had the added advantage for those wishing to learn from the differing trajectories of each community of scholars. To avoid being trapped by my preconceptions of the New Zealand field, I also used this strategy to check who was publishing in this area. A search of *Rural Sociology*, *Sociologia Ruralis*, *Journal of Rural Studies*, and *Agriculture and Human Values* was carried out and identified a small number of publications in each by New Zealanders, most of whom were working within one of the networks identified in this article. Another search of *New Zealand Sociology* and *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology* confirmed that few rural sociologists were publishing in local non-specialist journals. I supplemented this with interviews with rural sociologists (Hugh Campbell, Ian Carter, Charles Crothers, Bruce Curtis, John Fairweather, Ann Pomeroy and Claudia Bell) and a search for materials specifically addressing the history of the discipline. This confirmed that periodisation should address the ebb and flow of relationship between policy and research, funding as well as academic dynamics, and the importance of key individuals in promoting research agendas. Each period reveals people shifting between rural sociology and related social sciences, in terms of their self-designation and the journals in which they publish. This is not a review of all research related to rural issues, but will attend to some of this movement, and will try to track use of rural sociology or the sociology of agriculture, as a marker of affiliation to particular strands of sociology. In New Zealand, the dominance of farming or food and fibre production gives rural

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<sup>1</sup> In recognition of a shift in its primary research interests CSAFE was renamed The Centre for Sustainability in 2011. Resilience in rural communities is still a research theme.

sociology a special significance and if it is somewhat in tension with rural studies, this can be acknowledged as a creative force rather than a narrative of concern. Environmental history, social history, and labour history have all identified rural development in response to the needs of the British Empire as shaping New Zealand, with rural sociology addressing more recent history – post World War One up to the present day.

### **The first analysts of rural life: sociologists and their predecessors**

New Zealand has a history of people Brickell names “other sociologists” who were social analysts before formal sociology was established (Brickell, 2007: 4). Those included in “other” rural sociology by Professor Ian Carter, foremost analyst of its beginnings, are generally economists or educationists. Horace Belshaw’s work is the earliest, *Some Aspects of the Country Life Movement in New Zealand* was published in 1929 (Carter, 1986: 30).

Arriving from Scotland, Carter’s aim in reviewing the history of rural sociology in New Zealand was part of his more general exploration of a completely different country and planning a future research trajectory for himself. He was familiar with the resurgence of European rural sociology of agriculture, with its base in Marxist critique and review of the Chayanovian study of farm families that dominated the *Journal of Peasant Studies* and the revision of labour politics documented in *History Workshop*. As such, he wanted rural sociology in New Zealand to develop as a critique rather than a support of farm interests. Carter was less sympathetic towards the American community study and farm problem oriented sociology of the Land Grant Colleges that he discovered had attracted policy oriented New Zealanders to rural sociology in the 1930s: “This location and client group determined the ‘theoretically anaemic, descriptive’ (Shanin and Worsley, 1971: viii) form that American rural sociology would take.” (Carter, 1988: 216).

The story began in the Depression when New Zealand farmers faced similar problems of debt and isolation to American ones, but for the latter, rural sociology allied with the powerful resources of the United States Department of Agriculture during the New Deal era had brought some relief or “had shown an ability to get a purchase on at least some of these problems” (Carter, 1988, p. 216). Neither Lincoln nor Massey Universities had been founded on an American model, with the focus on adult education and farm family and community wellbeing that marked American

rural sociology departments in the Land Grant Colleges<sup>2</sup>. So the route in for rural sociology came through a combination of educational innovators and the Department of Agriculture<sup>3</sup>, with the Carnegie Foundation acting as midwife by funding local rural services such as libraries and visits from influential American rural sociologists such as E de S Brunner and J H Kolb.

The vision for adult education among Professor of Education James Shelley's Canterbury circle was behind a rural programme alongside the urban Workers Education Association during the Depression. Two of New Zealand's most famous "other sociologists" were linked to this coalition. Crawford Somerset's *Littledene* (1938) and William Doig's *Standards of Life of New Zealand Dairy Farmers* (1940) did not contain explicit proposals for social change, but clearly were intended to support it. Doig's study (1940) begins with a foreword that presumes standards of living can be understood in relation to other studies of farm management and farm capacity. It was a major undertaking - 526 farms were surveyed by field officers who visited farms and most families provided household budgets.

