

The Pennsylvania State University

The Graduate School

College of Agricultural Sciences

**OWNING LAND:  
THE EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN FARMERS IN MARYLAND**

A Thesis in

Rural Sociology

by

Madeline Gray Franklin

© 2014 Madeline Gray Franklin

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Master of Science

December 2014

The thesis of Madeline Gray Franklin was reviewed and approved\* by the following:

Carolyn Sachs  
Professor of Rural Sociology  
Head of Women's Studies Department  
Thesis Advisor

Kathryn Brasier  
Associate Professor of Rural Sociology

Diane McLaughlin  
Professor of Rural Sociology and Demography  
Community and Economic Development Graduate Program Coordinator  
Associate Head, Department of Agricultural Economics, Sociology and Education

Anouk Patel-Campillo  
Assistant Professor of Rural Sociology

\*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School.

## **Abstract**

This study examines the experiences of female farmland owners in North-Central Maryland. It explores the different ways in which women have acquired land, the variety of relationships that women have with their land, and the ways in which a woman's property impacts her roles and relationships on the farm. The study consists of in-depth interviews conducted with a sample of women from six counties in North-Central Maryland. A snowball method of sampling was employed to gather participants for the study. The sample is comprised of women who own land that they operate as farms, although they may share the title and operate it in conjunction with others. Efforts were made to collect data from as diverse of a sample as possible, striving to include women who have accessed land in different ways, who operate different size and types of farms, and who both do and do not share the land title. Interviews were conducted over a period of four months, and were semi-structured in nature. A phenomenological method of analysis was then employed to draw out themes and make more explicit the experiences of women on their land. This study finds that land holds more than a monetary value to women farmers, serving as a tool of empowerment, a burden, and a physical and emotional connection to family. In addition, social processes also impact the meaning of land ownership, with gender roles and relationships with family members mitigating women's power on their land.

## **Table of Contents**

<b>List of Tables .....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Research Problem .....</b>	<b>2</b>
Research Method.....	3
Structure of the Paper.....	4
<b>Chapter 2: Review of the Literature.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Theoretical Framework.....</b>	<b>6</b>
John Locke and Theories of Private Property .....	7
Polanyi’s Fictitious Commodity .....	11
<b>Female Land Tenure.....</b>	<b>14</b>
International Land Tenure Trends .....	15
Female Land Tenure in the US: Trends and Change Overtime .....	19
Female Agricultural Landlords .....	23
The Role of Culture in Shaping Female Land Tenure .....	25
Power and the Importance of Female Land Tenure .....	27
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Choosing a Methodology .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Research Method.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Study Site .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Study Sample .....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Critical Reflections.....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Chapter 4: Research Findings.....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Acquiring Land: Desires, challenges and the role of family .....</b>	<b>44</b>
Inheritance .....	45
Marriage .....	47
Purchase.....	48
<b>Making Decisions .....</b>	<b>50</b>
Roles in the family and on the farm .....	50
Other Barriers to Free Agency on the Farm .....	54
<b>The Meaning of Ownership.....</b>	<b>59</b>
Security.....	59
Responsibility .....	60
Different from Rented Land .....	63
<b>Relationship with the Land .....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Succession to stay in farming and/or family .....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion .....</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>The Importance of Family on the Land .....</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Caretakers of the land- A Woman’s Role .....</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Land as a Fictitious Commodity .....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>Land Ownership: Moving Beyond Locke .....</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>A Return to the Research Questions .....</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Contribution to the Literature.....</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>Implications for the Study Group.....</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>Areas for Future Research .....</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>Appendix .....</b>	<b>92</b>

<b>Interview Questions .....</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>General Information Form.....</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>Study Sample Characteristics .....</b>	<b>94</b>

**List of Tables**

**Table 1.** Women Farmers in the Study Region ..... 37  
**Table 2.** Demographic Summary of Entire Sample..... 41  
**Table 3.** How Women Acquired Their Land ..... 46

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

There is currently a shift in female farming and land ownership patterns emerging in the United States. Data from the agricultural census has revealed a significant increase in both women operating farms and owning farmland. This trend has leveled off in more recent years (NASS 2014). This increase in women farmers has not yet been well studied, and it is unclear what structures are informing such changes. It is also uncertain what impact this has had for women in agriculture, and whether or not the changing demographic characteristics of farmers are indicative of an increase in rural women's empowerment.

This demographic trend comes in the wake of much scholarship on gender in agriculture both domestically and abroad. Scholarship in this area has illuminated broad patriarchal structures within the field of agriculture, with women's knowledge and work as farm operators going largely unrecognized (Sachs 1983). It also follows scholarship and international policy trends that target land-titling programs toward women. These titling programs seek to empower rural women, but they inherently assume that land titles beget power, which has been widely criticized (Ribot and Peluso 2003).

This study examines the intersection of gender, agriculture and property. More specifically, this study seeks to describe the meaning of land ownership for women in the US. This is a context in which private land titles are supposed to confer sovereign power (Demsetz 1967), but where women are still subjected to patriarchal structures within the agricultural system. This study aims to cast light upon the ways in which women currently experience land ownership and how they gain access to land, understand their relationship with their land, and make decisions on their land. A final goal is to understand how land ownership impacts their role and relationships within their family and communities.

Exploring how women experience land ownership may serve a multitude of functions. It will elaborate upon previous studies on gender, agriculture and land, as well as inform further studies in the field. This study is exploratory in nature, and could contribute to the development of larger-scale longitudinal or nation-wide research on trends for women and agricultural land ownership. This study will help to develop a more holistic understanding of the social processes that govern power and access to resources on a farm. Furthermore, this study will hopefully contribute to the development of more appropriate and precise interventions and empowerment initiatives for women in agriculture.

### **Research Problem**

This study will explore the experience of land ownership for women farmers. It seeks to describe women's relationships with their land, how ownership of land is perceived, and the ways in which women farmers experience power through ownership. This research problem is further broken down into two questions regarding the experience of owning land as a woman farmer:

#### ***1) How do women understand their relationship to their land?***

The meaning of land ownership will be examined by addressing questions concerning how women feel about their land, what value the land has to them, and what the land contributes to their own identity and sense of empowerment. These are questions related to individual perceptions and feelings toward the land.

## ***2) How does land ownership relate to women's experiences and power on the farm?***

The experience of ownership will further be examined through questions pertaining to the ways in which land is acquired, how decisions are made on the land and what freedoms or barriers are encountered when making decisions on the farm. These questions relate more specifically to how women experience power on the land.

### **Research Method**

This is a qualitative, phenomenological research study. A qualitative design is appropriate for this study because the research is exploratory in nature, aiming to draw out themes and understand the experience of land tenure, identity and power. A phenomenological method was chosen because it enables the researcher to capture and interpret human experience from the subject's frame of view (Baker 1992) (Sanders 1982). This is beneficial in examining how women experience land ownership, and the variations that may exist by the different forms of acquiring ownership.

The site of this study was a six county region in North-Central Maryland. This region of Maryland was selected because it contains the largest number of female-owned and operated farms and the largest amount of acreage owned by women in the state (NASS 2014). It is a region that is diverse in operation type across all six counties, but is subjected to similar forces of encroaching suburban developments, high land prices, and increasing government regulations.

The population of this study consists of female farm owner-operators in North-Central Maryland. More specifically, the population entails women whose names are present on the land title for at least a portion of the operated farmland, and who participate in practices and activities

on the farm. The sample for this study was both small in size and purposefully selected. Seventeen women were selected as participants in this study. The sample was selected through a snowball method (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981), utilizing the aid of county agricultural extension offices and agricultural organizations. In order to collect the qualitative data for the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted over a period of 4 months. The interviews were structured around a series of open-ended questions that addressed each of the research questions. Data gathered from interviews were coded thematically and analyzed for common themes and the possible social structures that underlie these experiences.

### **Structure of the Paper**

The thesis begins with a review of related literature. The review contains a theoretical framework that briefly summarizes social theories of property, from John Locke's concept of private property to Ribot and Peluso's theory of Access, to Karl Polanyi's concept of fictitious commodities. After this framework is presented, recent literature on gender, agriculture and land are discussed. This includes a review of the international scholarship on women and farmland tenure, a history of US property laws and rights, and cultural institutions involving gender in the US agricultural system.

Following the literature review, the methodology for this study is discussed. This includes an introduction to the study site in North-Central Maryland, a description of the study population and sampling method, as well as the theoretical background behind the method of data collection and analysis. The section concludes with a breakdown of the steps that the researcher took to perform the study, and a reflection upon the shortcomings and potential biases in the data that may have resulted from the research methodology.

The research findings are then presented. The findings are divided into thematic sections including: how women acquire land, how decisions are made on the land, how women perceive ownership, what relationship women have with their land, and concerns regarding land succession. The findings are further analyzed within the discussion chapter that follows. This chapter identifies social structures that impact the experiences that are described in the findings chapter. These structures include the importance of family on the land and the position of caretaker that women tend to embody. Further themes are drawn out, which relate more closely to the theoretical framework presented in the literature review. The discussion relates the study findings to Polanyi's concept of fictitious commodities, and refutes Locke's theory of private property with a concept of social ownership, which involves a spectrum of power within land ownership. Conclusions are then drawn in regard to the contribution of this study to the wider literature on gender and agriculture.

## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

This chapter begins with a selection of classical social theory that addresses the concept of land ownership. These various theories of property are analyzed and compared to one another in order to structure a theoretical framework for the study. The writings of John Locke, Karl Polanyi, and Ribot and Peluso are included in the section. The second half of this chapter reviews the literature on gender and land tenure. It describes international trends for women as landowners, and then examines the literature on women in the US agricultural system.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This review of literature begins with an examination of the social theories regarding property. The review helps to place this study within broader sociological debates and provides a framework through which to analyze the study's findings. In order to discuss property rights, it is first necessary to define what is meant by property. The term elicits different meanings, and carries with it different ideologies and values. A distinction can be made here between what property and property rights are and what they should be, as any definition across time is reflective of the purposes of the dominant class in that instance (MacPherson 1978). To identify the meaning of property from a historical context can also help to decipher the writings of prolific and influential philosophers and sociologists who wrote on the topic. For the purposes of this paper, the term property will be used in reference specifically to land, as opposed to all objects of possession.

Modern understandings of property can be cast into two categories. For one, western society refers to property as an object within possession, at the exclusion of others (Hallowell 1982; MacPherson 1978). This conception of property emerged with the commodification of land; stemming from the English enclosure of the commons and evolving alongside the growth

of a capitalist market economy, property became an object in and of itself rather than a right to use (MacPherson 1978). Within the sphere of Western law, the term property is written to mean the right to access an object, not simply the object itself, however modern interpretations of law generally involve exclusive rights of some kind (Hallowell 1982; MacPherson 1978).

A final and distinctive characteristic of property is that it is an institution that is upheld by custom or law. This distinguishes property from informal possession (MacPherson 1978).

Arguably, however, law has limits of enforceability. Generally, customs and social understandings of property play a more important role in determining how property rights play out within a society (MacPherson 1978). Property as a social institution is both a reflection of social structure as well as a phenomenon with the potential to create and reinforce social inequities (Causer 1982; Hallowell 1982). It may, therefore, be helpful to conceptually subdivide property rights into political ownership-that which is officially recognized by law, and social ownership of land- that which is understood by informal institutions and assumptions (Petrzelka and Marquart-Pyatt 2011). Assuming that the social institution of ownership is necessarily housed within political ownership overlooks patriarchal assumptions embedded within the concept of property, which excludes the experiences of the less powerful within formal constructions.

### *John Locke and Theories of Private Property*

Locke's most important and revolutionary idea is that of unilateral, unlimited appropriation of land (MacPherson 1978). He began his argument by conveying the view that the Earth and its natural resources belong to all of human kind. This belief, like many others held by Locke, stemmed greatly from his Christian religion (Widerquist 2010). Given that nature belongs

to all humans, extraction and benefit from the land is a right that exists for everyone. However, Locke also believed that property, a possessive ownership that excludes all others, exists within each individual person. The only way to make individual property visible is to mix a person's labor with the land (MacPherson 1978; Blythe 2013; Widerquist 2010). Locke emphasized the necessity and holiness of labor, as a commandment of God (Henry 1999).

Altering land by physical labor transforms that land into an individual's privately appropriated property. Part of Locke's justification for this appropriation was that land itself carries no value- as it is owned by all- but that labor is a source of value and that value is then transferred to the land (Widerquist 2010). He also wrote that improving upon the land effectively provides more resources that might be available for others. Private property then becomes a public good, and a source of growth. In effect, Locke was arguing for the privatization of land in order to transform land into a commodity that can produce for- as well as be a part of- the market. Furthermore, Locke seemed to use this commodification as a justification for unequal appropriation, as even people without land may benefit from the fruits of the land through a market (Blythe 2013). He also expressed confidence that appropriation of land should ensure individuals the means to sustain themselves without the interference of others (Widerquist 2010). The appropriation of land and Locke's justifications of such an action is a legacy that has shaped theory and policy throughout the world.

Locke was revolutionary in his argument for private property rights. His work was very significant in shaping the ideologies and policies of those in power in England, and profoundly influenced the Whig Revolution (MacPherson 1978). In addition, his vision of private property helped to shape public thinking in the US and France which, in part, informed each country's revolution. The right to private property was written into or was influential during the writings of

the constitutions of England, France and the United States (MacPherson 1978), and continues to play a role in public discourse and identity within the United States today.

In 1967, Harold Demsetz revisited and modernized Locke's concept of private property with his influential piece "Toward a Theory of Property Rights." According to Demsetz, land rights should be based on a concept of private space, where the proprietor of such space can act at will without the intervention of others (1967). To illustrate this point, Demsetz used an example of what can only be described as a tragedy of the commons, from the fur trade in colonial America (Hardin's landmark article on the Tragedy of the Commons would not be published for another year). Demsetz found both empirical and theoretical links between the establishment of the first property laws in the new world and the development of the fur trade, a period when over-hunting could have impacted livelihoods in individual regions (Demsetz 1967). Following a Lockean tradition of protecting property from the influence of others, he subsequently concluded that private property is the only means of protecting against an imminent tragedy of the commons. The obvious assumption here is that common land use cannot be regulated in any way, which is often untrue (Ostrom 1999).

A preoccupation with Locke and private property rights has been evident in U.S. and, more recently, international policies concerning land rights. The first hundred years of the U.S.'s existence was characterized by land laws that sought to push out the Native populations, colonize the land before other settlers, and make a use of that land (Geisler 1984). This effort relied very heavily upon a concept of private property rights that would grant rights to land to an appropriator and no other. In addition, rights during this time were guided by English common law, which was patriarchal in nature. For the most part, single women were not allowed to own property (Sachs 1996), although wealth and power sometimes made for exceptions (Efland,

Rogers, and Grim 1993; Geisler, Waters, and Eadie 1985), and certainly very few non-white people were allowed to own property.

After the establishment of the US, a series of land laws were enacted that have shaped much of the property ownership regime in the US today. These laws began with the Land Ordinance and Northwest Ordinance from the 1830s, the Homestead Acts of the 1860s, and conservation laws of the twenty and twenty-first centuries (Wunderlich 1993). The Land Ordinance and Northwest Ordinance from the 1830s divided public and private land. The reasoning behind these laws was to open up access to private land for all (white, male) Americans. In practice, however, most private land was made available to an already privileged group: prospectors and politicians (Geisler 1984). The Homesteading Acts sought to claim and colonize the western parts of today's US territory. It granted every claimant access to 160 acres of land, that it would sell to them for a low price if they invested labor into that land (Geisler 1984). The law extended this right to land to any citizen or person who had applied for citizenship to the US, and who was older than 21. In reality, however, female and black applicants faced a greater challenge in claiming these lands (Geisler 1984), further reinforcing gendered power structures within the new country.

