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Eminent domain: documents of coordination in agriculture

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Eminent domain: Documents of coordination in agriculture

by

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A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
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Signature was redacted for privacy.

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Signature was redacted for privacy.

For the Major Program
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You'd prefer a vague agricultural illusion? ... You and your kind are a dying breed.... You people had your turn and lost it... It's my turn now. What you deem corrupt is the price we pay for progress. Romans thought Caesar was corrupt, too, but he turned a republic into an empire. America is becoming an empire (Six of One).
CHAPTER 1: HOW THE WEST WAS WON: NARRATIVE, SCIENCE, AND

PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION
INTRODUCTION

Local developers had just paved over acres of farmland to build the Southgate Shopping Center...I was disoriented to see stores and pavement where all my life there had been nothing but cotton. I'd never seen a field disappear before. I didn't know such a thing could happen. I thought a field was forever (Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood).

In 1887, 50 of these corn planters were sold in Iowa for seventy dollars each. Two operators were needed, one to drive the team and manage the raising and lowering of the fanning spades, and one to operate the dropping mechanism. Chapter 21, The Role of Machinery in Iowa Farming.

Figure 1.1: This sketch is taken from A Century of Farming in Iowa (1946), which has only glowing comments about Iowa's contributions to the history of agriculture in America.

In America, the messy history of agriculture is largely due to its turbulent economics. As this country established itself, strengthened its military and economic presence in the world, and battled perceived domestic and international threats to its manifest destiny, agriculture became cast as an important American contribution to these efforts. Farming acquired the aura of a respectable vocation that fed the country's citizens as well as their values: "Family farms appear to rank alongside the flag, mom and apple pie... The use of the term calls forth Jeffersonian images of the independent, self-reliant husbandman whose
virtues are seen as critical for the survival of democracy" (Peterson, Dickson and Bowker, 1989, p. 301). Such patriotism dovetailed nicely with the country's fiscal ambition. Regionalist Cheryl Herr (1996), citing Andrew Cayton and Peter Onuf's *The Midwest and the Nation*, explains how “many [pioneer] migrants sought to recreate in the heartland their abandoned European lifestyles, [but] they were also the vehicle of the international market economy and its patterns of extension” (p. 83). By the mid-nineteenth century, economic concerns had diluted these settlers' European nationalism, and the result was a fusion between farming and “its embrace of the market economy, its self-proclaimed dedication to the Protestant work ethic, its interweaving of middle-class morality” (p. 84).

Over the course of agricultural history, however, not even morality could entirely hide the environmental fallout from farming practices. The prairies that had been plowed under in America's colonial infancy had steadily eroded, and in the Dust Bowl of the 1930s the exposed topsoil blew across the country and throughout the world. The twentieth century also introduced food producers to herbicides and pesticides for their crops (including atrazines and nitrates that leached into potable groundwater supplies) and hormones, steroids and antibiotics for their livestock (see Ozeki, 1999; “Interview with Keith Bradsher,” 2002). The American public's growing awareness and concern of these developments were fueled by popular culture; Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* (1991) was even awarded the Pulitzer Prize for its portrayal of a corrupt farmer and the consequences of his farm practices: “Those lessons [the farmer learned] were part of the package, along with the land and the lust to run things exactly the way he wanted to no matter what, poisoning the water and destroying the
topsoil … and then feeling that all of it was 'right’” (p. 343). Even the satirical newspaper *The Onion* picked up on the popular concern with its article, “U.S. Children Getting the Majority of Antibiotics from McDonald’s Meat” (April 17, 2002).

The result of this national attention was the appearance of numerous federal, state and local government outreach programs, focusing on the impact of American agriculture. Whether these programs attempted to explain, change or just cover up agriculture’s consequences, they all addressed the public perception of contemporary farming practices. This dissertation focuses on the professional documents produced by one of these programs, Iowa State University’s Beginning Farmer Center (BFC).

**THE BEGINNING FARMER CENTER: “LEVERAGE THE ADVANTAGE”**

Like agriculture itself, the Beginning Farmer Center has had a rocky history. In 1994 the State of Iowa General Assembly delegated outreach funds to help farmers who had not recovered from the “farm crisis” of the 1980s. In fact, the precarious economic situation of small farms was so severe to have prompted cultural studies scholars specializing in rural issues to reject the term “crisis” altogether, arguing that the trouble in American agricultural communities was no longer ephemeral but chronic (see Davidson, 1996). These monies came with a catch, though, as governmental assistance always needs to be justified in the eyes of the voting public—much of which regarded farmers as legally-sanctioned polluters, and subsidies as agricultural welfare. Farmers needed to be rewritten as a sympathetic group to reduce constituents’ resistance.
The BFC As Environmentally-Friendly

Consequently, the farm crisis subsidies were cast not as a special form of welfare, but as an effort to clean up environmental problems and prevent future pollution. The Beginning Farmer Center therefore was born in 1994 as a component of the Iowa Groundwater Protection Act ("Talk of Iowa," 2002). This organization was designated as a joint effort of the College of Agriculture Experiment Station and Iowa State University Extension’s Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, similar to the partnerships that characterize many of the university’s outreach programs. Direction would come from an Iowa State professor of economics and an attorney, while fifteen “Farm Management Field Specialists” throughout the state’s nine planting regions would serve as program associates (M. Duffy, personal communication, June 28, 2001).

The BFC’s entire staff would operate under the auspices of the mission, “To address the critical issue of future caretakers of farmland” (Beginning Farmer Center, 2001). This objective suggests the organization’s original rhetorical situation, i.e., persuading a concerned public that farming was a safe, patriotic endeavor that still embodied the Jeffersonian ideals of long ago and would continue to do so long into the future. Farmers feed our world! They are the stewards of our future! Why would they want to harm our beautiful country? As an arm of the local-level Leopold Center and of the state-level groundwater legislation, the BFC was meant to represent a benevolent, environmentally responsible farming population. Furthermore, the BFC bore the responsibility of addressing Iowa’s agricultural problems not
just as an extension service but as one directed by a land-grant university with very prominent agricultural programs. The organization accordingly fulfilled its mission and responsibilities through events such as the Ag Link seminar for graduating agriculture majors, financial analyses of individual farm operations, the state-wide Beginning Farmer Options conference for newcomers to farming, and the FarmOn program for retiring farmers.

**Clouds on the Horizon**

Unfortunately, the BFC increasingly found itself battling other agricultural problems in addition to environmental pollution and farming’s tarnished reputation, namely the growing strength of large-scale, sprawling farms and the rapid disappearance of small-scale, family-operated farms. The tension between these two particular styles of farm operation has been building like a migraine headache since the creation of the United States, with its rich agrarian history and free enterprise ideology:

For the first 100 years of the Republic, the political factions generally fell within either the free trade philosophy put forth by Adam Smith, or what came to be called the American System of protection. As each side of this ideological debate gained political control of Congress, the resulting enacted legislation determined the development of banking, money, trade, and the availability of resources (mainly land).... The low farm income was the result of policy based on free trade ideology. This ideology called for the restructuring of agriculture in the belief that it would become more efficient. The move to corporate agriculture is being finalized now. These two different ideologies, that have been the underlying forces in political control over policy since the beginning of the country, are still present today. This creates problems for those who must deal with the restructuring of agriculture that is taking place. (Atkinson, 1999, p. xv)

The past two decades in particular have evidenced the fallout from this historical conflict between the free traders/"corporate agriculture" (what in this dissertation will be referred to
as industrial farms) and the "protected" farms (mostly small, family operations). Several new developments in Midwestern (and especially Iowa's) agri-business have markedly reshaped the way work gets done in agriculture. The farm crisis of the 1980s, NAFTA's promotion of global crop markets, and the 1996 FAIR ("Freedom to Farm") Act paved the way for such changes as runaway urban sprawl, insider contracts between industrial livestock confinements and meat-packing plants, and the growing number of industrial farms and multinational food production franchises (Avery, 2001). Compounding these developments, the American food production industry now must define itself as a global competitor, evoking defensiveness (often in ethnocentric terms) from many farmers who've spent their entire lives in one place: "'Mad cow and foot-and-mouth disease got you worried about the safety of your food? Good,' a Minnesota farmer said in a recent conversation.... 'How safe will you feel, buying your cheese from New Zealand and your beef from Argentina?''' ("Editorial: A Farmer Speaks," 2001). When compared to other states, Iowa has done little to relieve the pressure from changes such as these, and the result has been fiercer competition between family farms and those that are structured more like a "traditional" American capitalist venture (e.g., a strongly hierarchical, diversified site of mass production and sophisticated marketing).

Furthermore, for the BFC the multiplying problems in agriculture were accompanied by increasing evaporation of federal economic support, especially under the George (W.) Bush Administration. And at the state level, budget cuts have hit the extension programs hard—the Leopold Center alone had to cut 24% from its 2000-2001 operating costs (M.
Duffy, personal communication, June 28, 2001). Any monies still trickling down to university programs are under intense scrutiny, given such actions as the ISU Foundation’s recent sale of a farm that had been donated with the provision that it never be sold; angry voices across the state responded with demands that the incident be investigated and those responsible be held accountable.

A New Identity

Ultimately, because the BFC now is a financially insecure organization operating in a context that also is economically and politically unstable, it must work aggressively to prove itself viable and worthy of future legislative funding. The result has been a philosophical shift—rather than restricting its services to its historically small-scale clientele, since 1996 the BFC has cast its services as addressing agricultural changes in general, or what it calls “leveraging the advantage.” As one of its flyers states, “We can accept things as they are and say they can’t be changed, or we can help shape Iowa’s agricultural future.”

This dramatic shift in the way the BFC presents itself in turn broadens its rhetorical situation. Historically, its purposes (damage control, education) and audiences (the public, farmers) were narrow and specific; with the new mission, the purposes (damage control, education, fund-raising, political/administrative relations-building) and audiences (the public, family and industrial farmers, politicians, education administrators) have dramatically widened. Rhetorically, the communicative differences among these audiences fall along economic, political, and even epistemological lines. As this dissertation will demonstrate, for
small-scale farmers, their understanding of and communication about their world is largely experiential and in many ways oppositional to more empirical, institutional knowledges—such as those used by the general public, industrial food producers (think IBP, Tyson Foods, ADM, etc.), politicos and education managers.

Consequent to its expanding rhetorical situation, the BFC, which historically served family farm interests, now must increasingly negotiate between the less formalized discourse historically valued by farmers, and the more structured and conventional genres demanded by its other audiences. This complex rhetorical situation has markedly affected the BFC's professional communication; now the documents it produces must continue to address its environmental concerns, acknowledge other agricultural issues, and justify its government funding and educational administrative support.

As an organization under pressure to adapt to a quickly-changing agricultural climate—i.e., as a place where professional communication is under stress—the BFC is an opportune location for my dissertation research. BFC director Dr. Mike Duffy offered me the chance to participate in the organization's professional communication and help tackle the challenge of writing each document so that it is most appropriate to its rhetorical situation. Such experience will be a good opportunity to study the social, political, and economic situations in which agricultural organizations currently operate and the impact of this context on professional communication in agriculture. The rest of this chapter will 1) elucidate this context, 2) use narrative to explain the specific places of opposition between the BFC's
family farm and industrial audiences, and 3) review the literature from the professional communication field that has shaped my research questions.

**Monday, July 23, 2001**

The farm market report is blaring on the truck radio by the time I reach my destination. It’s only a stone’s throw southwest of the university campus, but far enough outside of city limits to give the impression of an undisturbed rural landscape, nestled between private farms that suggest a spectrum of prosperity. Lethargic beef cattle gaze at me when I drive by their pasture. Red Angus? Charolais? I guess. I don’t know the beef breeds very well; we were dairy people, Illawara Milking Shorthorns.

I am visiting Iowa State’s Ag450 farm as part of a collaborative research effort between the Beginning Farmer Center and the University of Tokyo. The BFC’s studies on farm succession have interested several Japanese researchers, who are concerned about their country’s aging farm population. Six scholars have traveled to Iowa State to learn more about the BFC’s research methodology and its findings, and about Iowa’s current agricultural climate.

The weather climate also is a big issue. Does it get this hot in Japan? I wonder. It’s 8:45 in the morning and already the temperature has hit 85 degrees, with a heat advisory in effect for the third day in a row. A welcome rain swept through earlier in the morning, but it’s not enough. The soybeans are three weeks behind in their growth schedule. I note how some corn stalks are turning yellow
as I pull into the Ag450 driveway, near the sign that proclaims, “Student managed since 1943.” As I would learn during my visit, the farm was the brainchild of ISU economics professor William Murray and began with 187 acres of what the Des Moines Register had dismissed as “overcropped” land. Every decision on the farm is made by the students enrolled in the semester-long AgEdS 450 class—from the type of livestock to the crop rotation to the purchase and maintenance of equipment.

The men who carry out their student managers’ decrees meet the Japanese scholars and myself in an air-conditioned office that reeks of swine manure. I am clad in shorts and a t-shirt, surrounded by scholars in sweltering business attire, the AgEdS 450 instructor, Scott Mikelson, and farm operator, Gary Vogel. I am the only woman.

“What are you studying?” Vogel asks me.

“Business communication,” I smile. I don’t even bother mentioning rhetoric.

“Oh,” Vogel guffaws. “Propaganda.” He looks at Mikelson to join in his laughter.

It always feels like betrayal whenever I realize that farmers too can be total jerks.

****

Soon we are sitting closely around a table, ready to learn about The Typical Iowa Farm from Vogel and Mikelson. I prepare myself for a speech about the Ag450 farm’s risk management programs and strategic plans.
But each man begins with a discussion of his personal experience in farming. Mikelson looks bravely around the table as he tells his story:

I was in Utah going to school and one day I got a call from my mom and dad, telling me that I had to come home and take part in a business meeting to decide what we were going to do about the farm. So my mom and dad and grandpa and I sat down and talked about some options, and then at the very end my grandpa stands up, says he has a plan in his head and he's going to keep running the farm, and walked out of the room. And because of that lack of communication, the farm is no longer in the family—it's been sold.

Vogel then takes his turn, discussing how his academic studies in agricultural economics led him to farming, even though he was not raised on a farm. During each man's autobiography, the Japanese scholars do not take notes. They fiddle with their tape recorders and look around the room. I scribble furiously.

****

WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE

The visit to the Ag450 Farm was an official, international business meeting, yet Mikelson and Vogel had subverted conventional professional communication protocol and privileged the experiential knowledge that is so prized in rural discourse communities. Even more surprising was the growing evidence during a tour of the farm that their decision was a conscious one. As my visit continued, it became clear that the volatile agri-political context in which these men operated had not transmogrified them into glossy salesmen; instead, the Ag450 farm’s ability to respond to Iowa’s changing agricultural needs had generated a communicative hybrid. Running underneath the neatly-turned catchphrases that bankers and legislators so like to hear—"value-added," "diversification," "strategic planning," "risk
management"—was a stubborn insistence on retaining the value system that characterized communication among small-scale, family farmers.

The Japanese scholars may have ignored the men's personal anecdotes, but I recognized them immediately in their familiarity. This was the way work got done on the Iowa farm—farmers strategized, managed, learned, and crystallized their lessons into lore that could be passed on to sons, colleagues, and neighbors. Mikelson and Vogel, however, were not naive to the ways of the world and realized that their rural discourse wasn't entirely appropriate for the situation: "We can read ourselves against another people's pattern, but since it is not ours ... we emerge as its effects, its errata, its counternarratives. Whenever we try to narrate ourselves, we appear as dislocations in their discourse" (Said, cited in Herr, 1996, p. 39). It would seem that Mikelson and Vogel consequently attempted to defend and salvage their rural discourse by infusing it into their presentation; in doing so, they somewhat resisted the conventional, persuasive "pitch" that dominates Western business situations. As Vine Deloria (1995) explains, "Any group that wishes to be regarded as the authority ... must become the sole source of truth for that society and defend their status and power to interpret against all comers by providing the best explanation of the data" (p. 40).

Mikelson and Vogel's resistance to the glossier, more conventional discourse expected in a conventional professional situation suggests the current tension between small-scale and industrial agriculture interests. Western agrarian cultures are characterized by fluidity, "an entire factory-floor tradition of American ingenuity, ... make-do problem-solving, experimental tinkering within tight budget limits, and joshing teamwork" (Wolcott, 2001, p.
and Western professional communication cultures are characterized by systematic predictability and control. In fact, I've witnessed that professional communication, to use cultural studies terminology, can be a site that elicits contempt, resistance, and outright hostility from farmers. For instance, referring to the engineers and technical writers who construct farm equipment operator's manuals, my uncle once commented, "You know, I'm in the field, I've run the hay baler day after day after day, whereas [for] these guys, it's all hypothetical. They're inside the company trying to project what'll probably happen" (P. Hoover, personal communication, February 22, 1999).

Rural and industrial communications' sometimes contradictory cultural forces and value systems suggest that their interactions would be chaotic at best, an unpredictable hybrid of agrarian story-telling and communicative genre-twisting. It is true that the success of most ag businesses (especially in the Midwest) historically has been contingent upon the support of rural consumers, so the personal and the professional have not been as distinct in agriculture communication genres as they would be in, say, accounting. Even the massive equipment manufacturer Deere and Company, a conglomerate so huge that it essentially owns the city of Moline, Illinois, recognized the value of the nonconventional when it revised its highly technical operator's manuals to instruct instead through the use of visuals, or what the company labeled "illustructions" (Conrads, 1987, p. 135). And recently, a local newscast ran a glowing report about the techniques being taught to Iowa State agriculture students. In one animal science course, for example, the students work directly with livestock to learn proper ways of herding, feeding and transport. The report cast the hands-on approach as
pedagogically revolutionary; as one student explained during an interview, "I'm an ag major but grew up in town, so I didn’t know any of this stuff" ("3 This Morning," March 4, 2002).

What the report failed to mention, however, is the fact that industrial agriculture conglomerates (Pioneer, Cargill, Monsanto, etc.) "sponsor" many university classrooms where these courses are taught; essentially, then, these conglomerates are appropriating historical small-farm epistemology (hands-on training, first-hand observation) for use in their curriculums. Because the students who learn these techniques overwhelmingly tend to work for the conglomerates after graduating, their industrial employers ultimately are profiting from the knowledge developed by small-scale competitors. As my farmer brother griped, "Pretty soon, they’ll [the conglomerates] have one of their recruits writing something like *What Color Is My Parachute* about farming and getting all sorts of rewards for [knowledge] that farmers have known for decades" (M. Lamberti, personal communication, March 4, 2002). This trend has not gone unnoticed by small-scale food producers, and their resentment only adds to the tension.

**Writing between the Worlds**

Anyone who chronicles the messy phenomenon of communication in agriculture must be careful not to let her written research fall victim to similar chaos; this dissertation therefore is different from past research. Previously, my writings about professional communication in agriculture have been in the form of class assignments with clear generic boundaries; in 1999, I began to interview farmers and use this research to understand the role of agri-technical
documentation, specifically operator's manuals, when using farm equipment. In 2000, I invoked an activity theory approach to postulate how these manuals were a site of negotiation among agricultural engineers, technical writers in ag engineering, and the documents' end users (farmers). This study entailed surveying technical writers as well as re-analyzing information from my past interviews.

This dissertation looks very different from its predecessors, as indicated by the following story, told by my uncle Joe—his narrative clashes with a dissertation's traditional conventions, many of which borrow heavily from the research report genre. As such, this "unexpected" component in the text serves as a metaphor for the tension between storytelling as a valid rhetorical device in communication (see Kelly and Zak, 1999; Holt, 1989; Wilkins, 1983) and the "factual," formal, and decidedly impersonal traditional Western communication genres. This dissertation is the product not only of a systematic research agenda, but also of unpredictable, unquantifiable stories.

Ultimately, my research is in response to a growing conflict in agricultural communication. Small-scale farming—and its narratives—which used to be the hallmark of American food production, now faces tough competition from the growing number of industrial agricultural interests, which favor the more scientific, traditional approach in their professional communication. As these worlds repeatedly meet, clash and collide, so do their respective communication conventions. For example, in her work on "Story Telling, Story Living" (1999), professional communication scholar Nancy Blyler examines the tension between family farms and "factory" farms and locates this tension in their communicative
differences. Despite the decline of family farms and their discourse within the battleground she terms the "Rot Belt," Blyler sees rural narrative as "viable" and persisting in "struggling for ascendancy" against the communication used by factory farms (p. 199-200).

Blyler also argues that if both rural and industrial worlds are to survive, there must be some synthesis between their discourses, "an alternative narrative model [in sustainable agriculture that] will lead to 'communicative action and thus toward sustainability.' " Blyler, however, has been criticized for providing only a vague description of what this model might look like (see Knight, 2001). And while there has been a twenty-year effort to instate telecommunications systems as a potential "alternative model" (e.g., Having All the Right Connections, 2000; Parker et al., 1992; Dolan, 1994), the use of satellites, teleconferencing and the Internet really hasn't caught on in rural contexts. Meanwhile, the opposition between family farms and industrial interests grows, as does the space between rural, narrative discourse and industrial, traditional discourse—and the need for a communicative bridge between the worlds.

I therefore offer this dissertation as one prospective model, as it examines the intersections between agriculture and professional communication in the form of a hybrid communication—what Bazerman (1998) has termed documents of coordination. Documents of coordination are specifically designed to "go between minds, creating meanings and accommodating novelties to existing sets of beliefs and social institutions" (1999, p. 2). These documents negotiate among and ultimately palliate the demands of competing discourse communities. Bazerman developed the concept of documents of coordination while
studying Thomas Edison’s work. The professional communication produced by Edison were

drafted to embrace oppositional interests:

Edison is regarded as the greatest inventor of his time... But Edison was also an
entrepreneur, starting dozens of companies to commercialize his inventions—almost
every single one of which failed, often miserably. Brilliant as Edison was, his career
provides powerful evidence that commercial genius and technical genius are different
animals, and that they rarely coexist.... The zealousness and messianism that underlie
all this [creative effort] ... are qualities that exist less comfortably inside a stable,
mainstream business. (Heilemann, 2002, p. 229-30)

In the case of this dissertation, the conflicting interests are rural and industrial

agricultural audiences. This is a study of selected professional communication documents

that are the product of blurred and synthesized boundaries between rural narrative and

traditional professional communication conventions. It is messy, it is scientific, and it is the

face of agriculture today.

SMOKIN’ JOE

I try not to smile when my uncle Joe grunts as he sinks into a plastic-
covered chair and reaches for his cup of coffee. Despite his doctor’s admonition
to lose forty pounds and quit smoking, Joe sets his Marlboros on the table, then
digs into a slice of my Aunt Joanne’s pie. Sitting across the tiny kitchen table from
him, I pick at the corner of my napkin and play along as Joe teases me about the
Cyclones and teaching first-year composition students at Iowa State. “What’s
going on up there?” he says. “You keeping those kids in line?”

Joanne hovers in the background, wiping the counter, washing a few
dishes, always refusing to sit down and relax. Joe’s slice of pie quickly
disappears, and cigarette smoke soon hisses from his nostrils. In between puffs, he sips his coffee. The Farmer’s Diet.

Finally, finally, I can get to the point and ask him about the issue that’s prompted my two-hour drive to his farm in New Virginia, Iowa. I am a researcher in need of a story. I am a former farm kid in need of “evidence.” I am a doctoral student who is writing a dissertation about farming, and its folklore and oral traditions have wedded me to agriculture in a way that years of browsing among library stacks never could. So I’ve come to my uncle Joe. He is my grandfather all over again, a balanced combination of businessman and bullshitter.

Joe laughs, then proceeds to tell his story. “Ah, hell,” he groans. “The belt on that goddamn baler wasn’t running right. I just stuck my hand in, next thing you know, it’s grabbed my hand! And I’m thinking, ‘Goddamn! It’s cut off my hand!’”

I ask about his reaction. Joe says, “Well, I go up to the house, I say, ‘Hey, Ma, you’d better call someone, the baler just took off my goddamn fingers.’ So she gets on the phone, and I wait for the ambulance. They take their sweet time to get here.”

Joanne interjects, “He just sat here and had a cup of coffee and held up his hand until the emergency people got here.”

By now, after a decade, Joe’s story has solidified into family lore—the image of him, a mug in one hand and a bloody towel wrapped around the other, both hands raised above his head, waiting for the emergency crew to locate his isolated farmstead. I don’t need to ask where Joe learned to keep his mangled hand elevated. The family legend includes a proud description of the emergency
training he received during his thirty years at the Firestone Tire factory in Des Moines.