Somerset's community study of Oxford (Littledene), modelled on the Lynds' Middletown, had chapters on both adult education and schooling. The educational focus was weaker in the dairy farmer study. W T Doig and the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR) Social Science section, supported by the Institute of Pacific Relations, were very detailed in their study of the living standards dairy farmers and carried out statistical analysis of the association between tenure, butterfat production, schooling, experience etc. and key variables relating to the home and female family members' work on the farm. The family's access to the outside world was sometimes better than their home comforts. While 78% had a motor car, only 16% had a septic tank, while 63% had a telephone, only 46% had running water to sink, bath and tubs attached to a drainage system (Doig, 1940: 47).

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<sup>2</sup> Each state had a university funded by income from land allocated by the federal government and providing an education that was responsive to local interests and inclusive. Unlike the private universities, departments of rural sociology were common and relatively separate from sociology per se.

<sup>3</sup> As it was then known. Subsequently it became the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, and currently is Ministry for Primary Industries (since 2012). It was known as MAF even when from 1998 it was solely concerned with agriculture.

Claire Toynbee's oral histories confirmed the strict management of children and women's labour was not limited to dairy farms (Toynbee, 1995).

Littledene was received with approbation by the educational community but the dairy farmer study attracted the attention of the Deputy Prime Minister Peter Fraser himself and the results were so politically unwelcome that publication was only possible as a draft was already overseas with the Institute of Pacific Relations. Nevertheless, by the mid-1940s, many of the Shelley circle had achieved power in the Public Service and MAF was prepared to take on rural sociology in the hopes of supporting productivity indirectly. The MAF Annual Report quoted by Carter (1988: 194) suggested: "It has been gradually realised that agricultural economics and the sociological aspects of farming are equally important and play their part in the success or failure of our agricultural industries". The intention was to ease farming into a post war regime that would help reintegrate servicemen into farming and maintain farming as an innovative industry, attractive to coming generations.

Carter chronicled the failure of the social science elements of the Rural Development Division<sup>4</sup>, staffed largely by women trained in Home Science extension from the University of Otago, to deliver on these objectives. Although the unit remained until 1972, supporting rural women as home makers, the failure of the first research project with a goal of improved rural housing ended the unit's research potential. Carter concludes that the graft of American rural sociology, which was successful in other countries (Lowe, 2010) failed for political reasons "centring on connections between interest groups and institutional groupings in the New Zealand state's agricultural apparatus". It was not the technical capabilities of the United States discipline that failed (Carter, 1988, p221). The role of funding and policy in shaping the rural sociology carried out in New Zealand is a theme which reoccurs in subsequent phases of the discipline. The importance of rural women in setting the agenda for this unit was emphasised in Carter (1986).

The 1970s saw a reinvigoration of community studies (Bell and Newby, 1971) and in New Zealand this was coupled with a period when the changes to farm income as a result of the United Kingdom's entry into the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973 put stress on New Zealand's sheep and beef farmers. Farmers' needs were documented (e.g. Lloyd, 1974) and there were ongoing reports on other aspects

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<sup>4</sup> Later restructurings of the Social Science unit are traced in detail by Carter (1988).

of the rural scene, such as small holdings and residential change, produced by the Town and Country Planning Division of the Ministry of Works, the Land Use Advisory Council, and other agencies with social research units such as the Forest Research Institute. The government had organised a National Development Conference in 1969 and the building of an accord between farmers and the state as profitability waned. A series of moves to fund land development by individual farmers was introduced; tax deduction schemes, fertiliser subsidies, as well as existing measures such as cheap finance. The aim was to promote a more business oriented farming and over time the state became increasingly involved in manipulating policy and trade regulations in favour of pastoral farming, though with greater income support for sheep and beef than dairy farming (Sandrey et al., 1990).

With this situation developing in the background, the community studies and surveys had a community well being focus and produced reports written for multiple audiences. However, some authors published more academically oriented articles informed by the field. Bob Hall's thesis on Kurow, completed in 1987, could be seen as the final flowering of this period. Although not aligned to the interests of the new sociology of agriculture (Buttel and Newby, 1980), he pays more attention to the rural hinterland than studies of larger rural service centres<sup>5</sup>. When Claudia Bell studied *Myths to Live By* in New Zealand rural communities in the 1990s, her analysis drew on cultural studies through John Fiske and Dick Hebdige as much as Anthony Cohen, Raphael Samuel and others central to community studies and rural history (Bell, 1993). Further, her data was dominated by the contrast between the rural ideal of many research participants and the sense of helplessness and loss created by the neo-liberal reforms and economic down turn of the 1980s, her data having been collected close to the peak of rural crisis, the process linked to a study of regional services for the National Library (Bell et al, 1986).