Internationally, post-colonial development policies primarily tend to push land privatization and individual land titling. Stemming from a Lockean belief that transforming land into a commodity can bolster economic growth, this policy centers on the notion of a natural progression from official title to investment, and to increased productivity (Feder and Nishio 1998). It also values the way in which private titles can allow farmers to use their land as collateral for loans, or to sell off for monetary gain. It is assumed that the ultimate goal for farmers is integration into the world market. It is also argued, as Locke believes, that private land

titling systems, unlike customary or traditional tenure systems, may also allow farmers to maintain tenure security- to defend their right to land against others- when they begin to function within the world market (Feder & Nishio, 1998).

Both US and international policies regarding private land rights are based upon neoliberal perspectives that are, in turn, based upon very limited selections of Locke's writings and philosophy. The tendency is to focus solely upon Locke's assertion that unilateral appropriation of land is beneficial to both the proprietor- through protection from others and through benefitting from the fruits of the land, and to society- through the market. One of the fallacies upon which Locke's argument may be based, the idea that there is an infinite amount of land to be appropriated, is not considered. Even more problematic is the paralleling of Locke's ideas to that of Adam Smith, by equating land appropriation with necessary individual greed that will ultimately benefit society in the long run (Henry 1999). Locke does not speak to necessary greed, and indeed his emphasis on morality, the evils of spoilage and the importance of charity seem to go against this principle (Henry 1999). It is noteworthy that practically none of Locke's stipulations are represented in policy, and although this may be due to problems of interpretation, it may also be because Locke's stipulations oppose neoliberal versions of his concept of unilateral appropriation.

### *Polanyi's Fictitious Commodity and a Theory of Access*

One theorist whose philosophies offer sound criticism of Locke's conception of private property is Karl Polanyi. Polanyi was greatly inspired by the writings of Marx, and agreed that the emergence of a capitalist economy has and will continue to cause social destruction. Unlike Marx, Polanyi argued that economies are based upon social constructions and that the economy

has to be regulated in such a way that it cannot simply consist of its own internal logic. As such, it is more appropriate to describe the economy as being a component within the social realm than the other way around (Block and Polanyi 2003). The economy is therefore a system that is subjected to moral and customary views.

One of the social constructions upon which the market economy is based is that which Polanyi termed fictitious commodities. This concept of fictitious commodities turns Locke's commodification of land on its head. Polanyi suggested that false assumptions concerning land privatization would doom the entire market system to fail. Within his book, *The Great Transformation*, he wrote, "in regard to labor, land, and money such a postulate cannot be upheld. To allow the market mechanism to be sole director of the fate of human beings and their natural environment, indeed, even of the amount and use of purchasing power, would result in the demolition of society" (Block and Polanyi 2003:278).

According to Polanyi, land, labor and money are falsely treated as commodities within market society, while they possess qualities that make them inherently different from market commodities (Block and Polanyi 2003). Land, labor and money are not products that are created by humans; they are the products of nature, of human capability and of human construct rather than products to be sold. They are objects that can give beyond their capacity; they can be exploited. The subjection of these three 'products' to market pricing would be both catastrophic for society at large, and for the market. To treat them as commodities would be to subject basic resources for human sustenance to the whims of the market, which is a precarious place to entrust them (Dale 2008). Additionally, to build a market on the basis of commodities that fundamentally do not contain the attributes of commodities is to base an entire economic system upon a lie, and therefore requires the intervention of the state (Block and Polanyi 2003).

Polanyi lived in an era where the state already played a central role in managing the market. He saw the failure of the supposed intrinsic logic of the market and the necessity of state interference as a double movement that relied upon the balance of liberalism and protectionism. Polanyi suspected that this trend was the direct result of the market's reliance upon false commodities. Moreover, the role of the state in the market was further proof to Polanyi that the economy was not its own entity, but a component of larger society (Block and Polanyi 2003).

More contemporary criticisms of Locke's private property can be found in analyses of family life and interfamilial power relations. Within his argument, Locke failed to acknowledge the difference between individual and familial ownership of land. It is possible that he took such an assumption for granted and simply considered husband/father proprietorship as the only legitimate kind of ownership. This not only makes women and children invisible, but it disempowers them and denies their own rights to property. Formal land ownership by children is not congruent with Western morals of children in the market place. However, the commodification of land that they are set to inherit does establish a power structure that impacts their agency. Modern studies have shown that children (mostly boys) who are set to inherit land from their fathers are much more likely than other children to be subservient to their fathers' will (Allen 1982). Furthermore, women, who are much more likely than men to perform reproductive work in the home and on the land, do not gain ownership over the object of their labor (Allen 1982). Locke's private property theory is, perhaps, better framed as a theory of property rights for men.

Access theory, a modern theory coined by Ribot and Peluso, recognizes that a person's identity will enable or constrain their ability to utilize resources. They argue that a person's gender, age and race will position them differently in regard to the people and institutions who

guard resources (2003). Depending upon a person's identity, they have different uses and forms of access to land. The term a 'bundle of rights' is often used to describe the various interests and uses that a parcel of land offers different individuals (Wunderlich 1993). This concept stands very much in contrast to Locke's hard-lined, individual full right to land. Even a husband's supposed ownership of land allows for informal land access and benefit to his wife, children, his laborers, perhaps even his neighbors. To imagine land ownership as one individual right is to ignore the bundled interests of others in the land. The other issue to draw out, here, is that access theory provides a good illustration of how common property rights are actually a bundle of individual rights. Common access, therefore, does not exclude an individual's rights, but rather includes the rights of all individuals (MacPherson 1978).

### *Conclusion*

John Locke established a theory of private property rights that has had profound impacts upon international and domestic policies, as well as narratives of property and land. There has been incredible consolidation of land ownership worldwide and a reinforcing of power structures. These power structures are evident in the circumstances of limited land ownership for women in the US and beyond, which will be described in the following section. These circumstances may well be better interpreted through a framework of access rather than individual property rights.

### **Female Land Tenure**

This review explores the literature on female land tenure. Research in this field in the U.S. has been fairly limited in scope, particularly in more recent years. Consequently the

literature review begins by addressing international trends in female land tenure. There is an abundance of research in this area, which stands in contrast to the meager number of US studies, but the patterns of inequality that emerge can be traced within the US context as well. This is followed by a review of the literature on female property ownership in the US, in regard to both statistics and structures that shape tenure inequalities. This section concludes with a discussion of why tenure inequalities are important to examine, and identifies gaps in the literature that remain to be addressed.

### *International Land Tenure Trends*

There is a very rich literature, internationally, on women and land tenure. Tenure is a loose term that encompasses all forms of land rights, both formal and informal. This literature primarily examines structures that have limited female land tenure, and the negative impacts this has had on women and development. Although widely recognized to exist, the land tenure-gender gap has proven difficult to quantify. This is largely due to the fact that land tenure is under-documented, and the gender of landholders is often omitted from official bookkeeping (Deere and Leon 2003). Not to be dissuaded, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has compiled a promising, albeit incomplete database that contains data relevant to ownership statistics (FAO 2014). The strength of this database is that it includes an organized catalogue of the laws and customs that deal specifically with female land tenure within many individual developing countries throughout the world. Structures that inhibit female land tenure are generally well documented and widespread. In a study by Carmen Diana Deere and Magdalena Leon, for example, women's limited access to land throughout Latin America was found to be the result of five practices and institutions, "male preference in inheritance; male

privilege in marriage; male bias in both community and state programs of land distribution; and male gender bias in the land market” (2003:926). Similar structural factors have been found to constrict female land tenure in South Asia, as well (Agarwal 2003).

Trends in agricultural land tenure changed internationally under colonialism. If not immediately appropriated by colonizing powers, family lands used by women were registered in the male relation’s name. Men were assumed to be primary farmers by the colonists, and were subsequently given control of the cash crop industry. In this way, land was used as a tool to marginalize women and remove them both from their land and from the market (Flora 1985).

This imperialistic view of land rights extends to recent development initiatives to secure land rights, typically in the form of land titling projects. Registration of land has often been conducted under the assumption that only one name on a title is necessary, and that it should be the name of the head of house; generally assumed to be male (Federici 2011). Furthermore, the privatization of land itself has created rigid boundaries that did not previously exist, and has instilled a sense of ownership that no longer allows for bundled layers of power and access to coexist (Federici 2011). As such, land titling programs have tended to strip women, and other marginalized people, of their informal access to land and resources.

There are strong arguments for the relationship between female land tenure, female empowerment and economic resilience, that are slowly gaining traction among academics and non-governmental organizations (NGO) (Agarwal 2003). From a neoliberal perspective, a woman’s ownership of land would allow her to participate in the market where women have so often been left out. Land ownership would allow her to access sources of credit that would otherwise be unattainable and give her something of value that may be bargained or sold (Agarwal 2003). From a theory of access, land tenure for women would be a potential tool for

social and political empowerment. In evening out access to resources between men and women, women's decision making power could increase both within the home, on the land and within communities (Agarwal 2003). They would be better situated to bargain, and they might derive an increased sense of worth, which could increase their participation in community-level decision-making (Agarwal 2003).

As of the 1970s, international institutions began to recognize the importance of securing women's rights to land and, prompted by organizations such as the FAO, many state governments across the world began to repeal laws that discriminated against women in terms of land ownership and inheritance (Agarwal 2003). But there is not always a direct link between law and processes on the ground. Bina Agarwal attributes some of this to the general ambivalence toward female land tenure among NGOs and local community groups. Among groups that are concerned with land distribution, gender tends to be seen as a peripheral issue, and among women's organizations, access to good wages and micro-credit is generally emphasized as the route toward eradicating female poverty (Agarwal 2003). The foci of these local groups mirror the priorities that have been emphasized by development agencies in Western countries and capitalist systems.

Governments that have sought to increase female land tenure through their titling programs have opted for joint titling between spouses. While this increases a woman's power and claim over resources if something were to happen to her husband or marriage, joint titling does not remove all constraints on women (Agarwal 2003). Women's bargaining power within the household may or may not increase, and they may still face constraints claiming ownership and resources on their land in cases where they would like to leave their marriage. In addition, if a woman does leave her marriage, or her husband dies, women are often still restricted by social

constructions of altruism to forego their land to another man, such as a brother or son (Agarwal 2003).

In response to land titling programs and the privatization of land, some groups have sought the establishment of officially sanctioned common land. Common land, as opposed to public land owned by the government, is a larger parcel of land that is owned and managed by a collective of families (Federici 2011). State governments and international bodies, such as the World Bank, have recognized communal lands, and have amended titling schemes to include this form of land tenure. Their method of titling establishes a management board, a selected group within the commons that reports to the government, and this has allowed for an elite capture of power within communal lands (Federici 2011). Since women are not generally a part of the elite, this system often puts women's access to land in peril. To this point, and in retaliation of power structures that govern land titling, some organizations suggest that the focus on land tenure shift toward redistributive land reform (Federici 2011). They argue in favor of increasing communal land, returning landless people to the land, and creating a space that is governed by old customary law. What this entails is not clear, however some women's organizations have argued that it would be easier to tackle customary and local-level power inequities without the presence of larger patriarchal structures of government and agribusiness (Federici 2011).

Internationally, women do not own as much agricultural land as men. This has much to do with local customs and the systematic disempowerment of women within a household. As discussed in the next section, inequalities in land tenure and the patriarchal structures that dictate them are similar across borders.

### *Female Land Tenure in the US: Trends and Change Overtime*

Landownership throughout the world is highly concentrated, with roughly 80% of all agricultural land being owned by 3% of the population (Geisler 1984). In addition, only 1% of that agricultural land is actually owned by women (Allen and Sachs 2007). This is similar to the US, where women control but 7% of all farmland (USDA 2014). Current statistics on female land tenure in the US are available in the USDA's agricultural censuses of 2007 and 2012. According to these surveys, women have been an increasingly more prominent proportion of primary and secondary farm operators (increasing from 11% to 14% of all principle operators between 2002 and 2007) (USDA 2007). In addition, the overall number of women farm operators has increased from 985, 192 to 969, 672 between 2007 and 2012 (USDA 2014). However, the number of self-identified primary operators has gone down slightly, from 306, 209 to 288, 264. This coincides with an overall decrease in number of primary operators, regardless of gender, so women remain approximately 14% of all primary operators (USDA 2014).

This change is even more clear when looking at trends over the past 30 years, with the number of female operated farms increasing by over 150% between 1982 and 2007 (USDA 2013). Such an increase holds true at all operation sizes, with the number of female operators of farms that garner no income increasing by 1200% and farms gaining over \$1million increasing by over 700% (USDA 2013). Moreover, female primary operators mostly own all of their own land (roughly 85% of them own the whole farm (USDA 2007)). Evidently, the demographic characteristics of farming and female land tenure are changing. With the exception of census keeping, however, many of the studies on women's land ownership in the U.S. are quite out-of-date. There are examinations of inheritance patterns and trends for female landlords, but there is

very little research that has critically examined the evolving patterns in female land tenure in the US.

In general, research on women in agriculture has not included information on land and ownership. Although data may be collected on this topic now, it is a challenge to examine the history and evolution of female land tenure in the US due to a general lack of documentation (Effland et al. 1993). One of the main reasons why documentation has tended to exclude women is that ownership and operation of land used to be viewed as synonymous, and has predominantly assumed to be by men. In addition, many women own land in conjunction with their husband, and this aspect of ownership has been neglected until recently (Effland et al. 1993).

One of the first studies to capture any information about female land tenure in the US was put out by the USDA and the National Opinion Research Center, in 1979 (Effland et al. 1993). This was followed up in 1988 with the USDA's most comprehensive study of agricultural land ownership, through the Agricultural Economics and Land Ownership Survey (AELOS) (Wunderlich 1993). Since this time, gender has been an important and regularly monitored statistic on the US Agricultural Census.

It is just as important to look at overall statistics, as it is to examine regional figures in female ownership trends. For instance, women own a smaller portion of land in the northeast US than in the Midwest (Effland et al. 1993). The AELOS survey of 1988 showed that males owned 72% of all agricultural land, women owned 17%, and 11% was jointly owned (of all jointly owned land, most pairings had spousal relationships, but that other couplings included sibling pairings as well as parent-child pairings). The percentage of women owners has grown

significantly since 1946, when women reportedly owned only 9% of agricultural land (Effland et al. 1993). The study from 1979 by the USDA and the National Opinion Research Center also found that a large share of women, 88% of those who lived on farms, owned a portion of land (Geisler et al. 1985) (Effland et al. 1993). It has been argued, however that their ability to wield power because of this ownership was often limited, in that they often did not self-identify as the farmer (Effland et al. 1993). This highlights a great disconnect between land ownership and operation for women.

More recently, an increasing number of women have begun farming in the US than had in the past, with the percent of female farmers more than doubling between 1978 and 2002 (Allen and Sachs 2007). Although the majority of women who own farmland are not operators of the farm (Rogers and Vandeman 1993), women now constitute a significant portion of all farm operators, approximately 30% according to the 2012 Census of Agriculture (USDA 2014). In addition, women who actually do operate their own farms tend to own their land, standing in contrast with the low percentage of male operators who owned their land (Geisler et al. 1985).

Women are less likely than men to have acquired any of their land through purchase (Effland et al. 1993). This means that most land owned by women comes through inheritance, although inheritance often operates within certain restrictions. Until recently, in the frequent cases in which women's names were not on the title when their husband died, women were subjected to an estate tax. This imposition assumed that the woman would not make as productive use of the land as her husband (Effland et al. 1993). In addition, women have historically tended to receive only partial ownership of land, through an institution known as Life Estate. Life Estates allow a person to make use of the land, but not to sell or mortgage it. This

transient form of ownership was given as a livelihood protection to widowed women, before full inheritance was passed to a male heir (Effland et al. 1993).

Other trends observed by Effland et al. were that women landowners are usually older than male owners (1993). Statistics cited from the 1988 study showed that 42% of women landowners were over the age of 70, whereas only 18% of male owners were over 70 years old (Effland et al. 1993). This trend might be related, at least in part, to the fact that women often inherit land when they are widowed. Also likely related to age and the mechanism through which they inherit land, women are less likely to be farm operators on their land than are men. This often means that women lease their land out to other farmers (Effland et al. 1993).

