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Chapter 2

The origins of the 'good farmer'

The husband is he, that to labour doth fall,
The labour of him I do husbandry call:
If thrift, by that labour, be any way caught,
Then is it good husbandry, else it is naught.
(Tusser, 1580, 16)

The good farmer has been many different things to many different people over the centuries. As we emphasise throughout the book, the concept of the 'good farmer' and what defines a 'good farmer' are not static but constantly vary as agricultural practices, the structure of farming, the social role of the farmer in society, and so on, vary over both time and space. In the earliest English literature, no mention is made of the good farmer, but of the 'good husbandman' where husbandry extended beyond agricultural practices, to the governance of a household – reflecting obligations to both the family and, almost peripherally, the farm. In fact, the term 'good husbandry' was used both with specific reference to managing a farm (e.g. Fitzherbert, 1523; Tusser, 1580), and reference to managing a family outside of the farm. De la Primaudaye (1589, p. 498), for example, defined good husbandry as simply attending diligently to the household through "industry in getting goods, and discrete government in spending them to good purpose." At this stage, the term 'farm' was not commonly used to refer to an agricultural holding. In fact, until the 16th Century, 'farm' had meant 'to rent' (from the Anglo-French term 'ferme') and, as such, the medieval farmer was not an agriculturalist, but a debt collector authorised to collect taxes, customs and other duties.

It was in the 16th Century that land began to be referred to as a 'farm' and the practice of managing that land 'farming', while the land manager him/herself remained a 'husbandman' (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2018). However, towards the end of the 16th Century the term 'farmer' began to be used to refer to persons cultivating 'farm' land (e.g. Gerarde, 1597; Plat, 1594). Initially 'good farmer' and 'good husbandman' were used interchangeably with some

retaining the use of husbandman (e.g. Markham's, 1616, *Cheap and Good Husbandry*) while others used the terms 'husbandman' and 'farmer' in equal measure – with seemingly no differentiation between the two (e.g. Surflet's (1600) translation of *Maison Rustique*). References to 'good husbandry' were common in the 18th century, occasional in the 19th Century and are still used today to a limited extent. Yet from around the beginning of the 17th Century, it was the 'good farmer' who emerged as the main contender.

Whether the term 'good farmer' as it appears in the English language literature is the equivalent of the 'good farmer' in other literatures is difficult to ascertain. There is some indication the term may have been generally applied. In particular, while in this chapter we focus on the English language literature (British and American), the agricultural literature across Europe (including Britain) has had strong connections since at least the 17th Century, with journal articles translated and reprinted, farmers writing about the agricultures of other nations (particularly in Europe and the U.S.), and references to the best publications cited in extensive bibliographies. For example, Von Münchhausen (1766, pp. 9–28) in "Der Hausvater" lists German, English, French, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, and Swiss agricultural publications for German audiences, while key texts such as Duhamel Du Monceau's (1762) "Elements d'Agriculture" were translated directly, as the royal houses of Europe sought to spread knowledge of agriculture throughout their dominions. The shared destiny of Western agricultures with the rise of a productivist model in the 19th and 20th Century is better documented (e.g. Potter, 1998) and despite its obvious specificity, the US example described in this chapter reflects broader global processes.

The importance of looking at the historical development of the concept of the 'good farmer' is that it enables us to view changes in the concept over extended periods of time and understand how it has been applied over the centuries. While the 'good farmer' today is most often associated with productivist conventional agriculture, our travels through the historical past illustrate that this was not always be the case. Rather it depicts a 'good farmer' who is constantly changing as well as a term that is appropriated and re-appropriated by various interest groups as they struggled to shape agriculture and the farmers themselves in the image of their own beliefs and desires. Together with Chapter 3 – which examines the development of symbols of 'good farming' using a similar historical perspective – it enables the reader to understand who the good farmer is and where he/she emerged from.

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Early notions of the good farmer: the good farmer in Britain 1500-1800

Literature on agriculture from before the 18th Century is scare, but literature on the notion of 'good farming' or the 'good farmer' is scarcer still. Printed accounts of how farming should be conducted (in English) first emerged in the United Kingdom in the 16th Century, with three accounts in particular standing out[1] – those of John Fitzherbert (c.1460-1531), Thomas Tusser (c.1524-1580) and Barnabe Googe (c.1540-1594).

As the first of these, Fitzherbert's main work the *Boke of Husbandry* was published in July 1523 and reportedly "throws considerable light on the state of farmers in those days", presenting a vision of a yeoman farmer as an independent man with a plain living drawn from subsistence farming (McDonald, 1908, p. 14). Fitzherbert's work (which can be found reprinted and annotated by Skeat, 1882) is a manual for farmers, and covers three main areas considered important to good farming, namely; practical aspects of farm management such as the construction and operation of farm tools, veterinary skills, and management advice for conducting fieldwork; advice for the management of the farm household targeted specifically at the farmer's wife, and the religious duties of the farmer along with lessons on morality interspersed with the practical advice. Fitzherbert also refers to the need to be part of the farming community. He argues that established farmers should provide young farmers the "seed of discretion", i.e. to freely provide advice on farm management to less experienced farmers "for the more that it is taken of or lent, the more it is" (McDonald, 1908, p. 20). While the entire theme of the book is good husbandry, there is little mention of the 'good farmer'. In fact, Fitzherbert's work appears to be targeted more to country gentlemen than peasants as is indicated by the use of Latin in the text, something which Skeat (1882) observes marks him out as not being a common farmer.