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<sup>5</sup> There were a number of studies of small rural Māori communities, but their focus was on education and culture rather than rural sociology (Crothers, 2002). Nor have I commented on anthropological studies of rural communities such as Hatch (1992). More recent attention to the community has moved away from the classic location-based study to develop specific themes e.g. see Bell (1995) on the self promotion of small towns or the work on resource communities completed by Taylor Baines and Associates (The numerous publications from this project are available from the Taylor Baines and Associates website [http://www.tba.co.nz/projects/frstproject\\_tbsx0001.html](http://www.tba.co.nz/projects/frstproject_tbsx0001.html)).

The earliest formal academic interest in rural sociology is likely to be that of the Gills at the University of Canterbury (Du Plessis, 2014). Howard wrote about labour relations with a neo-Marxist slant on his analysis (Gill 1979). Influenced by Pahl, and both British and American rural sociology (Gill and Gill, 1975), which began to discover women as farmers from the 1970s, Tiiti linked up with the always energetic Women's Division Federated Farmers and her Canterbury colleagues Peggy Koopman-Boyden, Arnold Parr and Bill Willmott. They produced the first large survey of rural women, collecting data on a wide range of aspects of rural life to act as a baseline for future work (Gill et al., 1975). With 144 questions they covered socio-economic status, work, family and home commitments, leisure and social support. Although not exclusively about farm women, 63% of the 934 interviewees' husbands "were connected with primary production" (Gill et al. 1975: 12). Only 10% of respondents were not married and farm employees or their wives were significantly under-represented (Gill et al. 1975:15). The University of Canterbury team found "a happier rural population than we had expected to find" (p.6) of whom only 24% had paid work (including part, full, relieving/occasional and seasonal employment). Others wished for greater access to work or education. These themes became much more important when the survey was followed up in the throes of neo-liberal restructuring in the late 1980s. The impact of the Matrimonial Property Act 1976 was to be another source of intervening change (Pomeroy, 1995b).

### **Policy oriented social analysis 1980s-90s**

Carter himself was the first sociologist employed in New Zealand academia to offer a course in rural sociology. He joined the University of Auckland in 1982, shortly before the advent of the Fourth Labour government which deregulated the farm sector as part of its neo-liberal reform and the subsequent restructuring of MAF. His identification of the power of Federated Farmers of New Zealand and its companion Women's Division in the 1986 article was written as the Labour Government moved to make membership of the Federated Farmers' organisation optional and some declared farming a sunset industry (Bremer, 1993: 121). There was a dramatic decline in farm sector ability to shape policy though some leaders supported liberalisation anyway. Carter's teaching of rural sociology stimulated the writer and others to see the farmer as neither a hero, nor an underdog (more common as restructuring bit hard), but as a figure in a complex historical, economic and political

context whose future had been tied to the national interest by generations of politicians. It was the era of Buttel and Newby's edited collection *The rural sociology of the advanced societies: Critical perspectives* (1980) and the resurgence of rural sociology as sociology of agriculture. It arrived in New Zealand just in time to guide analysis of shifting class interests and the role of the state in promoting the interests of large scale farmers, in order to produce cheap food and foster more general developmental policies in the national interest. Loveridge's (1991) study of class mobility among farmers, that showed how difficult that entry into farming was without land owning parents or state support, followed this line. State support for entry into farming had been wound down after World War Two but was available to a few until the restructuring of the Department of Lands and Survey in the 1990s<sup>6</sup>. The state also intervened in the control of farm wages, reducing this alternate route to ownership. Curtis's 1991 study of the meat industry concluded:

the confrontation between farmers and agribusiness firms does not have to be resolved in terms of the marginalisation of the former and the triumph of the latter. In the export meat industry of New Zealand family farmers and agribusiness firms co-existed. Curtis (1991: 306).

The arrangements were perennially unstable, despite state intervention through the Meat Producers' Board. Curtis favoured a combination of William Friedland's food chain analysis and actor network theory to introduce the flexibility required to understand the New Zealand case (Curtis, 1991: 18-21). The problem of applying theories identified overseas locally was a theme he would return to.