Joe teases me some more, drains his coffee mug, and says, "Well, Ma, I guess it's time for you to go out and take care of those calves. I just work so hard, I think maybe I should get a day off and let you do some work for a change."

The joke is a shopworn one, but still sweet to watch as my aunt feigns a resigned air. Joe mashes out his cigarette with his damaged fingers and clomps out the back door. "Don't work those poor students too hard," he yells as the door slams shut.

****

NARRATIVE AS NONCONVENTIONAL PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION

In [my grandmother's] memoir, she tells of a countrified way of life, and there is something countrified about the telling too, in that the time the dog's tail got stuck to the ice and the death of a sister are recounted in exactly the same tone (The Architect of Desire).

Former Iowa farm kid Jeanne Jordan once said, "People love to idealize farm life. They think it's wholesome and simple. Growing up on the farm, it gets a little more complicated. Life and death are a matter of chance" (Troublesome Creek, 1997). Jordan ought to know; in the early 1990s her parents sold literally everything they had—house, livestock, equipment, furniture, clothes—so they could pay off their operating loan and hang on to their farm land. In the world of agriculture, where people will bet it all on such an unstable life (fact: almost 50 Iowa farmers or family members are killed and an additional 2,300 are seriously injured annually ["I-CASH," 2001]), it makes sense that story-telling is a popular and important cultural behavior. Written historical documents can wash away in a
flood or blow away in a tornado or burn up in a fire; memories can’t, and so they are saved
due to the continuous incorporation of the past into the present. There is no way for that
which has really been forgotten to survive. Consequently, oral society orient's much of its
energy toward not forgetting, toward continuously re-enacting the past in the present” (cited
in Angus, 1993).

Hence stories like my uncle Joe’s. Or like the one about my great-grandfather George,
who apparently didn’t have enough sense to stay away from a tree during a thunderstorm and
was nearly struck by lightning (given other family lore, I gather that he must have been
drinking as usual). Always running through these seemingly casual tales, though, is a lesson
to be learned: Don’t stick your hand in the hay baler when it’s running. Don’t hang around
tall objects during a thunderstorm. In other words, don’t be stupid. On a farm, stupidity can
be deadly. As a local farmer once explained to me, “Most accidents I saw were the result of a
loss of judgment, usually drawing the response, ‘Well, that was stupid of him.’ While we
were certainly concerned when someone was injured, there still was a pretty high amount of
ridicule” (Kyle Swanson, personal communication, February 23, 1999). Story-telling enables
farmers to provide cautionary tales of, for example, mechanical misuse, all while strengthening
social connections. Barns, fields, dinner tables, fairs, lunch breaks, auctions, dispersal sales
and family gatherings are only a few of the common sites that encourage purposeful
exchanges.

This oral tradition serves as more than mere entertainment in agricultural communities.
Swapping anecdotes—whether at an equipment dealership, during an auction, or around a broken tractor—also builds professional ties, because stories can confirm similarities among the personal value systems of those in rural communities. As Beverly Sauer (1996) points out in her study of coal mining narratives, “The underlying values and assumptions in a culture... enable readers to understand and evoke the knowledges represented as visual and verbal narratives” (p. 307).

What I was raised to believe as the “truth,” then, was born out of an upbringing shaped by personal experience and community lore—what I’ve seen during milking time when the electricity keeps failing (“Whatever you do, don’t let that milker touch the ground!”), what I’ve heard my grandfather retort during “The MacLaughlin Hour” (“I wish someone would yank that pencil out of Pat Buchanan’s goddamn hand.”), what I’ve witnessed when my brother stares, depressed, at the calves that aren’t gaining weight fast enough (“Nothing’s wrong. I’m fine.” And then, “Don’t you think they’re a little bigger?”). In the world I grew up in, these events count as evidence—they are data as “real” as any statistic:

Farming the land was always new work; it was in the nature not of a repetition but of an experiment, always unfolding, destined never to be completed.... Experiments on the farm are not like experiments in the laboratory, where the variables can be reduced to known numbers. Farmers cannot afford the luxury of Cartesian thinking; they are obliged to work in the real world, the whole world, where one thing is indivisibly connected to another. (Gruchow, 1992, p. 79)

It would follow that a chronicle of such work would be just as fluid and unpredictable—the very traits of a good, entertaining story: “Stories are the way we make sense of our lives.
Stories anchor the chaos of events in our own experience, our own beliefs, and our own values" (Kelly and Zak, 1999, p. 297-8; my emphasis).

Obviously, narrative as professional communication is not a new concept. But within the context of this dissertation, the definition of rural narrative resembles

1) a “depiction of a sequence of events, real or fiction, to illustrate a truth or to create shared meaning” (p. 297). The emphasis here is on the deliberate, creative crafting of events to elicit the audience’s involvement, rather than “factually” parroting information for educational purposes.

2) the belief that “experience is storied and knowledge-making is a narrative endeavor,” suggesting that narrative is a more personal, intuitive mode of communication than other forms (Perkins and Blyler, 1999, p. x).

However, despite its more personal approach, narrative as a form of communication does possess certain conventions. After all, the rhetorical influence of context renders any social object, including narrative, a cultural artifact that represents the context and shapes it in turn. As Cole and Engestrom state, “Only a culture-using human being can ‘reach into’ the cultural past, project it into the future, and then ‘carry’ that (purely conceptual) future ‘back’ into the present in the shape of beliefs that then constrain and organize the present sociocultural environment” (1993, p. 21).

In the case of a rural, agrarian cultural context, a narrative’s conventions are characterized by their marked fluidity and interdependence. Kelly and Zak (1999) explain
that “[none of] the very basic elements of the story … can be omitted without causing a
change in its structure” (p. 307). This phenomenon primarily is caused by
1) how “narrative influences what constitutes good reasons for an audience,”
2) the active participation of this selected audience in the story, and,
3) as Barthes has noted, the fact that the story’s “meaning[, as constructed by the audience,
must] be the criterion for defining [structural] units” of a story (p. 298, 308). However,
this “meaning construed by a community rests on the structure of the story” (p. 312).
In other words, a narrative is constructed in a highly rhetorical, cyclical pattern: Context,
including an audience that is representative of a community, shapes meaning, which shapes
context, which shapes meaning, ad infinitum. Narratives are “‘variants of the culture’s
canonical forms’ … that reveal, though the possible lives they suggest, what a given culture is
like” (Bruner, cited in Blyler, 1999, p. 195). In the case of rural, agrarian narratives such as
my uncle Joe’s, the rhetorical situation is characterized by a unique relationship to the land
(i.e., context), an insular and clannish audience, and communicative purposes that shy away
from explicit persuasion and confrontation.

**Context: The Double Helix**

After she left her rural Prince Edward Island home to get married, novelist Lucy Maud
Montgomery never fully recovered from the move. During a visit to PEI twenty years later,
she lamented, “Oh, my Island is matchless—matchless. I feel that I did some violence to my
spirit in leaving it. I belong here. It is mine—I am its own. It is in my blood. There is a part
of me that lives only here” (1992, p. 136). Several critical pieces about Montgomery have commented on this weighty presence that the land plays in her texts: In “L. M. Montgomery and the Creation of Prince Edward Island,” Deirdre Kessler (1999) notes, “It is impossible to separate the strata of writer, landscape, and writing—person, place, and thing—impossible to uncouple the parallel stories, impossible to unwind Montgomery and a century of readers from the double helix of art and place” (p. 234).

Although the reference to a Canadian novelist may seem surprising in a dissertation about professional communication in Iowa agriculture, it serves as a helpful demonstration here: As evident in so much of Montgomery’s writing, in farm communities it is inappropriate to distinguish physical context from rural discourse. The land is both subject of and participant in rural communication. In his cultural study of The Rural Landscape, for example, John Fraser Hart (1998) devotes an entire chapter to examining the intricate relationship between landscape and what he calls the “cultural baggage” of people who make their living from the land. And, aside from his occasional lapses into nostalgic sentimentality, Wendell Berry’s (1996) discussion of land mis/use in The Unsettling of America compares environmental crises to what he sees as a deterioration of Americans’ character and values.

Rhetorically, of course, context is a critical component to understanding how a discourse has been constructed, and in turn it helps construct subsequent discourses. For the communication at work in the Midwest’s (particularly Iowa’s) rural culture, however, context assumes a tangible form, an embodiment of the value systems that are facing such political and economic flux; it pointedly acts as a measure of people’s ideological distance
from one another. As Arjun Appadurai (1996) suggests, "The mobilization of markers of
group difference may itself be part of a contestation of values about difference, as distinct
from the consequences of difference for wealth, security, or power" (p. 14).

As for small-scale farmers in Iowa, they similarly privilege an ideology where the
demands of the land prevail, and the people accommodate. Literature that has emerged from
this context bears out this fact; Willa Cather once averred, "Between that earth and that sky I
felt erased, blotted out" (cited in Davidson, 1996, p. 5). And in Drowning Ruth (Schwarz,
2000), a young woman accepts the fact that "on a farm, the earth has secrets, and the weather
has passions, but people don't matter so much."

Although at times popular culture draws upon this love and respect for the earth in
romanticized, Enlightenment-reminiscent portrayals of farmers as reticent stewards of the
land, it is important to note that "a place lover of worth can't settle for rejoicing but must
say, 'Such love of place is simple. Anyone can hide in mere love of place'" (Bly, 1992, p. 15).
For farmers, to embrace the land truly is to embrace all of its personalities, good and evil.
Hamlin Garland's books, for instance, depict Midwestern farming history as both "purely
nostalgic" and "deeply brutalized." His A Son of the Middle Border "reimaged the agrarian
experience as a kind of 'warfare,' a 'sordid monotony' punctuated by pain, despair, failure,

The so-called stewards themselves tend to adopt this more complex, pragmatic
awareness of and pride in their physical locatedness—and separateness. When in 1998 the
Des Moines City Council attempted a forcible annex of farm ground near Carlisle, for
instance, farmers responded with anger, using such terms as “territory” and “battle ground.” Their outrage inextricably connected the contested land to their discourse community: “This Is War” (Des Moines Register, November 1998). One woman said during an open town meeting, “Some of you [council members] came back with responses to people whose way of life was about to change[,] or could be changing[,] that were very insensitive and almost insulting. In my mind, I have put myself in your shoes, and I don’t think I’d want to be there all the time, but [at least] I’ve thought about where you stand in your life” (Annexation Approval, 1998).

**Audience: It’ll Rip Your Legs Off**

Given the caprices of such a volatile context—exacerbated even more by mercurial weather—audience and purpose are affected accordingly. A wet spring means an impatient, preoccupied and highly resistant audience. A good crop year suggests that the purpose of communication may not be supplicating (“Where can I find information on extending my PIK checks?”) so much as inquiring (“Tell me more about the new ten-row pickers. I might be in the market for a trade-in.”)

In other words, the unpredictability of this fluctuating context informs the audience’s (small farmers) use of equally unpredictable oral discourse—making their (professional) communications difficult to decode. As Hart (1998) says in reference to rural communities, “We can understand the aspirations, the needs, and the values of ordinary people only by listening to them, because they put pen to paper rarely, reluctantly, and with much painful
effort" (p. 1). Oral narrative, with a convention of fluidity that accommodates the audience's participation in a story, consequently becomes the most appropriate genre for a rural context: “[Narrative] offers a logic for understanding that can be tested by the listeners against their life experiences” (Kelly and Zak, 1999, p. 299).

Contextual differences between discourse communities obviously lead to disparities in value systems; these differences in turn affect how each group plays the role of audience. In fact, Knight believes that this is “the beauty of narrative... precisely because it allows a high level of detail, where readers are allowed and encouraged to add their own experiences to the central plot” (2001, p. 227). In the case of small-scale farmers,

1) suspicion of “outsiders,”

2) valorization of personal experience as authority, and

3) emphasis on first-hand observation are dominant values that shape their responses to communication.

Suspicion of outsiders. On smaller family farms, the strength of a rural community lies in its collegial membership. For example, a farmer whom I interviewed in 1999 looks first to community members for assistance, including the local agronomist and co-op “scouts” (who observe crops during various stages of emergence):

Good managers realize that there are experts you have to go to. [Preparing for planting season] is like a battle plan, getting ready for war. Everything is getting so complex that you have to call in outside resources. There are so many herbicides and insecticides now, like pre-emergence herbicides, the total post program.... You’ve got all these things to think about.... But if you’re a good manager and going to be successful, you need all of these people. Say if you have a good agronomist, you can talk to him, and [as for co-op scouts], they’re all part of his operating team (P. Hoover, personal communication, February 22, 1999).
Here note that all of the “experts” have earned the title courtesy of their membership within farming communities, and are referred to as “outside” resources only by virtue of their different job responsibilities. Otherwise, agronomists and co-op scouts work alongside farmers in the fields, studying crop yields, infestation, and ecological conditions. These experts are allies in what Hoover terms a “war” against the rural disasters that can befall community members in a heartbeat.

The war metaphor suggests why outsiders are viewed as threats. For instance, when Kyle Swanson, a small-scale farmer, described a corporate-sponsored herbicide study conducted in Iowa in 1999, his language was filled with mistrust:

The results [of the study] reinforce the feelings which I believe many farmers have about products produced by global corporations, that being that they are greedy, have little regard for the environment despite their nice, flashy TV ads and even less interest in perpetuating the livelihood of those who support them. I know what the results tell me, and I suspect that many farmers feel the same way. (personal communication, February 23, 1999)

Farmers are acculturated to immediately recognize those people whose interests differ from theirs. Swanson’s description suggests that the high resistance to the herbicide study is rooted in the farmers’ view of the “outsiders” as concerned about profiting from, not preserving, a way of life.

**Valorization of personal experience.** Considering such an emphasis on people (and their differences), it is not surprising that rural cultural values focus on personal experience. For example, my brother explains how his farming education was comprised of a series of verbal comments, warnings and cautionary examples, delivered face-to-face: “When
you get older, everything is common sense. However, when I was young, usually someone would say, 'Don’t go near the PTO when it’s running—it will rip your legs off.’ You learn that being stupid hurts” (Matt Lamberti, personal communication, February 26, 1999).

**Emphasis on first-hand observation.** Oddly enough, farmers will readily listen to a colleague’s comments but believe them only when they witness the lesson for themselves. First-hand observation is a crucial epistemological trait in farming; it indoctrinates its members culturally and ideologically while teaching the use and maintenance of farming’s social and mechanical tools. For instance, my uncle once described the typical process by which he reacts to malfunctioning equipment: “I fix something by trial and error. When a part breaks, you look at it and try to determine, for example, how do you get that part off?” He also added that his ability to make impromptu repairs “comes from being around the machinery quite a bit” (P. Hoover, personal communication, February 22, 1999).

In fact, among the many farmers I’ve known personally and interviewed formally, their valorization of first-hand observation repeatedly surfaces during our discussions. As Swanson revealed in response to my question about the extent of his experience with machinery,

At [age] ten, I began operating a 1952 Ford 8N tractor, my father’s first tractor. I don’t recall a great deal of instruction related to its use, only that much of what I learned came from watching. After having spent countless days riding with my father and brothers on equipment, I think the technical details related to operation just kind of seeped into my brain. What I’m saying is that any young, even somewhat inquisitive person catches on. (K. Swanson, personal communication, February 23, 1999)
Purpose: Just the Facts

Given the communication values most prized among small farmers—narrative style, experiential knowledge, first-hand observation—it is not surprising that the purpose of most communicative acts in farming is to inform: *Here are today's LDP bids. DuPont just bought out Pioneer Hi-Bred. Those sheep in North Carolina have tested negative for scrapie.* As Deloria asserts, "The possessor of oral traditions has nothing that would encourage him or her to change the meaning or emphasis of the information except ... the desire to entertain" (1995, p. 55). Because the success of an argument in a rural context is contingent largely upon the audience's prior knowledge and their first-hand observation, the effectiveness of overtly persuasive communicative acts is limited. A farmer who walks into his local John Deere dealership, for instance, will not be greeted with an overt sales pitch; dealers and their customers spend the majority of their time discussing the weather and the crops (thereby privileging the value for narrative) and then eventually work around to the reason for the farmer's visit—to shop for a piece of equipment. Of course, farmers at times may attempt *explicit* persuasion during their professional communication, but such occasions are rare; arguments can too easily become offensive in a culture where restraint, politeness and stoicism are paramount behaviors.

Narratives' Changing Rhetorical Situations

Because I was raised in this unique context/audience/purpose matrix, my communicative patterns were largely personal and anecdotal. When I began my graduate
program in rhetoric and professional communication, however, the "value" of my experience
and stories suddenly plummeted. There's no room for anecdote in making a recommendation!
What could my personal experiences "prove" in a feasibility study's argument? The world of
(industrial) professional communication was a strikingly different culture than that of rural
life. Whether I liked it or not, my move to a new world meant that I had to learn a new
discourse, to "code-switch," in order to be a successful student and professional
communicator.

I discovered the rules of this new discourse in a variety of places, such as the
interview I conducted in 1999 with "Melissa," one of Iowa State University's many
"communication specialists." At the time of this interview, Melissa worked at an ISU
transportation center, editing its highly technical research reports, pamphlets and newsletters.
Her experience embodies the character of professional communication in an industrial
rhetorical situation.

**MELISSA'S STORY**

**AL:** So how did you learn what [professional communication] was?

**Melissa:** A lot from class. But before I came to college, I had no idea that it was a
field at all, but my high school English teacher got her Master's here, so she was
in technical writing, so through her, she would tell me, 'You need to go to Iowa
State, and you need to go into technical writing,' but I didn't know what I wanted to
do. I liked writing, I liked English a lot, but I didn't like being creative and doing all
of that, so that's where I was learning about the field. But a lot of it I learned in
[English] 314 [Technical Communication] ... that was the big one for me.

**AL**: So has the way you grew up with computers, has that experience been very
different from the experience you've had with computers on the job?

**Melissa**: Definitely. Everything has completely changed since I started working
with computers. And the way people use the technology has changed. It used to
be basically just typing, word processing, and that was about it. Now, there are
these different programs for anything you want to do, and I think it's gotten more
mainstream.

.... [For example,] most of my experience with email was just for personal
use, with my friends and with my family, so it was just sort of a "Hey, what's going
on?" type of deal. Once I got here, it was the first time I'd actually worked in a place
where email was available, and it was actually a technology that we used, so I
think that it's probably why, it's just how I adjusted to the technology of email.

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**NARRATIVE AS CONVENTIONAL PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION**

*Science tells us that this whole panorama of life, our deepest experiences, and our most
cherished ideas and emotions are really just the result of a fortunate combination of amino
acids happening to coalesce billions of years ago and that our most profound experiences are
simply electrical impulses (Vine Deloria).*

Note how Melissa discounts her personal experience whenever she mentions
them—her personal experience as a student and an e-mailer may have led her to professional
communication, but it otherwise seemed irrelevant as she learned how to act in the discipline
and "properly" use computer technology. Instead, she was educated in more formalized, institutional contexts, the classroom and the workplace. Like Melissa, I became a member of the professional writing discipline by systematically learning what counts in this world as an argument, as evidence, as "communication."

Perhaps the highly formalized structure of the discipline stems from its pedigree. Many scholars and practitioners argue that professional communication is heavily—if not exclusively—shaped by scientific tradition. In other words, the replicability, predictability, and testability of scientific inquiry can be seen in specific communication practices. For example, James McDonald's (1987) history of professional communication curriculums reveals how 19th-century textbooks borrowed the style and "universal" principles of scientific inquiry by teaching that a professional communication text should be separated from its writer and context. And Hugh Marsh (1998) explains that "the classic skills of experimentation, analysis, and design are only part of the bundle of required skills" for workplace communication; engineers who must assume more writing responsibilities because of organizational downsizing, he argues, can use their scientific background to better understand the rhetoric of professional documentation (p. 1). In cases such as these, science has been used in professional communication practice to render documents as seemingly a-rhetorical—free of the "bias" and subjectivity of human involvement.

Others in professional communication concur that science has markedly informed their discipline. Charles Bazerman's study of the history of the APA Publication Manual, for example, demonstrates how the historical standardization of the Manual's format "serves
basically as a codification of behaviorist rhetoric" (1987, p. 141). Specifically, Bazerman examines a psychology article with an organizational structure that separated the authors from their research; these format requirements shaped the authors’ writings so that the research results seemed impersonal, a logical result of scientific process rather than a project supervised by humans. Because of this structural format, “not only do behaviorists categorically eliminate imputations of internal processes and introspective accounts; they no longer consider the external data as indicators of some mental process” (p. 137). In other words, the scientists learned to privilege certain information in response to this structural format; when certain writing conventions are followed faithfully, professional communication’s disciplinary values become normalized and eventually objectified.

The scientific shadow that looms over professional communication is apparent in its practitioners’ work processes. Like Melissa, many professional communicators cast their work as “unbiased” and believe that personal experience is irrelevant while replicability is paramount. As one editor told me, “Since all [our product documentation] is produced online, one writer works on developing training or online help for three or more products. Automation allows for quality products with very few errors…. Basically, it goes from writer to editor, to subject matter expert (SME), to customer” (R. Nipper, personal communication, April 19, 2000).

Other professional communicators echo Nipper’s view of his work as an extension of the scientific process, regulated and highly systematic:

[After I came on the job,] I was able to cut technical support calls drastically. It became mandatory the tech comms were in on the early stages of development and
interface design. Tech support database became public. Tech comms had all equipment (hardware and software) necessary to perform their duties. Development specifications and code documentation became mandatory. (T. Plath, personal communication, April 2000)

The powerful impact of the scientific method—with its emphasis on predictability and control—can be seen in these professional communication practitioners’ perspective. There is a Fordist¹ sense of mechanical mass production in Nipper’s reference to “automation” and Plath’s use of “mandatory” document specification, the implication being that deviation from these systems would cause a breakdown in productivity. As Gross (1990) says, “[Science’s] wellspring was the widening conviction that the eventualities of the natural order depended primarily not on supernatural or human intervention but on the operation of fixed laws whose preferred avenue of discovery and verification was quantified sensory experience.”

Such laws have tremendous and lasting power to “weed out” competing influences, such as personal experience or other data that cannot be replicated or predicted. The power is reminiscent of Gilbert and Mulkay’s “Truth Will Out Device” (TWOD); as Dorothy Winsor (1990) explains, the TWOD is invoked by a certain group of people to establish a certain body of knowledge as the Truth, “but only retrospectively: one waits and sees what ideas survive and then declares that these ideas were knowledge all along” (p. 11). The above practitioners do not look to replicable, controllable practices because of their inherent superiority, then, but because in retrospect such practices have been the norm. Not even the appearance of post-modern approaches to the professional communication discipline (e.g.,

¹ “Fordism” has become an increasingly popular term in research literature and “collectively refers to the social institutions of mass production,” particularly those that employ impersonal, automated, assembly-line mechanisms such as the one utilized by Henry Ford in his factories (Rupert, 1996).
cultural studies) can change overnight a monolithic shadow such as the one science casts over professional communication.

Because the scientific influences and current values of Western professional communication are historically so radically different from those of rural, agrarian communication, Western professional communication narratives are radically different from rural, agrarian narratives. Kelly and Zak explain how scientific influence has led to Western professional communication’s roots in “modernist discourse,” which can be quantified and predicted, and how this environment is not conducive to the type of narrative privileged in, say, small-scale farm contexts: “Whereas the discourse of the Aristotelian or modernist approach is based on an empirically established body of knowledge … to which the audiences’ experience or education many not make them privy, narrative … is a form of discourse that, in an essential way, must be personal to the audience” (1999, p. 300).

Therefore, narrative must be altered if it doesn’t intuitively fit with the scientific, “modernist” sensibilities of traditional professional communication. Gross (1990), explains the rhetorical impact upon such altered narratives: “In such a [scientific] view, ethos, pathos, and logos are naturally present in scientific texts: As a fully human enterprise, science can constrain, but hardly eliminate, the full range of persuasive choices on the part of its participants.” If narrative cannot be fully controlled, then, within the scientific paradigm the goal must be to constrain as much as possible the unpredictability of narrative, with its ever-fluid audience, purpose and context.
Some scholars are wary of science's strong influence over narrative. Specifically, in spite of science's "new humanism," with its emphasis on "the epistemologies of the oral-gestural tradition," even within a traditional professional communication context narrative nonetheless does not approximate "'natural' and 'intuitive' forms of use and interaction" typical in nonscientific contexts (Bleecker, 1992, pp. 8-9). Blyler (1999), citing Habermas, elaborates on the resulting rhetorical situation of these narratives as embodying "the technocratic consciousness," or, "the value society accords to science and technology and ... the effects of this valuing on social life" (p. 200). Specifically, traditionalized narratives embody the scientifically-encouraged "purposive-rational action," an "'egocentric' ... focus on advancing [people's] own interests rather than on 'harmoniz[ing] the interests of all concerned" (p. 200).