Thomas Tusser's book *Five hundred pointes of good husbandry* (initially One hundred points of good husbandry printed in 1557) is the most widely cited of the three early works. Various editions of Tussers work emerged between 1557 and 1580 and, even after his death, at least sixteen reprints have been made with three of these published in the 19th Century (see White., 1848; Mavor, 1812; Payne and Herrtage, 1878)). At the time of his death Tusser owned two

[1] For a biographical account of these and other early English authors see McDonald (1908)

small farms and, while evidence is scarce, Mavor (1812) suggests that, although he later lived in the cities of Cambridge and London (where he died), it was probable that during his life he was directly involved in practical farming. Unlike Fitzherbert's effort to present his advice as clearly as possible, Tusser's work is in verse – reportedly to ensure that the doctrines are taken up more effectively (Stillingfleet, undated, cited in Mavor, 1812). This desire to promote his doctrine may also be the reason Tusser chose to emphasise the notion of 'good farming' versus 'bad farming' throughout the publication. As with Fitzherbert, Tusser offers lessons in agriculture but, through employing the good farmer rhetoric, offers a stark choice between profitability and spiritual reward as a good farmer, or failure and damnation as a bad farmer. His advice has a number of components.

First, in the spirit of Fitzherbert's manual, Tusser outlines the practical aspects of being a farmer in terms of farm management, laying out the tasks in calendar form. For example, "October's abstract" states: "First barley or rye, then peas by and by. Then fallow for wheat, is husbandry great." Here 'good farming' refers to superior management practices, simply emphasising what is best to do in the profession of agriculture. Do this, he says, and you will be a good farmer.

Second, Tusser reveals a strong belief that good farming is being part of a community and working with others in agriculture. In a number of places, he denounces the slandering of others, while, at the same time, promoting the maintenance of good relations with neighbours through hospitality. Tusser further suggests that lending to neighbours in their time of need "wins love of thy neighbour, and credit doth breed" (p. 22), which suggests an understanding that being a good neighbour has rewards in terms of the development of social capital.

Third, Tusser, who was deeply religious, contended that a good husbandman had virtues that differed from a "bad husbandman". In particular, a section on "The description of an envious and naughty neighbour" outlines a cornucopia of "naughty neighbour" sins including greed, vengefulness, pride, boastfulness, being quick tempered, deviousness, being disingenuous, and engaging in gossip. In addition, Tusser frequently refers to the good husbandman's obligations to God, for example, that he should "seek to God for remedy, for witches prove unluckily" and "pray God a good harvest to send".

Finally, and similarly to Fitzherbert, Tusser emphasises the importance of the farmer's wife in good husbandry. Although her many tasks (which Tusser outlines at length) were associated with the management of the household rather than the fieldwork, for Tusser they appear as critical to good farming as the role of the male farmer. He observes:

> Of husband, doth husbandry challenge that name,
> Of husbandry, husband doth likewise the same:
> Where huswife and huswifery joineth with these,
> There, wealth in abundance is gotten with ease. (Tusser, 1580, p. 16)

Tusser also lays out "A comparison between good huswifery and evil" (p. 184) in which, rather than a list of tasks for the good housewife, he lists virtues (or ill-virtues) including slothfulness, gossiping, spendthrift, and pride as indicative of someone who is not a good housewife.

Constructed from the works of authors ranging from the classical era onwards and organised as an imaginary dialogue between four persons, Barnaby Googe's (1578) *Whole Art of Husbandry* provides another perspective on good farming – one that appears to be largely literature based and is in even more obscure verse than that of Tusser. This publication consists of Googe's translation of the work of the German Conrad Heresbach, himself interpreting classical scholars of agriculture – although Googe notes he "altered and increased his work with mine own readings and observations" (Googe, 1578, p. iii). Given the origins of the publication and the lack of clear attribution throughout, it is often difficult to discern which period in history and from which author the original ideas emerged. While the text is somewhat more convoluted than that of Fitzherbert or Tusser it also provides advice to farmers on how to manage their farms and emphasises the importance the farmer's wife, noting:

> I *confer with my wife* or servants of husbandry, appointing what I will have done: if my bailiff have any thing to say: if anything to be bought or sold: for a good husband, as Cato says, must rather be a seller than a buyer. (p. 4)

Religion is also an important factor in Googe's account. He notes before going to bed,

> Sometimes, (especially in winter) after supper, I may tell something out of the holy scripture, or else some pleasant prose, so that it may be honest and godly, and such as may edify. (p.4)

These three accounts of farming in the 16th Century present a picture of the good farmer that, while similar to today's 'good farmer' show some distinct differences. First, while the farm wife clearly had gender defined roles, the accounts suggest that good farming historically (or, more correctly, good husbandry) was an integration of predominantly male production roles and the female role of farm household management – such that being a good farmer necessitated the involvement of a "good housewife". F.B. (1672, p. 19) in *The Office of the Good Housewife* observes that "The condition and state of the housewife or dairy woman is of no less care and diligence than the office of her husband" but stresses that the farm wife does not perform field work but is "tied to the matters of the house" and, similar to Fitzherbert and Tusser, provides a long list of the roles for the "good housewife". Some of the roles of the good housewife are more commonly male roles today such as the responsibility for the management of breeding livestock, i.e. "take care that the cows be provided with a bull" (F.B., 1672 p. 25). The greater involvement of the wife historically makes sense from the perspective that many of the manufacturing tasks (e.g. making linen or cheese) were performed on the farm and thus a successful farm required a higher degree of labour and management input. We more directly address contemporary issues related to gender and the good farmer in Chapter 6.