In the same year Carter arrived as Professor of Sociology, John Fairweather completed his doctorate *Land, State, and Agricultural Capitalism in New Zealand: A Study of Change from Estate to Small Farm Production* (Fairweather, 1982). All these theses drew on a variety of resources other than sociology, such as geography, history or economics, particularly from Lincoln and Massey universities, and reports on topical issues by government research units. The Agribusiness and Economics Research Unit of Lincoln University (AERU) (See Tipples, Mackay and Perkins, this volume) was a key resource. It had been established in 1962, and Fairweather's appointment there in 1984 came just in time for him to help document the turbulent 1980s. One of his skills was identifying research needs and funding, which he used

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<sup>6</sup> Landcorp, Land Information New Zealand and the Department of Conservation were created at this time.



to promote rural research across the disciplines, addressing the rural sector at the level of individual, district and nation, often working in partnerships with academics elsewhere within Lincoln University, at the University of Canterbury and the University of Otago, and in the Crown Research Institutes (CRIs). Shortly after he was appointed to the AERU he set about promotion of linkages among rural researchers and activists through the 1986 Rural Economy and Society Study Group seminar (Fairweather, 1986). At this symposium, Carter addressed the years between MAF's "failed graft" and his own arrival. He comments on the lack of coherent theoretical framework in the intervening years, even while the empirical work of the 1970s and 1980s blossomed in both sociology (e.g. the Mangamahu Valley study (Kaplan et al., 1979) and geography (e.g. the Land Use Change in Northland series<sup>7</sup> of the Department of Geography, University of Auckland 1983 to 1985). In 1990 he is still noting that the work that might be done in other countries by rural sociologists is being done by geographers in New Zealand (Carter, 1990: 66). By the 1990s he was winding up his historical research into the Shelley circle and turned to a long term interest in food studies alongside new interests in the nature of academia and a history of modernity through the prism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century railways.

Rural sociology spread more directly from academia into MAF Policy in the 1990s when it was expanded to take on Rural Affairs with the appointment of Ann Pomeroy and a core of policy analysts. The Rural Affairs Unit was set up in 1991, in response to pressure from rural people, particularly from the Women's Division Federated Farmers, for support in the face of income and service decline<sup>8</sup>. This was a longstanding issue, and had attracted attention in the 1970s and 1980s, but the

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<sup>7</sup> Funded by the Northland Agricultural Advisory Council, Social Science Research Fund, MAF Economics Division and the New Zealand Forest Service, a typical combination of several small grants that is often used to launch social science research. Other research on Northland followed this pattern. This series focused on dairying and forestry, e.g. Maunier, Moran and Anderson (1985). Later series concentrated more on community change and off-farm developments. In the 1990s FRST funding was allocated to a multi-disciplinary team which produced a number of reports on land use change in Northland between 1996 and 1998. This is a fore runner of the Biological Economies programme discussed below but did not include any sociologists.

<sup>8</sup> While pressure to form a Ministry of Rural Affairs was resisted, MAF agreed to broaden its focus and to encourage/lobby other government departments to consider the specific impact of their policies on rural New Zealand (Pomeroy, 1995b). Between the wind-up of the Rural Development Division in 1972 and the 1990s attention to the social issues of farm families was intermittent and generally involved geographers or economists.

closure of Post Offices (providing banking) and other services provided by the government during the neo-liberal reform phase, alongside income loss, gave their concerns new point (Pomeroy, 1995b). Ann Pomeroy had left the New Zealand public service for the University of Essex, Newby's home base, funded by the government through a National Research Advisory Council Fellowship to complete her Doctorate on structural change in pastoral farming in 1986. She returned to MAF (via a stint in a similar job in New South Wales) to set up and manage the Rural Affairs unit and she and her colleagues instigated a series of annotated bibliographies and reviews of census and other existing data on rural change.

In the 1990s, MAF also picked up some of the networking functions originally hosted by the AERU at Lincoln University e.g. workshops on Community Studies in 1992 (Johnson, 1993) and social transformation (Levett and Pomeroy, 1997). Lists of rural research funded or carried out in universities showed work on education, health and safety, risk analysis, economics, farm extension, off-farm work, changing land use e.g. forestry, horticulture, rural tourism and farm ownership structures<sup>9</sup> (Pomeroy, 1995a, Anderson, 1996). While agriculture remained crucial to government policies in the 1990s, a variety of changes had taken place in rural areas over the last decade (Pomeroy, 1995b). Farm sizes had grown, while increased mechanisation had cut farm labour needs. Rural tourism had expanded and retirement to rural areas compensated for other incentives to rural-urban migration. Rural industry had diversified, in spite of considerable control over non-farm activities in the Town and Country Planning Acts of 1953 and 1977. To consider the specific impact of their policies on rural New Zealand, MAF required an empirical base to its arguments. Not only were rural sociologists, but geographers, anthropologists, political scientists and psychologists etc. employed by MAF, or received funding to document these changes.

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<sup>9</sup> The authors of the reports commissioned by MAF came from various social science disciplines and institutions. Alan Levett contributed to this phase, though his main research interests were community development, inequality, and education (Crothers and Dyer, 2010). Taylor Baines and Associates were a consulting firm that made a longer term contribution to understanding the rural scene e.g. Taylor and Little (1995) documented pluri-activity for MAF in the 1990s, followed by resource communities and tourism research funded by the Foundation for Research, Science and Technology. Their teams were multi-disciplinary, including sociologists, but oriented more to social impact assessment than sociology of agriculture.