Unfortunately, as these scholars believe, because narratives as cultural artifacts have the power to "marginalize alternative explanations" that help a discourse community to create knowledge, they thus limit and predict the look of future narratives produced within the field (Knight, 2001, p. 227). The control is especially ensured by traditional professional communication's conversion of oral narrative to a written form. Angus (1993) explains,

Writing has a centralising effect, tending to promote bureaucratic organization due to its one-sided orientation to space. It tends to promote analytic, abstract thought, and to isolate the writer and the reader from each other. Scientific thought, for example, whose cumulation of results depends on writing, continually liquidates its past to present an analytic, synchronic, theoretical summary of the current state of knowledge.

Some scholars have described the particular look of the scientific conversion of oral narrative to written form. Kelly and Zak, for instance, claim that traditional communication uses
narration in little more than case studies, and even then, “many cases are static; they are word problems designed to illustrate a managerial challenge and provoke the articulation of a specific solution” (1999, p. 299)—reflecting the strong presence of scientific predictability and control. And Perkins and Blyler (1999) agree that when it is used at all, narrative in professional communication “continues to be relegated to an inferior position” (p. 11).

Although the broad sweep of scientific predictability and control is the very type of meta-narrative that many postmodern scholars across disciplines now are rejecting, its influence over narrative in traditional professional communication remains strong. As opposed to the messy fluidity of a rural narrative’s rhetorical situation, with its mercurial physical context, suspicious and involved audience, and tacit, persuasive purpose, the narrative of a more traditional professional communication situation clearly suggests the influence of science: A controlled, predictable context, a passive, nonresistant audience and a sharply explicit purpose (Table 1.1).

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<th>Rural Narrative</th>
<th>Traditional Narrative</th>
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<td><strong>Context</strong></td>
<td>subjective and fluid</td>
<td>predictable</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Audience</strong></td>
<td>resistant and involved</td>
<td>nonresistant and passive</td>
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<td><strong>Purpose</strong></td>
<td>implicit</td>
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**The Self-Sustaining Context**

Professional communication in conventional organizations tends to confirm and reify their cultures, making them so predictable as to seem transparent; even communicators in such organizations do not recognize any relationship between their discourse and its context. A 1995 study by James Suchan, for instance, argues that “it requires an outsider … an
organizational development consultant or a perceptive newcomer to the organization, to note [the] language patterns" of the workplace (p. 14). In his research, Suchan noted how one company’s root metaphor “as a machine or mechanism” informed document production by eleven professional writers (known as information gatherers or “IGs”). Interviews with the writers revealed that the machine metaphor heavily encouraged the IGs’ perception of themselves as “cogs” in a machine and downplayed any concern for report readability and target audience—yet these writers never made the connection between these communication patterns, such as the use of root metaphors, and the larger organizational context.

The Nonresistant Audience

Just as context can be reified into transparency, so too can communication conventions—a phenomenon that affects the audience’s role. Dorothy Augustine and W. Ross Winterowd (1986) demonstrate how traditional professional document conventions are designed to invoke a particular response from a Western audience. In the tradition of classical rhetoric, by sharing “tacit knowledge of the regularities of conversation” a communicator attempts to implicitly “write” his/her audience’s reading into the document (p. 128).

Consequently, an audience that becomes thoroughly trained in response to conventional cues could unwittingly lose some of its agency and resistance. For instance, Western audiences have become accustomed to their role as passive consumers in response to the glossy, enticing sales pitches that have filled every communication medium in America—to the point where teaching the difference between “need versus want” is now a
common issue in parenting texts (see Hamilton, 2002; Dean, 2001) and consumer guides (see Sutton, 2001).

Purpose: The Hard Sell

While small farmers tend not to respond positively to blatant persuasive tactics, in most professions, including industrial farming, such explicit persuasion is the dominant purpose in communication. This purpose is particularly apparent in music, athletics and health and beauty industries—no media image lacks a message about the way Westerners “should” look and the things they “should” buy. A casual scan of a recent magazine, for instance, reveals thirty-four pages of clothing, lingerie, and music ads before the table of contents finally appears. This same magazine lauds the “exquisite beauty” of its cover girl and the “distracting” physique of a young Calvin Klein underwear model (Vanity Fair, September 2002).

The corporations behind such messages measure their economic success by the extent to which they can convince their consumers to continue their patronage. Furthermore, as demonstrated with the context and audience of traditional professional communication, the privileging of explicit persuasion is due to its self-perpetuating power—making it unlikely that its rhetorical situation will change much over time.
Rhetorical Situations as Power Struggle

With each facet of a narrative's rhetorical matrix (context/audience/purpose), the differences between the communication of small-scale farmers and that of traditional communicators grow clearer. Each discourse community carefully uses its professional communication (1) to distance itself from and (2) to empower itself against its competition. In other words, communication is an act of power because it is a sum of the social currency that audience, purpose and context lend to each rhetorical situation. In the situations where agrarian and traditional narratives meet, then, the assumption is that someone must blink first—unless a communicative medium can be reached via an "alternative narrative model"—documents of coordination.

INSIGHTS FROM THE FIELD: COMMUNICATION AND POWER

Professional communication scholar Beverly Sauer is one representative of the perspective that sees professional communication as an implicit power struggle. This view holds that certain generic conventions dominate in professional communication because they confirm and perpetuate the power of organizational structures.

Sauer's 1993 study, for instance, offers a sometimes disturbing foray into "salient and silent power structures that control discourse"—in this case technical writing (p. 76). In "Sense and Sensibility in Technical Documentation," Sauer invokes a feminist lens to study the public, scientific, and technical discourses responding to a tragic coal mine explosion. She examines mine inspection documents, noting how they consistently marginalize certain public
voices that describe the mine accident. Sauer concludes that the conventions of the technical report genre—and by implication the wider community of technical, textual discourse—privilege "objective language and scientific format," to the exclusion and detriment of the miners' widows (p. 67).

Ultimately, Sauer's research raises questions about the gatekeeping structures that assess particular forms of knowledge and their incorporation into communication conventions, as opposed to other knowledges that are diluted, devalued and omitted altogether. For example, comments from the nine women who testified in mining accident investigation hearings were essentially ignored. One woman referred to specific domestic incidents as indicators of the mines' increasing danger: She "measured the amount of rock dust in her wash cycles; her own domestic evidence represents truth for her" (p. 74). However, because these women called upon their personal experiences rather than upon a formal education or specialized training to assess the mining situation, their testimony was accorded little credit by the officials running the hearing. Sauer further argues, "By all standards of technical writing, the discourse these women speak is inarticulate, unstructured, and unobjective, but ... they speak the truth" (p. 79). Sauer's research is an important description of the process by which certain knowledges—and with them, certain implied values—do not possess enough currency to invade dominant communication conventions.

Other voices in professional communication scholarship agree that communication is an instrument of power. Brenda Orbell (1995), for instance, sees professional writing as inseparable from ethical considerations, and believes that by the very act of writing, a
professional communicator has made a decision to challenge or enable the status quo of his/her writing context. Mary Jo Reiff (1996), meanwhile, refers to Mathes and Stevenson’s (1976) and Locker’s (1992) discussions about audience in professional communication as opportunities for surfacing the values that are privileged in Western writing (p. 420). And Lisa Tyler’s (1997) article, “Liability Means Never Being Able to Say You’re Sorry,” argues how crisis situations most often are weathered by corporations that use professional communication to suggest a socially acceptable set of values and morals. When the communication suggests a clear “understanding of the uses and consequences of … reactive strategies [during a crisis],” consumers in turn tend to remain supportive of the organization (p. 67). Large-scale companies, Tyler argues, thus ensure that their professional communication is successful by striking a balance between their “internal social context” and the external pressure to be morally accountable for their actions.

Sauer, Tyler and other theorists have articulated how organizations gauge audience, purpose and context to develop “acceptable” professional communication, while simultaneously using these rhetorical strategies to bolster their profits. Such studies have helped me to understand how industrial agri-businesses participate in the formalized, replicable conventions of traditional Western professional communication. After all, it is the seeming “normalcy” of the organizational values being communicated that makes these businesses so commercially successful (e.g., Myer Farms’ references to “red-blooded American” nationalism in Applebee’s commercials to hawk their Angus beef); in turn, their success ensures the cultural and monetary power to perpetuate their value systems.
When the Beginning Farmer Center revised its mission from “[addressing] the critical issue of future caretakers of farmland” to “leveraging the advantage,” it adopted an approach in its professional communication that honors both its smaller-scale clients’ discourse and the power changes that are rending this discourse increasingly obsolete. The Center’s initial attempts to negotiate between each client’s preferred communicative style can be seen in a brochure published soon after its philosophical shift. Rather than employing fear tactics to scare its audience into utilizing its programs, the BFC’s document simply reviews the factors that make its programs so necessary: “We have [fewer] than 100,000 farms, 40 percent [less] than a decade ago” one brochure claims. This informative tone masks the persuasion that subtly runs underneath the declarative statements and statistics—a smart farmer should take advantage of the BFC’s services before it’s too late.

From the perspective of its industrial clients, such restraint in the BFC’s communication practices might seem unwarranted, but a conservative negotiation between its audiences’ differing rhetorical needs is supported by scholarship in professional communication. A study by Kathryn Riley (1988), for instance, suggests that a mismatch between a document’s implied purpose and its use of traditional generic conventions can lead to negative reactions; if an audience has learned to associate a genre with one particular purpose, it can become highly resistant if the genre’s conventions then are used to promote a different purpose. In 1998, for example, the BFC decided to abandon its hard-copy
brochures in favor of a Web site that promoted its upcoming events—a decision that most of its small-scale clients rejected (see Whitaker, 1998). Having learned from this experience, the BFC reverted to its original hard-copy documents and continues to use an informational tone in them.

For the purposes of this dissertation, three specific documents of coordination produced by the Beginning Farmer Center will be selected as the primary data under research. Focusing on these issues means looking at the Beginning Farmer Center’s small-scale and industrial contexts, audiences, and purposes, and how these three components interact and catalyze into “documents of coordination”—powerful in their capacity to mediate among such conflicting agricultural interests. When I entered this environment both as researcher and employee, then, I needed to bear several issues in mind to better understand the role each client, industrial or small-scale, and the power of its value system play in the BFC’s professional communication.

**Comparison of Rhetorical Situations**

Given that the BFC as a communication context has changed over time, it was important to compare the documents produced before the mission change to those produced afterwards (i.e., the documents of coordination). This comparison helped to clarify the specific factors in pre- and post- rhetorical situations and how those factors influenced the construction of each document.
Factors in Rhetorical Changes

These factors also influenced the success of each document as it was consumed by the BFC's various audiences. Furthermore, the reading response of each audience itself was shaped by particular factors that required my scrutiny, as well as the ephemeral moment when the composite of these factors—those of the document’s rhetorical situation and of the audiences’—meet.

These issues have in turn generated the following research questions:

- As professional communications, how do documents of coordination reify or challenge the audiences’ value systems?
- How do documents of coordination perpetuate or resist power structures that are embedded in professional communication?
- How do the BFC’s documents of coordination function as rhetorical tools?

FORECAST OF DISSERTATION

The organizational structure of this dissertation has been arranged to best display the answers to my research questions:

- Chapter 2: Method and Methodology. A discussion of cultural studies methodology and the methods of articulation and assemblaging, including their application to the research in this dissertation.
- Chapter 3: Initial BFC Documents of Coordination. A rhetorical analysis of the BFC’s first attempts at documents of coordination.
• Chapter 4: Academic Documents of Coordination. A rhetorical analysis of a BFC document of coordination that mediates among farming and academic audiences.

• Chapter 5: Textually Refereeing Farm Succession. A rhetorical analysis of a BFC document of coordination, aimed at audiences in conflict over the issue of farm succession.

• Chapter 6: In Conclusion. Final comments on the implications that the concept of documents of coordination holds for the professional communication field.
CHAPTER 2: "WITH A FULL HEART": LOCATING THE RESEARCH AND THE RESEARCHER
INTRODUCTION

I grew up in the fertile world of story-telling, filled with flamboyance, flirting, futility, and fear. My work ... is a result of my imagination dancing a kind of psycho-spiritual tango with my own history (Rebecca Wells).

The documents of coordination examined in this dissertation include

- a tri-fold brochure and one-page flyer that introduce the Beginning Farmer Center to new audiences;
- a report designed to influence farm legislation at the state and federal level; and
- a research report that in format resembles other Extension reports.

I have selected these three documents from the Beginning Farmer Center’s (BFC) publications primarily because 1) each document targets more than one audience, 2) each document’s audiences hold conflicting ideologies and interests, and 3) each document represents a different time period in the BFC’s professional communication history. The final three chapters of this dissertation are devoted to rhetorical analyses of the documents, including 1) a cultural studies articulation of the major influences at work in each document’s rhetorical situation, 2) comparisons of the rhetorical situations as they occur in the BFC’s timeline, and 3) a discussion of how the comparisons bear upon the idea of documents of coordination as a viable concept in the professional communication field. Before the analyses are presented, though, it is necessary to explain the method, cultural studies, and methodology, articulation, that I have used to rhetorically analyze my data.
During the course of two years' research, I not only have been introduced to the qualitative method/ologies embraced by the professional communication field but have had several opportunities to apply these methods to my specific research interests. This experience has helped me determine that my observations of the BFC's communication should be guided by what Taylor and Bogdan (1998) term the "constant comparative method," whereby data is coded and scrutinized for themes that reappear over the course of time. Wanda Orlikowski, a qualitative researcher in professional communication, explains the benefits of this approach: "Such an iterative analysis of data and themes allows the emergence of a conceptual framework that reflects the grounded experiences and interpretations of the actors in their context" (1996, p. 27).

A qualitative approach is appropriate for such a complicated issue as agricultural communication—rural, institutional or otherwise—because the data (especially narratives) are complicated, ever-changing, and highly contextual, and do not easily fit into a more "universal," quantitative framework. As communication scholars Christine Kelly and Michelle Zak (1999) explain, "[None of] the very basic elements of the story ... can be omitted without causing a change in its structure. We could [liken] this process to coding in grounded research where themes are uncovered" (p. 307). In other words, a qualitative researcher must work to understand how the research context makes the data, and ultimately
his/her conclusions, unique from those of other contexts.

With this in mind, I devote the rest of this chapter to justifying my choice of qualitative method and methodology, cultural studies, that is used in this dissertation. However, before my particular use of cultural studies is described, it should be explained that this dissertation's references to method and methodology stem from the argument that “a researcher’s commitments to specific forms of social action shape theoretical and philosophical commitments” (Herndl and Nahrwold, cited in Faber, 2002, p. 11). Because my personal behaviors are attempts at recognizing and honoring each person as a member of a culture, my strong belief in cultural constructionism accordingly is reified in my value system, politics and philosophies. As such, in this dissertation I understand cultural studies as not just a research behavior (i.e., method) but a philosophy toward the research which undergirds the behavior (i.e., methodology).

CULTURAL STUDIES: FITTING METHODOLOGY WITH THE DATA

The rhetorical situation of the Beginning Farmer Center’s professional communication, made contentious by its clients’ conflicting value systems and struggles for power, can be understood best in cultural terms. In this dissertation, “culture is not usefully regarded as a substance but is better regarded as a dimension of phenomena, a dimension that attends to situated and embodied difference” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 13). In this sense, both professional communication and agriculture can be considered cultures, in that they privilege a distinguishable value system and actively perpetuate these values through their work. Given
this assumption, this dissertation argues that the BFC's documents of coordination are the result of the power, resource and ideology differences between its small-scale and its industrialized audiences.

By seeing documents of coordination as cultural artifacts, I am choosing by default both my research method and the methodology that guides it. A cultural studies approach to the audiences/purposes/contexts that shape the BFC's rhetorical situatedness will enable me to name the numerous ideological and class differences that dominate in each rhetorical situation and the process by which these differences inform the BFC's communication decisions.

**Cultural Studies and Interdisciplinarity**

My research approach is an attempt to synthesize what historically have been artificially distanced epistemologies: The humanistic and the scientific. Even the pre-proposal for an interdisciplinary Center on Nature, Culture and Place at Iowa State University—a school renowned for its scientific focus—endorses such efforts at synthesis with its claim that “one of the most rapidly growing interdisciplinary fields [Nature, Culture, and Place] in the last twenty years across campuses ... [refuses] to separate the study of natural science and culture from its humanistic roots” (St. Germain, 2001, p.1).

Any researcher who desires such a synthesis of historically conflicting epistemologies needs a cross-disciplinary methodology. Cultural studies, which built itself largely by sampling and fusing theories and methods from other disciplines, is just such a methodology.
Many scholars, such as regionalist Cheryl Herr, even believe that cultural studies methodology and methods are the best for showcasing an interdisciplinary research focus. While Herr's work cites three primary reasons for this belief, it is her discussion of assemblages that pertains to this dissertation's synthesis of science, professional communication, agriculture, regionalism and even creative writing. An assemblage refers to a thematic connection across disciplinary boundaries (the author likens this process to "forced symmetry" in architectural design); Herr's work in Irish and Iowan agriculture, for instance, surfaces the similarities in trends across literature, film, agriculture legislation, and geographic history. As Herr explains, "in the case of [a] cultural studies [approach], forcing connection and probing similarities that appear accidental can become a creative, functional investigative tool" (p. 8). Furthermore, by using a cultural studies approach to examine the "interspace" between these assembled themes, "those arenas [become] thick with possibilities for manipulating absence and presence toward the end of producing thresholds from one zone to another, particularly from the industrially reified back to the nurturing and traditional" (pp. 7-8).

In other words, understanding how the boundaries that distinguish and distance disciplines are constructed and maintained is an important aspect of a cultural study, for boundaries cannot be challenged or even exploded until the researcher first recognizes them. Because the tension among disciplinary boundaries is a potential space for new revelations, a methodology that draws upon seemingly disparate disciplines, rather than adheres to the false binary of humanist-versus-scientific, is helpful for a multi-focused study such as mine; the
tensions between the emotions of rural story-telling and the pragmatism of organizational narratives (as described in Chapter 1) suggest revelations that challenge binary thinking.

**Cultural Studies and Data Types**

Using a cultural studies approach to understand these cross-disciplinary assemblages also makes the most of the data availed by agricultural communication research. Specifically, one of the most applicable tenets of cultural studies is its belief that credible evidence is not limited to numbers and replicated testing; instead, evidence can present itself to the researcher in any form at any time: “Cultural studies fill[s] in the jigsaw puzzle created by rationalization in order to discern an explanatory design larger than the parts of which it is composed” (pp. 27-8). Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987), also scholars of assemblages and interspaces, put it this way: “Assemblages are *passional*, they are compositions of desire.... The rationality, the efficiency, of an assemblage does not exist without the passions the assemblage brings into play, without the desire[s] that constitute it as much as it constitutes them” (cited in Herr, 1996, p. 80, my emphasis). Recognizing and thinking about more than just the logic or “rationality” of a phenomenon allows one a richer appreciation of that phenomenon; similarly, by looking at more data formats than the strictly quantitative, cultural studies paints a richer picture.

Most importantly, the cultural studies approach valorizes data that is not just overlooked but actually *discounted* by other methods, such as that used by agricultural economists Wesley Peterson, Bruce Dickson and J. M. Bowker. In their 1989 study, these
scholars attempt to quantify the cultural impact of family farms on larger American society and find the task impossible; they therefore conclude that no evidence exists "that [family farms] contribute importantly to U.S. society" and that saving them is unnecessary (p. 317).

In response to Peterson et al.'s reductionist methods, anthropologist Sonya Salamon (1989) argues that a complicated issue such as survival of the family farm cannot be understood by numbers alone: "Subtle trends in agricultural structure ... are overlooked or underestimated by limiting theorizing to census data, or by taking the purely market argument to its logical extreme" (p. 345). Then, for the sake of argument, Salamon further refutes the economists with a more holistic approach, by connecting economic statistics (farmers' "[participation] in the farm land market") to qualitative data (each farmer's dominant ethnic values) (p. 352).

Because a cultural studies approach recognizes that data is not exclusively numerical, it is a more appropriate method for documenting the both "rational" and "passional" natures of agricultural communication.

Cultural studies' lack of discrimination among data types is due to the field's "emic" nature. Despite Peterson, Dickson and Bowker's simplistic study, they do offer a helpful definition of *emic*, in that cultural studies seeks an "insider's view" of a culture. It is based on the notion that the units of conceptualization ... should not be imposed by the outsider; instead, they must be discovered or drawn from the culture bearers themselves... The test of the adequacy of any emic study is therefore whether or not the peoples studied find the "units" so discovered to be meaningful and correct. (1989, p. 302)

Osha Gray Davidson's *Broken Heartland: The Rise of the Rural Ghetto* (1996) provides an example of such emic data. His work on Iowa farming avoids omniscient researcher
paraphrasing and instead recounts farmers’ stories in their own words:

There is bad blood between the Bolins and the bank.... When [Kathy Bolin] showed up at the bank office, the loan officer walked up to her and calmly stated, “I don’t have to rent to you. You people have been nothing but a pain in the butt."

“He could have told me no over the phone,” says Kathy, her voice going flat again with suppressed anger. “He called me in there just so he could humiliate me.” (p. 15)

Only later in the study does Davidson himself enter the narrative, calling upon the participants’ stories to demonstrate how the hard times in agriculture can be traced to a larger historical trend: “The great American struggle between the consolidation of power and great wealth for the few and a distribution of these commodities among the many ... began even as the country itself was being founded” (pp. 21-2). As a result of his emic approach, Davidson is able to invoke his study participants’ own words when drawing a larger conclusion about his research.

Therefore, because of cultural studies’ interdisciplinarity and valorization of many data types, I am convinced that a cultural studies is the most appropriate approach for a dissertation on agricultural communication. The rest of this chapter will explain

• articulation, the particular cultural studies research method used for this study, and
• the cultural studies methodology that undergirds articulation, including the specific places where this method dovetails with the issue of agricultural communication.

ARTICULATION: FITTING METHOD WITH THE DATA

When assuming a cultural studies lens, articulation is a helpful investigative strategy because it emphasizes the many complex contextual forces that construct and are exercised by
a cultural practice such as professional communication. Cultural studies theorist Lawrence Grossberg (1994) even believes that it is the articulation approach to context that lends an academic advantage to cultural studies criticism: "What distinguishes [this discipline] is its radical contextualism. In fact, cultural studies, in its theoretical practice, might be described as a theory of contexts, or, in its political practice, as the practice of making contexts" (p. 5).

Articulation is the act of 1) naming the most influential cultural forces, or governing structures, that surface during a research study, and 2) describing the relationship(s) among them. These structures can include state, civil, economic, sexual, gender, racial, class, national, ethnic, age and other cultural forces (Grossberg, 1997, p. 223).

Granted, ethnography in general acknowledges the importance of a phenomenon's context; however, it is articulation's "radical contextualism" that distinguishes cultural studies from other ethnographic approaches. Unlike the Althusserian view that a social structure is composed of a deterministic base, articulation is based on the assumption that governing structures and their relationships are never predictable in their manifestation, interaction or results. Instead, governing structures can be named only as they exist at a particular moment in time. In other words, articulation is an ephemeral linking of a situation's various governing structures; similar to Cheryl Herr's assemblages, articulation makes apparent the places where structures meet and how these connections in turn affect the structures, while denying any implication that these connections can be anticipated or correlative—what cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall calls "no necessary correspondence" among the structures (cited in Grossberg, 1987, p. 91). Grossberg explains it this way: "'Articulation' refers to the
complex set of historical practices by which we struggle to produce identity or structural unity out of, on top of, complexity, difference, contradiction. It signals the absence of guarantees (1996, p. 154). The emphasis on these structures’ fluidity is productive for a research study because there are always new structures and connections to be explored.

Articulating the meeting place among such fluid, governing structures is productive in another way, in that the structures are not just considered a mere part of a context; instead articulation explicates how these structures act as both the context itself and the process by which the context is continually rewritten. A researcher takes on the challenge of understanding this symbiotic relationship between connection and context by describing the relationship’s trajectory (how particular discourses and practices are brought into an organized relationship at particular historical moments.) The result is a view of the research situation that could be likened to the composition of a spider web: the web’s structure is the source of its own strength, and the connections of its threads are unique to that web.