In addition to the figures that came out of the AELOS, studies from the 1970s and 1980s found further trends for female farmers. It was discovered that women are generally absent from the land market (Salamon and Keim 1979), but that when they are present in the market, they are usually sellers of land rather than buyers. Within families, even if a group decision is made to buy new land, women are often left out of the auction or purchasing process (Salamon and Keim 1979). Women farmers also tend to have less capital intensive farms, be more innovative and participate in alternative agricultural models (Allen and Sachs 2007). Women's inclination toward alternative agriculture may be an artifact of their tendency to have a greater concern for environmental issues than do men (Dunlap and Mertig 1991). Conversely, it might have more to do with the limitations of their access to land and resources. These women have operations that can function without the use of big machines, and that are not conducive to grain crops that require a certain scale to be profitable.

Similar to women internationally, US farmwomen own less land than farm men. According to the 2012 Ag Census, women's farms are, on average, 217 acres- while the average size of all farms is 434 acres (NASS 2014). When they do own land, they often share the title with someone else. What's more, all women seem disadvantaged toward the land market, and have historically been less able to access credit because of this. Many women throughout the world gain ownership of land through inheritance, but inheritance patterns tend to be patriarchal in nature. Moreover, women are most likely to own smaller, more diversified farms that make use of alternative or less industrialized forms of production. The similarities in the relationship between women and land tenure, internationally and domestically, are striking. They highlight the fact that overarching patriarchal structures impact women the world over, and should not solely be addressed within international development initiatives. It should also be noted that most of the studies reviewed in this section are twenty to thirty years old. The lack of recent data on women and land tenure patterns in the US is striking and highlights a need for more recent research in this area.

### *Female Agricultural Landlords*

Leasing agricultural land used to be a means through which farmers could enter into farming, eventually becoming able to purchase land in their own right. Now, however, the leasing system has evolved in such a way that about 40% of all farmers are tenant farmers (Wunderlich 1993). Often tenants are part owners and simply need to farm larger swaths of land in order to turn a profit.

Studies on the landlord populations have found that, in general, female landlords are less involved in decision-making than males, and younger landlords are more actively involved in

farm decisions than older landlords (Rogers and Vandeman 1993). In addition, landlords who identify themselves as farmers are more involved in decision-making than landlords who do not identify as such, and this relationship is unaffected by gender (Rogers and Vandeman 1993). Breaking down these statistics a bit, another interesting pattern emerges: younger female landlords are more likely to be involved in decisions on the farm than older men landlords, and a female farmer landlord is more likely to participate in decision-making than non-farmer male landlords (Rogers and Vandeman 1993).

Other studies show that female landlords are more likely than males to value conservation practices, but when faced with decisions on the farm, they are more likely to make decisions that maintain peace in the home than those that are mindful of the health of the land (Wells 2003). This tendency within decision-making has been found to extend to farm landlords, where women are less likely to be involved in decision-making on the land, and often shy away from insisting on environmental practices with male tenants for fear of creating problems and driving away good tenants (Carolan 2005).

A recent study by Peggy Petrzelka and Sandra Marquart-Pyatt specifically examined whether the power of landlords in decision-making on the farm fell along gender lines (2011). They found that women landlords generally have less decision-making power over their tenants than do men. This relationship may, in some part, be due to the fact that female landowners tend to be older than men, and older landowners themselves are less likely to be involved in decision-making (Petrzelka and Marquart-Pyatt 2011). Again, this may also be related to the mechanism of land inheritance, such as being widowed. The authors use these findings to suggest that power relationships on the farm, even in a case where women own the land, are uneven by gender. They call into question the relationship between physical ownership of land and power, favoring the

concept of social ownership, where ownership is a social construction based on patriarchal assumptions (Petrzelka and Marquart-Pyatt 2011).

Land ownership and social ownership may be overlapping, yet different concepts, which suggests that a framework of property rights does not aptly describe women's land tenure in the US. Rather, women's access and ownership over land may be better understood through the concept of bundled rights, where various individuals exercise different interests and uses of a parcel of land. A study of female land tenure in the US may, therefore, lend itself more toward a framework of access. This framework recognizes that intersectional aspects of a person's identity both enable and constrain their relationship to land, and provide a more critical lens through which to examine land tenure patterns and the processes that shape them.

### *The Role of Culture in Shaping Female Land Tenure*

Structural inequities among people are readily visible through an examination of land access and tenure. Although these inequities exist on a large political scale, inequities at a household level also play a large role in shaping land access, particularly in the case of inheritance (Salamon 1993).

Continuity in family ownership of a farm is increasingly under threat (Dumas et al. 1995). More and more, the pressure to industrialize and grow in size has pushed families out of farming and resulted in large, concentrated farms. At the same time, inheriting generations are drawn to other more profitable and less labor-intensive lines of work (Dumas et al. 1995). Arguably, the decision to take over the family farm, in many circumstances, is not a reasonable economic decision. As such, children who engage with the operation, to inherit and operate the

farm from their parents, are often socialized to do so from early in their life (Rosenblatt and Anderson 1981).

Some barriers and motivators to get into farming are similar for men and women, including barriers of financial viability, commodity specialization, and need for education, as well as motivators like passion for the farming lifestyle, relationship with nature, and connection to family (Morisset 1983). However, women tend to face discrimination in land inheritance more than men, and they also fear their quality of life will be worse given a double burden of productive and reproductive responsibilities (Dion 1983). Both of these factors, related to social understandings of gender roles, specifically limit women's participation in the succession of land within a family.

In an article entitled "Culture and Agricultural Land Tenure," Sonya Salamon argues that household decisions around land inheritance are shaped by cultural trends, and that these cultures- and therefore the inheritance patterns of land- vary across the US (1993). Salamon reasons that culture normalizes certain views about social relationships and relationships to land. Culture around these views is slow to change because these views often benefit a group of people who will work to maintain any imbalances in their favor. Consequently, land inheritance patterns are both the result of, and the reproductive channel of normalized views surrounding entitlement to land, and are slow to change because the people who control this land work to maintain their hold upon it (Salamon 1993).

Salamon performs an ethnography of two ethnic groups in the US Midwest, who she terms the Germans and the Yankees (from the British Isles) (1993). Each group has descended from a specific group of settlers, and has tended to remain distinct from the other. They also have

very different values surrounding the land and family relationships. The Germans view the land as integral to the family, whereas Yankees see the land as more of a commodity. In addition, power relationships in the family are negotiated differently by cultural group. Germans favor a father-son relationship that subjugates all females of the family, whereas Yankees favor a husband-wife relationship and the children are least powerful. Accordingly, Germans tend not to sell their land and value the attachment of the family name to the land. Yankees, on the other hand, are more inclined to buy and sell land based on the market and felt that the children needed to earn the land from the parents. Such an in-depth understanding of culture can help to draw out power within a family, who socially owns the land, and why land is passed down in a specific manner (Salamon 1993).

#### *Power and the Importance of Female Land Tenure*

The role of women in agriculture can be observed through their access to land, their input of resources -both capital and labor- their land-use decisions, and their relationships with other members of the household and the community at large (Flora 1985). It is important to study women's positions within agricultural land ownership because it exposes larger patriarchal structures that oppress women within agriculture and rural communities in the US (Allen and Sachs 2007). Inequities in land tenure may not only be demonstrative of social inequalities, but can also reproduce power relationships between genders on the farm (Shortall 1999).

Moreover, it is important to recognize that power relationships and inequalities may be expressed in different ways, depending on a range of identity-related factors. Intersectionality, or the convergence of various aspects of a person's identity such as gender, age, socioeconomic status, marital status and ethnicity, all moderate a person's access to land (Sachs 1996). A

relationship between identity and land may play a key role in determining relative power and human relationships. For instance, from a study in France, it was determined that a man's identity as a farmer is inherently linked to his ownership of the land. His own views of masculinity and domination over the land paralleled his relationship to women on the farm (Saugeres 2002).

Sally Shortall also asserts that property ownership itself endows power (1999). Such power is not only exerted between proprietor and property, but between family and community members. She bases this assumption on theoretical understandings of power, where power "must examine both who gets what, when and how and who gets left out and how (Shortall 1999:18)." She extends this to the idea of influence over desires, where a person who is in power not only dictates other's actions but also yields influence over what others want. In this way, subjugated people do not seek what is not theirs – in this case, Shortall is attempting to explain why more women do not contest their lack of ownership over land (1999). Instead, patriarchal structures hold women responsible for happiness in the home, and they focus their efforts therein. To oppose their husband on property rights would be a woman's failure of this responsibility and an affront to the larger good- the family enterprise (Shortall 1999).

Nevertheless, a direct link between ownership and power is debatable. In the case of farmers in the US Midwest, ownership of land may be an important measure of status and respect, with size of farmland being positively correlated to prestige as a good farm manager (Salamon and Keim 1979). The relationship between ownership and prestige in the community is generally limited to men, however. Even when a woman owns a significant amount of land, she is more likely to be confined to her home to take care of reproductive tasks, and cannot wield power as publically (Salamon and Keim 1979).

There are other factors surrounding land ownership that affect a woman's relative power, as well. For instance, the timing at which she gains ownership may impact the relative power she has over that land (Salamon and Keim 1979). If she gains ownership of land before or after getting married, her relative power over her husband in decision-making may change. In addition, if she inherits land after she and her husband retire, ownership of land may mean less gain of power within the household than if she had inherited earlier (Salamon and Keim 1979). Furthermore, a study from Finland found that women are still subjected to power imbalances, even when they own and operate a farm (Silvasti 1999). Although there is not a consensus about a direct relationship between increased female land tenure and a subsequent increase in power, it may at least be agreed that a lack of tenure is an indicator of power inequities, both within a household and within society at large.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter has traced female land tenure patterns internationally and domestically, highlighting inequalities in tenure and the structures that create them. It was found that international trends are similar to those that exist within the United States. Furthermore, it was established that land reform and a theory of access are both applicable to the US context, rather than just the international realm, and may provide a more critical lens through which to understand female land tenure in the US. A review of trends in land tenure revealed stark inequalities among genders, which were expressed differently by context, such as by culture, or in leasing out a farm. Women own very little land around the world, but they are an increasingly prominent demographic of land owner-operators in the US. It is important to study female land

tenure, because it exposes inequities within a society. What is more, changes in land tenure may have direct implications for a woman's ability to make decisions and wield power on a farm.

This study seeks to draw out some of the experiences of women farmers within the US, addressing the gap in literature on the current experiences of women as land owner-operators in an ever patriarchal yet increasingly female-occupied agricultural profession. Following Ribot and Peluso's assertion that there may be many types of land tenure, and recognizing that Locke's version of land ownership obscures familial relationships and the forms of ownership that women might take, this study explores whether a land title truly confers all of the rights and powers that it is assumed to hold.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter will outline the steps that were taken in order to perform this research. It will provide a brief argument for why the study methodology was chosen and how it was applied in this particular study. The study site and study sample are then explained in order to contextualize the research and make plainer its potential and limitations.

#### **Choosing a Methodology**

The methodology for this study was developed using principles of critical theory. It consists of a qualitative phenomenological inquiry into the experience of land ownership for women farmers. Critical theory comes from a long line of thought, including the works of Marx and Foucault. It can be described as an epistemology that examines power relationships (Willis 2007), and at the same time considers the difference between how things are and how they should be (Bronner 2011). The ethical drive behind critical theory also lends itself toward activism, as well as a careful reflexive analysis of the role of the researcher within the study. Critical theory applies to this study because this research attempts to tease out the experiences of a minority group- women in agriculture. It seeks to highlight barriers and structures that influence women's power on their land. It is the intent of the researcher, in bringing these experiences and power inequities to light, that this study might lend itself toward programs or policies that help to address these issues.

A phenomenological study seeks to capture human behaviors and understandings surrounding a certain experience. It both records the perceived experience, and then attempts to interpret the records for underlying social structures (Moustakas 1994). This method of research falls in line with the research questions for this study. The study is phenomenological because it seeks to explore the ways in which women farmers experience land ownership, and attempts to

tease out the structures that steer these experiences. Obtaining individual stories best captures a phenomenon. This is an inherently qualitative approach that involves personal interviews. In order to analyze interview data, the codification of transcripts is a widely used analytical tool. Coding toolkits such as *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Research* by Johnny Saldana (2009), which was used for this study, serve as guides to thematically coding and categorizing interview data so that it may be interpreted by the researcher. This study uses a phenomenological, qualitative methodology that is guided by critical theory. The steps taken by the researcher are outlined in the next section.

## **Research Methods**

After careful consideration of the phenomenological method of study and previous research in the field of gender and agriculture, the researcher drafted a research and interview protocol. This protocol was reviewed by a field expert, and then submitted to the ethics review board of the research institution. The protocol was amended to meet the requirements and suggestions of both parties, and was accepted by the board. After this acceptance was received, research began.

This study sought to interview approximately twenty female farm owner-operators in a six county region of North-Central Maryland. This sample of the population was obtained through snowball sampling. The first few contacts were made through county extension offices and regional agricultural organizations. University of Maryland's county extension offices for each of the 6 counties were contacted, requesting that they send the call for study participants out to their constituents. Only a few women were found through this means. An Annie's Project program out of one county's extension office was a particularly fruitful contact in this regard.

Annie's project is an extension program that offers educational agricultural programming specifically to women, and has been in operation for about a decade. Two regional sustainable agriculture organizations, The Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture and Future Harvest Chesapeake Association for Sustainable Agriculture, were also contacted and provided a few additional participants. All of the other women in this study were contacted at the suggestion of women who were interviewed earlier in the data collection period.

Study participants were met at a location of their choice, over a 4-month period in the winter of December 2013 through March 2014. In all cases, this involved visiting women at their respective farms. The researcher drove to the farm and found a quiet place to sit down and conduct the interview. After some introductions, a confidentiality form was given to participants, which outlined the ways in which the data would be utilized and that personal information would be kept confidential. All names used in this study are pseudonyms, and any identifying information is altered slightly. The women were then given a brief questionnaire to complete (see Appendix B). This questionnaire included information about the size of their farm and operations, years lived on the farm, as well as various questions about demographic characteristics.

After introductions were made and all forms were signed, the researcher requested permission to record the interview. All 17 of the women who were included in the sample agreed to being recorded. The interview was then conducted over a period of 30 to 80 minutes, depending upon the nature of the interaction. All participants were asked the same set of basic interview questions, although follow up questions varied by interview (see Appendix A). During the interviews, women were asked about the process through which they acquired their land; how their land is currently operated, how that has changed overtime and why; how decisions are

made on the farm; what barriers they have encountered in realizing their wishes on their land; what owning land means to them and how it impacts their relationships on the farm; how they feel about their land and what future they foresee for their land. The researcher also wrote handwritten memos during the interviews. After the interview was over, the researcher requested a tour of the land, if possible. Notes were taken during this tour. After the interview or the tour, the researcher then locked up the recording device and departed the farm. Occasionally, notes and observations of the researcher were written shortly after the interview had ended.

After all of the interview data was collected, interviews were transcribed. The interview data was imported as text into a qualitative data analysis tool, NVIVO. Within the NVIVO program, the 17 interviews were coded thematically. This process was performed utilizing a guide provided by Johnny Saldana (2009), in which interviews are coded by themes once through, and then combed through a second and third time to alter, condense and split themes. Themes were then grouped together into categories. The emerging categories formed the basis of the findings for this study. As a phenomenological study, broad categories from the data trends formed the framework for the data presentation, but the researcher used individual narratives and experiences of each of the study participants to draw conclusions about the structures that might underlie the experience of owning land for women farmers.