The second major difference is the role of morality and godliness in the concept of the good farmer. In addition to agricultural tasks, good farmers were supposed to be virtuous in the eyes of God. In part this may be attributable to references to the nobility of the farming profession in both the bible and the classical literature authors. For example, Googe (1578) observes that historically the "most mighty kings and emperors" bore a "singular affection for husbandry" while emperors were known to come "from poor herdsmen to the imperial vignette" (p.5). Googe reports that, at that time "as oft as they would give a man the name of an honest man, they would call him a good husband, comprehending in him in that name as much commendation, as they could give him" (p. 5). Others held similar views based on religious doctrine. Markham (1635, p.4) in *The English Husbandman,* for example, extols the high virtues of the husbandman in observing:

> Let every man understand that this title of husbandman is not tied only to the ordinary tillers of the earth, such as we call husbandmen; in France peasants, in Spain basonyans, and generally the clout-hoo. No, *they are creatures of a better creation*, for as Adam was the first husbandman so all the sons of Adam (even from the crown to the cottage) *cannot assume a greater a better or richer title than to be a good husband*.

In general, early characterisations of the good farmer differed dramatically from those of the conventional productivist farmer identities that dominate today (see Burton and Wilson, 2006). While innovation, efficiency and increasing production were primary goals, at this time the 'good farmer' was a more integrated character – a producer of food, yes, but also part of a family, a community, and a religion. In a sense, good husbandry of the land was integrated with "good husbandry" in the other sense it was used, that of maintaining the household economy and the caring obligations to the family. Being good at agriculture was essential, but one could not be a 'good farmer' without also being a good husband.

Why 'good farmer' rather than 'good farming'?

Frequent use of the term "good husband" and 'good farmer' throughout the 16th to 19th Centuries raises the question of what was the intended purpose of creating a "good" and/or "bad" farmer? Discerning between good and bad agricultural practices is obviously important to emphasise the difference between patterns of behaviour likely to result in positive outcomes for land managers (i.e. outcomes espoused by the author), and those that do not. However, if this were the sole purpose, it would be possible to present it as 'good farming', rather than creating the 'good farmer' and his/her counterpart "the bad farmer." The fact that reference is frequently made to "good husbandry" or 'good farming' illustrates that it is easily possible to advise readers how to improve their farming practices without personifying the concepts, so why is it necessary to create the good or bad farmer?

From one perspective the 'good farmer' appears to be a rhetorical tool for imprinting the message of the book. Severe criticisms act as a warning and emphasise the idea that you do not want to be identified as that kind of farmer. Plat (1594, p.9) for example, draws a distinction between the "learned husbandman master Bernard Palissy" who "wrung out of the bowels of the earth" his knowledge of agriculture and whose publications serve the basis of Plat's work,

and the "ignorant farmers (who) may also glean with them a few lose and scattered ears to make so much bread of, as may relieve their hungry bellies." Where the concept of the 'good farmer' is used, it is often to emphasise that the practice being advocated is a critical one. For example, Anon (1829, p.39) advocates for increasing manure usage by observing

> Manure is the great sinew of agriculture, as money is of war; and the making the best of every advantage or opportunity for increasing the quantity of it, is one of the most prominent traits in the character of a good farmer.

Thus, by making certain behaviours indicative of the 'good farmer' authors emphasise certain traits over others while presenting the individual with a stark choice – be good or bad. In other cases, however, it may simply be used for poetic purposes as is particularly evident in Tusser's work which is written in verse. For example, in the case

> Good husband and huswife, will sometime alone, make shift with a morsel and pick of a bone. (Tusser, 1580, p. 175),

the terms husbandry and huswifery, while equally applicable, would break the meter of the verse. Another possible reason is that the concept of the 'good farmer' reflected the structure of information transfer in farming communities prior to the development of experimental agriculture and formal institutions – which did not exist to any great degree until the first half of the 19th Century (Louden, 1839). In a profession with limited access to validated scientific evidence and widespread illiteracy, success was often measured by individual reputations, with "good farmers" serving as a focus for learning and information transfer in the communities. Early writers sought to justify their own agricultural knowledge by identifying "good farmers" as the source. For example, in reference to a response to the Bath Agricultural Society, it is noted that the answers "were given him by a very good farmer, and approved by all who had seen them" (Anon, 1783, p. 57). Consulting with good farmers was also an important form of validation for those with enquiries on farm management. Lisle (1757, p. 154), for example, observes:

> At Christmas-time (anno 1700) several good farmers being with me, I was enquiring for peas and barley for seed. They replied, that the housing of corn had been so good this year,

> the buying of seed might be ventured on the earlier, else they used not generally to buy their seed-barley, nor seed-oats, but just before sowing-time, lest they should smell by heating, and so not grow.

More recent literature on the 'good farmer' suggests being identified as a good farmer plays an important social role in farming communities, in that being identified as a good farmer enables farmers greater access to social capital – common resources obtainable from other members of the community (Sutherland and Burton, 2011). In the historical case being identified as a 'good farmer' may have had strong economic implications for the farmer him/herself. For example, Robert Bakewell from Dishley Grange (Leicestershire, UK) who built up a livestock farm in the mid-1700s that was identified as a "model for all practical farmers to study" (anon, 1842, 85). However, for Bakewell, who generated most of his income from livestock breeding, this reputation of being a good farmer undoubtedly assisted his highly reputable and successful stud business.