In addition to these general benefits, two facets of articulation method particularly “fit” the issue of agricultural communication cultures: 1) the insistence that governing structures’ power relations be examined and 2) the researcher’s obligation to acknowledge her location in the study.

**Structures, Power, and Method**

Articulation offers a richer understanding of culture and power than do other disciplinary methods. Granted, methods from other critical approaches (particularly feminist
and postcolonial) have drawn attention to power, but these approaches' understandings of power become significantly less monolithic and more complex when they are imported into a cultural studies framework and explored via articulation. This more complicated perspective results from two major influences in the cultural studies field. First, as Grossberg (1994) explains, cultural studies did not originate from within a theoretically classless academic system; as a field of inquiry it began to develop during community educational workshops for working-class students. This field then was further enhanced by the theories resulting from studies at England’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, which focused on the ways in which power structures marginalize selected groups of people and on the strategies that can help to empower these groups’ identities in larger society.

Second, cultural studies’ focus on power issues results from the field’s “raids” upon other disciplines—by first culling important theories and then complicating them by focusing on how the “raided” research has understood power. As Hall explains, cultural studies’ process of surfacing power issues in other disciplines occurs because “new theories are not generated without ‘taking on board the baggage that the concepts are already carrying from older meanings’ ... without excavating and addressing the traces of older meanings as untenable” (cited in Drew, 1988, p. 172).

It is in cultural studies’ valorizing and/or challenging of a study’s “take” on power (or lack thereof) where its methods, such as articulation, have proven especially valuable. With articulation’s emphasis on governing structures at work in a particular research situation, power by default is not just a component of the research situation, but an expected and
insisted upon component. Because “power is not an abstract concept, nor a reified set of presupposed structures, nor a universal process replicated over and over again, nor a subjective experience,” its manifestation in each individual research situation is unique and therefore needs specific attention (Grossberg, 1987, p. 95). For instance, in a study of farm equipment operator’s manuals that I conducted in 1999, I articulated how class conflict was a governing structure in the two cultures (agrarian and technical writing) linked to the manuals’ production; the socio-economic differences between the “white-collar, academic work” of science and the “mechanics who get their hands dirty” were especially evident in each culture’s perception of technology (Winsor, 1998, p. 285). In turn, these class-informed perceptions connected with and fed into each culture’s respective value system and informed its work—whether writing a manual or running a tractor.

But now, in 2003, the governing structures and their respective power would probably look very different and need rearticulation, especially given the recent lawsuit castigating Vermeer farm equipment and operator’s manuals. Having lost his arm in a baling accident, a farmer sued Vermeer (the designer and manufacturer of the hay baler), only to discover that the company knew of a high accident rate with that particular baler model and did nothing about it. Instead, Vermeer stood by the usability of its hay baler operator’s manual, claiming that the farmer’s use of the manual, not the equipment, was responsible for his tragedy (“CBS Evening News,” 22 March 2002). Given this data, if I were conducting a cultural study of operator’s manuals now, I would venture that the current governing structures would include the recent trend in implicating technical writers in litigation against
manufacturers, coupled with the rising popular call for personal responsibility (the slogan, "Guns don't kill people; people with guns kill people," comes to mind).

Consequently, when invoking articulation in this dissertation, I must bear in mind the connections among the dominating cultural structures in each document of coordination's rhetorical situation; I must not merely mention power but name and explore it outright, resulting in a more complicated description of how it percolates among economic, gender, class, racial and other structures in the agricultural industry. These are challenging goals, because cultural studies methodology believes in "no necessary correspondence" among such structures and their meeting places.

One strategy for articulating governing structures and their relationships within/between agrarian and professional communication may lie in their respective use of a shared cultural artifact: narrative. In "The Question of Cultural Identity" (1992), Hall shows the potential of narrative by casting it as a solution to a contemporary cultural problem—the modern decentering of human identity. While at one time "class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, and nationality ... gave us firm locations as social individuals," Hall argues that postmodernism and globalism have helped to fragment these self-understandings (p. 275). He then looks to narrative to understand humanity's response to this global trend, including our imagination of "safe narratives" to re-establish personal identity and boundaries and to insulate ourselves. Hall goes on to explore the nature of safe narratives and their comparison to community, national, and other larger-scale narratives and their cultural roles.

Similarly, as shown in Chapter 1, narrative can be invoked to understand rural agrarian
and traditional professional communication cultures. Several governing structures—scientific predictability and control, rural narrative fluidity, etc.—become apparent in each culture’s use of narrative as a cultural artifact, because at this moment they wield the most influence in the worlds of small-scale and industrialized farm communication. The meeting place among these structures looks like a “culture clash,” into which documents of coordination are located (Figure 2.1):

![Figure 2.1: Governing structures into which documents of coordination are interpolated](image)

If, as Grossberg (1996) claims, “The truth of a theory can only be defined by its ability to intervene into, to give us a different and perhaps better ability to come to grips with, the relations that constitute its context,” then the documents of coordination’s governing structures articulated in this dissertation should help us to better understand how these documents impact the rural and industrial worlds of professional communication (p. 166).
**Reflexivity and Agriculture**

In addition to articulation's approach to power and governing structures, its demand for researcher reflexivity also especially "fits" with the issue of agricultural communication. Specifically, the researcher's own implication in the study is an important and appropriate issue, given the at times highly personal nature of (rural) agricultural communication. To ignore the human element would be a tacit discounting of the personal in this study and of rural communication in general.

As such, when the use of articulation (and its insistence on researcher reflexivity) is layered on top of a cultural studies approach to agricultural communication (and its rich history of rural and industrial narratives), it should not be surprising that stories are an important component of this dissertation. Organizational communication scholar Brenton Faber (2002), citing Van Maanen, asserts that the stories which surface during the course of a study should be considered "startling, striking, active tales of research as discovery, shock, and expression" (p. 9). When stories are situated against each other (as with my uncle's and the technical writers' in Chapter 1), they can be effective commentaries about the agricultural communication focus, the cultural studies methodology, or, as with the following stories, the researcher's reflexive understanding of who she is within the study. As Catherine Sheldrick Ross (1985) states, "When for members of a particular cultural group the sense of reality changes, then the fictions that they tell themselves must change as well" (cited in Brown and St. Clair, 2002, p. 25). During the time of this study, the stories I found myself remembering represent the governing structures most at work in my role as researcher, most notably my
family’s influence over my views about farming.

**Saturday, August 11, 2001**

I have only been in my new apartment for a week, but plan to stay here until my dissertation is finished. No more moving until I’m done with Iowa State—I’ve vowed so to anyone who’ll listen. Here, I imagine, is where I will write, procrastinate, analyze data, and drive myself crazy.

Mom sails in; we have dinner plans. “How long will it take you to get ready?” she asks.

“I am ready.”

“Oh.” Mom shoots me a once-over. “You wear that outfit in public?”

After changing my clothes, I walk into my living room to see my mother pulling items out of a Wal-Mart sack: New lace curtains for my south window, a lace panel for my west window, and for the bathroom, an entire *ensemble* of soap dispenser, shower curtain rings, rug and gingham window flounce.

I stare at her. She has never attempted to “nicen up” any of my previous six apartments in Ames. “Mom,” I protest. “You spent a lot of money on this. Are you sure? Can I pay you back?”

“No, no, I wanted to help you fix things up, now that you’re in a decent place,” she says. She proceeds to hang the lace curtains and mathematically match the corners to one another.

I follow her dumbly from the now lacy living room to the bedroom, where she
hangs bright yellow curtains. "Oh, yes, Adrienne," she says. "These are so much
crazier than those shades."

She moves into the bathroom and grins at me for a moment. "I saw this
and couldn't resist," she warns me. She unfurls a rug adorned with a farm scene.
A doe-eyed cow gazes up at me. My cat immediately pounces on the rug and
attacks the cow, gouging its eyes with razor-sharp claws.

"Isn't the face on that cow so cute?" Mom says. "And look," she adds,
yanking more things from the plastic sack. "They have a whole collection like that."
We put up shower curtain rings shaped like pigs, chickens, barns and cows. We
fill a silo-shaped soap dispenser with liquid Soft-Soap. We hang the green,
checked gingham window flounce, which she has made herself. But Mom hates
to sew.

"This is amazing," I attempt. At the moment I am too stunned to expound on
the evils of Wal-Mart, one of my favorite rants.

My mother adjusts the flounce. "Well," she explains. "Since you're doing
your dissertation on farming, you know, I thought this might give you some
inspiration." This from a woman who read my first chapter and replied solely with,
"Well, that's a lot of talking."
I look at the effect of this interior redesign. Plastic pigs and chickens stare at one another across my bathroom. My cat writhes on the cow rug. Sunlight filters through the gingham.

This is the look, I suddenly realize, of my family's approval. It was a strange feeling.

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REFLEXIVITY: MAKING THE RESEARCH PERSONAL

"Let me tell you where I'm coming from . . ."—so begins many a discussion in contemporary U.S. culture. Pressed by an almost compulsive desire to situate ourselves within a definite matrix of reference points ..., we seem to reject adamantly the idea of a universal human subject.... [F]or from being a simple turn of phrase, it demarcates a whole structure of thinking ("Book Description").

Given the import of my farm upbringing and my family's approval, it makes sense that the personal nature of researcher reflexivity would be a significant component of my method. For example, I can identify with Susannah Lessard's exploration of geography and "belongingness" in her memoir, The Architect of Desire (1997), because it is so strongly reminiscent of the intensely personal relationship between farmers and their land: "When family love is displaced onto land, every change that happens there has meaning.... When the deflection of love is also a deflection of pain, the gradual decomposition of such a place can be excruciating, a kind of lifelong torture, and yet, at the same time, a hypnotic, unfolding story."

The Architect of Desire was written in an attempt to understand Lessard's family's history and its tangled relationship to the family homestead and architecture (Lessard is the great-granddaughter of Stanford White, a celebrated Beaux-Arts architect during turn-of-the-century
New York).

Like the reference to author Lucy Maud Montgomery in Chapter 1, the reference to Lessard here demonstrates a larger research issue, namely, the reliability of qualitative methods when researching a phenomenon. Lessard’s deconstruction of the strained silences and fuzzy memories surrounding her great-grandfather’s murder and other family skeletons all are recounted in a (supposedly) forthright tone. Nothing seems to be glossed over (whether it be incest, philandering, insanity, or abuse) as Lessard travels to White’s most famed buildings, examines photographs and parses through family documents and stories. However, as cultural studies theorist Richard Johnson (1986) warns, no researcher should assume that qualitative methods, including ethnography, can exactly recreate the situation being observed:

Secondary analysis and re-presentation must always be problematic or intrusive if “spontaneous” cultural forms are seen as a completed or necessary form of social knowledge. The only legitimate practice, in this framework, is to represent an unmediated chunk of authentic life experience itself, in something like its own terms. (p. 71)

In other words, the traditionally positivist assumption that data can be represented transparently has come under fire by qualitative researchers, especially cultural studies theorists. One response to this perceived problem is for the researcher to acknowledge his/her own position in the study, rendering him/herself every bit as subjective as the observed. Noted qualitative theorist Yvonna Lincoln (1995) supports such researcher reflexivity by arguing that it “clearly brings the inquirer and those whose lives are being questioned into the kinds of communal contact that are not possible in more traditional inquiry” (p. 278). Acknowledging the implications of such “communal contact” is an ethical
responsibility on the researcher's part. Lincoln explains how strategies unique to qualitative research, such as reflexivity, coupled with "interpretive social science in general[,] bring about the collapse of the distinctions between standards, rigor, and quality criteria [on the one hand], and the formerly separate consideration of research ethics [on the other]" (p. 286).

A researcher's reflexivity also is important because it authenticates his/her observations and experiences. Self-awareness of his/her unique perspective, complete with its biases and blinders, can assist in a fuller and more appropriate description of the research situation—a qualitative "triangulation," as it were. As qualitative scholars Margot Ely, Ruth Vinz, Maryann Downing, and Margaret Anzul (1997) argue, the structures and values surfaced during reflexivity are important "tools ... to tune the instrument of the Self in particular ways," and the researcher should use these tools for the benefit of a qualitative inquiry (p. 335). And as behavioral scientists Frank C. Richardson, Anthony Rogers, and Jennifer McCarroll (1998) elaborate,

The modern notion of the self tries to disengage us from cultural narratives in order to advance human autonomy and undermine traditionalism and arbitrary authority. The postmodern, decentered view of human agency also tries to distance us from narrative forms as something we impose on experience and events in an entirely arbitrary manner (Foucault, 1980). But there is no need to view narrative modes of self-understanding as inherently confining or arbitrary. (p. 496)

Given the cultural influences endemic in such "narrative modes of self-understanding," it makes sense that articulation, as a cultural studies method, would include reflexivity as part of its technique; certainly there are benefits to such an effort. During the course of an emic study, for instance, there is an advantage to appearing like a "native," as I have been when interviewing and observing farm families. As Taylor and Bogdan (1998) have discussed, a
bartering system between researcher and informants can be a helpful tool in discovering information without violating the privacy or rights of the participants under scrutiny (p. 59). There is a second benefit of having such rapport with my informants. Ely et al. (1997) state that a scholar’s reflexive musings on both “telling moments” (p. 32)—the careful process of selecting the most powerful data to present the research situation and people involved—and his/her “angles of repose” (p. 53) are part of the emergent character of qualitative theory. A relaxed research participant is more likely to share and reveal important data than one who is suspicious of or otherwise resistant to the researcher.

Along with these benefits, there are of course drawbacks. Simply put, it is difficult for me to critique my own preconceived notions and acknowledge their presence in my research. Torn between my responsibilities as a person from a rural background and my responsibilities as a researcher, I seem to be representative of “a key but often silenced issue in cultural studies—the tension between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’.... Neither casting aspersions nor enacting a bogus beneficence appears to be a satisfactory response when theoretical debate comes down to cases” (Herr, 1996, p. 1). Although Ely et al. (1997) believe that “one of the most fascinating—and sometimes frightening—aspects of qualitative research is its emergent nature” (p. 175) and other ethnographic researchers (e.g., Steven Taylor and Robert Bogdan [1998], David Jacobson [1991], Lincoln [1995]) cast their work within this larger theoretical discussion of qualitative scholarship’s “emergent nature,” their discussion is always paired with the understanding that such emergence renders each researcher’s experience unique and exciting—a claim that is difficult for me to believe because
I want to bring the answers with me whenever I deal with the BFC.

Because it chronicles my own contradictory roles, this dissertation is vulnerable to parallel contradictions. In particular, as a professional communication document my writing could become unacceptable because of an overserious tenor and defensiveness—emotions that drive the Midwestern sense of self but scholastically are discouraged and discounted. There also is the danger of assuming the role of an omniscient savior. The researcher’s positioning as a subject within the context being studied allows for a sense of agency, and with it the option of intervention. Slack (1996) explains that “the theory and method of articulation as practice highlights ... [the fact that] we engage the concrete in order to change it” (p. 114). A scholar’s act of critiquing his/her position, then, is not merely a theoretical issue; it is a significant component of the practice of research, especially how a researcher observes a study’s context, participants and data and reacts to the findings. I must not allow my research agenda to transform into a soapbox lecture on the farm crisis.

Given the benefits and the dangers of researcher reflexivity, I have attempted to lay out exactly how my point of view has been constructed. The following subsection describes the three major forces in my personal and professional life and the geo-political context in which these forces have developed.

The Farm Kid

My protective attitude toward farming is generated partly by the nostalgic sentimentality that Carol Bly (1992) rightly deems superficial and worthless, and partly by a
genuine anger at what is happening to family farms. Having watched my grandfather, uncles, and now my brother work incessantly to scratch out a living, it seems flatly unfair that their loyalty and dedication have been fruitless. My grandfather is dead after decades of broken health. Physically, my uncles are headed in the same direction. My brother alternates between false hope and depression. None of them are financially secure. I was shocked to hear my uncle Pat say, “If I could get a million for this place, I’d sell it tomorrow.” By the time his bills were settled, he’d have no debt, but he’d have no home and no money, either.

“Gone, gone, gone is the inevitable refrain of any writer who looks beyond the walls of bedroom or boardroom to the land” (Sanders, 1995, p. 47)—such is the influence that my former “farm kid” identity wields over my research perspective, and it’s a profound one. As I wrote in a rhetorical analysis of a research study I conducted in 1999,

Why do I care about a bunch of farmers? Because a bunch of farmers raised me. Because one of them suffered a terrible accident with a hay baler. Because I saw my grandfather’s face when the cattle he loved were being auctioned off to strangers. And because I am fortunate enough to have the education and opportunity to surface agricultural values and power by discussing these issues in a public forum, whether in classrooms or in print.

But as Ely et al. warn, “most researchers ... are so caught up in the mood and emotions of their first observations or interviews that they find it difficult to step back to a more abstract level” (1997, p. 167). Or, as the BFC’s director asked me, “You’re not some starry-eyed, I’m-going-to-save-the-world type of person, are you?” Recognizing my personal involvement in agriculture may not be a sufficient bulwark against skewing my research findings; although my advocacy for farmers brought me to this study, my role as a scholar should dictate the research process. Throughout the study, I have had to critique every
observation and assess the lenses that most shape my conclusions—or, as I reassured the director, "I'm no missionary."

The Professional Communication Student

As for my second major identity as a scholar in professional communication, I must find a way to acknowledge other research studies and theories, but avoid merely replicating what they have already accomplished. Ely states that analytical processes "almost always lead to a change in the way the researcher sees the original research problem or questions"; however, I wonder if the powerful influence of previous scholarship in my discipline will make it difficult for me to formulate "new" ideas (p. 181). Such scholarship includes that by Sauer (1993, 1994a, 1994b), Jennifer Slack (1989), and James Paradis (1991), who have critiqued the role of professional communication in highly technical fields, especially its ability to tacitly reify values that may not always be in the best interests of the communication's target audience. Paradis's discussion in particular has been influential; his study of injuries caused by "power-actuated fastening devices" (stud guns) not only examines the forces at work in the practice of writing technical documents, but also connects a work culture's values and structures to the moment when they meet with other, possibly disparate, values and structures. Paradis' research and studies like it have received accolades in the professional communication field, which in turn reaffirms their influence over my own research perspective.

As powerful as this influence has been, it should be added that I have high regard for
the field of rhetoric and professional communication and attempt to do it justice in my own work. Ironically, it was my studies in this field that enabled me to voice my observations, because as a child my comments were often hushed with the admonition that I was being "overdramatic." Rhetoric taught me not only how to shape my observations into written form, but to forgive myself for having such observations in the first place—for being the "weird" one on a traditional farm, for being the "liberal" in a highly conservative family, for being "bookish" while everyone around me preferred to learn "the hard way." Rhetoric enlightened me that my perceptions weren't "wrong," they were just Other, and no apology was necessary for them. By invoking a cultural studies methodology, I'm able to synthesize these personal experiences with professional communication's generic conventions.

Women's Ways of Knowing and Narrative

A third important influence over my research lens is my gender role, including the comparatively little social credence given to my perceptions as a female and the parallels between these perceptions and those constructed by my farm experience. Many scholars, particularly those in women's studies, have revealed how knowledges and epistemologies that do not fall neatly into a scientific paradigm—replicable, controllable, predictable, quantifiable—are marginalized, not because they are intrinsically inferior but because they are overpowered. Professional communication scholar Mary Lay (1991) explains that a feminist approach—attending to and valuing otherwise marginalized knowledges—can highlight these "gaps or silences" of the "identity of [those voices that are] missing and the potential nature
of the [information] had the missing been included” (p. 352). Such “missing” knowledges, including experiential, do not fit cleanly into the quantitative categories and criteria that Westerners prefer when assessing, storing, and retrieving information. The fluidity of these knowledges blurs boundaries and makes categorization and verification difficult. The fact that methods for collecting such knowledge are nonconventional only further detracts from their perceived worth (R. Burnett, personal communication, September 13, 1999).

In terms of researcher reflexivity, it is doubly significant to me that this “woman’s way of knowing”—knowledge as experiential, narrative as ideologically constructive—strongly resembles the knowledge-building process of rural narrative. Lay, for example, understands “feminist theory” as comprising six primary features, three of which mirror the values embedded in rural, narrative knowledge: Valorizing experiential knowledge in discourse, giving voice to traditionally silenced/marginalized discourses, and recognizing new places where knowledge can be constructed (1991, pp. 350-3). Like farmers, women have been shown to privilege personal experience in their communication, an important indicator of their cultural and ideological influences (Kirsch and Ritchie, 1995, p. 8). And women’s studies scholars Mary Rubio and Elizabeth Waterson’s (1992) description of author L. M. Montgomery’s communication style could easily refer to that of small-scale farmers: “Montgomery lived in an imaginative world impelled by female modes of discourse.... She was always shaping, making over, making up, making do. Nothing is finished her mind; she is speaking ... out of a moment in process.... At every given moment of writing ... she presents a truth as she sees it at the moment” (pp. xxiii-xxiv).
Note the fluidity and unpredictability in the above description, similar to that of the narrative process in small farm contexts (not to mention articulation’s understanding of context as ephemeral). This process-oriented epistemology is how my personal gender role was shaped, invoking the same rural narrative that taught my brother how to use the front-loader on our farm. Each story’s implied audience, the audience’s active involvement in the story’s construction, and the mutual influence between the audience and the story’s structure (the tenets of rural narrative as described in Chapter 1) remained constant, whether the story involved my dubious teenage hairstyles or mechanical troubles with the bulk tank. Consequently, because the work of women’s studies scholars has suggested certain parallels among marginalized knowledges (in my case, female and agrarian), my interest in and dedication to this dissertation’s topic partially rises from the realization that mine is a doubly-ignored epistemology.

Ultimately, the use of researcher reflexivity reveals that I am situated as a farm kid, a graduate student, and a woman. An articulation of my self-perceived identity, then, might look like the following (Figure 2.2):
Note how all of these identities are subsumed within a strong awareness of my geographic location. To use cultural studies discourse, I believe that at this moment in time, the governing structure that dominates my multi-faceted identity is a strong Midwestern sensibility. The following section explains why my sense of place trumps even my identities as a farm kid, scholar, and woman, strong as they are.
crossed paths with George Hoover. I'm sure, somewhere underneath his already-
habitual drinking, there must have been something attractive about him—or else it
was the excitement of the forbidden. Either way, Cretia wound up pregnant. And
her parents, my sober, solemn, Methodist great great-grandparents, dragged their
only child up the farmhouse stairs and locked her in the bedroom until she
promised to marry drunken, landless George.

I don't know what the room looked like in 1908. I myself haven't been in it
for years, but I remember it as dark and gloomy, with a slanted roof and a single
south window. There is a huge, dark wardrobe, crammed full of family cast-offs,
and heavy curtains. The wallpaper is yellowed. I must have visited the room while
I was reading *Jane Eyre*, because I always associate Cretia's imprisonment with
Jane's—alone in the room, sensing her family's presence in the house, beating
her hands against the door and screaming. What details the official story omits, I
put in.

Cretia held out for awhile; my great-aunt Merlie was born only two months
after she finally married. George was mean and lazy and he lost a good portion of
the farm to gambling. He was a drunk and a wife- and child-beater and a
philanderer. My grandfather once commented that "a pine barrel was too good to
bury that sonofabitch in." When he was a young boy, Granddad once saved Cretia
from a beating by up-siding George across the head with a log from the woodpile.
She divorced George the moment her children were grown, sitting in the witness
stand and declaring him publicly to be "a perpetual drunk."

It's easy to recall the rest of Cretia's story, because here it suddenly
becomes rich with details. She loved new, fast cars. She always kept her hair beautifully styled. She married good-hearted Henry McGuire, who soon died. Eventually, she deteriorated into senility at a nursing home. Her demise lends her the tragic aura of a good person who suffered from bad things. With each detail, Cretia becomes more solidified in the family lore as a survivor, an ancestor to be proud of.

I have no idea what happened to George. He disappeared into one of history’s gaps, and no one seemed to miss him. His brief story is always told so tightly that there’s no room for details that would redeem him. He’s not even allowed to be a little sympathetic—the report that he cried at the “perpetual drunk” accusation is always relayed with contempt.

So I try to redeem George with the few details that I do know. Maybe I’m impelled by a latent messiah complex, or the story-teller’s desire to level the bar between characters. I suspect, though, that it’s probably just a general sense of the injustice of things, how each one of us is unwittingly interpolated into a complex web of social norms and family expectations. Always accompanying this injustice is my slowly dying, naïve belief that somehow I can retrospectively cut through the tangle and make things right.