Pomeroy (1995b: 53) notes that “women had now to be recognised as clients, and this has required a change in perception of women’s work, including that carried out by farm resident women”. Women could be seen as farmers rather than helpers, and voluntary work and off-farm work came into view as well as traditional concern over cooking for contractors and other domestic work that benefitted the business. Several small studies of women on farms and their role in decision-making, farm labour or farm inheritance had been conducted, mainly by geographers and anthropologists<sup>10</sup>. The 1989 survey of rural women was a major undertaking, with 1,600 women interviewed face to face. It was among the first data collected after the neo-liberal restructuring in the farm sector. The final text was produced with input from the members of the Federation of Rural Women<sup>11</sup> as interviewers with data analysis by one of the members, Anne Hilson, and various Massey sociologists as well as Brian Ponter, who is responsible for the final text (Ponter, 1996). While following up some of the 1975 survey questions and presenting a valuable commentary on rural change<sup>12</sup>, there was new emphasis on services and well being.

A number of the 104 questions included comparisons with experiences in 1983. Unsurprisingly, of the 34% who worried more than in 1983, planning for retirement showed the largest increase, with various other financial issues following. A review of the 1975 recommendations shows few had been successfully implemented. Paid labour has often been replaced by non-paid family labour and intensity of farm production has decreased as women travel further to work, rather than finding better local opportunities. Acknowledgement of women’s involvement in decision-making was little better. Ponter concludes “It is likely the family farm will continue to survive as farm families work increasingly harder in an ever more demanding way of life” (1996: 201). But he suggests resilience will not meet every

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<sup>10</sup> Keating and Little (1991) is one of several projects Heather Little worked on after expanding from farm activism to research, while Norah Keating was an American rural sociologist who specialised in family studies and aging who was one of many overseas researchers hosted by the AERU.

<sup>11</sup> Members of the Federation’s committee listed in the appendices of Ponter (1996) were involved in both the Women’s Division (shortly renamed Rural Women New Zealand), the New Zealand Country Women’s Institutes, and other rural education welfare organisations.

<sup>12</sup> 1975 comparisons centred on the sample profile and questions on voluntary work and decision making. Women were still active in rural organisations and some have moved on to local body politics, but time pressures may have led to decline of voluntary work among working age women. Some of their off-farm work is essential to farm survival.

challenge<sup>13</sup>. The next wave of research into rural women moved more explicitly into farm life and identity, and came from companion disciplines such as anthropology (e.g. Morris, 2002) and geography (e.g. Peoples, 2007). Women's identity as farm managers and owners was still limited by their own and others' conceptions of women and change on-farm was taking longer than change in off-farm work.

Pomeroy also documents the inclusion of Māori in policy consideration. The Treaty of Waitangi Settlement Act 1975 and the resurgence in Māori activism in land rights, followed by Te Turi Whenua Māori Act 1993 (the Land Act) also required an understanding of Māori relationships with the land for policy makers. For communal land owners an understanding of the potential for the development of the remaining land and that still to be returned through the Treaty of Waitangi Settlement process was important. Their goals for social and environmental development have been pursued alongside economic ones (Munn, Loveridge, and Matunga, 1994). While women have disappeared from explicit mention in Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) policy, MPI 2015 Science Policy (p. 15) states "We will have improved capability and capacity for working with Māori perspectives, tikanga and mātauranga Māori, which will better enable iwi/Māori to use their mātauranga and undertake kaitiakitanga to achieve better outcomes for all."

Māori are increasingly included as researchers in interdisciplinary teams, as in the Geography Department's Study of Northland in the 1990s, (Kaipo, 1997) and this is also occurring in research units within the CRIs that were formed by restructuring the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research's and MAF's science capability. Research within CRIs tends towards extension, participatory research approaches/promoting dialogue among stakeholders, or the tracking of public attitudes towards developments of interest to various science projects (for example genetic engineering, animal welfare, perception of natural hazards, or improvement in water quality). Projects are often team based, and as social science in CRIs relies partly on soft funding, from the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) Contestable Research Fund, MAF, the Health Research

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<sup>13</sup> Ponter does not quote Harriet Friedmann's work on self exploitation of farm people, that was to influence Agri-food research, but he referenced Ruth Gasson and other well known contemporary leaders in rural sociology.

Council, etc.; these teams are continually reforming<sup>14</sup>. Although sociologists have worked as members of research teams, these have rarely been rural sociologists<sup>15</sup>.