Finally, in recognising that "good farmers" formed the centre of information transfer within their communities, early authors may have employed the concept to encourage wider change in agriculture by seeding "good husbandmen" among the community. Plat (1594, p.26) for example, observes that farmers would marle (a form of fertilizer) their lands and

> … in so doing thou shalt show thyself a good husbandman and become a pattern to all they slothful neighbours, whereby they shall be forced to imitate thy good example.

Certainly, at a time when formal agricultural education was scarce and demonstration agriculture in the United Kingdom relatively ineffective (Burton, 2020), encouraging a generation of "good farmers" to serve as the centre of the development of farming communities was probably the most effective a means possible for promoting development.

The changing identity of the good farmer

Historical references to the 'good farmer' generally recognised only a single farmer 'type', whereas now, when we think of the good farmer, we conceive that there may be different cultural categories of farmer (e.g. Sutherland and Darnhoffer's, 2012, distinction between

conventional and organic farmers). One of the first observations of different farming types can be found in William Marshall's (1778) classification of farmers according to their dispositions and practices[2]. Typologies distinguishing between farming types or cultures have become relatively common in the last few decades, for example, in the form of van der Ploeg's widely applied "farming styles" approach (van der Ploeg, 1994 or through numerous bottom-up data driven typologies - e.g. Bakker and van Doorn, 2009; Davies and Hodge, 2007). Marshall's main concern in deriving this typology was to identify which types of farmers may be most useful for improving the condition of English agriculture. In the typology farmers were divided into three principal classes: the aboriginal farmer, the scientific farmer, and the aerial farmer.

Aboriginal farmers, Marshall (1778) contended, can be divided into five main types:

The illiberal sloven – The illiberal sloven was "A sullen, designing, incommunicative being, who holds his profession as a family-secret, though his management be execrable, his fields are foul, his crops wretched, his live-stock pitiable; his whole life is a scene of cunning, toil, poverty and wretchedness." (p. 8)

The illiterate economist – An illiterate economist was similar to the illiberal sloven, being "Equally disingenuous, equally incommunicative" but he "has more cunning, and is a better farmer. He keeps his land tolerably clean, and in tolerable heart; his crops, and every thing around him are tolerable and he gets rich in proportion to his rent, taxes, and luck" (p. 8).

The ape-gentleman – the ape gentleman is a farmer who has made sufficient capital in agriculture to consider himself a gentleman, and adopts all the trappings of a gentleman farmer (wine consumption, horse riding, lavish entertaining, etc.) – but the family "is extravagant without gentility" (p. 8). His good fortune creates indolence and pride and, in the end, management of the farm becomes lax and the business declines.

The substantial – The substantial farmer is a core farmer in Marshall's aboriginal classification. He reportedly "springs from a long line of economists and industrious housewives. He is possessed of a fortune independent of farming; he is the Lord of the Village he lives in; and

[2] While Marshall (1745-1819) became a wealthy estate manager/owner he was the son of yeoman farmers and, according to Fussel (1949), unlike Arthur Young and other improvers, did not dismiss customary practices of common farmers as backwards and thus needing to be improved out of existence.

deals out comfort or oppression to his poor neighbours." In terms of their social position, "his whole family is a pattern of rural decency, and their manners a relic of ancient hospitality … though he is a customist, and, of course, cannot communicate his general management, he knows the customs and usages of the Country he lives in, and can obviate a thousand petty difficulties" (p. 9).

The gentlemanly – the gentlemanly farmer is the educated son of a substantial farmer. While seen as a liberal, Marshall contends he will never become a scientist, noting "He may improve but can never perfect; because, he is prejudiced by the custom of his ancestors, and the Country he happened to be bred in, whose errors he has not only received as immutable truths, but his whole life has been employed in the practice of them" (p10).

The Scientific farmer appears to be the ultimate 'good farmer' of Marshall's typology – one which Marshall believes all others should emulate. Consisting of a single type, the scientific farmer is one who "believes that the customists collectively are far advanced on the road of perfection; but he knows nothing in agriculture, which proceeds not directly from analysis, experiment, and observation" (p11). The scientist is reportedly concerned with desires to optimise production – to see each soil type "occupied by the Vegetable which affects it and, collectively, by such as are most immediately subservient to the natural necessities of man" (p12).

Aerialist farmers, on the other hand, are those that are always moving from one thing to the other chasing the "chimeras of vast improvement and vast profit" (p.12) based on knowledge from books rather than experiment or experience. However, aerialist farmers do not have the understanding of the scientific farmers, nor the wisdom of the substantial or gentlemanly farmers. "He is constitutionally volatile, speculative, and credulous, and habitually bookish. He has acquired a smattering of the lighter branches, the twigs of human knowledge and apes genius, though void of penetration and judgment" (p. 12).