And so, there’s George. He couldn’t have been a happy man. Alcoholism isn't an illness of the joyful. Although he would go for long stretches of sobriety and then fall off the wagon again, I imagine it more as an ambush by his demons than an intrinsic weakness of character. Although he tended to hide in Des Moines speakeasies during chore-time, I imagine it was the act of a man seeking
refuge from an unwanted farm and an unbidden family.

I imagine that both of my great-grandparents wore the look of dazed confusion that comes from being strong-armed into a life they never planned to have. What I just can't imagine, though, is the commonness of this story. This land is soaked with the histories and memories of people to whom free will was a dream.

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SUNDAY, JANUARY 27, 2002

My mother, aunt and uncle are standing in the dining room, rummaging through cabinet drawers and cardboard boxes. “Do you want this doily?” Mom asks me, holding up a heavily-embroidered piece of linen. The last time we circled like vultures and tore apart the farmhouse contents, Granddad had died, and there really wasn’t much to sort out. All I inherited from my grandfather was a flannel shirt and a smart mouth.

This time, we are sorting through Grandma’s stuff, because she’s just moved into a nursing home. It still feels like a death of sorts.

The sunlight hits Mom’s face and I notice her wrinkles. Deep lines race from her blue eyes and her silver hair glitters in the sun. She’s only fifty-five, but she’s aged more than both of her older siblings. I imagine that her appearance is the product of repressed emotions and blighted hopes, decades of them. In contrast, my aunt Rosemary looks less worn, perhaps due to her absurdly youthful hairstyle. Or maybe it’s because she’s funneled her own thwarted, Baby Boomer, pre-women’s lib disappointments into obsessive-compulsive disorder, an
effective weapon she frequently beats the rest of us with. Meanwhile, my uncle Pat sips a Pepsi and stares out the window, speaking only when we ask him a question. While the rest of his siblings grew up and left the farm, he essentially was guilt-tripped into staying on and making do.

I once joked that if my family had a coat-of-arms, it would bear the image of a person getting kicked in the ass.

Mom, Rosemary and Pat comprise the second phase in my grandmother's childbearing. Seven years separate the trio from their three older siblings, and the age difference yawns between the two groups in subtle and profound ways. Their sense of separateness, as in most cases, is the result of a tragedy—Rosemary's twin, Ross, was only a toddler when he drank some sulfuric acid and died painfully and lingeringly. The accident happened over half a century ago, but it might as well have been yesterday, because the scars will always be fresh. My grandparents, guilty, grieving and terrified that a similar horror could happen, guarded and spooked their three youngest children so effectively as to hobble them.

The official story of Ross's death, of course, goes like this: "The milk tester foolishly left a bottle of sulfuric acid in the milk house, and Ross found it and drank it. Six months later, he died." But just because the grief is unspoken doesn't ameliorate its effects, and today it is no coincidence that Mom, Rosemary and Pat are the ones who are lingering in this old farmhouse, sorting and organizing and hanging on tight.

Per Grandma's instructions, I now have inherited several embroidered
pillowcases and crocheted doilies, two crystal candlesticks, and a stemmed glass bowl. My mother is very excited about the bowl.

"It was Grandma's," she tells me.

"Which grandma?" I ask. In my family, references to "Grandma," "Grandma McGuire," and "Grandma Hildebrand" are tossed around casually, and it's up to the unfortunate listener to figure out which grandma, and on which side of the family.

Mom sighs at my lack of fealty. "Lucretia's. She inherited it from her mother."

I do some mental figuring. Originally, the bowl would have belonged to my great great-grandmother, Rose. It could easily be a century old.

Later, Mom holds the bowl and gazes at it. "I'm so glad you got this. I always loved this bowl."

Suddenly I am insecure about my ability to live up to the bowl. "Do you want it?" I ask.

"Oh, no, no. But I'm just glad that it stayed in our branch of the family. We can appreciate it."

What she means is that we deserve it, as opposed to her older siblings, who allegedly have had easier, happier lives. Mom believes that her three oldest brothers and sister grew up in a golden, post-war daisy field, with a chicken in every pot and a fat farm check in every mailbox. And it's true that my uncles Joe and Jerry and aunt Jeanette have led very different lives, richer and farther flung. I suspect, though, that their baggage is merely different, not lighter.
My mother and I spend an hour cleaning and arranging our plunder. I fill the bowl with potpourri and arrange a doily under it. They seem, at first glance, such benign, pretty objects. But I’m keeping all of my loot at my mother’s house, within the farm’s boundaries. If you want to inherit any heirlooms in my family, you must also inherit their ghosts, and I only have so much room in my apartment.

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A “Sense of Place”

We need to know where we are, so that we may dwell in our place with a full heart (Scott Russell Sanders).

A contributor to the Kind Spirits listserv recently commented on the idea of place and its role in contemporary society:

How interesting it is that we used to be tied to each other much more by *place*. You were friends with those around you because you didn't have any other options. Now, we are tied by ideas & interests because you can "be" anywhere & everywhere with a few clicks from the comfort of your own house. Not to mention that in our much more mobile society, few people are right where they were born -- with all the same neighboring families that have known each other for generations. (personal communication, April 4, 2002)

This contributor has explicated exactly why one’s “place” over time has devalued as a shaper of one’s identity. But in this discussion of researcher reflexivity, “sense of place” is a necessary component because 1) my self-identity nonetheless has been largely constructed from my physical locatedness, and 2) this dissertation’s use of cultural studies methodology and articulation method to synthesize various disciplines’ epistemologies, or “the particular intersection of nature and culture[, also] produces a sense of place” (St. Germain, p.1, 2001; my emphasis).
An increasing number of scholars across various disciplines increasingly recognize place as an important shaper of identity and define “place” in terms of physical, geographic locatedness. Michigan historian Fred Reedholm’s (Weekend, 2002) chronicle of the Lake Superior iron-ore mining region connects the mining culture to the physical iron itself, and to the miners’ proud recognition that this element has helped to build “America’s infrastructure.” And historian Vine Deloria (1995) and archaeologists Clark Erickson and William Balee (Mann, 2002) all have managed to upset scientific assumptions about ecology in their studies of Native Americans’ relationship to the environment. While Deloria looks to Indian narratives to reconstruct the geography of America before European contact, Erickson and Balee’s work questions the supposed “pristineness” of the pre-contact Americas and alleges that much of this naturally-occurring environment, such as the Amazon rain forest, was in fact a man-made cultural artifact of Indian settlements.

Whether the academy’s awareness of place as a formative cultural identity is claimed by sociology, community studies, anthropology or critical regionalism, the fact remains that place-as-identity must be acknowledged in a dissertation about agricultural communication, because the two issues are intertwined. Specifically, the kind of fluid narrative found in rural contexts is the same story-telling process that invokes residents’ sense of place in order to develop a community: “If sense of place sustains our sense of self, it also undergirds our sense of others…. Individual and collective memories can only exist by being anchored to places … The stability of place allows it to become the container of shared memories and experiences” (Sellery, p. 545, 2000). Via architecture, geo-physical landmarks and
boundaries, or other tangible markers, inhabitants' sense of place enables them not just to view their physical surroundings as aesthetic pleasures but to attach their group identity to these surroundings. For instance, Paula Whitman (2001) encourages her writing students to actively focus on settlements' architecture as a physical representation of cultural identity, a viewpoint that inspires many architects' design philosophies.

A community's sense of place enables residents to use their physical location to develop unique cultural boundaries as well. In other words, placedness not only focuses on a geographical location but also enables inhabitants to understand their physical surroundings as a psychological extension of their Otherness: "Places infect their people, coloring their speech, their attitudes, and their dreams," all primary markers of difference (Hine, cited in Steiner, p. 453, 2001). Deborah Keahey's compilation of North American prairie literature, for example, reveals prairie settlers' "creation of the social, psychological, and cultural relationships that people have to particular landscapes or physical spaces" (cited in Sellery, p. 545, 2000). And Christian Riegel et al.'s description of Dawson City, Alaska reveals how its gold rush fever-afflicted residents built on the site of a Han First Nation village. Because the female settlers viewed the city's physical history as a site of Indian "savagery," they worked to establish white "respectability" by using the addresses of fellow women to assess their social stance. Respectable women lived on certain streets, while those of alleged ill-repute inhabited alleyway tenements (p. 545).

Once a group of people has been influenced by sense of place to self-identify a community and cultural group, the tendency is to figuratively circle the wagons and fend off
the threat of outsiders. This is true for rural communities, where residents can remain suspicious of newcomers for years. And what appears at first glance to be paranoia actually possesses some merit. Books such as Robert Hine’s *The American West: An Interpretive History* “are streaked with the tragic failure of community and the remorseless rise of roving individualism rewarding those who ‘gouge and litter with impunity…. [What’s lost is] a sense of place, a love of the land—the quiet satisfaction from rippling wheat or quaking aspen or purpling desert hills.’” (cited in Steiner, p. 453, 2001). And in Salamon’s (2002) study of the growing pains faced by small Illinois towns, the residents’ “sense of place” markedly informed the degree of their resistance to outsiders. The residents of primarily agrarian towns worked to preserve a sense of community, tied this pride to their physical identity as a small town, and expected all newcomers to either adopt this ideology or get out. Meanwhile, residents of small towns that had been suburbanized into bedroom communities appeared to lack a sense of place; any community spirit they exhibited was tied exclusively to school activities. Salamon even refers to these suburbanites as “sojourners,” preoccupied with their careers and capital gains taxes and quick to move away.

**My Sense of Place: The “Culture of Silence”**

In terms of this dissertation, my identity-as-place especially is relevant to my role as author. Native Ohioan Scott Russell Sanders (1995) believes that the Midwest is an uncomfortable context for written expression: “Midwestern writers have not been so much lured elsewhere, I suspect, as driven out, by a combination of puritanical religion, utilitarian
economics, and anti-intellectualism” (p. 25). No other region in America prompts its writers to flee from their geographic origin, and no other region of American writers produces work that so obsesses about “home” and the land left behind. What, Sanders wonders, is so unacceptable about writing that drives these scribblers away?

Perhaps it’s because writing is the act of naming outright the conditions of our lives, the emotions that cut to the bone; the reality of naming sometimes can be too much, so it’s avoided altogether. This silence seems to surface as a leitmotif in many authors’ reminiscences. As Jeanne Jordan (1997) says while preparing for her family’s farm auction, “Like a lot of families facing a real crisis, we immediately stopped talking about it.... The thing about history is it's usually silent.... I think we were all afraid we were on the wrong side of history, that the time for a small farm like [ours] had passed.” And novelist L. M. Montgomery, a highly emotional artist unable to express herself in the stoicism of turn-of-the-century farm life, worried that she would be irrevocably quieted by her surroundings: “This life I am living is unfitting me for any other life. I am being compelled to shape myself into habits that will—or may—hold me prisoner when the necessity for them is removed. I shall, I fear, be unable to adapt myself then to any other existence” (cited in Rubio and Waterston, 1985, p. 305). The “culture of silence” is a powerful mechanism.

But in a world driven by Western post-modern civility, to acknowledge conditions of a rural life, and in particular farm life, would be to destroy it. Think about it—who in their right mind would hook chains to an unborn breech calf and yank it unmercifully out of the bleeding, bawling cow? What kind of person would think nothing of filling a bucket of water
and dropping unwanted newborn kittens in it? Take away the farm context, and such people become less than human, monsters. Any “decent” person would find such acts abhorrent. A. Manette Ansay’s *Vinegar Hill* (1999) includes such a brutal example: The farmer, needing more sons to help him work the land, stalks, ambushes and rapes his wife in the hopes of impregnating her. When twin sons are born, the farmer is away, and the wife’s mother kills and buries the babies rather than acquiescing to the farmer’s brutality. The farmer returns to find his wife and mother-in-law sitting at a table, pretending to him that the pregnancy never existed and acting surprised at his question, “You up already?”

Herr agrees that no halcyon, romantic story of farming should be relayed without also revealing its toll: “Responsibility is not a question of either/or but of both/and: at the very least, the family farmer’s willingness to buy into a lifestyle that privileges productivity at any cost” (1996, p. 151). The act of naming, then, as a sign of independent thought development and expression, can pose a threat to family farms’ very survival. The passing of a farm from one generation to the next occurs only if the successor uncritically accepts and embraces the conventional belief system, brutality and all. While stories concerning machinery and livestock abound, the more “monstrous” and “abhorrent” behaviors that are required to keep the farm going are hidden by an absolute silence.

The geographical context has helped in this struggle for self-control. “Menaced by wildness in our bodies and in the land,” Sanders (1995) explains, “we [Midwesterners] have labored to control nature with a thoroughness and zeal unmatched in any other region” (p. 45). In other words, the buffeting Midwesterners have endured at the hands of Mother Earth
and Mother Nature, the extremities in weather and in geographic volatility, and the fearful recognition that "[Nature] can lure us away from the artifice of being human and remind us that we are animals" (Brown, 1988, p. 204), all have humbled the people and muted their emotional effusiveness. For instance, the tenor of the congratulations that author Jane Smiley received when she won the Pulitzer Prize was characterized by Iowan restraint: "I went to Fareway and the cashier said to me, 'Saw your picture in the paper.' And that was it! That was supposed to be a compliment" (personal communication, 1995).

The Culture of Silence and Researcher Reflexivity

In a sense, a cultural study is the best method for breaking the silence, for it allows a researcher to name not only what is said, but what is not. As explained above, naming the "assemblages" of similar, explicit cultural phenomena that occur across disciplines draws attention to these phenomena's cultural power, but revealing the tacit "interspaces" between the assemblages can be telling, too. As Herr explains, "An analyst's willed migration from one subjective position to another enables a view of experience from the edges ... A practice of constant relocation makes visible, however, fleetingly, the larger system from which reification, standardization, and instrumentalism drop like leaves from a tree" (1996, p. 160-1). Novelist and literary critic David Lodge puts it this way: "Writing ... is a way of imposing order on the chaotic flux of experience, to make it comprehensible and to project a vision of what it should or might be" (2002, p. 99).

For example, Stephen Bloom's (2000) cultural study includes an incident in an Iowa
diner to reveal how Midwestern silence obscures the townspeople’s methods of
differentiation between themselves and outsiders (in this case, Bloom’s family):

Excited about the parade and buzzed by his cache of candy, [my son] was talking up a
storm. Two elderly ladies in their Sunday finest sat nearby. They were as thin-
lipped as the farmer’s wife from *American Gothic*. They poked their forks in their
[food], each glaring our way, grimacing, whispering, then scrunching their noses into
doughy twists. When we passed their table to leave, one lady looked up at me and
asked in an Almira Gulch tone, “You’re not from around here, are you?” (p. 15-6)

Here Bloom’s description does not explicitly mention the nature of the “difference” between
his family and the old ladies, but the silence surrounding his Otherness is loud enough, and
the rest of his cultural study is peppered with behavioral, tacit demonstrations of his
neighbors’ intolerance toward Jews and non-Iowans. In other words, the act of writing
within a cultural studies framework becomes a tool for *naming* the interspace (the town’s
anti-Semitism) between assemblages (a variety of differing contexts within the town) that
otherwise remains unspoken.

**Final Thoughts**

To review, this research is a cultural study, an articulation of agricultural
communication, conducted by an author who is positioned by her rural, agrarian upbringing,
her higher education in the professional communication field, her female gender, and her
Midwestern context. While my rural, feminine and Midwestern roles are characterized by
unwritten, oral and even silent epistemologies, it is my role as a scholar that has prompted
this dissertation’s existence. The Midwestern culture of silence won’t do anything for
agricultural communication, but the rhetorical action of writing, of *naming*, just might.
CHAPTER 3:
BEGIN THE BEGUINE: THE BFC'S INITIAL ATTEMPTS AT DOCUMENTS OF COORDINATION
TUESDAY, AUGUST 14, 2001

"The Extension booth? Uh, well... let's see." The cardinal-and-gold-clad woman at the glittering, noisy Iowa State University booth glanced around, then brightened. "I think if you go over to the Grandstand, we've got a booth in there somewhere. This booth here is just for the university."

My mother and I left the air-conditioned Varied Industries building and wormed into the crowded, stuffy room underneath the state fair grandstand. We rarely visited this area—it was filled with booths where pop cans get sliced with Ginsu knives and machines predict your future based solely on a handwriting sample. "C'mon, girls," an Oxy-Clean sales rep called out to us. "You've gotta see what this stuff can do." Finally, I spotted the Iowa State Extension booth, jammed into a far corner of the room—right next to the John Birch society. Considering its inglorious location, I was surprised to note a crowd had gathered at the booth.

The crowd, however, was mostly children, anxious to see the ISU Zoology insect exhibit. The zoologists were patiently demonstrating bees and beetles and jostling for space with their booth partners, the celebrity voices of WOI radio. There were no other Extension exhibits on display. That's it? I thought. Flies and Don Forsling? Where are the pamphlets? Where are the other Extension programs? Even the county fair had more stuff than this.

Never fully committed to my scavenger hunt, my mother abandoned me for a t-shirt booth. I left the Grandstand to wander through the Ag Building. The bee exhibit there always cheered me up. I'd been coming—or had been brought—to the fair for 29 years, and still I loved to find the queen bee in one of the buzzing
hives. So I stood next to the five-year-olds who tapped at the glass display cases, trying to make the bees jump, and pondered the nearly total absence of Iowa State Extension at the Iowa State Fair. Could it be financial reasons? Probably not; the entry fee for a modest booth would have cost a fraction of that red and gold rah-rah monster in the Varied Industries building.

Damn it, I frowned. I can't enjoy the bees! Only when the little kid beside me shot me a look did I realize I'd spoken out loud.

One pretzel, one cup of honey-sweetened lemonade, and one Diet Pepsi (or approximately 20 minutes) later, I spotted it. WHERE DOES YOUR FOOD COME FROM? a sign over a small booth asked. In a primitive, fifth-grade sort of way, the booth visually traced the production of corn and soybeans to a plate of prepared food. Lying on a side table was a pad of paper that asked fair-goers to write down all of the foods that Iowa farmers produced. Ignoring the spelling errors, I noted how the pad was filled with proud entries: “Sweet corn with butter!” “The best pork in the world!” Then I spotted the booth’s sponsor—Iowa State University Extension. Its 3x5” sign was placed low, in a corner of the tri-fold booth walls. Had I not bent over to scrutinize the fair-goers’ comments, I would have missed it completely.

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BACKGROUND

For years, extension services have symbolized an agricultural legacy of providing education and support to rural communities:

In *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professorate* (1990) Ernest Boyer called outreach simply “the scholarship of application...” The *Auburn University Outreach Strategic Planning Committee Report* (1996) defined outreach as “instruction, or research, or instruction- and-research that is applied to the direct benefit of external audiences...” In the great land-grant tradition, outreach extends the university’s faculty resources to the people to solve problems and promote the quality of life in our communities. Striving to be relevant, the university constantly redefines outreach as it addresses key societal issues through its varied disciplines. (“On Outreach,” p. 1, 2001)

In other words, extension programs have funneled knowledge from concentrated areas of learning—mostly universities—to more isolated audiences, including farmers. In doing so, the knowledge often is translated from mostly theoretical contexts to more applied scenarios. In this translation from the theoretical to the experiential lies extension’s importance and relevancy to the community it serves, and that relevancy would seem to be a reliable
guarantee of extension's survival.

However, in spite of extension services' long association with land-grant institutions and community well-being, I should not have been surprised by the comparative invisibility of Iowa State University Extension at the state fair. The recent erosion of extension services reflects a larger Midwestern trend, as other agricultural outreach programs have been financially pruned or, as in the case of Nebraska's extension services in 2000, essentially eliminated. Indeed, virtually any organization associated with farming has been negatively impacted by many recent factors, such as the farm crisis of the 1980s, the proliferation of industrial farm competition, and the 1996 Freedom to Farm Act—effectively a tourniquet for federal subsidies.

**The Introduction of the BFC**

The impairment to agriculture and extension programs is not exclusively financial. As described in Chapter 1, widespread concern over farming's effect on the environment has grown steadily in the past few decades, and with it has grown a popular consensus that farmers essentially were being paid with hard-earned tax dollars to wreck the earth and poison the populace (Robison, 2000). Programs and organizations affiliated with farming also became cast as accomplices in the pollution.

To achieve damage control, agriculture needed to quickly display some rhetorical

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2 As defined in Chapter 1, in this dissertation "industrial" refers to those enterprises that adhere to highly conventional, Western operating strategies. Because large-scale farms tend to be characterized by such traditional procedures (as opposed to the less predictable, more fluid approach of small-scale, family farms), they too are referred to as "industrial."

sophistication. The development of the Beginning Farmer Center (BFC) in 1994 was one rhetorical move made in response to these troubles. Its mission statement, "To address the critical issue of future caretakers of farmland," was sufficiently innocuous and general—no loud partisanship or hysterical banner-waving here. The subtle use of *caretakers* also signaled a master rhetorical stroke, implying that farmers continued to be responsible stewards of the land. Furthermore, as an Iowa State Extension program, the BFC played upon the history of outreach organizations as benevolent to and supportive of their communities ("Talk of Iowa," 2002).

**The BFC over Time**

As the Nineties passed, small-scale farming became increasingly swallowed by industrial operations. In fact, agriculture scholar Brian Whitaker (1998), citing Robinson (1983), states that industrial farms eventually will produce "95% of the total agricultural output" in the twenty-first century (p. 1). Fully aware of this trend, in 1996 the BFC revised its mission statement, moving from its publicly explicit, comforting support of small farmers to a more business-like focus on "leveraging the advantage." As one brochure claimed, "We can accept things as they are and say they can't be changed, or we can help shape Iowa's agricultural future." This particular word choice tapped into the increasing popularity of the word "leverage" by the business world to convey a general sense of professionalism and efficient work energy (M. Regenold, personal communication, 2000). In essence, while the BFC continued to support its original, small-scale clientele, in the mission
statement change was an increased tacitness of this support.

With the change in mission statement came changes in the rhetorical situation, particularly audiences and purposes, for the BFC’s professional documents. The potential audiences increased to include not just small-scale operations but most of the players in the world of food production—politicians, education administrators connected to Extension, financial institutions, and consumers. The potential purposes no longer focused on damage control so much as self-perpetuation, i.e., financial insurance to keep the BFC going for years to come.

Furthermore, these mission and rhetorical changes also boded a change in what counted as a “successful” professional document. An informal, chatty brochure that mimicked the rural discourse of small-scale farmers now ran the risk of being viewed as unprofessional by a lending institution—yet a highly formal, glossy technical report might be tossed aside by busy farmers with little time to read during the planting season. In short, the BFC needed to revamp its communication approach, publishing documents that simultaneously addressed several disparate audiences—the very spirit of Bazerman’s *documents of coordination*. While the term “documents of coordination” was never used by the BFC communications staff, the concept nonetheless was implemented as an answer to the organization’s new rhetorical situation.

This chapter explores two documents of coordination that were created in the early stages of the BFC’s ideological migration: 1) a bi-fold brochure and 2) one-page flyer, both of
which introduce the Beginning Farmer Center to three different audiences.

**ARTICULATING ASSEMBLAGES AS ANALYSIS**

This chapter, like the two following it, will analyze the most widely distributed BFC documents of coordination by naming the governing structures that most heavily impact these documents' rhetorical situations—in particular their contentious target audiences. As described in Chapter 2, the analytical method applied to these data is informed by the cultural studies' act of *articulating* the governing structures (the most influential cultural forces that exist in a particular context), and by Cheryl Herr's discussion of *assemblages* (thematic connections that exist across various and at times conflicting contexts). I will start by justifying the selection of this method, which as yet remains a nonconventional one for conducting research.