### **The era of Agrifood**

Restructuring in the 1980s also stimulated a new generation of rural researchers whose work was more directly critical of government policy. Hugh Campbell, currently Professor of Sociology at the University of Otago, began studying restructuring after realising the severity of the situation of many mid Canterbury farmers while involved in a study of rural drinking in the late 1980s (Fairweather and Campbell, 1990)<sup>16</sup>. Because there were relatively few academics with rural research programmes the history of rural sociology in New Zealand is intertwined with that of Australia as well the mixing among disciplines already mentioned. Geoffrey Lawrence<sup>17</sup> had attracted the attention of early followers of neo-Marxist analyses of capitalist farming in the United States and the United Kingdom with his hard hitting saga of decline in Australian family farming (Lawrence, 1987). In keeping with his position as lynchpin within New Zealand rural research networks, John Fairweather not only employed Campbell for the drinking study, but recommended Lawrence's book to him. When Campbell, then with a Master of Arts in anthropology, sought a doctoral supervisor he travelled to the Wagga Wagga campus of Charles Sturt University to work with him. His thesis identified social isolation, harassment by banking staff, exploitation of children and other conditions unseen since the 1930s on some mid-Canterbury farms (Campbell, 1994).

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<sup>14</sup> The funding regime for CRIs has contributed to a decrease in the presence of permanent social science staff. See Davenport and Bibby (2007) for an over view of CRI's and competitive funding in New Zealand. Changes have occurred since this article was published. The original funder, the Foundation for Research, Science and Technology (FRST) itself merged with the Ministry of Research, Science and Technology in 2011 to form the Ministry of Science and Innovation, and is now part of the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. CRIs get some core funding (Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, 2015).

<sup>15</sup> The exceptions would be myself as a member of the social research unit within DSIR and projects such as ARGOS or Rural Futures which involved staff from CSAFE as discussed below.

<sup>16</sup> John Fairweather's role was different to Lawrence's as he did not teach, but as Curtis (2004) was to note he knew and worked with all the key figures until his retirement as Professor in 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Now professor emeritus in Sociology at the University of Queensland.

On his return he was employed to teach agri-food related courses in the anthropology department of the University of Otago. Although informed by the political economy approach of the sociology of agriculture, agri-food study is characterised by integration of the spheres of production and consumption and is more varied in its methodologies. By 1995, the farm crisis had eased and his first major research funding became the basis of the Greening Food programme. The production of organic peas for the Japanese market was just taking off, and John Fairweather put him in touch with Jon Manhire of The AgriBusiness Group, who was to be involved in many of his subsequent projects.

This first bid was written quickly in the wake of the demise of the NZ Institute of Social Research and Development (the small CRI formed from the DSIR social science unit), and the reallocation of its FRST funding. The funded research that followed was in the agri-food arena rather than the rural sociology of his doctoral research. That had applied French regulationist political economy to New Zealand's farm crisis with modification for local conditions which draws on Friedmann and McMichael's food regimes concept (1989)<sup>18</sup>. The programmes he was involved in on genetically modified organisms, Agriculture Research Group on Sustainability (ARGOS): Pathways to sustainability in primary production, and Rural Futures continued the agri-food focus, discussed in detail below. He became an academic in an era which emphasised acquisition of external funding and the ability to work with multiple stakeholders (OECD, 2010). His career demonstrates the permeability of disciplinary boundaries in a small academic pool, and the ease with which those inclined may participate in multi disciplinary teams.

Campbell was an early member of the Agri-food Network<sup>19</sup> founded in 1992, which organises lively interdisciplinary conferences that continue to shuttle back and forth between Australia and New Zealand. This was the major initiative of the 1990s for rural sociological research and rural study of any discipline. Arguably it supported the small number of rural sociologists in New Zealand to continue and it fostered new postgraduate work in this area. The network tended to meet in small

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<sup>18</sup> Other elements of the local scene were also introduced through the work of people who were to become stalwarts of Agri-food such as Richard Le Heron. Harriet Friedmann and Philip McMichael were later keynote speakers at Agri-food Network conferences.

<sup>19</sup> Now known as the Australasian Agri-Food Research Network or AFRN. The first organisers were David Burch, Geoffrey Lawrence and Roy Rickson.

rural service/tourism centres as well as universities and incorporated field trips run by local experts, attracting people from CRIs, private consultancies, and the farm sector<sup>20</sup>. The Network has been able to sponsor a series of keynote agri-food specialists from overseas who have sometimes joined local research coalitions. Prolific writers, the conference attendees were publishing collections of conference papers in edited books or special issues of journals from their earliest years. Few sociologists with a rural interest did not attend these conferences, though some linked more closely to the resource community studies undertaken by members of the Social Impact Assessment community, Kaylene Sampson and Colin Goodrich at Canterbury University being in this category. Their work on community and land use change in South Westland attended to West Coast identity, policy, environment and resource use in a rural area they argued was unique (Sampson and Goodrich, 2009).