## **Study Site**

Maryland has a diverse agricultural sector, with regional variations in industry and social structure. Generally speaking, the different agricultural regions within Maryland correspond to its five physiographic provinces. The coastal plain province can be divided into two parts: the

Eastern and the Western Shores, which are separated by the Chesapeake Bay. The Eastern Shore is dominated by large-scale poultry and egg operations and overwhelmingly the largest landholdings per farm. It also has very few women farm operators (NASS 2014). The Western Shore is characterized by the remnants of tobacco production and transition farming, with a great deal of production in grain and oilseeds. Western Maryland, containing both the Ridge and Appalachian Plateau Provinces, contains mostly dairy and cattle operations. This region is the least woman-friendly, with less than ten percent of all farms being owned and operated by women (NASS 2014). Lastly, there are the provinces of the Piedmont Plateau and the Blue Ridge, which constitutes a region that may be referred to as Central Maryland. This is the location of the study sample.

Central Maryland is very diverse in farm operation type, the largest grossing operations being in flower production, dairy and grain/oilseeds. There is also a great deal of horse farming. The region contains the largest number of farms in the entire state, and accordingly landholding size tends to be smaller (NASS 2014). Six counties make-up this region: Montgomery, Howard, Frederick, Carroll, Baltimore and Harford. These counties span the Baltimore-Washington Metropolitan Area, and contain both very rural and very urban communities.

The study region may yield results that are specific to the site, not easily generalized to other locations. The most important characteristic that could make central Maryland unique is its location within the Baltimore-Washington metropolitan area. Most of the farmers in the study lived in what could be considered rural neighborhoods, however there is an increasing pressure of urban development creeping out into the rural parts of this region. The encroaching urban spread makes land very expensive and hard to come by. Land is a much more precious resource for farmers in central Maryland than it might be elsewhere, and it is very difficult for farms to

expand. At the same time, these farmers are well positioned next to an enormous consumer market. In addition, many farmers have developments as neighbors, as well as other farmers. This might impact the kinds of relationships that women farmers may have with their immediate neighbors. This makes central Maryland a very interesting place to examine the experience of farming, but it also makes the results of this study difficult to generalize out.

This region also holds the largest number of women farm owner-operators in Maryland, both in overall number and as compared to the number of farms owned by men (NASS 2014). The average number of farms owned by women in a Maryland county is 84, an average that is well below the numbers in this region (Table 1). The reason why women are more prominent farmers in Central Maryland is not clear, however. It may be that the culture of the region permits more gender-neutral inheritance and education customs (Salamon, 1993), it might be that the smaller parcels of land are more feasible for resource-poor women to purchase (Hoppe, 2013), or any number of other factors. Regardless of the structures that have led to the relative prevalence of women farm owners and operators in Central Maryland, and from a practical standpoint, an abundance of women farmers makes this region an ideal area to study gender dynamics and community power within a farming area because women farmers are slightly more visible than women farmers in other parts of the state.

**Table 1. Number of Women Owned and Operated Farms in the Study Region**

<b>County</b>	<b>Number of Farms in the County</b>	<b>Number of Farms Operated and Owned or Dually Owned by Women</b>	<b>Percent of all farms that have a woman owner</b>
Allegany	302	32	10.60%
Anne Arundel	377	100	26.53%
<b>Baltimore</b>	<b>751</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>22.90%</b>
Calvert	274	48	17.52%
Caroline	574	74	12.89%
<b>Carroll</b>	<b>1148</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>17.25%</b>
Cecil	583	137	23.50%
Charles	418	71	16.99%
Dorchester	424	46	10.85%
<b>Frederick</b>	<b>1442</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>17.34%</b>
Garrett	677	32	4.73%
<b>Harford</b>	<b>704</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>17.76%</b>
<b>Howard</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>26.27%</b>
Kent	377	65	17.24%
<b>Montgomery</b>	<b>561</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>24.42%</b>
Prince George's	375	80	21.33%
Queen Anne's	521	65	12.48%
St. Mary's	621	82	13.20%
Somerset	329	47	14.29%
Talbot	305	17	5.57%
Washington	844	111	13.15%
Wicomico	508	72	14.17%
Worcester	384	62	16.15%
<b>Averages:</b>	<b>558</b>	<b>91.78</b>	<b>16.40%</b>

Women farm owners and operators in Central Maryland, although relatively numerous, own fewer and smaller farms than men in the region. According to the Census of Agriculture, among the six counties, women operate and own at most 26% of all farms, and at the least 17% of all farms. Although these women own and operate fewer farms than men, they still operate more farms than the average across the United States (at 14%). In addition, the average landholding for women farmers in each county is at most 45% the size of the average farm holding in the county, and at the least only 29% of the average farm size (NASS 2014), so, on average, they operate smaller farms than men in all central Maryland counties. It is important to reiterate here that these are numbers for the Center region of Maryland, the most gender-equal region- at least in terms of number of farms, in the entire state (Table 1). Such discrepancies suggest a power differentiation within the larger farming community of Central Maryland. This pattern mirrors the trends for women in agriculture in the United States and the world.

Central Maryland was chosen as the study site because its characteristics met the needs of this study. This six-county region technically constitutes one Agricultural Census region, which makes the boundaries more consistent with other political delineations. A sizeable population of women farmers was needed in order to feasibly gather a sample of women owner-operators to interview, and this section of Maryland contained more women farmers than any other region of the state. In addition, the study sought sample variety in operation type, land-holding and gross sales. This region, more than many others, offers a great deal of variety in all of these categories, making central Maryland an ideal location for the study. It is important to note that these numbers describe a presence of women farmers, but do not capture their perspectives and experiences- which is what this study sets out to do.

## **Study Sample**

The population of this study consists of female farm owner-operators in North-Central Maryland. More specifically, the population encompasses women whose names are present on the land title for at least a portion of the operated farmland, and who participate in practices and activities on the farm. In order to capture the experiences of this population, 17 women from across the region participated in this study. In order to capture a range of experiences, the researcher tried to gather as diverse of a sample as possible. The researcher attempted to include women who gained ownership over their land in a multitude of ways; land acquired through inheritance, acquired through marriage, acquired through purchase, or acquired through an alternative method. Variability was also sought within the sample's operation sizes and statuses as a primary versus a dual operator.

The sample for this study was both small in size and non-randomly selected. Sampling had to be non-random because there are no official listings of female farmers from which to draw a random sample, and the population is relatively small. The sample was selected through a snowball method (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981), utilizing the aid of county agricultural extension offices and agricultural organizations to identify the first contacts. From there, study participants were asked about other women who might fit the study criteria and be interested in participating. The only criteria for selection was that the subject is part of the study population (i.e. is a woman, has her name present on the title of a parcel of farmland in the study region, and identifies as a primary or dual operator of that land). Although diversity in lifestyle and farm operation within the sample was desired, other factors were not required for inclusion in the sample. Out of concern for diversity of sample, I only reached out to new participant suggestions if they seemed to possess characteristics that would make them different from the other

participants that I had already interviewed. Finally, I stopped sampling when the sample size was as close to 20 and as diverse as I could gather.

The study sample consists of 17 women from a six county region in North-Central Maryland. Twelve of these women considered farming to be their primary occupation, and seven of them listed multiple occupations including farming. Only four of the women were sole owners of their farms, 12 of them owned land with their romantic partners, three owned some land with their parents, two owned land with their children, and five shared land with their siblings. Many of the women in this study owned different parcels of land with different family members, as well as having multiple people on each of the land titles. The participants ranged in the amount of time that they had owned their land, from two to 47 years, the median being 20 years on the land. They also ranged in the amount of time that they had lived in their county, from four years to 63 years, with a median of 35. This number is larger than the period of land ownership, suggesting that most people either inherited or bought farms that they had grown up on, or that were nearby.

The demographic characteristics of the study participants were relatively diverse (See Table 2 and Appendix C). Women ranged from the youngest age category of 26-35 to the oldest category of 65+ although the median age category was 46-55. Education ranged from high school diploma to Graduate Degree, and the median education level was a Bachelor's degree. Fourteen of the women in this sample were married or in a committed partnership, one of whom was in a same-sex partnership. Fifteen of the women had children, about half of whom were under the age of 18, and the rest above 18. In terms of farmland and operation, the women in this study owned between two and 868 acres of land, the median of which was 76 acres. They had various operation types, including conventional beef, grass-fed beef, conventional grain, grass-

fed pork, conventional dairy, organic fruit and vegetable, sheep, emus, and value added enterprises. Their gross sales ranged from the lowest category of \$1,000-9,999 to \$500,000+ and the median sales range was \$10,000- 99,999.

Overall, the study sample was very diverse (Appendix C). It is important to note, however, that all of the women in this study are white. Although there was no racial or ethnic diversity, there was diversity of other characteristics. The goal of achieving a diverse sample was to capture as large of a range of farm land ownership experiences as possible, to describe the phenomenon of owning land, for women farmers. The sampling methods, as well as the demographic characteristics of farmers in the study region, limit the scope of diversity that is possible to capture.

**Table 2. Summary of Characteristics of the Sample**

<b>Total# Interviews</b>	17
<b># Primary Occ Farmer</b>	12
<b>Range Years on Farm</b>	2.75 to 47
<b>Median Years on Farm</b>	20.00
<b>Median Education Level</b>	Bachelor's
<b>Median Age</b>	46 to 55
<b># Married</b>	13
<b># Single and/or Divorced</b>	3
<b># Committed Same-Sex Partnership</b>	1
<b># With Children</b>	15
<b>Median Land Size</b>	76 acres
<b>Median Sales</b>	10,000 to 99,999

## **Critical Reflections**

Throughout the study, a number of factors may have influenced the data and possibly contributed to a bias in the presented finding. These factors include the identity of the researcher, the presence of people other than the research participant during the interviews, and confusion over interview questions. Although it is not possible to identify exactly where and how these issues may have influenced the data, it is important to acknowledge them and to bear them in mind when addressing the research findings and discussion.

As the researcher, I am a young, white, female graduate student. I am of the same race and gender, as all of the study participants, however I am younger than all of them and more educated than roughly half of them. I am from Maryland, and have a significant understanding of the study region. I have a background in the food industry, but do not have a farm background like the women in this study. I collaborate with women farmers in other aspects of my work, and I also tend to work more frequently within the realm of sustainable agriculture. Many of the women in this study identified with the values of sustainable agriculture, but many of them held conventional operations as well. All of these aspects of my identity as the researcher may have influenced the way in which I interacted with the study participants, and in turn may have impacted the nature of the answers that were given. For example, many of the women in the study felt comfortable making off-hand comments about gender normative expectations or actions from their partners, assuming camaraderie in me as a woman. At the same time, some of the women were intimidated by the research process and being included in a study, and would consider me to be an expert in areas in which the farmers themselves were more versed than I. It

would be difficult to identify all of the places in which my identity may have skewed the data received, however it is possible to suggest that bias did occur.

During seven of the interviews that were conducted, people other than the study participant were within earshot of the interview for at least a portion of the conversation. In all cases, the person present was the romantic partner of the participant. This occurred naturally due to the location of the interviews. Participants were asked to select a location for the interview where they were most comfortable. In all cases, this was the farmer's home, and other members of the household were occasionally home. While the presences of the partners were often unobtrusive, their presence may have impacted the answers that the study participants provided for some of the interview questions.

Out of the seven interviews in which partners were present, three of the interviews involved the active participation of a partner. This means that the farmer's partner actively listened to the interview and occasionally interjected their own ideas or contradicted those given by the participant. This was disruptive and altered the dynamics of the interview. It altered the nature of the participant's answers, and the researcher has numerous memos that noted the fact that these women farmers would sometimes glance at their partners before answering a question, or would simply redirect the question toward that partner. It is not possible to tell just how different the answers given would have been from a private interview, however they may have been significantly altered.

Finally, there was some ambiguity built into the interview protocol, of which the researcher was made aware throughout the interview process. Phrasing of interview questions were constantly tweaked, but still frequently interpreted in a variety of ways by the research

participants. Slight miscommunications and misunderstandings could bias the answers in this study, in addition to the impacts of the researcher's identity and the occasional presence of outsiders during the data collection process.

## **Chapter 4: Research Findings**

This chapter outlines the general findings from this study. Results are presented in chronological order, first describing how the women in this study acquired their land. It then outlines how the women's current operations are managed, examining labor divisions and decision-making on the farm. The findings then delve into the women's interpretations of land ownership, and what owning land means in their lives. This is followed by an exploration of the different types of relationships that women have with their farms and how they feel about their land. Finally, this chapter will discuss succession planning, and women's hopes for the future of their land.

### **Acquiring Land: Desires, challenges and the role of family**

Women gain ownership of land in a number of different ways. While every woman in this study came into property through a unique path, they all shared one common thread: the presence and influence of family. In some cases, women inherited or purchased land from their parents. Some women had to negotiate the purchase of land from their siblings. Some women in the sample married into land, and were added to the property title. Others purchased the land with their partner. For many of these women, the experience of acquiring land was very positive, while others encountered great challenges. In this section I will outline the various ways in which women farmers acquire farmland, and the importance of family throughout this process.

The table below illustrates how the women in this study acquired their land. It is important to note that several of the women in the sample acquire multiple plots of land in different ways (the total n below is greater than study sample n=17). Roughly half of the women

purchased land with a partner, while just two of them purchased it with other family members (in this sample, one was purchased with a child and the other with a parent). Three of the women were added to the title of their partner’s land. Of considerable note is the fact that seven women in this study acquired land in their own right- but in every single one of these cases, they were purchasing or inheriting this land from their family members- usually parents or siblings.

**Table 3. How Women Acquired Their Land**

<b>Purchased Land with a Partner</b>	9
<b>Purchased Land with Parents or Children</b>	2
<b>Purchased and/or Inherited Land from Family-Alone</b>	7
<b>Added to the Title of a Partner's Land</b>	3

### Inheritance

Leslie, at the young age of 26, owns 200 acres of land in a very developed region of the state. Having grown up on a farm that her great-grandfather bought, she has a great sense of pride in her family’s local farming legacy. When Leslie’s grandfather- who owned the property while she was growing up- passed away, he left the land to his children. Her uncle had no interest in the farm, however, and wanted to sell it. Leslie offered her immediate reaction to his announcement: *“My mother and I were like ‘that’s not happening’ ... so I bought that from him.”* This young farmer acknowledged that she will be paying off her uncle for a long time, however she also asserted that purchasing the land from her uncle was a better scenario for the farm and for her. Through this transfer of land, the farm remains in the hands of the family, and Leslie was able to negotiate financial terms that she deemed reasonable. It is notable that Leslie

did not buy out her mother, rather the two of them own and operate different parcels of what used to be one farm.

A shepherd, Rose, had a similar experience acquiring her land. Rose grew up on her farm and paid rent to her mother as an adult. Some years later, she purchased one of the two deeds that her mother possessed. Like Leslie, this process was a positive one, however the distinction between each individual's parcel is more blurred than on Leslie's farm. Rose explained "*since we're family, she and I work together and we count it as one big piece.*" For Rose and her mother, ownership is a fluid notion that, although owned individually, is almost perceived as a joint ownership.

Both Leslie and Rose relate good experiences purchasing land from their family members. Not all such purchases go smoothly, however. Lucy, a farmer who bought out the rest of her siblings on a property that had belonged to her parents referred to the experience as "*probably among the most difficult times of my life.*" Lucy, a self-identified outcast among her siblings, was made to leave her mother's urban home upon her mother's death and retreated to the farm- of which she then owned but a fourth. To actually purchase the rest of the farm required emotional discussions with the other siblings, souring relationships that were already strained by grief. Eventually, an agreement was made and Lucy became the sole owner, but not without conflict and strife.

Another farmer, Annie, describes the fear that she lives with, not yet having finalized a land purchase from her parents. Annie's relationships with her parents and siblings have become mistrustful ever since her parents began estate planning. She expects that the land purchase will go through, but no longer believes this to be certain. She is also unsure about her prospects in

terms of inheriting a fair portion of the rest of her parent's property. Annie has based her livelihood as a farmer upon her ability to farm her parent's land, but the role of her younger sister and her ambitious brother-in-law has led her to feeling threatened.