Marshall's typology portrays some interesting changes in the notions of good farming that occurred in the second half of the 18th Century, presenting a more nuanced (if individual) view of the 'good' and 'bad' farmer – ranging from the aerialist farmers who ought to be reformed or 'annihilated', to the scientific farmer who all others ought to emulate. Farmers for Marshall

were no longer simply 'good' or 'bad', but came in different shades of 'good' and 'bad', identifiable by their different but equally flawed approaches to farming. The scientific farmer, largely devoid of customs and focused on optimising production on the basis of scientific principles, appears to be a precursor to the modern productivist farmer. This reflects the transition occurring at the time from tradition-based agriculture to experimentation-based agriculture – from small scale self-sufficient production to production for markets to feed the growing cities in Europe. A noticeable turn in the literature can be found from the mid-18th Century onwards from a period where advice was either customary or anecdotal (providing references to good farming practices) to one where scientific principals and experimental agriculture formed the basis of evidence for improved practices. As the 18th Century came to a close the good farmer was decreasingly portrayed as the community oriented godly farmer supported by his industrious wife, but as a farmer scientist whose main concern was to improve the productivity of agriculture to fill the world with "universal plenty" (Marshall, 1778, p.11).

The good farmer in the United States – new land, new peoples, new concepts.

Through the early part of the 19th Century scientific principles played an ever-increasing role in agriculture while traditions and customs were declining. Agriculture was changing from the use of simple implements to being reliant on increasingly complex machinery and, as we outline in Chapter 3, this meant considerable changes to the role of farmers and the notion of good farming. Nearing the mid-point of the century the changes had become so dramatic that Loudon (1839, 1206) in the "Encyclopaedia of Agriculture" contended that publications prior to 1830 were "of very little value" from a scientific perspective but were "to be considered as historical documents of the progress of opinions and practices". Britain was no longer the only Anglo-country developing its agriculture at a rapid pace with the colonies in Australia and New Zealand, desperate to both feed their growing settler populations and develop agricultural industries for export. This was a new type of agriculture, largely devoid of tradition and the land ownership systems of the past, where individual farmers made their own rules and carved out their farms from land taken from non-farming indigenous populations.

The 19th Century also saw the United States begin to play an important role in defining the 'good farmer', in particular, between the US Civil War (concluded in 1865) and the US entry to World War II (1941), a point at which we argue that the productivist mindset was set as the

model of global agricultural policy. As with the various iterations of 'farmer' and 'good' in the UK examples we see the use of 'successful', 'better', and 'master' in some of the following examples, but the ideal of what is 'good' remains central. In the US, the connection between farmers and citizenship started with Thomas Jefferson – farmer, drafter of the Declaration of Independence, and second president. In a letter to John Jay, Jefferson (September 23rd, 1785) wrote

> Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens. They are the most vigorous, the most independent [sic], the most virtuous, and they are tied to their country and wedded to its liberty and interests by the most lasting bands.

As historian Don Worster (1993, p. 87) argues, "We have been taught from Thomas Jefferson's day on down that what is good for the farmer is good for America". While Jefferson retreated from an early assertion that the country would be better off with ever more farmers, this Jeffersonian agrarianism still captures American farmers' imaginations. In regard to what a good farmer is specifically, Danbom (1991) articulates two major strains of agrarianism (rational and romantic) that both believe they are contributing benefits to the development of the country and themselves as citizens. While agrarianism gets at part of what it means to be a good farmer in the US, the rest of this chapter will highlight three examples of good farmers from the period between c.1870 and World War II – those of freed slaves, farmers in an expansion period (both to the West and more intensive use of machinery), and the Master Farmer movement. These stories, in parallel with the UK examples, help us comprehend the interrelated development of industrialisation in farming and the evolution of a productivist good farmer ideal.

Making good citizens: African Americans as good farmers

The emancipation of former slaves created multiple challenges for US society, many of which remain unresolved (White, 2018). Many African-Americans moved North rather than returning to Africa while others remained scattered across the South and became sharecroppers, an arrangement whereby land that once was intended to be freely distributed to former slaves (the origins of the 40 acres and a mule mythology), was now being farmed in a tenancy agreement. While England had seen some move towards tenants achieving independence and self-

determination (Haggard, 1899), the same was not true for African Americans in the US. This struggle and outright racism developed into the sharecropping system that came to dominate the American South (Daniel, 2013; Seavoy, 1998; White, 2018). As W.E.B. Du Bois (1903, p. 211) wrote:

> among such conditions of life there are few incentives to make the labourer become a better farmer. If he is ambitious, he moves to town or tries other labour; as a tenant-farmer his outlook is almost hopeless, and following it as a makeshift, he takes the house that is given him without protest.

At the same time African American cooperatives sprouted across the South, utilizing farming as a form of resistance to economic and political domination including the emergence of white supremacist groups like the Ku Klux Klan (White, 2018: 14). The recent freedom of so many people with specific skills in agriculture led to a conundrum in the agricultural press. On one hand the (overwhelmingly white) press made examples of a few talented African American farmers to demonstrate the benevolence of white mentorship using 'this could be you' journalism to inspire both other African Americans and 'lazy' white farmers. On the other hand, there emerged a black agrarianism – notably through Frederick Douglas and George Washington Carver along with numerous slave narratives (Glave, 2010; Smith, 2004) – that aimed for a Jeffersonian ideal where farming offered a path to full citizenship for the newly freed slaves. Smith (2004, p. 270) argued that black agrarianism made a pitch that "secure property rights create economic and emotional incentives for good stewardship, while an equitable labour system creates a respect for labour that encourages good farming". In the agrarian tradition, then, having secure access to land "in turn leads to careful stewardship" or good farming (Smith, 2004, p. 283). Turning disadvantaged or oppressed groups into good citizens by making them "good" farmers was not unique to African Americans in the United States, but was also a strategy applied to colonised Ireland as well as indigenous American tribes in the mid 19th Century (Burton, 2020).