**Choosing Nonconventionality**

Because *articulation* and *assemblages* both attempt to name a phenomenon as it exists only in one, ephemeral moment in time, both terms fly in the face of scientific empiricism's demand for predictability, replicability, and control—and thus are regarded as suspect analytical methods. However, the scientific method is privileged as an analytical paradigm in the academy not for its *intrinsic* superiority but because of the academy's historical *consensus* that the paradigm is superior. Over time, such a consensus takes on the power of an irrefutable, prescriptive, unchallenged truth. As Ess (1994), quoting Habermas’ *Critical*
Theory, explains,

"Whenever we assert that something is true or right, we imply that all other persons should agree with us." In this way, consensus replaces deductive and inductive validity as "the touchstone for truth and justice." And, presumably because persons in dialogue bring to their discourse their individual and particular backgrounds, interests, and so on, along with their skills in rational analysis, such consensus necessarily binds together "contingency and necessity, particularity and universality, factuality and normativity in discourse." (p. 238)

Furthermore, the scientific method itself is not infallible; as a human construct, it is only as reliable as the people who use it, as recent misfortunes have demonstrated. The entrapment of nine workers in a Pennsylvania mining shaft is one example of how easily scientific empiricism can be twisted by human bias. Because a corrupt mining official had manipulated map-drawing technology to hide improper mining procedures in the shaft, the miners were not aware of the shaft's existence and fell into it ("Governor Pledges," July 29, 2002).

Ultimately, since the scientific method is not an inherently privileged approach and because the rural communication patterns in this study typically are not predictable, replicable or controllable (see Chapter 2), a more accommodating analytical framework is appropriate for this dissertation. As speech communication scholar Tarla Rai Peterson (1991) states, "whatever their measure as 'reliable, trustworthy, and desirable,' [nonconventional data, such as stories and popular artifacts] do guide thought and action... a critic can discover both symbol systems that people have evolved and the historical patterns of experience that give these systems social vitality" (p. 292). Information from rural narratives, for instance, may not be quantitatively measurable, but such narratives do contain profound "social vitality," and as such should not be discounted simply because the scientific
method does not honor their validity.

An increasing number of scholars, such as Brenton Faber (2002) in *Community Action and Organizational Change: Image, Narrative, Identity*, also acknowledge the value of so-called unorthodox evidence to better understand how people are positioned in their rhetorical contexts. As Faber explains, "People make pivotal, life-changing decisions without the kind of certainty my professional academic culture often stipulates. These professional forces have unfortunately created an artificial, yet hierarchical, divide between what is considered 'research' and what is condemned 'a story'" (p. 14). Even mathematical logician W. V. Quine warns against what he calls "reductionism dogma" in research, where "each meaningful statement [by the researcher] is [supposed to be] equivalent to some logical construct upon terms which refer to immediate experience" (1972, p. 46). The "real life" studied by the ethnographer is not clean and neat, and so data culled from this life should not be force-fit into the clean and neat categories of scientific research.

However, it should not be inferred that the predictability, replicability and control of science here are being situated as oppositional to the flexibility of articulation and assemblages—even Habermas has devoted his work to "bring[ing] together the normative or prescriptive power of traditional politics [i.e., cultural and social constructs] and the descriptive accounts of empirical sciences" (Ess, 1994, p. 230, 234). Instead, this dissertation draws upon the science-informed ethnographic tradition (particularly the attempt to ensure "representativeness" of the data) to articulate how governing structures across disciplines (assemblages) influence documents of coordination.
Articulating Assemblages: A Closer Look

In her definition of assemblages (thematic connections that exist across various and at times conflicting contexts), Herr (1996) makes a case for basing research conclusions on a range of data types in addition to the feedback from traditional ethnographic methods. Her research assemblages have revealed unexpected similarities among political, educational, popular, agricultural and academic phenomena. In her work, Herr doesn't see the similarities as a beginning to finding her argument—she sees them as the argument, phenomena that are unique by virtue of their repeated appearances across otherwise incongruous worlds. She argues that the assemblages' "forced symmetry" across disciplinary boundaries itself is sufficient "evidence" that does not necessitate further support through more conventional data-gathering methods. For Herr, the assemblages are proof enough.

Assemblages as a research method have been gaining support, appropriately enough, across disciplines. For instance, in Whose Reality Counts? Robert Chambers (1997), who does a great amount of field-work in rural community development, espouses a technique he calls "participatory rural appraisal" (PRA) to better understand the lives, cultures and phenomena of rural communities disenfranchised by poverty. PRA involves balancing ethnographic methods such as the survey and the interview—methods that he claims can easily be corrupted by the "top-down, center-outwards" approach characteristic of traditional academe—with a mapping technique. Like Herr's assemblages, and in keeping with cultural studies' egalitarian belief in "no necessary correspondence" among governing structures, PRA
involves mapping, web-like, 1) connections across data collected by ethnographic methods\(^3\), 2) cultural behaviors and attitudes observed both by the researcher and by the participants\(^4\), and 3) a constant sharing and comparison of these data among researcher and participants (pp. 103-5). In other words, PRA is a hybrid of the ethnographic concept of the *constant comparative method*, cultural studies articulation, and assemblages. It would seem that as a research method, articulation and assemblages harness the cumulative, exponential effect of similar phenomena that gather visibility over the course of time, to emerge at one particular moment in connection to one another.

The core of this dissertation, then, will invoke the methodology of articulation and assemblages to 1) analyze how three sets of documents from the BFC compare to Bazerman’s concept of *documents of coordination*, 2) describe the rhetorical situations in which the BFC documents of coordination were created and circulated (one of this dissertation’s primary objectives), and 3) do so by articulating the assemblages across industrial (political, educational, popular, academic) and rural boundaries. These assemblages comprise governing structures that are suggested by personal interviews and evident across farming, political, financial, academic and popular cultures.

\(^3\) For example, in participant-observation ethnographies conducted in the 1990s, Chambers noted how 1) geographical conditions, 2) status of the crop production process, 3) topographic character, and 4) problems in agriculture research and development emerged as assemblages across three very disparate agricultural community types in sub-Saharan Africa: “Industrial,” “green revolution,” and “risk-prone” (1993, p. 61).

\(^4\) In other words, the researcher alone does not formulate conclusions about the phenomenon and participants being studied, but actively solicits information, viewpoints and advice from participants about his/her conclusions. Chambers compared late-1980s studies of technology-transfer efforts in Asian, African and Latin American agricultural communities. The studies that assumed a traditional, top-down approach (i.e., the researcher imparts his/her knowledge and revelations to participants) generated very different conclusions from those studies that assumed a “farmer-first” approach (i.e., the farmer participants do the majority of data
FRIDAY, MAY 24, 2002

As I gasp my way up flights of stairs in Curtiss Hall en route to the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, I realize that I should have exercised instead of drinking Old Style at the l-Cubs game. Once I reach the second floor, I note the colorful poster displays that advertise specific Iowa State agricultural programs and promote farming in general. The displays have all the visual sophistication of a ten-year-old's diorama. Interestingly, Curtiss Hall is the same building where high-tech classrooms are "sponsored" by Pioneer, Cargill and other conglomerates. Unsponsored classrooms, as I know from my teaching experience, are characterized by temperamental, decades-old equipment and herds of dust-bunnies.

The Leopold Center possesses the dead atmosphere of a Friday afternoon before a holiday weekend. I wind my way through several cubicles to Mike Duffy's office, and buzzing in the back of my mind is the realization that the Center seems oddly bare. Even Mike's office lacks the coffee-cup clutter and general bonhomie of his other office in East Hall. Soon, I will discover the reason for the sparseness: This isn't a new office getting off the ground—this is an office that is closing up shop.

As usual, Mike is on the phone, putting out fires. He is professor-in-charge of the Beginning Farmer Center, speaking often in front of state and federal lawmakers on behalf of small and mid-size farms, and as such is an oft-cited source in the newspapers. At this time, he is performing his responsibilities analysis and experimentation; the researcher supports rather than directs the participants' efforts (p. 68-9)).
literally single-handedly, as his left arm is in a sling. But the injury is not the reason for his downcast air—he greets me with the news that the state Republican legislators' proposal, issued three days earlier, argues that the Leopold Center's $100 million budget should be reappropriated to the general state budget—essentially drying up all funding and dissolving the Center altogether. Governor Vilsack has indicated that he will sign the bill, albeit under duress. Although the BFC will continue, the imminent death of its parent organization surely bodes ill for the future.

"This signals the change that the state isn't interested in groundwater, and if you're a small and mid-size farm, they're not interested in you anymore, either," Mike tells me. "If you're not big, you're not important, and if you're small, you're going to get screwed."

I reflect on the news after our interview. This development, I reckoned, is an example of qualitative research's constant comparative approach, or how the emergence of new data affects the researcher's view of subsequent evidence. That the Leopold Center did not escape the budgetary ax suggests its failure to professionally communicate its worth to the legislature. From my perspective, what kind of damage does this news do to the ethos of my data, the BFC's documents of coordination? I'm no fan of country music, but this reminds me of a line from a Tanya Tucker song: "I've been rearranging chairs on a ship that's going down."

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INITIAL DOCUMENTS OF COORDINATION

In May 2002, I interviewed Mike Duffy regarding two publications that were created after the BFC's mission change, a bi-fold brochure and one-page flyer (see Appendix A). As a source of information about the BFC's professional communication, Mike is invaluable because he initiates most and approves all of the organization's public documents; consequently, he was a good "starting place" for gathering research data and locating interview participants.

After two years of working with Mike, I have learned that he is a friendly, casual kind of guy—no carefully phrased sound-bites or anxious damage-control maneuvering here. His close acquaintance with small-scale farmers can be seen in his preference for coffee-klatch chats, punctuated with frequent story-telling. I consequently made sure to avoid a formal, rigid interview structure. Instead, before the interview I mentally solidified my purpose for talking to Mike, then during the interview I adhered to that purpose by asking general, who/what/where/when/why/how questions about the documents' creation. While Mike knew that I was studying the brochure and flyer and needed to ask him about the documents (as I'd told him while scheduling the interview appointment), my questions to him nonetheless occurred during the course of a larger conversation about farming, politics, the BFC and Iowa (see Appendix A). In fact, had I attempted to constrict and steer the conversation, I would not have learned about the Leopold Center's loss of state funding.
New Purposes and Audiences = Documents of Coordination

Mike’s comments helped me to understand the rhetorical situation out of which the bi-fold brochure and one-page flyer emerged. Mike explained that the first professional communication documents issued under the aegis of the newly-revised Beginning Farmer Center were meant “to show ‘satisfying’ behavior [to the state legislators], or that we were working, so they would continue to fund us” (personal communication, May 24, 2002). After all, the BFC owed its allegiance first to the organization that birthed it—and had also the power to kill it. Another purpose was “to alert people to the Center’s existence.” Because the BFC administrators “knew we wouldn’t reach all the farmers,” they “hoped there would be a secondary impact [in that the other ‘people’ targeted by the documents] would help” the small-scale farmers (personal communication, May 24, 2002).

However, when I asked Mike to clarify the “people” who needed to be “alerted,” the array of audiences he listed indicated that these publications do in fact qualify as documents of coordination: Small- and mid-size farmers, Extension staff, and “other [agricultural] providers” such as grain elevator operators and financial lending institutions. And it would seem that agriculture is the only connection among these otherwise disparate audiences. In fact, a BFC study in 2000 showed that its farm clientele in particular do not communicate with politicians and bankers, even concerning crucial issues; 52% of retirement-age respondents, for instance, had not discussed their retirement plans with anyone, much less someone outside their immediate family (“Farm Succession”).

Furthermore, the idea that politicians, bankers and farmers are not only disconnected
but in opposition is so often commented upon as to be popular knowledge—from rancorous letters in *The Des Moines Register* to lyrics in country music songs (“And the meek shall inherit the earth/And the bank shall repossess it” [Macanally, 1992]). When I asked my brother, a farmer, whether Dwight Freitag (one of my banking interview participants) pronounced his name “FREE-tag” or “FRY-tag,” Matt snorted, “It’s ‘FRY-tag.’ Just remember that there’s nothing free at a bank.” And after my interview, when I told my grandmother, a farm wife, that Freitag had been a little grouchy and refused to be tape-recorded, she replied, “He probably hadn’t had a chance to count his money yet today.”

Even filmmaker and former farm kid Jeanne Jordan admits that farmers, bankers and politicians all are liable for the financial mess of small-scale agriculture, but each side prefers to abjure responsibility and blame the other parties (*Troublesome Creek*, 1997).

The BFC’s attempt to reconcile such oppositional audiences through its documentation is a formidable challenge. If the flyer and brochure were to be successful, they needed to coordinate among audiences that often are in conflict, usually over money matters—farmers haggle with bankers for loans and with politicians for subsidies, politicians want to see justification for these subsidies, and bankers continually negotiate between political restrictions and angry farm clients in order to ensure a solid profit margin.

**Context: Reverting to the Original**

Despite the BFC’s attempt to broaden its rhetorical situation, Mike’s description of the documents’ writing process reflected a privileging of the organization’s original audience
(small-scale farmers). As he explained, the process of writing these documents was strongly influenced by the reading patterns of its small-scale, rural clientele. Obviously, the writer who bears the audience in mind when constructing a document has a greater chance of achieving his/her purpose. And, given that communications “that are integrated into cultural traditions as articulated by farmers are more likely to succeed than (even technologically superior) alternatives that remain outside farmers’ systems of values,” it is no surprise that the rural emphasis on first-hand observation played a significant part in the BFC’s written documentation (Peterson, 1991, p. 289).

In extension programs, professional communication documents often invoke visual design to connect to the farmers’ predilection for first-hand observation. Heavy reliance upon visuals instead of text dovetails with extension services’ long-time use of “alternative” methods to instruct farming audiences; after all, the primary audience for extension programs historically have been adults, who “have more experiences and a larger base of knowledge on which to learn” (Whitaker, 1998, p. 4). For example, R. Mack Strickland, an outreach project leader at Purdue University, relies upon visuals in computer-assisted instruction (CAI) to teach farmers about water pollution; his research report even distinguishes the “effectiveness of a CAI tutorial with traditional instruction” (1994, my emphasis).

Recognizing the importance of visuals and a lack of reading time as critical factors for its farming audience, the BFC hired a graphic designer to draft a visually distinguished logo (Figure 3.2) “to put some professionalism into [it]” (M. Duffy, personal communication, May 24, 2002).
Envisioning these documents as farmer-centered resulted in textually-simple, visually-clean products. In the bi-fold brochure (see Appendix A), the front panel intimates the new organizational mission by referring to the “big challenges” faced by farmers, yet still tries to give small-scale farmers a sense of agency (“We can help shape Iowa’s agricultural future.”)

On the right, inside panel, a bulleted list concisely describes how the BFC works with a variety of client groups, including new and retiring farmers (the FarmOn workshop), “bankers, attorneys, investment counselors, planners, and insurance representatives (Maintaining Your Ag Client seminar), and agricultural students (Ag Link).

However, despite Mike’s assertion, the one-page flyer does not target a farming audience so much as it favors the political audience and purpose. At the top of the page, the BFC’s official logo provides visual recognition, while large-font headings and horizontal lines cleanly demarcate the organization’s purpose, history and programs. The contents of each section of text reflect the legislature’s reason for creating the BFC (i.e., “coordinating educational programs..., assessing needs..., developing statewide programs...”) and, with a highly reassuring tone, the organization’s efforts to fulfill these needs (“The Center has undertaken a variety of ... activities since its inception”). On the back of the flyer is the popular “Leveraging the advantage” phrase, which is conspicuously absent on the bi-fold
JULY 2, 2002

It would seem that the Leopold Center has been given a reprieve by the state legislature. Mike, however, sees it differently. Once again, I am sitting in his bare office in Curtiss Hall while he scrutinizes an Excel chart full of statistics.

"I hate to ask," I ask, "but did the legislature approve the Leopold budget reappropriation?"

"You mean the de-appropriation?" Mike half-laughs. "Yeah, they did. Although..." Here he reluctantly turns away from his statistics and looks at me. "They plan to reinstate the budget in one year's time."

The illogic of this news silences me for a moment. "So, then, you'd have to dismantle, then re-form in a year?"

Mike sighs and half-laughs again. "Yeah."

He gives me more news. The Leopold Center is fed up with its mercurial legislative sugar mama. "We're done with them," he says shortly. Now the Center is casting about for what Mike calls a "more permanent financial base."

I joke, "So this place might be called the Pioneer-Cargill Leopold Center one day?"

He turns back to his computer. "It's interesting that you should say that, because we have been talking to Cargill."
The fatalist in me suddenly thinks, *They might as well—Cargill owns most of this university, anyway.* But I remain quiet. I can just picture a Cargill-financed BFC brochure: *Is your family farm on the brink of failure? Try our Cargill seed—We'll get you on your feet again!*

Mike glances at me, then says slowly, "We were already in the middle of three initiatives when the state pulled the plug, and we talked to Cargill about continuing with one of the projects, and... well, we don't want to cut off our nose to spite our face."

Still, I am unresponsive. *Feeling depressed about your impending bankruptcy? Our new pesticide is sure to salvage the wreck of your economic existence!*

"One million dollars is chump change to them. And who knows, maybe we can get them talking about sustainable agriculture."

I nod, a little.

Finally, Mike says, "If something does happen with Cargill, we'll have to be careful about the way we do this. Otherwise, people will think we've sold out."

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**TWO FARMERS, TWO POLITICIANS, TWO BANKERS, ONE RESEARCHER**

As argued in Chapter 1, both rural communities' communication patterns and those patterns typical of more traditional, industrial communities reflect tacit values privileged by each discourse, whether it's the hands-on approach to work favored by farmers or the more scientific sensibilities of a politician or banker. For example, in her studies of farm
communication, Peterson (1991) has shown that if there is a “gap between technical knowledge” and “farmers’ hierarchy of motives” in a text document, a farm audience will reject the document because its information does not fit into their experiential epistemology (p. 290). Or, as one farmer stated, “We know how to farm better than we do farm. We simply take chances, winning in [a] good season, and losing when it fails to rain, or if the wind blows out our crops” (Worster, cited in Peterson, 1991, p. 290; my emphasis).

Because the BFC’s brochure and flyer, being documents of coordination, attempt to encompass audiences with differing “motives,” it is important to understand the exact moments when and places where farmers, politicians and bankers diverge in their behaviors and perspectives as readers. This section therefore includes comments from representatives of each audience regarding their specific reaction to the documents, and the specific governing structures and assemblages in operation when each audience encounters the brochure and flyer.

As always, Mike Duffy was very helpful by naming people who were involved with the creation and/or representative of the conflicting audience groups. He suggested four of the six interview participants discussed in this chapter because they are included on the BFC’s mailing list and thus are specifically meant to receive these documents. Though the other two participants are not on the mailing list, they represent the same demographics as the colleagues in their profession and therefore are equally representative of the BFC’s readers.
AUDIENCE #1: FINDING THE FARMERS

As elaborated in Chapter 1, Midwestern farmers tend to exhibit a "nonconventional" communication pattern, characterized by fluidity of audience, purpose and context. Their emphasis on first-hand observation and a hands-on work ethic only adds to the unpredictability of a communicative situation, as these experiences are unique to each individual.

The difficulty in quantifying this communication pattern has led to misunderstandings that only increase the distance between farming and more traditional, industrial discourse communities. Peterson describes the difficulty in finding sources during her data collection process: After phone calls with numerous potential participants, only "two [farmers] agreed to participate only after repeated assurances that I was not working for the government and would not ask them to fill out questionnaires (which they claimed had previously been used to distort their opinions)" (1991, p. 306). Given this kind of historical discourse clash, coupled with the isolated context in which farmers work, it is no surprise that they do not look upon strangers graciously—especially someone from an "ivory-tower" university who carries a notebook and tape-recorder.

The Farming Participants

Not surprisingly, I faced similar difficulty in securing interview participants in the farming community (even my uncles tend to be close-mouthed with their "weird," "bookworm" niece). The older farmers on the BFC mailing list, particularly those who have
retired, either did not respond or refused my interview requests outright. These men, as the following participant told me, have in the past twenty years experienced such increased governmental involvement in their private farm decisions that outsiders are more suspect than ever.

Cutting through these farmers' resistance, I soon realized, would mean demonstrating my ethos to them; so when I contacted Maurice Moffitt, I made sure to mention my grandfather, who had exhibited cattle at the same county fair as Moffitt's father. Moffitt's tone immediately softened toward me and he agreed to speak with me on a sunny day in September 2002.

Moffitt is on the BFC's mailing list and he is a small-scale retired farmer in his late sixties, making him a typical representative of the BFC's farm audience. He grew up just east of Indianola, Iowa, on a rolling farm dotted with beef Shorthorn cattle—an operation he inherited from his father and eventually passed down to his son. Before retiring a couple of years ago, Moffitt attended the 1996 Beginning Farmer Center's AgLink workshop with his son to learn about the complicated legal, social and emotional process of farm succession. Now, they live as neighbors on the same farm, and the senior Moffitt spends his days working for numerous ag and civic committees. Having earned certification from ISU's Master Farmer Extension program, Moffitt proved to be very articulate about issues beyond his immediate agricultural experiences.

My second farm interview participant, David Hummell, is on the other end of the small-scale farm spectrum. Hummell is in his mid-twenties; after graduating from Iowa State
in 1998, he went into partnership with his father on his family’s 1000-acre corn, soybean and hog operation. Despite the differences in age and phase of life, Hummell, like Moffitt, nonetheless represents the farm audiences targeted by the BFC’s bi-fold brochure and flyer. Also like Moffitt, Hummell attended the AgLink workshop with his father and is on the organization’s mailing list.

But unlike the older farmers, Hummell expressed no reservation in speaking with me at his farm near Eldora, Iowa in early September 2002. We sat near a large picture window, and he frequently gestured toward his operation while we talked. It was obvious that this farm was Hummell’s pride and joy, but his comments suggested that the practical nature of farming kept his future plans for the operation from becoming the slightest bit unrealistic.

**Maurice Moffitt**

While Moffitt’s reaction to seeing the flyer and brochure again eight years after their publication was diplomatic, he obviously still regarded the documents as irrelevant to him as the target audience. Moffitt stated that because the brochure and flyer did not include any information that directly affected his financial status or farm management decisions (such as a new EPA regulation, for instance), he assumed that the documents were not directed at him specifically. “It’s [the flyer] quite general, isn’t it?” he asked. “I might pay attention to something [in the mail] that has ‘USDA’ on it, but otherwise I don’t have the time for it.”

Furthermore, in keeping with farmers’ preference for information in visual as opposed to textual form, Moffitt referred repeatedly to visual, nontextual features of the documents.
[the white background and black text] when explaining why they would not catch his
attention on a typical day. “When you see something that’s mailed for only three cents, you
know it’s not very important,” he said. “Now, Chariton Valley Beef has a nice flyer they
just sent out; it’s either pinkish or yellow, if I remember right. That color kind of separates it
from some of the other mail” (personal communication, September 12, 2002).

David Hummell

Although he had received the flyer and brochure in 1996, when Hummell opened the
documents during our interview, he hesitated. “It kind of looks wordy,” he said. Like
Moffitt, Hummell had little use for the brochure, and similarly cited visual design as one of
the primary reasons. As someone who frequents the Internet to learn about new farming
concepts (in his case, integrated pest management and swine breeding techniques), Hummell
finds hard-copy text inefficient if it does not call out to him specifically:

Does it catch my eye? If I look at this brochure, boom, it’s Iowa State [points to the
logo on the brochure], I have a connection to Iowa State, so... There’s Extension, [the
words] ‘beginning farmer.’ The first word I look at, to see if it has any appeal to
me.... Maybe you should make the bullets a little larger. I need some bullet-point,
specific information about what this [document] is about, what it’ll do for me.

Hummell actually preferred the one-page flyer (over the brochure) because of its visual
design: The red, horizontal lines that demarcated the logos from the text, as well as the large-
sized headings in each section. “I might read this one, actually,” he said. “I like headings.”

Also like Moffitt, time constraints are the strongest factor in Hummell’s reading
context. Hummell typically sorts through his mail over his lunch break, where he would
“open it up, look at it, see if it applies to me, make a decision, and go from there. It’s like a credit card application—‘Nope,’ pitch it, and go to the next one. It needs to be [geared to] a certain age bracket, my age bracket—‘Hey, Mr. Young Farmer, want to come back to the farm but don’t have the opportunity?’” A visual design that does not prove itself worthy of Hummell’s limited time quickly renders a document into trash.

Farming Assemblages

Given Moffitt’s and Hummell’s comments, it became clear that time and visual design are two governing structures most at play in their role as a small-farm audience. Other governing structures, however, obviously factor into agriculture as well. In the late 1980s, when the effects of the early-80s farm crisis were still palpable, Peterson wrote her dissertation about small-scale farmers; she has since made her career at Texas A&M by studying communication in farming, and has concluded that three governing structures in particular most inform a farm audience: Geographical pressures, class conflict with non-farmers, and the Western equation of technology with progress. Although Peterson’s insights are well-founded, since her dissertation was written the latter structure especially has accumulated such power across disciplinary boundaries as to now qualify as an assemblage.