*“If I owned this land [completely], it would give me a better sense of security. I think that in all that has come forward in the last couple years, suddenly what we believe to be true is scary ground.... Our future worries me. And if I owned it, I would know where we stood better, because I would be in charge of it more. Not being the full owner of our land where we have our business and our land where we live creates a fear.”*

### Marriage

A few women in the study sample married into their properties, a process that instilled a sense of insecurity for all of them. Charlotte, whose husband bought a farm before they started dating, was added to the property title shortly after her wedding. She eventually left an off-farm job to work on the farm full-time, and she and her husband jointly purchased more land as their operation grew. Charlotte admitted that she still tends to see the land as her husband's farm, even though she technically owns the land, too, and has been operating it for 25 years. She elaborates on her feeling of alienation from the land and attempts to explain it, saying *“I sometimes feel guilty about the fact that it's his salary that has paid for the farm.”* Charlotte's husband overheard this remark and jumped into the conversation, pointing out that she did in fact contribute to the purchases of more land. Charlotte nodded, but still noted that she *“often [thought] of it as his farm.”* Monetary investment plays a big role in how Charlotte views her ownership- or lack thereof.

Julia, a farmer who had land of her own before marrying into her husband's farm, offered up similar feelings of insecurity, but her uncertainty in ownership lay with her husband's siblings rather than her husband. She indicated that her sister-in-laws felt threatened by her presence, having assumed that her longtime bachelor husband would one day pass the farm on to them. Although Julie helped to operate the farm and the sisters did not, they made it clear to her that the farm did not belong to her. Although it took time, Julie said that she does feel like the farm belongs to her, but she had to come to terms with the way that her in-laws perceived her. Part of Julie's increased sense of security comes from her years working on the land, as well as the fact that she does have legal ownership over the land- unlike her sisters-in-law.

### Purchase

Women farmers also acquire land through their own initiative. Although not exclusively, most of the women who purchased their own land did so in conjunction with a romantic partner. The women who purchased their own land tended to offer explanations of why they wanted property in the first place. This is distinct from the women who purchased land from family or married into land, possibly because the 'why' seemed either implicit or irrelevant to them.

Dawn, whose parents owned a large dairy operation in the area, had just recently purchased a farm with her parent's help. She explained her reasoning as such, "*[I] jumped into it. I was raised with the idea that- when the opportunity to buy land comes up, and you're in a position, do it. Because it's a limited resource and it's only gonna go up in value.*" For Dawn, this purchase was a monetary investment. She goes on to discuss shortcomings of the property; how it is too small and how she is unsure what farming operation to place on the land. The

purchase was made at the aid and encouragement of her parents, with very little emotional attachment or business vision on her part.

Quite the opposite, Sandy bought her farm after years of searching. She describes her discovery thusly: *“I drove down and the sun was shining and it was like open land, and I was like ‘yes.’*” Purchasing property, an investment for Sandy- like Dawn, was also an investment in the non-monetary features of land. Sandy was picky, and bought a farm with her partner once she had found the intangible characteristics that she sought for what she intended to be the venture of a lifetime.

Michelle and Lori both purchased land with their partners, as well. For each of them, the process of buying property was a matter of compromise. For Michelle, her husband wanted property with a house that was large enough for him to use as an office, whereas she wanted property that was large enough to farm. She described the search as challenging, but felt happy with their find. For Lori, the compromise was not with her husband but with their finances. Time and place limited Lori and her husband’s options when they were looking for land, and they found their property with great difficulty.

Women farmers acquire their land in many different ways. Their finances, location, desires, and their familial relationships influence these experiences. For some of these women, acquiring land was a positive process, and for others it was a challenging one. The process through which each woman acquired land, and the different people involved, tended to be influential on the trajectory of the farm and continue to influence each woman’s experience on her land.

## **Making Decisions**

The women interviewed displayed different levels of agency when it came to performing activities on their land. Not only did these women face certain financial and legal restrictions, but they were also limited by social roles and power dynamics within their families. Women were asked about how their land has evolved overtime, and what drove those changes. Most of them indicated that they had made many of the decisions and acted on them as they chose. Some women cited a partner or other family member as a supportive or influential figure in the decision-making process.

### Roles in the family and on the farm

Leslie, who operated a farm with her mother, described the farm operation decisions as ideas that arose organically overtime. These decisions were mostly her own, although she relied upon her boyfriend's contribution of physical labor with the larger animals, and on her mother's 'business sense' for help in making and seeing through her decisions. She explained, however, that the support of her boyfriend and the guidance from her mother were merely aids- not determinants- in her farm decisions. Although young, Leslie suffers from an autoimmune disease. As she learned more about health and nutrition to support her own body, she began altering her farm practices to meet the expectations that she had for what she thought would be healthy for her body to consume. She explains her venture into grass-fed pigs thusly: *“At the time, I was learning from a nutritionist that healthy fats are good and healthy fats come from healthy animals who are outside in the sunshine. So I said ‘Let’s do it’ and I ended up changing to pigs.”*

Leslie is not the only farmer to claim relative sovereignty in making decisions on her land, while relying upon the aid of family members to carry out these plans. Quite the opposite of young and single Leslie, Lori is both retired and married- but she still makes all of the decisions on her land. *“I’m the farmer,”* she says, *“I see what needs to be done and ask my husband to help me, and he does.”* Michelle, Charlotte and Sue also rely upon their husbands to perform much of the handy work, and to make decisions around matters of infrastructure and maintenance. Although the farming business itself has evolved out of Michelle’s desire to farm (her husband works off farm and could care less about having the farm business), she says that she has less knowledge than her husband on the logistics of keeping animals. She claims ignorance on matters involving infrastructure and their different levels of maintenance, and acquiesces to her husband by spending money erecting new buildings- despite her general lack of enthusiasm in this regard.

Charlotte also leaves the logistical planning and maintenance up to her husband, who is trained as an engineer, however she makes it clear that she still gets to play a large role in determining what to do and plant on her land. She describes the evolution of her and her husband’s farm as a playful competition: *“He decided he wanted to grow a few acres of sweet corn, and I didn’t want to be outdone, so I put in 50 tomato plants.”* Sue waits for her husband to return from work to do some of the heavy lifting. As the fulltime farmer on her land, Sue will haul big loads of water from one plot of land to another, but she says that it helps to have her husband around to move big bails of hay. These women rely upon their partners to different extents, and certainly the presence of physical aid helps to sway these women’s decisions in terms of what they are able to accomplish. However, the degree to which these partners actually make or influence the farm decisions through their own opinions seems to vary.

The reliance upon a partner for physical aid mimics traditional gender roles. Slightly distinct from a woman's decision-making abilities and her power on the farm, a division of labor indicates specialization of knowledge and abilities, and impacts a woman's confidence in certain arenas. This is particularly problematic in cases like Michelle's, where her husband erects buildings that she does not wish to build. In addition, an extra supply of labor on the farm is not unusual, but the roles that these women take- generally using their partners as the muscle or the maintenance men- does fall inline with traditional understandings of women's and men's strengths and abilities. This is not to conflate such a division of labor with decision-making power, however. Many of these women direct their partners' labor, a relationship that does not fit within traditional roles on the farm.

The one exception that I found in this sample was a farmer named Tina, who worked on the land alongside her husband. When asked about the division of labor on their farm, she said that she performs all of the maintenance work. I asked her to elaborate and she explained that she does maintenance on *“the tractor equipment... the fencing. [My husband] likes the screwdrivers, he's just not good with them. But it's really sad because he just inherited it. His mother got locked in once by a childproof door.”*

Not all the women interviewed felt that they had a great deal of decision-making power on their farms. Julia, for instance, does not consider herself competent enough to make farming decisions. As Julia put it, *“the decision-making, I always leave up to the men... Even with my farm – because I don't feel knowledgeable enough to step in and – I mean, I give him suggestions when I think they're viable, but to tell him what to do would be pretty silly on my part.”* This quote shows how Julia perceives her power and decision-making role on the farm, however in reality she does make decisions when it comes to her own operation. When planning for her

gourds and her garden, Julia figures out how many seeds to buy where to plant and how to reach her market. Her perception of farming and of gender roles remains relatively traditional while at the same time she breaks those boundaries by making decisions of her own. The value of the fruit and vegetables that she was growing did not ring true to her partner until she came back from the farmers market with her returns. These returns legitimized her work in the eyes of her partner, but she continues to dismiss her work.

Julia also offers an interesting bit of wisdom when it comes to determining how a parcel of land should be operated. Julia explains, “*Lots of times when people pass away, you get into these inheritance things. I think people lose sight of the fact that it’s what the person who worked for it and kept it going wanted – not what you think it should be.*” Julia is both observing and affirming the importance of the will of the original or most recent landowner – namely her parents. Many other women interviewed noted the same importance in terms of the role of the parents in making decisions, however, not all of them found this role to be particularly easy to abide by. Often times, this was a great source of stress or frustration when trying to make a claim or act at will upon their farms.

Bea, a farmer who bought into her husband’s property, alongside his parents and siblings, found it difficult to navigate the different needs and expectations of her in-laws. She gives an example of having been discovered by her mother-in-law while working in the office. She claimed that she felt guilty working inside when she could have been doing other things outside, under the gaze of her mother-in-law. Although she was doing financial work on the computer, she knew that her mother-in-law thinks that indoor work means goofing off. She felt uncomfortable, feeling that she was disappointing or not living up to this woman’s expectations

for the manager of her family land. Although this does not directly impact her decision-making, it does impact how she acts and what tasks she performs on the farm.

Women who discussed the roles of their parents or their in-laws on the farm did not seem to describe very different circumstances. All of them made comments about feeling beholden to this older generation, and discussed the various ways in which these parents exercised their own will on the land. Perhaps the only notable distinction that came out of the interviews was the degree to which family legacy compounded upon a woman's desire to carry out the wishes of her family. Bea, for example, indicated that she felt beholden to her in-laws insomuch that her husband took great pride in the legacy of the farm and she wanted to support him- whereas Rose actively sought out her mother's ideas, hoping to maintain the farm that her mother helped to build.

#### Other Barriers to Free Agency on the Farm

Family members are not the only factors to weigh on a woman's decisions and power on her land. Barriers also arise when finances, governmental regulations, neighbors, personal values and location-related logistics get into the way.

Maryland is a very particular setting in which to farm. It provides access to a wealthy urban and suburban market, but it also has a great number of restrictions and laws that farmers must heed. Some women saw their setting in Maryland as a boon to their business, and some found it to be a constant obstacle. Bea describes some of the problems that she has encountered as a farmer in Maryland.

*“Maryland is becoming so environmentally tough on farmers. I truly think that they don’t want animal agriculture in Maryland. And sometimes I even wonder about the grain farming, too. Just, there have been so many new regulations. So I hope that it is still possible to find in Maryland in 20 years. I think my biggest – what I’m most sad about in farming in Maryland is that there’s not... there’s not a whole lot of support.”* Charlotte expresses similar concerns. She goes into a story about attempting to put in a pond in order to capture nutrient run off before it goes into her stream. This, she saw as an important aspect of maintaining the environmental integrity of her land, however government regulations made her process quite difficult. She wondered aloud if it wouldn’t have been better to beg forgiveness than to have asked permission.

A number of the women in the sample operated farms that were near or included property in Pennsylvania. Owning property across two states can be challenging, as expressed by Elsie. *“When we were first married, they wanted us to pay Pennsylvania income tax on what we made on the fields in Pennsylvania. And oh my goodness, you’re running a piece of equipment with seeds in it across the field – and the line goes right through the farm! We have 5 acres from this farm that runs into Pennsylvania... now we only pay income tax in Maryland, but we pay real estate and school tax in Pennsylvania.”* Sandy encountered similar problems when attempting to develop a storm water management plan. Maryland and Pennsylvania, she claimed, have different approaches to storm water management, which made the process very confusing and expensive.

For some women, the biggest problem with farming in Maryland has less to do with regulations and more to do with the ever-encroaching city. Lori, whose parents owned farmland in a region of the state that became developed for both the Baltimore and Washington metropolitan areas, describes the history of her parents land as such, *“my mother had actually*

*made a trust, put the land in a trust, but it was only for us so that siblings could buy each other out. We all agreed that we wanted to keep the land. But, during the [financial] bubble, the land grew too valuable. None of us could afford to buy anyone out. So, now it's sprouted mansions like every other farm in the county. It makes me very sad.*" As a result of development pressure, Laurie and her husband were forced to seek out new, cheaper land much further north of her parents' property, in order to continue farming.

Christa, a beef farmer with her husband, claims that development makes access to land the biggest barrier to growing her operation. Although she has a big enough market to support growth, she cannot find affordable land to purchase near her current farm. Christa believes strongly in the value of grass feeding cows, but as a result she requires certain acreage per head for her operation. Dawn expresses similar concerns. *"The big challenge in this area is just the opportunity to buy into [land]. There's not fields going up for sale, there's no deals out there or it's rare. So it's just going to go – the price for land's going to go up and up and up. And it's going to become more of a limited resource."*

On the other hand, Maryland's growing metropolitan areas provide an endless market base. Leslie wields the lion share of decision-making power on her land. She recognizes, however, that her flexibility has a great deal to do with her supportive customers as well. Her location in a relatively urban and wealthy area provides her with a limitless supply of customers who are willing to buy almost anything that she cares to produce, a market that many farmers are not lucky enough to rely upon. In her words, *"I get to say, I make decisions based on what I wanna do! Who gets to say that?"* Of course, Leslie is the only farmer to express this sentiment so confidently.

Some of the barriers that the women encountered came from their values about agriculture and what constitutes good farming practices. The values of these women often prevented them from performing certain activities. Lucy says *“I see myself as a steward of the land. I’m not renting, but in a way, the land owns me.”* Lucy values the land and its needs over her own vision for the land. Although these two are intertwined, she must make decisions based upon what she sees to be the healthy fit for the land. This may or may not coincide with the most economical option. Mae is another farmer who describes her decision-making limits in terms of environmentally friendly practices. She describes one of her ongoing challenges in terms of managing her soil in an environmentally friendly manner. She also describes attempting to balance the concept of big equipment that utilizes gas and oil versus the amount of personal and other human labor that is needed to produce a certain amount of profitable food to sell.

Gloria has a similar perspective on farm activities; she does not want to perform practices that are not environmentally friendly, and she refuses to feed her animals anything but organic feed. At the same time, however, she lacks infrastructure and finances to maintain her business practices. She is unwilling to bend her environmental values to meet financial goals, however she cannot afford to make these decisions. Gloria is now at a stage at which she is questioning the feasibility of her farm and operation. Money is spent in maintenance, and in areas of the land that she did not expect; *“Just trying to keep the fences clear and just managing the piece of land, besides the business, is a lot.”*

Dual roles of mother and/or wife in the farm household, in addition to being the farmer, also plays into the various decisions that women will make on the land. Michelle describes this particular phenomenon as a threat to her future in farming. Michelle's husband is slowly falling ill and she foresees the day when she will have to take care of him in addition to her parents and

her children. *“How can I farm all day and then help take care of him? I'm an only child, and my parents live across the street, and chances are that at the same time the health of one or both of my parents will be failing- but, I'll still have a kid in high school!”* The number of roles that she performs and the importance of Michelle as a caretaker for her family impact her agency on her land. Her place in her family seems to be an overwhelming burden in addition to the farm, and so she foresees the day when she will have to sell her land. Rose also describes limitations that she feels on her land given her role as a mother. *“I don't want to grow too fast that I can't keep up with it. I want to be able to take my kids out to a park and not be like I've got to dye more yarn, I gotta keep up with the orders.”*

Rose's fear of not having enough time with her children is both a barrier in terms of a clash of roles, as well as a lack of physical labor and time. She is not the only farmer who describes a lack of labor or time as a primary problem on the farm. Sandy, a farmer who bought her land while she was still working a career to pay it off, has since been unable to perform the tasks that she would have been able to perform 30 years ago – when she first bought the farm, but was focusing her energy on her non-farm career. Sandy was one of the women who had bought her farm on her own. This made it impossible for her to actually farm it herself however, renting the land out during her first couple of decades on the farm, due to her original lack in finances.