Attention kept returning to what constituted the most effective approach to New Zealand rural problems, and this sometimes led to discussion of disciplinary boundaries alongside the empirical studies. For example, Curtis' article in *New Zealand Sociology* (2004) introduces a collection of papers from the previous Agri-food Network Conference by shadowing Carter's (1990) comments on the dominance of geography in New Zealand. But it also comments on the symbiosis within rural research "this engagement [of geography with rural sociology] involves a double movement: allowing human geographers and anthropologists to shed the trappings of positivism, while shifting from idiographic to nomothetic approaches in studying community" (Curtis, 2004: 181). For a geographic audience, Curtis notes attention to the fate of family farming using neo-Marxist theory "that addressed the revolutionary capacity of the peasantry" (Curtis, 2004: 180) was called the new geography of agriculture.

Curtis muses on the diversification of rural sociology over the following years as it addresses the position of women, the environment, consumption and participatory research, taking in the more constructivist methods associated with post-productivism. While praising the work on commodity chains of Le Heron and others for its inclusivity (covering farming to retailing), Curtis finishes his review

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<sup>20</sup> They soon attracted about 60-70 to the New Zealand ones and slightly more to the Australian Conferences

by saying he would have preferred further development of rural sociology towards Actor Network Theory. He regrets that the phase of revitalisation drawing on the concept of food regimes (Friedmann and McMichael, 1989), allowed a turn to post-productivism. He regrets those moments when the marriage of production with consumption leads to a disembedded approach to the local to the extent that the political economy backbone of sociology of agriculture is lost.

In 2004 Curtis identifies “a coincidence between inter-disciplinary work and localism” (p. 187) that was to draw his attention in the Mackay, Perkins and Espiner (2009) review of rural research between 1989 and 2009. For Curtis the move from political economy exemplified in this review is fraught and while it might be appropriate in the United Kingdom or Europe it is not in New Zealand where policy is centred on production far more than amenity or environmental services. This applies even in an area where pastoral farming exists alongside tourism or the farm itself is a tourist attraction (Curtis, 2012). Research on multifunctional areas has increased in New Zealand over the last decade and the Mackay et al. (2009) review was a very useful contribution to this trend. The science funding regime has encouraged interdisciplinary work and post-productivism, and in this phase Campbell has again been a pivotal figure in the relationship between geography and sociology.

Rural amenity research was allied to on-going programmes in Lincoln University’s Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism, the AERU (which researched both farming and tourism/recreation) and members of the Agri-food Network within the geography departments of Auckland, Massey and Canterbury through this decade. Campbell and others at the University of Otago maintained a closer connection to pastoral farming, but the Agri-food Network facilitated joint research. CSAFE was another key element in this phase. It grew out of Campbell’s rural social research combined with Professor Moller’s interest in food and environmental practices of Māori<sup>21</sup>. Established as one of the University of Otago’s research centres in 2000, it grew in an interdisciplinary, collaborative mode, and less than a third of the researchers who have been associated with the Centre would be sociologists, chiefly Campbell himself, John Fairweather, Lesley Hunt (also of the

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<sup>21</sup> CSAFE history is documented in full on their website:  
<http://www.otago.ac.nz/csafa/about/history/>



AERU), and Paul Stock. They were concentrated in ARGOS which was funded by FRST to investigate *Pathways to Sustainability in Primary Production* – both social and environmental in two phases between 2005 and 2011. ARGOS produced a large number of reports and peer reviewed publications, book chapters and articles, written by researchers based in Otago and Lincoln Universities, plus the Agribusiness Group whose expertise is farm advisory. For CSAFE researchers, disciplinary identity is secondary to research questions. Funding has come from core sources such as MBIE's Contestable Research Fund for "mission-led" science and innovation<sup>22</sup>, the Marsden Fund<sup>23</sup> and Ministry for Primary Industries' Sustainable Farmers Fund, but also local government, iwi, and specialist government organisations. Research has been carried out in partnership with visiting scholars, centres within Otago and other universities, CRIs and industry. ARGOS was in a sense a stepping stone to the more recent Biological Economies programme, which has the aim of breaking up disciplinary boundaries between the biophysical as well as the social sciences. "The second step is that we should move beyond thinking of "agriculture" (meaning "agri-business") as New Zealand's dominant rural land use." (Campbell et al., 2009: 92). The programme leaders were Professor Richard Le Heron and Hugh Campbell and the team that put out the manifesto consisted of 12 researchers from six institutions in seven locations. Pastoral farming and the family farm are only one of many facets of rurally based production, and future funded research will probably focus on innovation, markets, governance and other elements crucial to the government's programme.