As one might imagine, much of the commentary by white agricultural writers discounted the skill of African-Americans as farmers (e.g. 'Successful Negro Farmer', 1886) despite a long history of contributing admirably and creatively to the strength and emergence of Southern agriculture (Carney, 2001). Sharecropping, particularly around cotton, saw former slaves

offered parcels of land on exhausted soil, often from former plantation owners now not in residence who then took much, if not all or more, of the harvest each year. The exceptions to this system – those lucky to be working a fertile piece of land and lacking a vengeful land owner/landlord – were celebrated in genre pieces that highlighted that the farmer should be seen as a 'credit to their race'. For example, the Goldsboro Messenger noted in 1886 about Scipio Williams:

> Williams, a coloured man, farming on the plantation of Capt. W. S. Ellerbe ... is a phenomenal negro in many respects, a credit to his race and a living refutation of the idea that there is no money in farming. (p. 7)

The article goes on to speculate on what it was that made Scipio a good farmer including succeeding "by dint of hard blows and indomitable energy", being thrifty, being independent, feeding his family, and that he "never mixes in politics or meddles with other people's business" – a thinly disguised reference to knowing his place in a white society. As with the case of Irish peasant farmers under colonial rule, the notion of a 'good farmer' was associated with a sedate population controlled by their dedication to the land and obligations to their families in such a way that they were unlikely to cause problems for the dominant classes. Yet despite the white narrative of a good black farmer as never mixing in politics, for many former slaves, their narratives expressed hope to enrol "democratic agrarianism to establish blacks' rights to the land and citizenship" (Smith, 2004, p. 277).

The 'good farmer' as a transformative social force: George Washington Carver and Seaman Knapp

The late 19th and early 20th Century was a period of profound transition and contradiction, with agricultural progress being defined as both backward looking and forward looking. 'Backward' progress was seen in the embrace of soil build up and ecological awareness about waste embodied by Carver, Albert Howard, Gabrielle Matthaei, Louise Matthaei, Rudolf Steiner, Lady Eve Balfour, and J.I. Rodale. 'Forward' progress would come to be defined as productivism and involved the development of an agriculture dependent upon chemicals, artificial fertilizer, and ever-larger machinery as was occurring in the United Kingdom and across Europe. To help understand what a good farmer was in late 19th and early 20th century

United States we turn briefly to George Washington Carver's time at the Tuskegee Institute. Tuskegee was set up in the wake of the Civil War to extend practical skills to African Americans in the Macon, Alabama area. Once George Washington Carver (an African American) joined Tuskegee in 1896 he set about researching, writing, and speaking about all of the ways in which African American farmers could improve the soil and, thereby, their lives. His bulletins were filled with the latest technological innovations, recipes, and crop suggestions indicative of Carver's idea of what a good farmer could be given such great limitations on land, credit, and technology (Hersey, 2011; White, 2018). Carver's agrarianism tapped into the ideals of Jeffersonian connections between good farming and good citizens. While abandoning some of the boosterism for new technological advancements (simply because his constituents could never afford them – Hersey, 2011), Carver advocated for the restoration of the highly depleted southern soil. Carver went so far as to write that taking care of the soil is the moral equivalent of taking care of other people. As Hersey (2011, p. 142) describes Carver's stance: "High yields and rich profits alone did not a good farmer make."

In many ways we see the emphasis on soil over profit evident in the relationship between Carver and Knapp. Seaman Knapp met Carver at Tuskegee in 1906. Three years prior, Knapp – realizing that farmers distrusted government agricultural agents because they had no economic stake in the outcomes – pioneered the US demonstration farms by convincing a private farmer in Texas to set aside 70 acres (Hersey, 2011, p. 155). Three years later Knapp visited Tuskegee to find the mobile demonstration school an inspiration. This mobile school consisted of a wagon outfitted with tools, seeds, and other materials relevant to improving not only farming but life in general through providing information on homemaking, hygiene practices, and so on. For rural Alabama African-Americans the mobile school out of Tuskegee provided Carver and others a chance to share what they had learned and promote their vision of the 'good farmer'.

While it is difficult to judge the "success" of the mobile school, two things are notable. First, what was included on the wagon certainly demonstrates what Carver and others at Tuskegee's agricultural school saw as representative of good farming: "different kinds of plows and planters, a cultivator, a cotton chopper, a variety of seeds, samples of fertilizers, a revolving churn, a butter mold, a cream separator, a milk tester, and other appliances useful in making practical demonstrations" (Mayberry, 1991, p. 87). Second, the mobile school made an

impression on Knapp during his visit such that Knapp would include versions of the demonstration wagon/van in the creation of the county extension agency that Knapp would spearhead soon after. Aligning with agricultural schools and local governments, the extension system provided funding to make sure that every county had an extension office to support the farming needs. While this model become more productivist as the years went on (see Hightower, 1978), at the beginning Knapp envisioned extension agents would carry out his vision of agriculture as embodied in his Ten Commandments of Agriculture (Figure 1).

Knapp's Ten Commandments of Agriculture (Knapp, 1909, p. 153)

1. Prepare a deep and thoroughly pulverized seed bed, well drained; break in the fall to a depth of 8,10 and 12 inches, according to the soil, with implements that will not bring too much of the sub-soil to the surface. The foregoing depths should be reached gradually.
2. Use seed of the best variety, intelligently selected and carefully stored.
3. In cultivated crops give the rows and the plants in the rows a space suited to the plant, the soil and the climate.
4. Use intensive tillage during the growing period of the crops.
5. Secure high content of humus in the soil by the use of legumes, barnyard manure, farm refuse and commercial fertilizers.
6. Carry out a systematic crop rotation with a winter cover crop.
7. Accomplish more work in a day by using more horse power and better implements.
8. Increase the farm stock to the extent of utilizing all the waste products and idle lands of the farm.
9. Produce all the food required for the men and animals on the farm.
10. Keep an account of each farm product, in order to know from which the gain or loss arises.