Technological advancements. Certain factors in agriculture historically have been fed by larger American culture, especially the West’s fascination with technological advancements. As Hummell told me, “Whether you run a bank, or a laundromat, or something, you’ve gotta work through [whether I] am gonna spend this much money to get
this. If you get caught up on cost control, you divert yourself out of something new, something that’s going to bring more income back.” Hummell also stated that one of the issues preoccupying him as a beginning farmer is the role of technology in agriculture, especially its risks:

Each technological improvement, with record-keeping, and financial management, and debt management, we’ve worked through every one of those. Those are all things we’re managing from day to day, that we were not doing ten years ago. And that’s mainly because I had interest in doing that, not Dad.

Take, for example, the newest technology, this GPS-driven field yield monitors and mapping. Okay, well, so instead of saying, “Well, geez, that’s five thousand bucks, I can’t afford that,” and walking away, I’ve had to, and I think most successful farmers say, “Well, gee, what’s it going to do for me, and what’s the bottom line, and what am I going to get out of it,” instead of just saying “No” when they hear the price, they work through the rest of the details and weave your way through it and decide whether it’s going to work for you or not. And that applies to, you know, AI, or adding more sows, buying a new combine, every business decision. (personal communication, September 9, 2002)

Professional communication scholar Jennifer Slack (1989) explains that in Western culture, technology is closely attached to the Western love of “progress,” and consequently “the development of more sophisticated technologies comes to exemplify the process of the continual reach of humankind toward perfection” (p. 331). This ideology trickles down into agriculture; as a result, the American belief that “participation in the frontier mission [was] a patriotic duty” and an “American self-image [that] emphasize[s] the [farmer’s] role as guardian of civilized progress” marries farmers to technological progress not just as a practical necessity for working the land but as an ideological imperative (Peterson, 1991, p. 297). As an Iowa State agriculture major recently asserted after visiting the 2002 Farm Progress Show, “It’s not what the technology does now, it’s what it might do in the future” (J. Greiner,
personal communication, September 24, 2002).

Technology's dominance informs farmers' reading responses to documents such as the brochure and flyer by rewriting rural, oral discourse patterns. In his text, *Transformations of Literacy in Computer-Mediated Communication: Orality, Literacy, Cyberdiscursivity*, rhetorical theory scholar Martin Jacobsen (2002) explains that the "communal" nature of oral discourse is dependent upon the agency of the communicators; carrying on a conversation successfully requires engaged listening, analyzing, and responding. And because technology cannot operate independently of the user, it similarly taps into human agency, a requirement obviously familiar to participants of an oral literacy (pp. 78-9). In contrast, Jacobsen argues, the "finality" of a printed document encourages greater passivity from the user: "For the most part, those receiving the ... sign are being led about by the producer of the linguistic product" (p. 78). Farmers, raised in an oral, rural context, used to transferring that agency to the technology surrounding them, and disdainful of anything that attempts to "lead them about," are asked to deny that agency when confronted with a print document—a request that in turn could build the kind of reader indifference or even resistance demonstrated by Moffitt and Hummell.

In addition to its impact in farming, the role of technology in other fields confirms mechanical innovation as a widespread cultural assemblage. In coastal ports, longshoremen are currently striking against the automated inventory calculators that will eliminate the need for human logisticians ("Longshoremen Find Strength," June 30, 2002). And in Maine, lobster fishermen who rely upon personal experience and fishing lore are being challenged by
scientists who use underwater robots to assess the marine life population (Corson, 2002).

As lobsterwoman Linda Greenlaw states, “The state of Maine says I can fish [in a big area], but realistically, I can fish in only 10% of that without losing gear. The time-honored boundaries are what we adhere to rather than what’s legal” (Hatty and McCall, 2002, p. 8). But even lore and personal experience and rules honored by time cannot triumph over the efficiency of technological innovation.

In fact, whenever a non-technological phenomenon somehow gains enough power to compete with the mechanical, the fact is publicly noted as an oddity. For example, in its stark contrast to American industry’s reliance on technological labor, the post-9/11 heroism attached to the manual labor of police officers and firefighters only further demonstrates the pervasiveness of technology. Because the nation watched as “progress was made in the privacy of a thousand moments on loose, broad fronts, by individuals looking after themselves and generally operating alone,” the efforts of the rugged individual—itself a pervasive American myth—briefly became valued once again over impersonal machinery work (Langewiesche, 2002, p. 56). Ultimately, though, even the extensive coverage of 9/11 heroes and the Western love of rugged individualism do not reduce the culture’s other entrenched belief that technology is king; while the popular spotlight on 9/11 individualism has faded, technology powers on as a critical aspect of American life.

Furthermore, technology has so greatly infused all areas of American life that hand-tooled craftsmanship now has become a marketable commodity. As the bulk of products on the Western market became mass-produced by machines, the demand for individual craftsmen
dwindled—to the point where craftsmanship now is rarified knowledge. In fact, the
craftsman’s knowledge is so unusual in a world of assembly lines and mechanical workers
that handmade products have, according to American journalist John Brodie (2002),
“developed a cult following” (p. 358). In a recent magazine article, Brodie gushed extensively
about the personalized, unique services offered by Italian shoemakers and “bespoke suit”
tailors. And in New York, because of their growing popularity, custom-made lampshades can
cost thousands of dollars; each shade takes up to sixty hours to create and is tailored to the
client’s individual preferences (Green, 2002, p. 97).

**Preoccupation with volume.**  It appears that farmers are influenced by another
pervasive American assemblage in addition to technology: A preoccupation with volume.
Writer Ian Frazier, cynical of this country’s obsession with consumption and its resulting
complacency, believes that Midwestern culture is a breeding ground for this trend: “[It] was
familiar music to me. I knew it from my childhood: Out here we had the biggest and the
most and the best.... Anything you wanted might be Out There somewhere. The dream was
of amplitude...., turning the limitlessness of the Midwest into a limitless that holds no
surprise” (2002, p. 130). Health-care workers worry about the super-sizing of Americans’
diets; as one dietician told me, the typical serving size of a meal in this country is *twice* the
recommended amount (J. Cox, personal communication, December 2001). A recent, popular
CD boasted the title “Bigger, Better, Faster, More.” And in his book *High and Mighty*,
writer Keith Bradsher argues that the current popularity of the huge, unwieldy SUV was
instigated more by pure consumer desire than savvy marketing by the automotive industry
Specifically in farming, when the brochure and flyer were constructed in 1996, agriculture was so markedly affected by the Freedom to Farm Act and similar legislation as to rewrite farmers’ ideas of what was important—more, more, more. Granted, food production always has been measured in terms of volume, but in the past two decades the issue of volume has become the primary measure of financial success in agriculture for all farmers, large and small. American subsidy legislation has recast farm economics so that sheer volume, rather than the supply and demand of classic capitalism, is now the litmus test for financial success; for instance, the global competition opened up by the Freedom to Farm Act prompted American export market prices to bottom out—in turn forcing farmers to produce as much as they could in order to recoup sufficient governmental subsidies. By now, farmers’ desperate attempts to produce enough to break even are popularly referred to as “farming the government.”

As Moffitt told me, “Production really became the big thing starting in the Seventies. The idea was to produce more—we really can’t raise enough” (personal communication, September 12, 2002). In response, farmers continued to rely upon their fluid cultural conventions to fulfill a volume-driven economy—more hands-on work, more improvisational tinkering, more oral comparison of personal experiences with other community members (Death of the Dream, 2002). And while the aforementioned technological innovations such as global-positioning systems played an increasing role in farming, the expense of such
machinery and the lure of tradition adhered farmers to the tried-and-true as they tried to cope with a fast-changing economy.

AUDIENCE #2: FINDING THE POLITICIANS

As compared to the "nonconventionality" of rural communication, the discourse of American politics tends to adhere to more traditional pattern. For instance, Congressional staffer Ron Wilson's 1984 speech to the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives exhibits a conservative tone that conforms strictly to the values of a traditional, scientifically-informed professional communication.

Wilson's discussion of the agricultural legislation passed in 1985 promotes the idea that even politicians' personal motivations eventually can be boiled down into predictable patterns: "There may be a course of action suggested by economics, a course of action dictated by ethical concerns, and a course of action dictated by political concerns" (1984, p. 173). His claim exemplifies how the scientific predictability so common in conventional Western communication (as argued in Chapter 1) also dominates within a political realm. As Eric Hees, a scholar who focuses on the relationship between farmer and politician, argues, "The idea of policy formation as a linear, rational and synoptic process in which policy is the result of a well-defined rational choice made by politicians and administrators from a range of different scenarios" is a privileged belief (2000, p. 179).

The different value systems embedded in nonconventional rural discourse and conventional political discourse in turn promote a particular discourse structure (which in
turn reinforces the values systems in a cyclical pattern). Because political decision-making is a centralized effort at consensus undertaken by a select group of people, the discourse eventually is distanced from the fluid, give-and-take of outsiders and assumes a replicable, fixed process. Wilson devotes a considerable portion of his speech to explain this process. For instance, an agricultural issue raised by a constituent is brought to the Senate by a representative (and only if enough constituents raise the issue so as to constitute a statistical significance [Stotsky, 1987, p. 398]), where it then goes to the Senate Agriculture Committee, where it becomes parsed, rewritten and bargained over by the committee members. “The implication is,” Wilson states, “I won’t meddle in cotton if you won’t meddle in wheat. So the groups get together and work out their differences commodity by commodity and then package it all together. Then the challenge becomes how to shoehorn it all into the budget, and that is where the tradeoffs begin” (1984, p. 176). Hees castigates this privileged system as too isolated and lockstep, and instead advocates policy mediation, which represents a wider range of interests than those of a select group of committee politicos: “Actual situations on the ground should be understood better and more systematically by all of the parties involved to prevent missed opportunities” (2000, p. 181). However, politicians continue to invoke the replication and predictability of traditional, more scientific Western communication so they can better handle the volume of their constituents’ demands.

The Political Interview Participants

From May through July 2002 I solicited feedback from several local, state and even
federal politicians regarding their views about the BFC and its brochure and flyer. I chose these politicians because of their affiliation with the BFC’s creation and their work in agricultural legislation. Patty Judge and John Norris responded to my queries. I communicated with Judge via email, while Norris and I held two telephone conversations.

As Mike Duffy explained to me, current Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Patty Judge was a state senator when the BFC was created and publicly supported the organization during its initial years. Her positive viewpoint represents the majority vote by which the state legislature approved funding for the BFC’s creation, and therefore the political audience to whom the BFC’s initial documents were directed. Judge also has extensive experience with agricultural issues as they are manifested in political contexts.

Because the State of Iowa Web site repeatedly encourages visitors to email their politicians, in May 2002 I emailed several questions and copies of the bi-fold brochure and flyer to Judge (see Appendix A). I believed that the electronic format would encourage her to respond when her busy schedule permitted, rather than generate the forced, possibly reluctant answers of a cold-call telephone interview. My guess proved correct, and she did not respond to my message until a month later.

During the time of our interview, John Norris (D-Iowa) was running for the U.S. House of Representatives. Although he was not mentioned as a possible interview candidate by Mike Duffy, Norris still is something of a coup in terms of this dissertation’s interview participants. His previous experience as top assistant to U.S. congressman Leonard Boswell (who is known colloquially by his pre-redistricted constituency as a “farmer politician”)
included years of working within Iowa, with Iowa’s agricultural issues, and within a political forum, and he shares the same Iowa farm constituents as state-level legislators.

Consequently, Norris’ statements represent the rhetorical situation in which the BFC’s political audience would read the documents of coordination.

In July 2002, I emailed copies of the Beginning Farmer Center’s one-page flyer and bi-fold brochure to Norris; two weeks later, we spoke by telephone about his reactions to the documents. The interview began with a list of open-ended questions that I asked of all my interviewees (see Appendix A), but I kept the interview structure sufficiently informal to allow Norris to elaborate on certain points and range into other subject areas.

As politicians, Judge and Norris obviously have certain agendas; Judge must balance her rural constituents with the much-needed lobbyist support from industrial farms, and Norris is promoting a certain agenda during his run for U.S. Congress (and knew at the time of our interview that I was not a voter in his district.) But by virtue of their political demographics, including work experience in and public support of agriculture, these two nonetheless are representative of the BFC’s targeted political audience. Both provided helpful comments about the BFC’s documents of coordination.

Patricia Judge

Judge’s initial comments describe the political context in which the flyer and brochure’s political audiences would read these documents: “I believe now, as I did then, that the work of the BFC is very important to the future of agriculture in Iowa. We are seeing an
overall decline in the number of farms and farmers in Iowa, but agriculture remains the
cornerstone for the state and a powerful force in our economy.” Two phrases here, “the
cornerstone for the state” and “a powerful force in our economy,” suggest that the
documents’ political audience assigns equal power to the cultural significance of the family
farm and the economy. (Although Judge does not specifically use the phrase “family farm,”
her statement that farms and farmers are in an “overall decline” are assumed to refer to small-
scale enterprises, as the number of industrial farms are on the rise in Iowa.) These two issues
(the decline of family farms and the growth of industrial farms), then, would be in play when
political readers examined the BFC’s documents.

However, Judge’s subsequent comments suggest no connection between this political
context and her interpretation of the documents:

As the average age of farmers rises, efforts to ensure the success of beginning farmers
is crucial to the future of Iowa agriculture. It was our hope then—and I believe the
BFC has been successful—that this program would help raise that success rate.
While I don’t recall my reaction upon first receiving these publications six years ago,
reading through them now I feel they accurately portray both the reason for and the
mission of the BFC. (personal communication, June 21, 2002)

Judge’s statements reflect an apparent disconnect between context and her reading of the
documents. Given the manner in which her final sentence is constructed, Judge does not
acknowledge that “reading through [the documents] now” is a different rhetorical act from
that of 1996. Instead, her evaluation of the documents is based solely on one criterion—how
effectively they communicate the reason for the BFC’s existence—and this criterion has
remained static despite the turbulence of the past six years in Iowa agriculture.
John Norris

Norris’ immediate comments suggest that the one-page flyer and bi-fold brochure do not convey a sharp sense of audience and purpose: “I wasn’t sure what the intention was for the documents, and I wasn’t sure who they were prepared for,” he said. In fact, his question, “Was this a promotion type of thing that was sent out to farmers, or...?” implies that the documents’ multiple audiences may have mislead readers to believe that the target audience was strictly a farming one.

In terms of a political reader’s context, Norris explained that his only time for reading documents was while traveling, and during that time he obviously had other things on his mind such as his destination and responsibilities upon arrival. The distracted reading context helps to define what a high readability level would be for a political audience:

To get my attention, you need something like bulleted points that highlight the organization’s successes or key points, something that I can take away with me. Something that piques my interest so that I want to know more about it. That would influence how much time I’d spend with the material. I wouldn’t have time to read through something to gather the points.... The missions and accomplishments need to jump out at me more—as a politician, that would be the information that I’d remember if I don’t work with the issue all the time.

The restrictions on a political audience’s reading time is a significant issue. In fact, while soliciting data for a Final Report on Evaluation of the Communication Between Land-Grant Universities and Congress (2002), researchers Boone et al. discovered that some legislators’ offices are so busy that their aides are prohibited from filling out questionnaires (p. 2).

Such busy political audiences also wouldn’t have the time to do the work of following up on a document, a fact that places a greater burden on the document’s persuasive purpose.
Although contact information is provided at the very end of both documents—in line with professional communication scholar Kitty O. Locker's (2000) recommendation to place important text in the top-left and bottom-right corners of a page (p. 137)—Norris did not notice this information: “[The documents] need an avenue for someone to get more detailed information.”

Norris’ final reflections on these documents confirm the idea that they have failed rhetorically. “Another thing that strikes me is that these two documents seem to be fairly repetitive,” he explained. Also, “I didn’t get the impression that [the BFC’s primary clients] were small farmers.” Norris elaborated on why this omission would especially be detrimental for a document directed at politicians who fund agricultural programs:

There’s got to be something new about the information. You know, there’s not much hope right now, and so you have to offer something new to survive in the economy besides using subsidies. Are we going to look at niche marketing? Create new ways for farmers to get into farming? These are the things that a prudent policymaker needs to know when making a decision. (personal communication, July 15, 2002)

**Political Assemblages**

Literature on professional communication in American politics suggests a theoretical paradigm shift in the research sometime during the years of Ronald Reagan’s presidency. While pre-Reagan and Reagan-era research tends to focus on explicit communicative strategies such as cartoons, word choice, gestures and media imagery (i.e., Brummett, 1980, 1981; Bull, 1986; Chaffee and Tims, 1982; Gregg, 1977), a survey of post-Reagan articles suggests that subtler rhetorical analysis—including a focus on tacit values and beliefs embedded in the explicit behaviors—plays a more prominent role in political communication research. In
keeping with this wider rhetorical approach, the following assemblages can be seen as representative of the most consequential issues embedded in a political audience’s reading context.

The divisiveness of class. While reviewing the documents, Norris stated, “The number of people who are being helped by this program [the BFC] aren’t really significant to me. What are they—sixty or seventy people who’ve been helped? That’s not too many” (personal communication, July 15, 2002). As public figures, both of my political interview participants are highly conscious of what comprises a critical mass when it comes to their constituency; in other words, majority still rules, both in terms of voting numbers and in the dominance of voters’ viewpoints. “Sixty or seventy” people, even if all of one mind about an issue, do not count for much if the majority of other voters think differently.

While the constituencies are heterogeneous, in public venues they are situated as farmers-versus-nonfarmers. In the farm demographic, the relationship with political representatives is particularly dicey because it is based mostly upon the struggle over agricultural subsidies. Peterson, citing Henderson, explains that this tangled financial relationship breeds mutual misunderstanding and even resentment between farmers and legislators: “One who has never viewed life from this solitary post has no right to determine how farmers should act. These farmers have redefined … freedom as the right to manipulate objects without outside interference” (p. 302). From the farmer’s perspective, the politicians are the ones “who sit complacently in the midst of civilization,” characterized, as a farmer tells Peterson, by “some guy sittin’ behind a desk sayin’ ‘well, you gotta do this,’ and ‘you
gotta do that’” (p. 302).

Meanwhile, central Iowa newspapers and television news promote the non-farmer constituents’ perspective. Register columnist Shirley Ragsdale, for example, recently ignored the pollution of industrial farms and instead focused on the smell of small-scale hog operations: “Regardless of opposition to corporate farming and industrial-strength hog production, the reason [small farms are] being singled out over other livestock operations is the smell” (April 5, 2002). Ragsdale goes on to explain is that the demographics of the people who complain about the smell—non-farm constituents—are the underlying reason small farms are being targeted. Those who complain loudest have the money, and the power, and the social cachet, and so their complaints rise to a political level:

An increasingly urban Iowa is pressing for changes in the state’s once politically sacrosanct agriculture industry. People who don’t know or care how the pork chops show up in the plastic-sealed container in the supermarket are building homes in the country. After they’ve invested several hundred thousand dollars in real estate, the prevailing wind changes and they get a whiff… They slam the windows closed and ask, “What’s that smell?” And then they complain to their county supervisor, their state legislator and anyone else who will listen. (April 5, 2002)

Or, as Maurice Moffitt told me, “The people who have a big enough voice in politics, they may be from the city, but they put their input into farm bills just as much as anybody” (personal communication, September 12, 2002).

**Preoccupation with volume.** Given the contentious issues that can so easily make or break an election, it is no surprise that in the political field success is defined as the American hunger-for-more—more votes, more lobbyist support, more funding. As Norris commented, “sixty or seventy” people do not count for much when thousands of votes are
Politicians’ response to this preoccupation with volume relies heavily upon quantitative strategies and measuring-sticks. In 2001, for instance, Congress developed a bill that would allocate federal funds to schools that had proven their effectiveness via high standardized testing scores: “[This bill] will stifle, and hopefully it will kill creative teaching methods,” the U.S. assistant secretary of education boasted. In this bill, politicians argued that quantitative empiricism is the best method for Congressional decision-making (Balta, 2002). No more tinkering with touchy-feely qualitative studies—their empirical efficiency was unproven. And recent developments in America’s “Homeland Security” defense program include a plan to “develop a scientific system to detect a person’s hostile intent” toward the U.S. government (Hall, 2002). That, as a rhetorical move, legislators promote the scientific assessment of even human emotion demonstrates the extent of science’s power as a cultural tool.

In fact, legislators may reject certain proposals if there is insufficient quantitative evidence. A current bill in the California state legislature, for example, will protect Native American sacred sites from the money-making potential of land development (particularly shopping malls)—only if Native Americans can show evidence in addition to their tribal lore that a site is religiously significant: “Oral histories could be part of it, but more would be needed.” As California legislator Wes Chesborough elaborates, “Such things as … carbon-dated fire rings, a university research ethnographer’s investigations, rock art [with images that reappear across rock formations and thus can be counted], any of those kinds of things that
can demonstrate beyond one individual saying that [the site] in fact once was used [for religious purposes]" are necessary to prove the sacredness of the ground ("Native American," July 22, 2002). Like many Western communities, then, in the political world the dominance of scientific replicability and controllability trumps such qualitative evidence as oral narrative.

AUDIENCE #3: FINDING THE BANKERS

The conventional communication strategies typical of the banking world dovetail naturally with this industry's dependence upon cold, hard numbers. For example, one in-house newsletter that circulated among Bank of England employees boasts how the bank took thirty private sector economic surveys and converted their data into more reliable statistics for its own marketing use (Cunningham, 1997, p. 292). At the heart of banking is a quantitative issue—money handling—and as such it follows that the majority of banking communication also would concern numbers and the integrity with which they should be calculated. This discourse community therefore suggests a stark opposition to the personal nature of rural communication:

Did I ever tell you the story about the cattle feeder that went into the bank and wanted to borrow money to feed cattle? This banker was a kind of a tough, old guy and he said, "Well, I can't lend you money to feed cattle." And the [farmer] said, well, he really wanted to do that. [The banker] said, "I'll tell you what I'll do." See, this banker had this one glass eye. He was real proud of that glass eye because he thought no one could tell that he even had a glass eye. So he told the farmer, he said, "You look me right in the eye and if you can tell me which eye is the glass eye, I'll let you have the money." The [farmer] studied him real close and he said, "Your right eye is the glass eye." And [banker] said, "How did you know that?" He said, "I didn't think anybody could tell." And [the farmer] said, "Well, I looked at them both and there was a little bit of feeling in that eye." (Troublesome Creek, 1997)
Consequently, as I would find in my interviews with banking representatives, even a bank located in a small, rural town could be characterized by the focus on scientific accuracy rather than the fluidity of rural discourse.

The Banking Participants

Mike Duffy suggested that a credible representative of the BFC’s banking audience could be found in Mike Bobst, a banker at Raccoon Valley Community Bank in Minburn, Iowa. As a member of a small-town financial institution, Bobst works closely with farm clients and was very supportive when the BFC was first organized. On July 12, 2002, I spoke with Bobst via telephone and asked him some preliminary questions about his association with the BFC; he told me, “I have seen the need for this type of service for many years and have tried to be of assistance in any way I can. [BFC attorney] John Baker has involved me in some of the projects for the BFC.” While Bobst was a friendly participant, he obviously was pressed for time, and as such preferred to examine the documents of coordination and answer my questions via e-mail rather than in a personal interview.

The only other banking participant who agreed to be interviewed for this dissertation was discovered by chance. During a Sunday dinner with my family, I half-listened as my uncle and brother critiqued Dwight Freitag, their local banker. My ears picked up, though, when my brother commented, “I think he used to be a dairy farmer.” Freitag, I thought, would pose an interesting perspective, as a representative of both the farming and banking audiences targeted by the BFC.
Dwight Freitag grew up on a family farm, which he sold during the farm crisis of the 1980s. After knocking around in various positions—including manager of a Country Kitchen restaurant—he began work as an Agriculture Representative at Community State Bank in Indianola, Iowa. On August 1, 2002, I met with Freitag at the bank, having waited 20 minutes for his arrival. He greeted me with, “Oh, that’s right. I’d forgot you were coming. I was watching the Cubs game.” He led me to his office, warily eyeing my tape recorder; whether his refusal to be recorded stemmed from a farmer’s general mistrust or a banker’s need for confidentiality was unclear. His comments during the interview further demonstrated the influences from the farm and banking worlds, and the difficulty in bridging the two.