Women hold different positions on the farms that they operate. Although they own the land, they often share activities and decisions with other family members. The degree to which they have autonomy on their land varies, as does their confidence in their own abilities as farmers. The degree of power that they exert often reflects the roles and relationships that they have in their own families. These variations in power include Bea's concerns about how her

mother-in-law perceives her work ethic and farming decisions, to Tina's role as the maintenance person within her marriage and partnership on the farm, to Leslie's reliance upon her mother for guidance but general feeling of self-reliance on the land.

## **The Meaning of Ownership**

Owning land can be an empowering experience for women farm operators. For many of them, it is their dream to own and operate land. As Lucy put it, *"I always said that if I won the lottery, I would buy a farm. So essentially, I won the lottery!"* Ownership is seen as a source of pride, as a sense of security and a great responsibility. Although the responsibility of landownership is uplifting for some women, for others it is a burden. This section will look at how the question of ownership impacts women, and how that might differ from renting land.

### Security

For a couple of the women interviewed, including Gloria and Sue, a sense of security arises from their farm ownership, as it provides a source of stability and the presence of a fallback plan. It is collateral, it is a place to grow food in the case of emergency, and it is also seen as a fruitful source for future return. Gloria describes her thought process as follows: *"I see it as being a failsafe for my family. In case things go foul in this world. I mean, I think about people around the world, global warming and whatever and [people who] buy food in the stores... What do I need to do here in the intervening years to be the in the best condition for that possible future."*

For other women, the security that they derived from ownership was more a matter of knowing that the farm was not going to be taken away from them- either by the government or other family members. Julia, who had difficulty being accepted by her husband's sisters, describes her ownership as being very important to her security, sense of self and power on the land. She claims that, "*with his family situation and with them all around here, I would probably stay in the house. For instance, one day I got a call from his sister and went to see them, and I said something about my field. She very quickly let me know that the estate wasn't settled.*" The fact that Julia has her name on the title to her property now grants her that power to feel comfortable on her own land, and the right to work her fields.

Some of the women in the sample described more of a sense of peace than of security in owning land. Lucy described it as providing her with a sense of the sacred. She explains that developing her land has made both her property and her inner world more 'whole.' A farmer named Tara confirms this idea. "*It gives you a sense of place and a sense of purpose. You know, some grounding that you do own something.*" The spiritual and physical security that the women depict is a positive and empowering feeling that they derive from the ownership of land, and one that they experience on an individual level. It is a personal relationship to ownership. Michelle further describes the sort of personal relationship that she experiences, "*Oh, it brings me a sense of self. It gives me a sense of who I am as parent, and mother, and as a person.*"

### Responsibility

Operating a farm is a lot of work, as is owning a large piece of property. The women interviewed for this study felt, overwhelmingly, that with ownership comes a great deal of

responsibility. For some women the responsibility of their farm was a huge burden. For others, it was in line with their worldview and their values as farmers.

Mae, a beginning farmer, noted that owning property was indeed a lot of work, but because she owned it she did not mind. She indicated, however, that others who work on the farm and don't own it might feel differently. *"I love my farm. Who wouldn't? No, I guess some people wouldn't think that – having the farm and... This is a lot of work. But I don't look at it that way at all. My boyfriend might – but I don't."* Mae takes great pride in her farm, and does not have a problem handling the work and responsibility of owning land.

Many of the women that I interviewed spoke of their land as something that needed to be taken care of from an environmental perspective. This perspective did not just come from values around sustainability, but also one of caring for living organisms. Many of these women saw themselves as caretakers, responsible for the land. Lucy shared one of the most vivid quotes on this topic. *"In a way, if you think of land as a woman – mother Earth – and we as women don't want to be violated. We want to have "why yes I'll make love with you, but no I won't make love with you because you didn't bring me flowers, you just assumed that I would crawl into bed with anybody. So there's an issue of respect and attention and care. Now the land, I think – it's my job to listen to the land."*

Lori describes this particular vision of her land and responsibility as something that limits her in her enterprise. *"I believe that there is only so much land on this earth, and that it's a God-given responsibility to be a good steward of it. And so I would not want to have more land than I could well take care of."* She does not see land size as a barrier, just something that she needs to take into consideration. The responsibility of owning land also limits Sandy's actions, preventing

her from leaving and moving somewhere else. This is not necessarily a bad thing however, and seems to be exactly what Sandy wants. About her land, Sandy says, "*well, it's a little teeny patch of land that I can take care of and treated ethically without a bunch of toxicities that are present on our planet. We can we talk every once in a while about packing up and moving somewhere else, and [my partner] is like 'you won't leave here.' You get attached to a place.*"

Leslie is also inherently tied to her land. Unlike Sandy, above, her attachment has more to do with family. Leslie explains, "*My grandmother passed away in 2001, [my grandfather] wrote on the stone, on the tombstone in the yard 'never sell the land.'* So we laugh and that's etched in stone on the land. And that was his philosophy, and I definitely have a lot of that." While Leslie's legacy from her family and their feelings about the land might be perceived as a big responsibility, she looks fondly upon this responsibility and takes it on with pride.

A couple of other women did not necessarily see this responsibility in as kind of a light. Bea explains the hardship of owning land. "*My name is on it. Your reputation. You're responsible. So, sometimes I can feel almost like a burden because you like, who, you don't want all that. But I'm not gonna see – nothing is going to fail on my watch. I just don't want it, you know what I mean?*" Bea has had land thrust upon her, in some ways, by the family that she married into. Although she cares about the land, she also laments her accountability. The burden of caring for the land also means that there is less time spent caring about other things and other people. Charlotte despaired at the end of our interview, expressing her regret at having spent too little time with her boys. She often had them play in the fields while she worked, something that she expressed as one of her greatest regrets in life. Certainly owning land is a great responsibility to these women, and sometimes that comes at a cost.

### Different from Rented Land

Some of the women that I interviewed operated land that they did not own, in conjunction to their own land. I asked these women what it was like to own land as opposed to the land that they rented or operated for others, and if their relationship to each plot of land was different. Most of the people that I spoke with felt that renting land was, indeed, very different from owning land they farmed. Only one farmer, Tina, felt that there was no difference between the land that she owned and the land that she leased.

Bea explained what it was like to operate her own land as opposed to the time she spends on land owned by her husband's family. *"It's empowering. I think it's a whole different feeling between whether you were given the ground, or like- you know, we're on family ground now- and I feel like sometimes, you know, it's not really my place to say or do something different. But, when you own the ground and your name is on it, it is empowering because then you can say, 'you know what? This is what you need to do.'"* Bea's concerns about operating land that she does not own herself stems from challenges to her agency on that land. Her concerns are somewhat echoed by Annie, who is still in the process of purchasing her land from her parents. Recent familial strains have put her in a position where her lack of total ownership makes her feel vulnerable to the whims of others.

Michelle describes another concern about rented land that a number of other women mentioned when asked about rented property. Her concern was not necessarily of agency, but rather of investment. For some women like Charlotte and Sue, the difference in investment has to do with financial concerns and a resistance toward developing infrastructure. Michelle also describes investment on an emotional level. *"Even if I won't be here forever, I still feel a great*

*deal of investment in the land, whereas a leased land I would take good care of it, but I wouldn't get attached to it because you can't get attached to something that's not yours."* She, like others, claimed an intent to treat the land as well as possible, however she could not guarantee that she would be willing to put the same amount of investment, as she would not be as attached to it. For Charlotte and Sue, the difference in investment had more to do with lack of financial return.

Slightly different from the other women's experiences is that of Gloria. She describes the empowerment that ownership brings, but in relation to her neighbors. *"I think neighbors pay a little more attention because we own it rather than if we rented it. You know, if I show up and say you're both on my property or can I talk to you about buying hay you know, there's a certain amount of – I think nobody takes you as renters seriously as neighbors."* Here she is referring to the agency that she believes she has on her land as well as in her community – an agency that comes from owning land. To a certain extent owning land, in Gloria's eyes, confirms one's status as a true farmer. All of these women have described the experience of ownership as an important aspect of being a farm operator. It offers a sense of security, as well as a sense of legitimacy both within a family and among neighbors.

### **Relationships with the Land**

When asked to describe their relationship to the land, most of the women in the study described the relationship as an emotional connection. The emotional connections that they described stemmed either from an association with family, or with a spirituality that linked them to the health of their farm. Only one of the participants described a utilitarian relationship to her land, devoid of emotion or attachment.

For some women, the family legacy that is wrapped up in a piece of land creates an emotional connection to the property. Two of the landowners that I spoke with operated land that had been in the family since the eighteenth century. Interestingly enough, the two women interpreted this connection differently. Julia expressed a great sense of pride that she got from farming this history-rich land. Part of her pride also comes from the rarity of her situation, as only five or six other century farms are listed in her county. Bea also feels very connected to her farm due to its familial legacy. Her emotions are more negative than Julia's, however, as she sees the land's history as a responsibility that she cannot escape. While she is not legally required to hold on to this land, of course, she feels a sense of obligation to her husband's family.

*"It's almost like the family farm – the history of all that is sort of a ball and chain that you just, we just wouldn't sell the family farm. You know what I mean? So someone's got to do it."*

For other women, family connects them to their land emotionally in a more direct and present manner. They describe having watched their children grow up on the land, and what they did as little children. Annie described her relationship to her deceased husband and the way that the land helped her to heal. She said that she drew strength from the farm's need for attention, and she drew joys from stories of the various animals on the land. Michelle had an even more compelling connection between her family and the land: *"I'm overly emotional towards my farm, and I'll probably cry because when we moved here, shortly after I got pregnant with my third child. Who died. And his ashes are here, we have a garden for him. That was only six years ago, so I feel like I don't ever want to leave here."*

While most of the women described the emotional connection between family and farm as a positive thing, Charlotte and Bea felt somewhat otherwise. Bea describes the interconnections as occasionally overwhelming, stating that *“It's all tied together. It's not just – that's another thing about farming in general but I don't think other people realize. That it is all tied together. Your life is your farm is your family. It's just- there is hardly any separation between. And sometimes that's really nice, and sometimes it's like whew – you just need a break.”* In this instance, Bea is describing a frustration with the prominence of family on her land. Charlotte's grievance runs the other direction. She laments having spent so much time in the field, and forcing her sons to play nearby. She describes a fear that she was perhaps inadequate as a mother or was unable to provide her children with a proper childhood experience because of the responsibility of her land.

A number of women in the study felt connected to their land on a more personal or spiritual level. Their emotional attachment to the land was more directly linked to the land itself rather than through their family. For a few of these women, the emotion stemmed from their sense of responsibility and the connection they have to the land as a caretaker. For other women, the attachment came from a symbolic understanding of home.

*“I feel deeply connected to it. That's why seeing my backyard, the pasture so torn up, it disturbs me.”*

Sue describes the way in which the health of her land impacts her sense of self, and her feelings. Although this could be interpreted as a reaction to her difficulty in caring for the land, Sue actually seems to be hinting more at a direct emotional connection to the status of the land itself. She is not the only farmer to almost personify her land. Lucy tells a story of the time that

she had a Native American woman come out to her farm to tell her what her land wanted. She believes that the land has desires of its own, and although she doesn't seem to see the land as a conscious being, she does feel that it will guide its own fate.

Other women describe their emotional connection to the land as their home. Again, this is still usually tied to the care that they bestow upon their land, but their reasoning behind caring for the land is that it is home- and a happy home is one that is growing and thriving. Sandy summarizes it as such:

*“Well, it’s my home. I’ve been nurturing it for the past 25 years come. I get really excited when I see soil that looks rocky and crappy a year ago and the next year it’s full of silt and earthworms. I feel a connection to the soil. That is fulfilling in a way.”*

Annie, Rose and Charlotte all express similar feelings. They describe a passion for their home, and a pleasure that they derive from seeing this home thrive with life. This brings a degree of wealth that cannot be compared to money or vacation time. For most of these women, the land is their major asset, and like many small business owners, they have difficulties finding opportunities to leave the farm. Gloria lamented this issue, but the other farmers did not seem to mind. Charlotte put it thusly:

*“This past year I’ve gotten more sentimental about it... We may be land rich, but I don’t have all the things my friends have. But I have land that makes me happy.”*

There were a few exceptions within the sample, where women did not describe an emotional attachment to their land. Instead, it was a tool or resource. Tina, Gloria and Dawn all had fairly matter-of-fact descriptions of their relationship to their properties. *“It’s a fallback plan,”* said Gloria. Dawn concurred, and elaborated that *“[Land] is a limited resource and it’s*

*only going to go up in value. So this is an investment opportunity for me.*” Important to note, in this case, is that both Gloria and Dawn have very different operation types. Gloria operates an organic farm that focuses heavily on sustainability, whereas Dawn’s operation is much more conventional. The study sample is too small to make any wide generalization, but this finding does raise questions about whether or not operation type is necessarily a determinant of how women perceive their land.

The women farmers in this study expressed a range of connections to the land. For many women, there is an emotional connection to the land. This is most commonly expressed as an extension of their connections to their families. Emotion was also derived from a personal connection to the land. The emotions expressed by the study sample were both positive and negative, although they tended to be more positive overall. There are also some less emotional and more utilitarian relationships to land, however this understanding of property was much less common.

### **Succession to stay in farming and/or family**

Finally, one of the biggest concerns that women had when it came to their land was the nature of its future. These concerns encompassed both the future use of the land, as well as issues of family and succession. Some of the women expressed very optimistic views about the possibilities for their land’s future, however most of the study’s participants worried about what might happen.

The study site exists within a very particular setting for land and development. The Baltimore-Washington metropolitan area is a growing region, farmland is expensive and many

people are selling out to developers. The vast majority of the women in this study expressed concerns about their farmland's future, and felt very strongly that their land should remain farmland. Sandy told me that she *"would like this to stay a farm. It would be awful to see this developed. It's such rich soil."*

For a great number of women in this study, the main way that they ensured a proper future for their land is through Ag Preservation or Environmental Trusts. Both of these avenues are county and state government programs that prevent land from being developed, and in the case of Ag Preservation programs- ensure that future landowners keep the land in agricultural production. These women, although they often benefit financially from placing easements on their land, cited development as their main reason for entering the program. Mae explained, *"I did put the property in Maryland environmental trust so that it cannot be subdivided. It has another potential lot that could've been built on."* Mae placed the land into a trust as a measure to protect it.

Beyond a desire to keep their land in farming, many women hoped that the future tenants of the land would care about it as much as they do. *"I would hope that somebody would come here and do what I did. I would hope that I could sell it to somebody who could look at the coop house and see what value it is to them,"* said Michelle. This sense of value that the women hope to pass on is one of the reasons why they are so concerned about who will succeed them. In many cases, they are unsure whether or not their children will want to take over the farm. *"Do I think any of them will become farmers? No,"* said Sue. Her conclusions are echoed by Charlotte and Gloria.

Gloria continues, *“I would like to make sure that it doesn’t ever become developed, you know I’d like to see that it continues to produce food into the future. And I don’t know how it will go on if my kids don’t want to get into that.”* Planning for the next generation and the continued prosperity of the land is an uncertain future, and that is a source of great stress. At the same time that they want the farm to continue, however, many of the women don’t want to impose the farm and the land on their children.

Gloria expressed concern that farming is a difficult occupation with very little financial return, and she didn’t think that her children would be happy with the lifestyle. Bea repeats this concern, comparing the land to an anchor that could force someone to remain on the farm despite its perils. She says, *“It’s neat, it’s really cool and I feel proud to sort of continue that tradition of farming. But then, it’s also a ball and chain kind of, because you’re like – it doesn’t pay to farm. Farming in this area is definitely not the major industry.”*

The importance of passing along a parcel of land is made even more important by the family legacy attached to it. Leslie, whose great grandfather had originally purchased her farm asserted that *“I don’t see this as something that is sellable. I see it as something that can be passed on. But it’s not something that can be valued. Because once it’s gone, it’s gone.”* The value of the land, to Leslie, is wrapped up in family and history. It is also surrounded by developments, so she fears that the farm could be lost to housing if it were ever sold.