What Carver and Knapp offer is a related, but divergent idea of what it meant to be a good farmer. While Carver was concerned with using farming as a way to secure a better hold on citizenship for often poor and illiterate farmers, Knapp was focused on broadly transforming rural society at a national scale, through the improvement of agriculture. For example, Knapp

(cited in Martin, 1921, p. 17) details how creating a new concept of good farming through demonstration would lead to major social change:

> His neighbours ask him how he produced it. He is invited to address public assemblies. He has become a man of note and a leader of the people and cannot return to his old ways. Soon there is a body of such men; a township, a county and finally a state is transformed.

This idea that society can be bettered by transforming bad farmers into good farmers was also evident in the origins of demonstration farming in the early 1800s when Mark Fellenburg established the Hofwyl agricultural institute in Switzerland (Burton, 2020). Whether improving the lives of former slaves or creating 'men of note' to lead counties, the notion of the creating good farmers as a transformative social force illustrates how the notion of the 'good farmer' has not always been defined solely by production or technical skills.

The industrialisation and productivisation of the good farmer in the U.S.

The extension work of Knapp and Carver in the early 20th Century helped to define the notion of the 'good farmer' in America through improving cultivation and management approaches. At around the same time, however, a new force that would become important for defining the role of the 'good farmer' was emerging: the introduction of lightweight tractors to replace horsepower. This was not the first time fossil fuels had been used to power agricultural implements. The development of the coal fired steam plough (with the plough dragged along wires) in the mid-19th Century (see Annual Register of Progress in Mechanical Engineering and Construction, 1866) enabled farmers to plough faster and in straighter lines than previously possible. The cost of establishing steam ploughing (for example, reorganising field boundaries, buying the machinery, employing skilled engineers), however, meant that steam technology was only available to wealthier farmers and landowners. The arrival of the internal combustion engine meant that lightweight mobile machinery capable of treating fields with a precision never before possible was finally available to common farmers – with the result that expectations for tidy farming increased and the role of mechanic gradually grew to become part of the farming role. Finally, farmers had a source of power that, unlike the steam machinery of the past, was fast, mobile and lightweight – capable of driving onto soft fields without destroying the soil structure and doing the job of the horse without tiring.

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which should be used for any reference to this work

At the same time, it was increasingly evident that agriculture was becoming a business and, with that, notions of god, community, and family being part of the good farmer identity were, in many cases, declining in favour of business acumen. Throughout the late 19th Century the perceived role of farms and farmers as the bedrock of democracy gradually diminished. With the evolution of the railroad, the telegraph, the creation of grain futures (Cronon, 1992), and the opening up of global markets, agriculture in the United States began to privilege huge land holdings with yield, not necessarily quality, seen as a lodestone for success. Consequently, what was being held up as an illustration of good farming was not small family farming conducted by farmer stewards, but industrial-scale agriculture where efficiency and profit were primary objectives. Finally, the farmer could become an industrialist, adopting the language of efficiency, concentration and economies of scale. The logic of the industrial revolution transferred easily into agriculture — to optimise production agriculture could be operated like a factory and provide ever greater returns on the capital invested.

In the US this development was seen by some as both inevitable and undesirable. As Carver (1914, p.5) lamented,

> The growth of large-scale production in other industries has led very naturally to the query whether the same tendency must not show itself sooner or later in farming. That would be a pity, because it would mean, not only that the small farmer would disappear, but that the last large class of self-employed men would be eliminated.

However, strains of Jeffersonian agrarianism still held strong as a counter to the increasing reality of larger more mechanized farms in the U.S. Echoing Carver’s and Knapp’s emphasis on soil health, as it was insisted in the Michigan Farmer (W.H.P., 1905, p. 469):

> Farming whose chief aim is immediate financial returns regardless of the future is not successful farming. It is, one of the great faults of our farming. . . The only kind of farming which can be called successful is that which attaches a bold and intelligent peasantry to the soil because they love that manner of life for its own sake more than for its financial returns, and which thus natural loves and takes care of the soil. We are trying to cultivate too much

> land. We need more farmers and better ones, settled on less land and better land. Therein lies the solution of many vexing questions, including falling fertility and the hired man.

About the same time, Liberty Hyde Bailey's (1915, p. 220) conclusion to his report on The Country-Life Movement in the United States provides and idealized and hopeful summation of the good farmer:

> My reader may wish to know what constitutes a good farmer. I think the requirements of a good farmer are at least four:
>
> The ability to make a full and comfortable living from the land;
> to rear a family carefully and well;
> to be of good service to the community;
> to leave the farm more productive than it was when he took it.