In his introduction to the 2016 Special Issue of *Agriculture and Human Values*, which contained a selection of papers presented at the Agri-food conference addressing alternative food networks and food sovereignty, Campbell emphasised the political as well as research intention of the network. Campbell begins his recap

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<sup>22</sup> This is the largest source of science funding allocated through processes designed to direct money toward government goals and to ensure uptake of the research, stakeholder support is essential to funding allocation. There are also more targeted funds allocating smaller amounts and substantial money is allocated to universities through the PBRF (MBIE, 2015; OECD, 2010). See footnote 14 for more detail on the funding regime.

<sup>23</sup> The contestable Marsden Fund was established by the government "to fund excellent fundamental research ... It operates under the Terms of Reference issued by the Minister of Science and Innovation.

<http://www.royalsociety.org.nz/programmes/funds/marsden/about/background/>

of Agri-food research on similar lines to Curtis (2004). He noted the importance of Buttel and Newby (1980) to addressing the crisis of capitalist agriculture, during which both smaller farmers and workers have been exploited by off-farm capital. Next came the Commodity Systems Approach (CSA), via Friedland (1984) that addressed the relationship between production and consumption. Within a few years, “Food Regime Theory (Friedmann and McMichael, 1989), geographically and historically embedded these new additions” (Campbell, 2016: 217) without abandoning their common critique of capitalism and political motif.

As New Zealand moved out of its farm crisis, the original Marxist political economy critique was also being revised globally. Campbell includes Actor Network Theory as an advance in the mid 1990s analytical toolbox, as did Curtis, but notes post-structural discourse more approvingly than did Curtis:

focus shifted in favour of more dispersed powers; the power of materials; and new ways of understanding social dynamics and processes that might act as alternatives to the kinds of mainstream food systems (and scholarship) that agri-food scholars still united to critique. (Campbell, 2016: 218).

He considers that a subtle shift from critique of capitalism to critique of neo-liberalism in agri-food writing captures its political development. Research into organic agriculture, that has been an ongoing element of CSAFE research, was so important because it is a rejection of mainstream values as well as requiring understanding of particular technologies. Responses to organic farming range from seeing it as a sham (now being taken over by corporate farmers), to seeing a future when organics will be recognised as more able to feed the world long term than conventional farming. As well as its political implications, it has been a crucial route into understanding the process and potential of more environmentally sound production:

At present, the current state of agri-food debates consists of a strong, continuous use of macro-level structural, political economy-inspired concepts such as food regimes, development, and a hostile stance towards corporate power. However, these concepts now operate alongside analyses that draw more from post-structural approaches. (Campbell, 2016: 218).

Campbell concludes that political intent provides the greatest unity to agri-food research which is more diverse than in the 1990s.

## **Conclusion**

Rural sociology has been a diverse discipline, ranging from research programmes which border on community studies and extension science, to the critical agendas of the neo-Marxist sociology of agriculture, and now embracing central concerns of sociology itself including the cultural turn. Friedland (2002: 351) considers it is mostly accepted as “*what rural sociologists do*” in spite of the difficulties in defining the rural in a networked, globalising world.

New Zealand’s rural sociology community has always been small, and its selection from the full body of sociological theory has been shaped by the potential for dialogue or joint projects with like-minded researchers from a range of disciplines, hence the title of this article, which acknowledges the potentialities of this situation. It has also reflected the structural challenges of access to research funding and other resources which pipe policy concerns into the research community. These may increasingly be around the poles of environmental degradation and innovation in production rather than the productivity of the individual farmer or farm family wellbeing. Beyond these areas, researchers will turn to smaller scale local or historical projects. Given the difficulties in addressing rural sociology as a sub discipline coherently, my concluding reflection will paraphrase Campbell’s (2016) analysis of agri-food research, that an agenda of support for positive social transformation provides the most unity to any account. While much influential theorising has been imported from other countries and its application here is sometimes contentious, Campbell et al.’s (2009) point that New Zealand is strategically located to encourage innovative research through its capability for face to face engagement across disciplines and institutions still applies. It has also formed strong international links through initiatives such as AFRN and the employment of academics from overseas. This suggests this rather fragile plant has the potential for new flowerings as the historical context evolves, even though the direction is not clear at this juncture.

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