Passing farmland to the next generation can be tricky, however. This remains true even if the children actively do want to farm- maybe even particularly so. One of the most emotional stories that came up during this study came from a series of interviews with three women from the same family. Each owned their own farm, and we generally spoke about those parcels of

land. The matriarch, Elsie, and her husband were also in the process of estate planning for the time when they would retire and eventually pass the rest of their land down to their three girls. Two of them were in farming and the third sister, with whom I did not speak, was not. This family was struggling with the planning process, and there were many hurt feelings. Elsie spoke about the issue the least, but her concern was clear. *“Hopefully we can work out this estate planning so that we’re still a tight, strong family. But it’s a challenge to know what we do. I’ve taken about every course offered to listen to how to do that succession planning, and I don’t know of a clear-cut answer.”*

The location of the study site, amidst ever encroaching development, places the future of farmland at risk. This is a great source of stress for the women farmers with whom I spoke. They want their land to remain in farming, and many of them want it to be valued and cared for in a manner similar to their own. Sometimes this was tied to family, and a desire to carry and pass on a legacy. Succession planning helps to further illustrate the emotional attachments and connections to family that land bears for women farmers.

This chapter has covered the study’s findings in regard to women’s experiences of land ownership. It has uncovered a few different ways in which women acquire land, all of which involve family in one way or another. It also has cast light upon the various barriers that women encounter when making decisions on their land, including family and power relationships, personal values, finances and governmental regulations. This study also examined what land and ownership means to women. It found that ownership can be an object of empowerment, but that it is also a great responsibility. That responsibility is interpreted differently among the women, as either a source of pride or a great burden. The study also found that women are often emotionally

connected to their land, and have a great deal of concern about the future wellbeing of their land.

These findings will be examined further in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

The findings of this study describe a multitude of experiences and understandings of women farmers' understandings of land ownership. There are a few themes that run through many of the participant's lived experience. One of the most striking themes is the importance of family, and the influential role that family serves in determining a woman's experience of land ownership. Another is the sense of responsibility that women derive from their property, understood as either good or bad, but universally felt. Implications from the research point to the writings of Karl Polanyi and John Locke. The relationships of the women in this study to their land, and the implications of ownership in their lives, help to support and elaborate upon Polanyi's concept of fictitious commodities. In addition, the varying levels of agency that the women in this study have on their land, and their different interpretations of ownership help to refute Locke's conceptualization of private property and ownership. This discussion section will examine these points in depth.

### **The Importance of Family on the Land**

Family members play very key roles in the relationships that women have with their land. They are usually present in the process of acquiring land, and they are often active participants in the farm operation, as well, even if they are not the primary operator. This may well be an artifact of the very nature of a farm property- that is, it is not just the location of a business operation, but it is also the dwelling place of a person or family. The mixture of business and home that a parcel of land offers a farmer leads to very unique circumstances involving family members on the land. They are connected to it through residence and sometimes through

ownership. This involvement of different family members on the land inherently impacts the ways in which women perceive their ownership and power, as well as their relationships to the land itself.

Family can bring about positive feelings and experiences on a farm. Some parents and partners can act as guiding or supporting roles for a woman out to purchase land or begin a farming operation. Grandparents and children can be the symbols of happiness and family memories on the land. Legacies and family ties that span multiple generations form senses of pride and attachment, contributing to identity and sense of ownership over the land. These are the relationships that enrich the experience of owning farmland and help to empower women on their properties.

Family can also be a great source of strife and a barrier to women's agency and connection to her land. Parents and partners sometimes impart their will and claim power over various aspects of purchasing or decision-making on a piece of land. Siblings can bring about great familial strain or infringe upon the sense of ownership that women feel toward family land. In-laws can have opinions and grievances that weigh upon women, challenging their power and vision for the land. Children may throw the future of the farm into limbo, bringing uncertainty onto the vision for the land that many women hold, unable to guarantee a natural successor to the farm.

Family certainly plays a central role in determining how women experience owning land, and the very nature of these familial relationships seem to determine whether the experiences are positive or negative. The roles that women fulfill within their families often relate quite directly to their roles on the farm. A woman who describes positive relationships with her parents may

also view her parents as advisors, while claiming full agency over her land. A woman who is comfortable claiming the role of farmer, while her husband holds the off-farm job- contributing a benefits plan and occasional running of errands for the farm- may describe a sense of power on her land.

Conversely, a woman who operates land inherited from her in-laws may feel a burdensome sense of responsibility toward fulfilling her family's wishes for the land, rather than her own, and a woman who grew up believing that men should be dominant and are the natural knowledgeable farmers may demote her role on the land and confer most decisions to her partner. These statements are neither universal nor inevitable, but each describes the situation of a woman in this study. This study finds a connection between a woman's role within her family and the ways that she interprets these relationships, and her role and power on her land. Factors that play a role in shaping these relationships include the transfer of power between generations, blood versus marital relations, and individual family dynamics, constructions of gender and patriarchy.

### **Caretakers of the land- A Woman's Role**

Land is understood as a great responsibility. It is something to take care of, something that is alive and in need of constant watch. The women in this study perceive this responsibility in different ways, however they all describe the feeling in one way or another. The role of caretaker that women farmers undertake can be likened to the reproductive position that women often hold in the household. Although being the caretaker for a parcel of land may serve as an

extension of a woman's traditional role, such a relationship to the land might actually be quite healthy.

The majority of the women in this study value and practice various methods of sustainable agriculture, including organic production and grass-fed livestock. This bias reflects a general trend for women in agriculture in the United States (NASS 2014). It is also the result of sampling methods, which included the consultation of two sustainable agriculture organizations when searching for participants, and the utilization of snowball sampling, leading to the inclusion of women with similar farm operations. It is important to note that many women in this study identify with sustainable farming values because such values go hand in hand with an obligation to care about the health of the land. As such, many of the women in this study described their relationship with their land, and their obligations toward it, in regard to the land's health. The women who did not describe their responsibilities in relation to health tended to cite a responsibility toward the happiness of the animals, the success of the farm business, or the happiness of their family members.

There is scholarship on women's ascribed roles as reproducing the family and the farm (Whatmore 1988). Their responsibility is reproductive through work that remains invisible but allows the family and the farm to continue living and operating, as opposed to the productive work of developing commodities and services to be sold. This study found that women's responsibility toward their land both fits and breaks this particular patriarchal mold. As self-identified primary or dual farm operators, most of the women in this sample saw themselves as productive farmers. They were responsible for the farm business in some fashion or another and did not fit the traditional mold as a farm wife or helper.

Although the women in this study considered themselves to be productive farmers, they also tended to describe their role on their farms as a reproductive undertaking as well. The grand majority of the participants emphasized the importance of the health of their land. They embody the role of caretaker for their land, developing richer soils, nursing animals back to health and helping plants to grow. The tone that many women take when discussing a relationship to the land, and the personification of the land that a few of the farmers employed are reminiscent of women's roles as caretakers for the family- an extension of reproducing the household, these women are responsible for reproducing the farm. Arguably, however, this approach to farming is a beneficial one. It is not revolutionary in terms of expanding the scope of women's work, like production on the farm, but it is an approach that is key to a mindset of sustainability. The reproductive approach that many women undertake on their farms might be a benefit to other farmers who seek sustainability for their land and farm operation.

In addition to taking a reproductive angle to production farming, many of the women in the study sample also took on traditional reproductive roles within the family. A few of the women interviewed spoke directly to the topic of working from home as a farmer and being able to take care of the children. Many of the women who discussed their position as a mother found the work/life balance to be difficult, however. Charlotte and Gloria both expressed frustration and guilt about the limited amount of time that they have been able to give their kids, despite working at home. Serving as both producers and reproducers of the farm and family, these women often struggle to find satisfaction in their abilities to function in all roles. Their struggle is one of attempting to break gender barriers while still feeling beholden to the roles that they are traditionally prescribed. The women in this sample performed a range of functions on their land;

they can at once be caretakers as well as productive farmers, fitting and breaking traditional gender roles in agriculture.

### **Land as a Fictitious Commodity**

In the United States, and commonly now throughout the world, land is treated as a commodity. It is bought and sold, appraised, and traded as an object with a market value (Geisler 1984; Feder and Nishio 1998). The market, in turn, treats land as though it has no value outside of a monetary one. This logic has been applied to nearly everything, including cars, pets and human services. In his landmark piece, *The Great Transformation*, Karl Polanyi criticized the commodification of the modernizing world (Block and Polanyi 2003)). In particular, he was critical of three items that the current market values, but that he did not believe could be categorized as commodities. He argued that land, labor and money possessed traits that exempted them from such a category, and predicted that these three be exploited as well as pose a threat to the viability of the market itself, should they be considered commodities. The ways in which women farmers describe and relate to their land suggests that land is more than a mere commodity, lending credibility to Polanyi's claim.

The women in this study access and derive a living from their land. Their ownership of the land has been a vehicle through which they have been able to perform productive and reproductive roles on the farm that challenge the gender normative divisions within the US agricultural system. For some, land is a source of legitimacy within their family, among their neighbors and within the farming community at large. In many cases, the degree to which women exhibit agency and power on their land is mitigated by their familial roles and

socialization, however owning land still provides these women with opportunities to alter their status and perform activities of their choice. As such, land is an object of empowerment.

Farmland is also a source of emotion and attachment. It is a connection to family. A woman's family may be tied to their land through a legacy from an elder generation, or from the memories that the current family makes- as the land is a part of their home. Land is also something that many women take pleasure in caring for, and something whose wellbeing sometimes corresponds with the mental wellbeing of the farmer. These emotions and attachment to place bring another value to a parcel of land.

Empowerment and emotional value cannot be measured monetarily. They do not have a market-place equivalent. If they did, then selling the family farm would not be a last-ditch decision. It would not be this object that farmers are so determined to pass down rather than to sell. As it is described by most of the women in this study, land is not a commodity. Polanyi feared that the commodification of land would be problematic both for the economic system as a whole, as well as for the environment. He predicted that subjecting land to the market would lead to its exploitation. For farmers whose only relationship with their land is production and extraction, this might be true, however this study did not find those farmers. Rather, it interviewed women who- on the whole- cared deeply about the health of their land.

Most of the participants in this study feared for the future of their farms. They wished to protect their land, somehow, to maintain its environmental integrity, or at least for it to remain farmland. Many of these women did not have obvious successors, and this provided a great deal of stress. The only political avenue that they could employ to ensure any protection was through easements. The majority of the farmers interviewed had worked with either Ag Preservation or

an environmental trust. Easements are the only official way that they can place any sort of non-monetary value onto their land, but this might not be enough.

Treating land as a mere commodity, holding nothing but a market value, poses a risk to the land and the farmers who operate the farms. Easements might help to mitigate potential exploitation of the property, but it does not ensure it. In addition, there are no safeguards for the benefits that land provides owners, including physical resources and- as is the case in this study region- proximal location to a wealthy and engaged market. Some organizations hold workshops about farm succession processes (Farm Journal, 2014), and lawyers can work to mitigate property-based suits and wills. There is no insurance for the power, legitimacy and emotional attachment that land provides women, however, and this is a peril of the current economic system.

### **Land Ownership: Moving Beyond Locke**

The meaning of property, in the US context, is that of autonomous procession. It also holds a connotation of personal agency and power in regard to a property's usage. This particular understanding of property follows the work of John Locke, wherein he describes property as land that is parceled off from the commons once a man alters it. He believed that if a person (man) worked the land, then he should call it his own without worrying about another person infringing upon that land (Henry 1999). This is a very strict and limited interpretation of owning land, but it has been an influential one in today's society. The experiences of owning land for the women in this study actively contest such views, however.

The time in the United States when land belonged to those who claimed and worked it, notably the homesteading period, has long passed. Today, people who outright own land either purchased it themselves, inherited it, or were added to a deed. The limited supply of land and the narrow mechanisms available for property acquisition suggest that Locke's original work might be slightly outdated, however his general assertions regarding private property and power are still highly influential. Here, again, his assumptions shall be challenged. Land ownership and an individual's autonomous power and access to the land are not synonymous.

Patriarchal inheritance customs, biased institutions that have prevented women from accessing loans, and sexist notions of who can be a credible farmer have all contributed to the fact that the overwhelming majority of farm owner-operators in the US are men. The skew in numbers is, in itself, problematic- and it is indicative of other inequities for women in agriculture. Indeed, women have traditionally been viewed as farmer's wives or helpers- not farmers in their own right. But the women in this study defy both of these trends. Not only do they own farms, but they self-identify as a primary or dual farm operator. While this is a triumph for women within the patriarchal field of agriculture, it is not their only hurdle.

Farmers face a number of barriers when making decisions on their land. The women in this study listed finances, governmental regulations and labor as just a few of the hurdles that they face when operating or making changes on their land. These are issues related to access to resources and politics- problems that do not challenge the woman's ownership of the land, in and of themselves (although governmental regulations and the power of eminent domain do suggest that complete private ownership of land does not truly exist). Women also face social barriers to making decisions on their land, and this has a great deal to do with the construction of traditional gender roles in the family and on the farm.

Other family members always partake in the process of a woman acquiring land or making decisions on her land. In part, this has to do with the fact that women are often accessing land through family, they are farming with the help of family- because farming alone is difficult- and because the farm is also the location of home. Family and land are very intertwined, and so the power dynamics that play out within a family also tend to play out on the farm. While a woman might own land in her own name, she must often answer to the will of others on the deed or who have a personal investment in the land's operation. A farmer's actions on her land might be shaped, in part, by her husband's interests or her parent's distaste. She does not possess complete autonomy in decision-making on the land.

Land ownership has been described as an object of empowerment. Indeed, some women in this study felt that ownership granted them legitimacy in the eyes of their families or neighbors as landowners and farmers. Other women, however, still felt uncomfortable directing a farm's operations and did not recognize themselves to be genuine farmers with the right to act on their land at will. The range in power that these women experience as landowners suggests that there is more to ownership than political recognition. There is more to ownership than working the land. Land ownership is a social process that is subject to social structures.

Women experience ownership on a spectrum rather than simple autonomy, and this spectrum is mediated by patriarchal and hierarchical customs and gender roles. This spectrum ranges from relinquishing all decision-making to someone else, to being challenged by family or neighbors when making decisions, to feelings of complete sovereignty over the activities that occur on the land, even if the woman's name is on the title in each of these cases. Locke envisioned a private property that went unquestioned by others, and today the laws are set up under the assumption that property begets power. It is important to recognize that women in

agriculture might not hold complete agency on their land, and that social ownership is as important of a concept as political ownership (possession of a deed) of land. The term ‘social ownership’ here stems from Petrzelka and Marquart-Pyatt’s description of the patriarchal assumptions that underly land ownership (2011), and evokes questions over legitimacy. That is to say, family members and women farmers themselves hold assumptions that place constraints upon who may be a legitimate farmer or a legitimate farmland owner, and these assumptions color their perceptions of themselves and others. These are the perceptions that inform familial relationships and power struggles over decisionmaking on the land.

### **A Return to Research Questions**

This study sought to understand how women farmers experience land ownership. This objective was further broken down into two research questions: How do women understand their relationship to their land, and how does land ownership impact a woman’s power on and off of her land. The nature of this study, with a small nonrandom sample of women farmers discussing their experience of land ownership, makes generalizations to the general population of women and men farmers unfeasible. It is neither possible to compare women’s experiences to men nor to claim that these stories describe the whole of what all women across the country experience. As such, any discussion of this study’s findings may only attempt to draw out the themes that exist for the women in the study sample. The study is, however, able to analyze and contest conceptual and theoretical relationships around gender and land ownership.

Women relate to their land in a number of different ways, but for the most part they are very attached to it. This attachment is emotional, it is financial and it is related to family and

security. Women's relationships with their land go beyond that of a Lockean description of private property, as it is an item that is valued greatly and generally kept away from the open marketplace- in some cases being treated as an item that simply cannot be sold.

Ownership of land also impacts women's power on and off of her land. There is not always a positive or direct correlation between the ownership and power, however. A woman derives power from ownership through the legitimacy that property provides her, both within her family and with her neighbors. However, women often have to negotiate their power within their families, and the roles and relationships that they have within their families (generated by patriarchal familial structures) are often reflected in their power on the land. The relationship between ownership and power is often indirect, and is confounded by other factors, patriarchy as a dictator of family relationships and concepts of legitimate farmers, in particular.