In 1915, Bailey found himself in agreement with Carver and Knapp (and some romantic agrarian strains), along with resonance with the UK emphasis on the interrelatedness of land, family, autonomy, service, and stewardship as the makings of a good farmer. In contrast to a vision of good farmers in balance with community and the global economy, World War I's conclusion led to both a period of increasing mechanization and a related achievement of overproduction. The resultant price drop began a long farm recession that would mark the beginnings of and continue through the Great Depression. The ill-conceived notion of farming on the US plains and uprooting of the native prairie for monocultural cotton production combined with severe drought and windstorms created the Dust Bowl era. The resulting mortgage, farm, labour, and migration crises put a pause on more mechanized production and a focus on yield was called out in the US government. On the eve of Roosevelt's election and the New Deal that would transform economic policy in the US, Arthur Capper (1931), a senator from Kansas, offered a scathing criticism of the predominant attitude towards farmers (and the model set up by Knapp in part):

> For generations these agencies have been urging the farmer to become a more efficient producer. He was told that the man who made two blades of grass grow where one grew before was a public benefactor – and would be rewarded for his efficiency and benefactions

> by getting more profits from his farming operations … The agricultural colleges taught his children how to grow more to the acre on good ground; how to grow wheat on the arid and semi-arid lands that had been a few short years ago marked on the maps as the Great American Desert. The farmer responded to the advice, benefited by the instruction. He followed improved methods; he bought the latest machinery; he increased his efficiency; he became the most efficient producer of foodstuffs the world has ever seen. And what has been the result? His taxes, his living expenses, his cost of production, his transportation and marketing costs have increased as his efficiency increased, and in even larger proportions. But his reward for increased efficiency has been lower prices for his products, an increase in the mortgage on the farm, probable foreclosure of the mortgage, bankruptcy, and no place for him to go when he leaves the farm.

By this stage Knapp's original work had been turned into a major institution intent on selling a particular brand of farming called out by Capper and others. Just like the wider Agrarian Question, the systems in which farmers found themselves enmeshed encouraged one kind of farming (bigger, more capital- and technologically-intensive, more corporate) at the expense of the farmers themselves. Increasingly, to be a good farmer meant making farmers vulnerable to losing, first, their farms, and second, their identity as farmers. Waring and Teller (1944, p. SM18) outline the reality of this evolution in the midst of World War II:

> In a technological society like ours the tendencies are toward bigness, and little people are being crowded to the wall in agriculture just as in other parts of our economy. … The big operators and plantation owners do not want small farmers and tenants to become independent operators producing war crops. They want instead an army of surplus underpaid labour ready to work for what is offered. A continuation of this process will result in a widespread system of "factories in the fields."

The beginning of the twentieth century represents a period where ideals of agriculture and 'good farming' began to clash. Whereas in the 18th Century and early 19th Century the battle had been between customary agriculture and scientific agriculture – with few arguing for the virtues of customary practices – in the early 20th Century the notion that small scale farming by a "bold and intelligent peasantry" focused on maintaining soil fertility was being forwarded as a competing concept of 'good farming'. The rhetoric of the 'good farmer' was no longer the

sole preserve of those who sought improvements in yields and practices through capital and technology. However, the food shortages of World War II led to the emergence of state driven productivist agriculture that tipped the balance of good farming in favour of industrialisation and ever-increasing yields. Production and the distributions of surplus became paramount. Most importantly, the good farmer in the productivist period became the one who most efficiently produced material for the global marketplace. Their contribution to the country in other ways (the health of the soil, contributions to the community well-being, the family tradition, and so on) become secondary to efficiency and increasing production until the emergence of butter mountains, milk lakes, and increasing environmental degradation caused by industrial modes of production in the 1980s.

Conclusion

In this chapter we witnessed the 'good farmer' change from a family man – a man of God whose role as a husband was so intertwined with the farming role that the terms 'good farmer' and 'good husband' were used interchangeably – to one where the role has become predominantly one of production. One thing evident from the analysis is how the notion of the 'good farmer' is strongly tied to the condition of agriculture. In the 16th Century subsistence farming rather than commercial farming dominated. The role of the farmer was then survival of the family as a social unit and, as a consequence, the life of the 'good farmer' revolved around wife, family, community, and God with, as we note in Chapter 3, little concern for symbols of production such as tidy farms and fields. This was not unique to that particular period of time. As we witness from Knapp's efforts in the early 19th Century and the story of the African-American 'good farmer', whenever the conditions for agriculture are poor and farmers struggle for survival, the role of the 'good farmer' as a community builder returns. With the growth of cities, improved transport links, and external manufacturing, agriculture became focused on supplying food and raw materials for consumption or manufacture elsewhere – and the stronger this effect, the more the 'good farmer' moved from a family to a commercial role.

The story of the 'good farmer', however, is more complex than this. The histories of the 'good farmer' presented here represent but a few of many and, as they rely on the observations of literate men (and they *were* almost exclusively men) rather than practical farmers, do not

represent the story from the farmer's perspective. Eighteenth and nineteenth century views in particular, as we observe in Chapter 1, are more often attempts to define what a good farmer is for the purpose of initiating change, rather than attempts to find out who the good farmer actually is on his/her own terms. In reality a 'good farmer' is not a literary being, but emerges organically from the interaction between farmers, society, and, in particular, the knowledge, implements and machines that are used to work the land. As we note, one became a 'good farmer' by reaching a level of competence in a set of culturally significant behaviours – which could vary significantly from place to place and over time. How 'book' farmers chose to judge the good farmer was of little concern to those who had to earn their living from the land – while observing their neighbour for signs of being a 'good' or 'bad farmer' was often critical for success. But what are the signs and symbols of being a good farmer and how do they evolve? In the next chapter we address this question – we look at what defines a good farmer from the farmer's perspective and why.

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