### **Contribution to the Literature**

This study provides an in-depth investigation of women's experiences in owning farmland, as farm owner-operators in the United States. Currently, the research on women farm owner-operators in the US tends to focus on operation type, values, identities and experiences as farmers, rather than focusing on farmland. There is also some research in the Midwest on women as farm landlords. The only work that this researcher has encountered regarding women farmer's experiences with land ownership comes from studies that examine the impacts of land titling projects in the international arena. Inspired by the work on women farmers both internationally and abroad, this study brings a topic of international concern to the US context, and finds trends that are remarkably similar to those found by earlier studies- concerns about traditional gender

roles, a distinction between political and social ownership of property, as well as legitimacy and power inequities between men and women.

This research also addresses social theories developed by John Locke and Karl Polanyi. It refutes many of Locke's claims about the nature of private property, finding that property is not experienced through total autonomy. Instead, it is a process that is mitigated by other social processes and inequities. The study also resonates with Polanyi's concept of fictitious commodities. It confirms that land possesses qualities that make it much more than a commodity, and to treat it as one may be problematic. While Polanyi was concerned about the exploitation of land as a market commodity, this study extends the danger to the landowners themselves. Land as a source of emotional attachment and empowerment, treated as an object with only a monetary value, poses risks to those who own- and could lose- the land.

### **Implications for the Study Group**

Women comprise approximately fourteen percent of all primary owner-operators in the United States. Presently, most research and agricultural education and support programs are geared toward a different demographic. The goal of this study was to uncover and describe women's experiences with their farmland. This was performed in the hope that this research could help to guide further studies and encourage agriculture and land-related programs to address issues that are important to women farmers. It is important for farm and land related programs to be aware of the various barriers that women farmers face when operating their land, as well as the values that they hold in regard to their property. People who work with women owner-operators should be aware of the strong impact that women's families have on their decisions and power on their land, and that women experience different levels of legitimacy as

landowners and farmers. Programs and further research could help to support women as landowners, and further empower them on their property.

### **Areas for Future Research**

This study was exploratory in nature, and should be followed by a larger and more comprehensive examination of women farmers and land. One good extension of this study would be to perform a broad national survey on women farmers and land. This could provide statistical support for the various experiences that women described in this small qualitative work. It could expand upon the observed trends, and make comparisons across space and the characteristics of the women and their families. A great limitation to this study is that it cannot be generalized to the population, and a large-scale survey would fill this void.

Another direction that research could pursue is a comparative study between male and female farmers. This study cannot make any statements that necessarily distinguish women's experiences from those of men. Another study could potentially make those claims. Further areas to explore could include a larger investigation into the differences between forms of land tenure in the US, including ownership, rent, tenancy and communion. This study suggested that there might be a difference in the experience of owning versus renting land, but this could be explored in more depth.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, future research could explore options to help address the inequalities and barriers that women farmers face in their land ownership and operation. Programs could be developed to address this need, and evaluated by follow-up research. It is the hope of this researcher that all good scholarship be put to a practical use. This

study was developed with the intention of casting light upon the experiences of a minority farmer sample in the hope that this light might encourage change.

## References

- Ahrendsen, Bruce L., Charles B. Dodson, Bruce L. Dixon, and Stephen R. Koenig. 2005. "Research on USDA Farm Credit Programs: Past, Present, and Future." *Agricultural Finance Review* 65(2):165–181.
- Allen, Graham. 1982. "Property and Family Solidarity." Pp. 165–82 in *Property and Social Relations*, edited by Peter Hallowell. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.
- Allen, Patricia, and Carolyn Sachs. 2007. "Women and Food Chains: The Gendered Politics of Food." *International Journal of Sociology of Food and Agriculture* 15(1):1–23.
- Baker, Cynthia. 1992. "Method Slurring: the grounded theory/phenomenology example." *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 17: 1355-1360.
- Block, Fred, and Karl Polanyi. 2003. "Karl Polanyi and the writing of *The Great Transformation*." *Theory and Society* 32(3):275–306.
- Blythe, Mark. 2013. *Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bronner, Stephen Eric (2011). *Critical Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. Retrieved from <http://www.ebilib.com>
- Causser, Gordon. 1982. "Some Aspects of Property Distribution and Class Structure." Pp. 131–48 in *Property and Social Relations*, edited by Peter Hallowell. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.
- Creswell, John and Miller, Dana. 2000. "Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry." *Theory Into Practice* 30(3): 124-130.
- Dale, Gareth. 2008. "Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation* : perverse effects, protectionism and *Gemeinschaft*." *Economy and Society* 37(4):495–524. Retrieved December 5, 2013 (<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03085140802357901>).
- Demsetz, Harold. 1967. "Towards a Theory of Property Rights." *The American Economic Review* 57(2):347–59. Retrieved (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20888544>).
- Dion, S. 1983. *Les femmes dans l'agriculture au Quebec*. Longueuil, QC: Montreal: Les Editions La Terre de Chez Nous.
- Dumas, Colette, Jean Pierre Dupuis, Francine Richer, and Louise St.-Cyr. 1995. "Factors That Influence the Next Generation's Decision to Take Over the Family Farm." *Family Business Review* 8(2):99–120. Retrieved April 8, 2013 (<http://fbr.sagepub.com/cgi/doi/10.1111/j.1741-6248.1995.00099.x>).

- Dunlap, Riley and Mertig, Angela 1992. *American environmentalism : the U.S. environmental movement, 1970-1990*. Philadelphia, PA: Taylor & Francis.
- Effland, Anne B., Denise M. Rogers, and Valerie Grim. 1993. "Women as Agricultural Landowners : What Do We Know about Them?" *Agricultural History* 67(2):235–61.
- Farm Journal. (2014) Legacy Project. Retrieved September 5, 2014 from <http://www.agweb.com/legacyproject/>
- FAO (2013). Gender and Land Rights Database. Retrieved September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2014 from (<http://www.fao.org/gender/landrights/en/>)
- Feder, Gershon, and Akihiko Nishio. 1998. "The benefits of land registration and titling: Economic and social perspectives." *Land Use Policy* 15(1):25–43. Retrieved (<http://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S0264837797000392>).
- Federici, S. (2011). Women, land struggles, and the reconstruction of the commons. *WorkingUSA*, 14(1), 41-56.
- Flora, Cornelia B. 1985. "Women and agriculture." *Agriculture and Human Values* 2(1):5–12. Retrieved (<http://link.springer.com/10.1007/BF01534986>).
- Geisler, Charles. 1982. "Local Control and Land Use Planning." Pp. 69–92 in *Property and Social Relations*, edited by Peter Hallowell. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.
- Geisler, Charles and Popper, Frank. 1984. *Land reform, American style*. Totowa, NJ: Rowan & Allanheld.
- Geisler, Charles, William F. Waters, and Katrina L. Eadie. 1985. "The Changing Structure of Female Agricultural Land Ownership, 1946-1978." *Rural Sociology* 50(1):74–87.
- Hallowell, Peter. 1982. "The Nature of Property." Pp. 1–10 in *Property and Social Relations*, edited by Peter Hallowell. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.
- Henry, John F. 1999. "John Locke, Propert Rights, and Economic Theory." *Journal of Economic Issues* 33(3):609–24.
- Hoppe, Robert A. 2013. "Characteristics of Women Farm Operators and Their Farms." *Economic Information Bulletin* (111):1–51.
- Lamoreaux, Naomi. 2011. "The Mystery of Property Rights: A U.S. Perspective." *The Journal of Economic History* 71(2):275–307.
- MacPherson, C. B., ed. 1978. *Property: Mainstream and Critical Positions*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

- Marx, Karl. 1978. "Communist Manifesto." P. 61 in *Property: Mainstream and Critical Positions*, edited by C.B. Macpherson. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Morisset, M. 1983. "L'avenir de l'agriculture". Pp. 107-112 in S. Dion, (Eds.), *Les femmes dans l'agriculture au Québec*. Longueuil, QC: Montreal: Les éditions La Terre De Chez Nous.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412995658>
- NASS (2014) Data and Statistics. Retrieved September 15<sup>th</sup> 2014 from ([http://www.nass.usda.gov/Quick\\_Stats/Lite/](http://www.nass.usda.gov/Quick_Stats/Lite/))
- Newby, Howard. 1980. "The rural sociology of advanced capitalist societies." Pp. 1-30 in F. Buttel and H. Newby (eds.), *The Rural Sociology of the Advanced Societies*. Montclair, NJ: Allanheld, Osmun.
- Ostrom, E. 1999. "Revisiting the Commons: Local Lessons, Global Challenges." *Science* 284(5412):278–82. Retrieved November 7, 2013 (<http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/doi/10.1126/science.284.5412.278>).
- Petrzelka, Peggy, and Sandra Marquart-Pyatt. 2011. "Land tenure in the U.S.: power, gender, and consequences for conservation decision making." *Agriculture and Human Values* 28(4):549–60. Retrieved April 8, 2013 (<http://link.springer.com/10.1007/s10460-011-9307-0>).
- Ribot, Jesse C., and Nancy Lee Peluso. 2003. "A Theory of Access." *Rural Sociology* 68(2):153–81. Retrieved (<http://doi.wiley.com/10.1111/j.1549-0831.2003.tb00133.x>).
- Ryan, Allen. 1982. "The Romantic Theory of Ownership." Pp. 52–68 in *Property and Social Relations*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.
- Sachs, Carolyn. "Invisible farmers: women's work in agricultural production." Rhinehart Allenheld, Totowa (1983).
- Sachs, Carolyn. 1996. "Rural Women's Connections to the Land." Pp. 45–65 in *Gendered Fields: Women, Agriculture and the Environment*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Salamon, Sonya, and A. N. N. Mackey Keim. 1979. "Land Ownership and Women's Power in a Midwestern Farming Community." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 41(1):109–19.
- Salamon, Sonya. 1993. "Culture and Agricultural Land Tenure." *Rural Sociology* 58(4):580–598.
- Saldana, Johnny (2009). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. Retrieved from <http://www.ebilib.com>
- Sanders, Patricia. 1982. "Phenomenology: A New Way of Viewing Organizational Research." *The Academy of Management Review*, 7(3): 353-360.

Saugeres, Lise. 2002. "Of Tractors and Men: Masculinity , Technology and Power in a French Farming Community." *Sociologia Ruralis* 42(2):143–159.

Shortall, Sally and Campling, Jo. 1999. *Women and Farming: Property and Power*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.

Silvasti, T. 1999. Farm women, women farmers and daughters-in-law – Women's position in the traditional peasant script in Finland Unpublished paper. Helsinki: University of Helsinki

Schmitt, Richard. 1996. "Marx's concept of alienation." *Topoi* 15(2):163–76. Retrieved (<http://link.springer.com/10.1007/BF00135387>).

Widerquist, Karl. 2010. "Lockean Theories of Property : Justifications for Unilateral Appropriation." *Public Reason* 2(1):3–26.

Jerry W. Willis. (2007). Chapter 3. Foundational Issues: Postpositivist and Critical Perspectives. In *Foundations of Qualitative Research: Interpretive and Critical Approaches*. (pp. 67-95). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781452230108.n3>

USDA. 2007. "2007 Census of Agriculture: Women Farmers." Retrieved ([http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Online\\_Highlights/Fact\\_Sheets/Demographics/women.pdf](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Online_Highlights/Fact_Sheets/Demographics/women.pdf)).

USDA (2014). 2012 Census of Agriculture Race/Ethnicity/Gender Profile. Retrieved September 15, 2014 ([http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Online\\_Resources/Race, Ethnicity\\_and\\_Gender\\_Profiles/cpd99000.pdf](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Online_Resources/Race,_Ethnicity_and_Gender_Profiles/cpd99000.pdf))

USDA (2014) "2012 Census of Agriculture: 2012 Census Highlights." Retrieved on September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2014 from ([http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Online\\_Resources/Highlights/Farm\\_Demographics/](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Online_Resources/Highlights/Farm_Demographics/))

Whatmore, S. (1988). From Women's Roles to Gender Relations. Developing perspectives in the analysis of farm women. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 28(4), 239-247.

Wunderlich, Gene. 1993. *Land ownership and taxation in American agriculture*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

## Appendix

### A) Interview Questions

#### 1) Tell me the story of how you acquired your land.

Probes:

- Why did you get this particular property?
- What was the biggest challenge for you in acquiring the land?
- Would you have done anything differently, looking back?
- Do you rent or operate any land that you do not own?
- Do you lease out any of your land? Why?

#### 2) Tell me the story of your farm.

- How long has it been in operation?
- How has the farm changed overtime?
  - Why?
  - Who drove each of those decisions?
- What operations do you manage? Do others manage?
  - How did you come to perform the tasks that you do?

#### 3) How do you view your relationship with your land?

- What does owning this land mean to you?
- Would you have a different relationship with the land if you did not own it, yourself?
- What do you see as your role toward the land?
- What role does the land play in your life?
  - Does it impact the way you view yourself?

#### 4) Does owning land influence your relationships on and off of the farm?

- Do you think owning land shapes the way that people interact with you?
  - Neighbors
  - Family
- Have you ever been prevented from doing something on your land that you wanted to do?
  - Why?
  - By whom?
- Do you participate, or are you a member, of any organization off of the farm?
  - Has owning land shaped your participation?

**B) General Information Form**

Please answer the following questions, to the best of your abilities.  
You may skip any questions that you prefer to remain blank.

**Primary Occupation:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Other Occupations:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Years Lived in the County:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Years Lived on the Farm:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Education Level (circle one):**

Less than High School

High School Diploma

Associates or Technical Degree

Bachelor's Degree

Graduate Degree

**Age Range (Circle one):**

18-25

26-35

36-45

46-55

56-65

65+

**Marital Status (Circle one):**

Single

Married

Separated/Divorced

Committed Partnership

Widowed

**Offspring (Circle one):**

No

Yes

**If yes: Number of children under 18 \_\_\_\_\_, Number of children 18+ \_\_\_\_\_**

**Size of landholding (in acres, if possible):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Other people who hold the property title:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Operation size (Circle one):**

\$1-\$999

\$1,000 - \$9, 999

\$10,000 – \$99,999

\$100,000- 499,999

\$500,000+

### C) Study Sample Characteristics

Farmer ID	Years Lived on the Farm	Education	Age Range	Marital Status	Size of land	Gross Sales	How acquired
1	22	Some College	46-55	Married	868	500,000+	married into land and purchased with partner
2	44	Bachelor's	36-44	Married	100	100,000-500,000	purchased with partner
3	25	Bachelor's	46-55	Married	76	100,000-500,000	married into land
4	10	Bachelor's	36-44	Married	70	10,000-99,999	purchased with partner
5	29	Bachelor's	26-35	Married	80	100,000-500,000	purchased with father
6	47	Graduate	65+	Married	526	500,000+	inherited from family and married into land
7	2.75	Bachelor's	36-45	Married	85	10,000-99,999	purchased with partner
8	5	Graduate	56-65	Married	350	100,000-500,000	inherited
9	4	High School	36-45	Married	3.5	1,000-9,999	purchased with partner
10	26	Bachelor's	26-35	Single	200	100,000-500,000	purchased/inherited from family
11	7	Bachelor's	65+	Married	5	10,000-99,999	purchased with partner
12	10	Graduate	56-65	Single	132	10,000-99,999	purchased/inherited from family
13	10	Bachelor's	46-55	Single	20	1,000-9,999	purchased with partner
14	7	Bachelor's	36-45	Married	5	10,000-99,999	purchased with partner

<b>15</b>	37	Bachelor's	36-45	Married	15	10,000-99,999	inherited/purchased from family
<b>16</b>	25	Associates	56-65	Committed Partnership	11.57	10,000-99,999	purchased with partner
<b>17</b>	20	Bachelor's	46-55	Married	2	100,000-500,000	Inherited