**Mike Bobst**

During my interview with Bobst, he told me that he reacted favorably to the flyer and brochure when he received them in 1996: “There was much information given in the initial [contact with the documents] over a very short period of time. I was impressed with the range of relevant information being offered, [and] with the development of the manual and the use of the Drake Law Center for the transition to ag living.” He did not offer any suggestions for the texts’ improvement or ask that any information be clarified.

However, Bobst’s interpretation of the documents’ intended audience accounted for his diplomatic critique, as he did not identify himself as one of the documents’ target audiences. Instead, he read the purpose of the BFC’s texts as providing
information for the replacements of the farmers who will be retiring in the very near future.... [In the documents,] I was looking for what type of information [was] being offered to the those individuals who are trying to get into farming. The replacements for these retiring farmers will need to be young, well-educated, well-prepared people who will take on the challenges of the agricultural world.

Bobst’s subsequent description of a banking audience helps to explain why he did not see his profession as a target audience: “There continues to be a need of open honest communication between those who want to be in agriculture and the lending community. The continual need for accurate financial information is necessary if the lender is to give advice and direction to the farmer. The pro forma information is an absolute necessity in any part of financial planning” (personal communication, July 17, 2002). By implication, a document distinguishes itself in the eyes of a banking audience if its content is explicitly financial. The BFC’s bi-fold brochure and one-page flyer, with its matter-of-fact history of the organization, offers no such context. Financial information worthy of a bank audience’s attention, according to Bobst, includes guideposts that specifically influences how the reader reacts to the document: “I look for the detail and accuracy of the information. It should complete and realistic. From these documents I will determine how much effort I will put into further study of this operation. I will not waste time on something that is not going anywhere.” If the enterprise has successfully established its financial viability, then Bobst “would offer any support I could give for the improvement of [the service being described in the document” (personal communication, July 15, 2002).
Dwight Freitag

Freitag reflected on how preparing the paperwork for his first farm (as a banker) taught him two important lessons about the relationship between farming and banking worlds. First, he was “amazed at the debt load carried by farmers in their sixties. When I was young, by the time you were sixty, you were moving to town!” Second, “the regulations just go on and on now, especially after the S&L got done doing its thing [i.e., the scandals of the 1980s]” (personal communication, August 1, 2002).

Ultimately, Freitag’s lengthy paperwork load, coupled with his description of the context in which a bank’s professional communication occurred, made it clear that the type of hard-copy documents like the one-page flyer and bi-fold brochure probably would end up at the bottom of his reading priorities. In a small-town bank, he explained, only those general mailings with specific deadlines or banking regulation news would circulate throughout the entire bank; each banker would read the document, initial it, then pass it along to the next banker. Having explained this context, he rifled through a messy stack of miscellaneous flyers on his To-Do pile and finally pulled out The Exchange, the Iowa Bankers Association’s official newsletter, as an example of a mass mailing that he would be compelled to actually read.

Banking Assemblages

One of Freitag’s comments during our interview described how times had changed: “The ‘good ol’ boy’ banking days are over. You know, when I was young, you went and
bought your cows, and then the next day you’d go in and get your loan. You just can’t do that anymore—it doesn’t matter if so-and-so knows your family or whatever.” Instead, the primary manner in which a client can build ethos with a banker is on paper, including tax returns, business plans, and other financial statements. This demand for and privileging of an informational paper trail is now so prominent in Western culture that it now has taken on the power of an assemblage.

**Information proliferation.** Freitag’s comments regarding government loans elaborated on the growth of information: “They make you jump through the hoops, that’s for sure,” he stated. “I’ll bet that by the time I was done [preparing his first loan], I had this much paperwork [indicates two-inch width with fingers], and all they sent back were two little sheets of paper, saying that they approved the loan.” Now, he says,

other bankers won’t even do government loans anymore. I play golf with the president of [X] Bank, and he won’t even look at the papers. And [colleague] here at this bank, he’s been here a lot longer than I have, but he’s not from a farm, and he’s more likely to measure the risk factors and crunch the numbers. But overall he would probably rather just steer clear of the whole [government loan] thing. (personal communication, August 1, 2002)

Similarly, in his response to my interview questions, Bobst mentions “information” seven times, and his critique of the brochure and flyer is punctuated with references to the “type of information” and the “range of relevant information” they include. Furthermore, it is significant that the main thing he remembers from his first contact with BFC documents in 1996 is the large amount of “information given … over a very short period” (personal communication, July 17, 2002).

In sync with the Western push for technological innovation, especially that of
computer technology in the past two decades, information too has become both a commodity and a result of technological advances. In fact, popular magazines now refer to the “New Establishment” of the millennium as being those businesspeople who traffic in information dissemination rather than tangible products (Fink, 2002, p. 254). There are thousands of texts that discuss life in the technologically-operated “Information Age,” on issues that range from ethics (Schultze, 2002) to breastfeeding (“Breastfeeding,” August 16, 2002).

A second catalyst in the information explosion is the recent, rapid vertical integration of American business. What used to be termed a “hostile takeover” of a company in the Eighties now is an accepted business practice. Beatrice Foods, DuPont, Inc., AOL-Time Warner… the list of conglomerates that span across the globe and encompass hundreds of subsidiaries is lengthy and complicated. For instance, in 1999 DuPont completed the buyout of Pioneer Hi-Bred, which itself already was an international corporation with fingers in the aeronautics, fiber development, and bio-genetic research pies (“DuPont,” October 1, 1999).

One of Moffitt’s comments points to the nature of a multi-company situation, in this case the financial loan industry:

Most farmers usually used only one or two lenders, thirty years ago. Now there’s a lot of them that are financed by two different machinery companies, and feed companies all want to finance the seed and crop input, and then you still need a lender for general operating money. The seed companies and the chemical companies have kind of delved in; they’ve taken a second position and have been willing to loan money unsecured. That’s something that didn’t used to happen. (personal communication, September 12, 2002)

These Hydra-like companies require such immense legal, financial and research paperwork processing that information consequently becomes prioritized as an important business tool.
In fact, in her study of *Control through Communication*, professional communication scholar JoAnne Yates (1989) describes several major American conglomerates as examples of how “procedures, rules, and financial and operational information [in the twentieth century became increasingly] documented at all levels, making organizational rather than individual memory the repository of knowledge” (p. 271). Yates also explains how “a strong manager” in each conglomerate became prompted by technological and growth trends, among other factors, to “champion” increased documentation in their respective companies (p. 273).

**Preoccupation with volume.** For the banking industry, handling such a vast paper trail is best done quantitatively. This decision is an obvious one, as the very nature of banking is quantitative; this industry trades solely in a *counted* product, currency. In this world, the hunger-for-more is satisfied with numerical empiricism—so much so that even qualitative information must be converted to some type of volume before it is “valid” in bankers’ eyes. During the interviews, for instance, Bobst praised the brochure and flyer for their efficiency—conveying a significant amount of information within a short amount of time.

The preoccupation with numeric volume is evident throughout the banking world. One article in *Bank Marketing*, for example, advises its readers to avoid what it deems the inconclusive murkiness of “Focus Group Purgatory” and instead to convert focus groups’ feedback into numbers when testing marketing campaigns. Bankers are told to focus on “quantity, not quality:” “While it’s true focus groups can yield eye-opening, even revelatory, insights into why customers behave the way they do, such data is not statistically reliable”
(Vincent, 1999, p. 37).

Even the personal contact between customers and tellers in small bank branches—such as the “How’s it goin’” conversations enjoyed by farmers in small-town Iowa banks—does not “count” as important information until it is scientifically translated into numbers. In an article from Banking Strategies magazine, banks are told to disregard this personal contact and instead “carry out a quantitative analysis on the benefits of database marketing in various banking operations and services such as the endorsement of personal loan checks and pre-approved credit cards” (Stoneman, 1998, p. 46). This emphasis on numeric empiricism is confirmed repeatedly throughout this industry. In fact, George W. Bush’s recent comment that “sometimes things aren’t exactly black and white when it comes to accounting procedures” was met with widespread incredulity—not because he was dodging questions about his affiliation with Harken Energy Corporation but because he was suggesting that numbers somehow are interpretive (Kelly, 2002, p. 22).

As my interviews with farming, political and banking participants suggest, specific governing structures and assemblages played a significant part in audience reactions when the BFC’s flyer and brochure were mailed in 1996. Unfortunately, the reactions to these documents of coordination were mostly lukewarm. The final section of this chapter explores how the audiences’ various assemblages are implicated in the flyer and brochure’s rhetorical failure.
NEITHER HERE NOR THERE: THE BFC’S 1996 DOCUMENTS OF COORDINATION

While the BFC’s flyer and brochure received a mixed review from the interview participants, none of them saw the flyer and brochure’s target audience and purpose as relating specifically to him/her. The farmers, resorting to their reliance upon visual cues, did not see any attention-getting design strategies that would incite them to read more deeply. The politicians saw the documents as either a-rhetorical (Judge’s disconnect between context and the act of reading) or rhetorically muddled (Norris was uncertain as to the documents’ target audience). Meanwhile, the bankers cited time constraints as the primary contextual factor that influenced their tendency to read a document, and neither one was prompted to “waste time” (Bobst’s words) reading the documents because they did not contain financial information.

In other words, these audiences found the documents to be irrelevant because they did not address the issues (assemblages) important to the farmer, politician, and banker. Interestingly, while these assemblages differed from group to group, the preoccupation with volume emerged as the only assemblage shared by all three audiences. Hummell worried over his farm’s production rates. Obviously, Judge and Norris campaigned for the largest volume of votes, and Bobst and Freitag focused on the volume of information and paperwork in their field. Not only did the flyer and brochure fail to address the issues privileged within each world, then, but these documents of coordination did not even attempt to mediate among the farmer, politician and banker by invoking the one assemblage they do happen to share.

In sum, then, the lack of explicit features (attention-getting visual designs, financial
content) and the absences of assemblages important to each audience rendered the BFC’s first documents of coordination a rhetorical failure. By not relating to any of the audiences, much less all of them, the documents neither reified nor challenged any of the audiences’ value systems; instead, these publications existed in some kind of rhetorical limbo as they circulated from the BFC through the postal system to the target audience, failing to connect anywhere, ultimately landing in the trash. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that the audiences’ interactions with the BFC in the following year slightly deteriorated; for instance, while twenty-one families participated in the 1996 BFC AgLink workshops (which took place before the documents were mailed), only thirteen attended in 1997 (“AgLink,” September 28, 2002). Furthermore, as the next chapter demonstrates, the condition of Iowa’s agriculture continued to worsen financially and politically after 1996, forcing the BFC to once again rethink how its publications operated in a most turbulent context.
CHAPTER 4:

FALLING INTO THE GAP: AN ACADEMIC DOCUMENT OF COORDINATION
BACKGROUND

In 1996, having reshaped its mission statement from a small-farm focus to the more general “leveraging the advantage,” the Beginning Farmer Center accordingly began to publish documents of coordination, or documents tailored to negotiate among a number of conflicting audiences. Two such documents, a bi-fold brochure and one-page flyer (see Chapter 3), were published in 1996. These two pieces were targeted to small-scale farmers, politicians and bankers, each of whom had a particular agenda for Iowa agriculture and each of whom was informed by certain governing structures and assemblages. As the indifferent and negative reactions toward the documents by the interview participants suggested, the flyer and brochure failed to connect with any of the audiences. Farmers were not drawn to the text-heavy nature of the documents, politicians did not have the time to read texts that did not appear to address a particular audience (i.e., constituency), and bankers reserved their energies only for documents that pertained specifically to the financial industry.

The 1996 brochure and flyer would be the first in a series of attempts by the BFC to target several audiences within one document. And, as it had with those documents, the organization again experienced failure in 1998 with the launching of its Web site (see Chapter 1). In fact, the site’s lack of success was so marked as to inspire a study by an Iowa State Master’s student (see Whitaker, 1998). Furthermore, in their lack of connection with their various audiences, the brochure, flyer and Web site did not assist the BFC’s role as a viable Extension resource for the surrounding community.

Unfortunately, financial constraints severely restricted the BFC’s professional
communication alternatives. The global competition in agriculture, increased significantly by the 1996 Freedom to Farm Act, was followed by several years of low domestic grain and livestock market prices and lowered support of government farm programs. As chronicled in Chapter 1, large-scale farm operations easily survived and even benefited from the competition, but small-scale farms and the programs designed to assist them struggled. Further stricken by budget cuts at the state level, in 2000 the BFC appealed for help from the USDA's Advisory Committee on Beginning Farmers and Ranchers ("USDA's Beginning Farmers," 2000). A year later, the BFC joined forces with the national Institute for Social and Economic Development and the Center for Rural Affairs to plead again for more government support of agriculture ("Rural Leaders," 2001).

Granted, Extension programs such as the BFC always have been vulnerable to economic trends. However, in the 1990s farm-related programs like the BFC faced yet another challenge: One-sided news stories about agriculture in the media. In 2001, agriculture education scholar Mohamed Yacoub studied how Extension informed media stories about farming and discovered that nationally broadcasted shows such as Ag Day and U. S. Farm Report obtained their information largely from for-profit sources rather than from non-profit sources such as Extension. Moreover, when non-profit Extension sources were cited in the media, they typically were used by newspapers (which have comparatively smaller audiences than broadcast media) or in specialized trade magazines (again, with much smaller audiences) such as Wallace's Farmer and Progressive Farmer (p. 53). If Extension were to continue at all as a competitive, reliable source of information, then its publications needed to be
rhetorically sound—and at the BFC, a history of failed documents of coordination worked against this imperative.

The cumulative result of publication, budgetary and media pressures resulted in an increasingly perilous situation for the BFC. If the organization were to survive, then it needed to publicly validate its existence. Unfortunately, its previous documents of coordination were not helping to promote the organization’s mission and clientele—and considering the audiences’ reactions to the documents (Chapter 3), the BFC’s communicative failure perhaps even dulled its public reputation. To add insult to injury, the BFC staff was disappointed in the results from a study it conducted in 1998 (where the majority of its AgLink seminar participants reported no use of the materials distributed by the BFC during the seminar). In other words, the organization found itself in a precarious rhetorical context when it came to its published communication. The BFC’s next major document had to repair whatever ethos had been damaged.

This chapter chronicles the development of the BFC’s next major document, a research report targeted at several audiences: Farmers, the editorial board of a professional journal, and the journal’s readers. Because the research report was yet another document of coordination, it needed to embrace all of these audiences’ differences, yet fulfill the journal’s very focused requirements for publication. As the following discussion of the report’s context and audiences will show, however, the conflicts of interest between and special demands of the farming and academic audiences resulted not in a successful document, but
rather a cautionary example of failed rhetoric.

APRIL 2001

Looking for a way to justify my employment to ISU Payroll, BFC director Mike Duffy proposes that the findings from a recent BFC survey be written up into a research paper, modeled on a report from Cornell University Extension. Not only would using this model enable a comparison among American, British, French and Canadian farm succession trends, but it would make available a more elaborate analysis of farm succession should any of the BFC’s survey participants—all farmers—wish to learn more about the issue. Mike is very enthused.

And so, Farm Succession in Iowa is born. Mike, John Baker (the BFC’s attorney) and I agree to meet several times during the course of the report’s development, but it soon becomes clear that I alone will be writing the thing. Mike and John have already conducted the statistical research with their 2000 survey; it is now up to me and my rhetorical skills to present the data, following the generic conventions of a research report.

Easier said than done, I think. No farmer I know would be interested in slogging through a highly technical, impersonal report. I could just hear my uncle Jerry now: “What the hell is this? I don’t have time for this bullshit—the east field needs spraying.”
I definitely have my work cut out for me.

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WRITING THE REPORT: FOUR DRAFTS

In the spring of 2000, the BFC had spent a great deal of time and money to survey Iowa farmers about their retirement plans. Since that time, a few small projects had developed based on the participants’ feedback. Mike had been able to generate political speeches and short Des Moines Register editorials from the survey’s statistical results. And in early 2001, I had developed a tri-fold brochure (Planning for the Future), targeted at small-scale Iowa farmers, which touched upon the survey results and directed interested readers to contact the BFC if they wished to learn more (see Appendix B); the original intention was that interested readers would receive a lengthier document in response to their inquiry. No substantial publication, however, had been released that commented upon the survey results and their implications for agriculture in Iowa. Such silence was not in keeping with an Extension program affiliated with a research university, where the tacit “publish or perish” rule still prevailed.

Consequently, the idea for Farm Succession in Iowa was developed in a context where research standards were high, and where funding often was based upon the merits of published research studies. The structural model Mike chose for the document—a research report resembling texts published by other Extension programs—reflects this context. By using a conventional model, the BFC would reestablish itself as a credible source of research in Extension. In addition, certain conventions of the Extension research report, such as the
introductory description of survey methods and the concluding section discussing implications for future research, made for a convenient structural model for communicating the BFC survey results.

As I worked on *Farm Succession in Iowa* between June and December 2001, it underwent four major iterations in the BFC’s quest for a successful document of coordination (see Appendix B); each draft necessitated a face-to-face consultation with Mike and John. In addition to the meetings, I participated in twenty-one email conversations about the report with Mike, who in turn spoke with John whenever the latter was on campus (John works for the BFC from his West Des Moines office).

At the time of each meeting, the decisions we made seemed isolated from those made in previous and subsequent meetings, thus muddling the report’s overall rhetorical situation as I parsed through survey data and developed statistical bar graphs. Only in retrospect do the decisions made among Mike, John and myself cohere into a specific trajectory, shown in the following description of my writing process. Granted, a writer’s struggle to get an article accepted for publication is nothing new in the academic world; the trajectory of this particular report’s writing process, however, is different from the typically focused rhetorical situation (i.e., a targeted audience, a primary purpose, and a static context).

In essence, the *Farm Succession in Iowa* report is a study of an attempt to negotiate simultaneously with the worlds of academic publication and of farming. By playing with publication’s explicit rules and cultural values in order to address disparate audiences, I
attempted to draft a text that would embody the spirit of a document of coordination. I attempted to write a text that was publishable and yet focused on an issue of little interest to the journal publication in question. And I attempted to format a text according to publication requirements, yet toyed with some of these requirements in order to retain the farming audience’s attention. In other words, the *Farm Succession in Iowa* writing process was not the typical author’s experience of negotiating solely with a journal’s editorial board, but rather with several groups on a number of fronts.

**First Draft: June 6, 2001**

When I wrote the first draft of *Farm Succession in Iowa*, I had assumed that the report would be a natural follow-up to the 2001 *Planning for the Future* brochure. Because *Planning* had not been a document of coordination, it targeted only one primary audience: Small-scale Iowa farmers who wanted to learn strategies for retirement. I thought that *Farm Succession in Iowa*, as a lengthier version of *Planning*, accordingly would target this single audience as well. But I was mistaken.

Mike’s decision to use a research report model therefore seemed rhetorically inappropriate to me; certainly these farmers would have little or no interest in such a research-oriented document. My belief was strengthened by my observation that other Extension reports seemed to meet small farmers’ preference for visuals as a part of their experiential epistemology; for example, the SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education) report relies heavily on visuals to break up blocks of concise text (see Appendix
B). Consequently, bearing in mind *Planning* and SARE's focus on a small-scale farm audience, I decided to slightly alter the typical research report structure. Two significant consequences came from this decision: I used lots of graphics and I omitted the "Implications for Further Research" section.

**Using lots of graphics.** I decided to use bar graphs to describe the survey participants' demographics as a means of generating farmers' interest; if the audience could see how it resembled the survey participants in age and size of farm operation, they might be enticed to keep reading. Consequently, of the 4-1/2 pages of text in the first draft, 1-1/2 were devoted to these visuals.

**Omitting "Implications for Further Research."** In the interests of the farming audience, I decided to avoid discussing the data's implications for future research. Given farmers' heavy preference for visual design and their lack of interest in future research implications, I assumed that my structural alteration was rhetorically sound.

During the "first draft meeting" with Mike, however, he challenged my concept of the report's rhetorical situation, which in turn made me realize that *Farm Succession in Iowa* was going to be yet another document of coordination. This particular document, Mike explained, would have two target audiences: Small-scale farmers, and an academic audience interested in research studies on farm succession.

Furthermore, Mike told me that the small-scale farm audience needed to be conceptualized as comprising two subgroups: Farmers who already have made retirement plans and farmers who need to make retirement plans. Mike believed that the latter audience
would find the Implications for Further Research relevant, as this section would demonstrate the dire need for retirement planning in farm operations.

As for the academic audience, Mike explained that scholars would want to know about the research methods and implications of the survey findings; this necessitated writing sections on each to establish the BFC's methodological credibility. As with most research reports in Extension, the Implications for Future Research section also would implicitly justify the social, political and financial expense of the research. I left the meeting realizing that my draft needed extensive revisions.

Second Draft: November 5, 2001

The second draft of the BFC report still included a number of visual aids, but having taken Mike's advice, I expanded the text in certain areas that catered more to the academic audience than to the farm readers.

Finding an issue. During the "second draft meeting," Mike and John both said that they believed that there existed a critical issue for retiring farmers; namely, a majority of the survey respondents expected a third of their income to come from their farm operation after they had retired and passed the farm down. As Mike explained, this statistic, coupled with the fact that many respondents had neither discussed their retirement plans with their successors nor done any concrete retirement planning, implied a future of great conflict for farm families. A successor who expected to take full control of the farm one day, only to discover that he was expected to give up a substantial portion of his income, probably would
not be satisfied with such a financial arrangement. Because few other scholars had discussed this looming conflict, the BFC report had an opportunity to situate itself as a cutting-edge document by discussing a heretofore ignored phenomenon.

While I worked on showcasing this issue, I also attempted to retain the farm audience’s attention by adding another visual aid—a pie chart that defined the survey participants’ retirement statuses as “holding” onto, in the process of “transferring,” or having “passed” their farms onto the next generation.

Comparing succession plans. Mike also gave me several academic and Extension reports that discussed farm succession and asked that I compare the BFC survey findings to those in the other reports. Accordingly, I read several articles by University of Plymouth scholar Andrew Errington (1998, 1999), Laval University scholars Jacques Tondreau, Diane Parent, and Jean-Philippe Perrier (2002), and a Cornell University Extension bulletin (1992), then addressed these texts’ major issues in the BFC report (i.e., “length of semi-retirement,” “managerial issues during transfer,” and “sources of retirement income”). Because both Errington and Cornell Extension are authoritative sources on farm issues, Mike believed that references to them in the report would further establish its academic credibility.

Third Draft: December 14, 2001

By the third draft, because of its statistics-heavy content and inclusion of academic citations (e.g., Errington), the report leaned more toward the academic audience than the small-farm audience—even though the target of the report ostensibly remained small-scale
Citing authoritative sources. In the tradition of an academic paper, the BFC report now included a literature review that acknowledged other scholarly work conducted on the topic of farm succession. Specifically, I extended the description of the survey format to include a reference to Errington’s work on farm succession, a quote from Errington in the section on “The Succession Process,” a longer description of one of Errington’s key concepts (the “succession ladder”).

Emphasizing the issue. Acknowledging other scholarship enables an author not only to point out its merits, but also its omissions. Such was the case with the BFC report’s third draft. For instance, I lengthened the section on “The Respondents and Responses” to more explicitly display the heretofore overlooked issue addressed by the BFC report (i.e., a majority of the survey respondents expected a third of their income to come from their farm operation after they had retired and passed the farm down.) And rather than cast this issue as one that the farm audience should learn from, I was encouraged to cast it as a crucial area for further scholarship.

By its third draft, Mike decided that the report better fit the rhetorical situation he’d described during our first meeting. And in early December, John received a Call for Papers that he thought would be appropriate for the report. In January 2003, the Journal for Business Venturing (JBV) would publish a special issue on “The Evolving Family/Entrepreneurial Business Relationship,” and given our report’s focus on the impending change to family farms in Iowa, both John and Mike agreed that we should submit
it. Consequently, on December 14, I met with Mike to discuss formatting the report for submission to *JBV*.

What we did not discuss was changing the *content* to better fit *JBV*'s rhetorical focus. Even though the report would be formatted for an academic journal, Mike still intended the document to be used by farmers as well, and revising the content would have violated the report's major purpose as a document of coordination. Consequently, after our meeting the only changes I made to the text were in accordance with the journal's submission format requirements (i.e., margins, font type, etc.).

**WRITING THE REPORT: *JBV* Context**

A closer examination of *JBV* reveals specific places where its context (and therefore its editors' and subscribers' reading response) differs from that of the BFC report's small-scale farmer audience. Rhetorically, three particular facts about *JBV* should be noted:

1) *JBV* is published by Elsevier Science (a division of Elsevier Publishing), which puts out a large range of academic journals;

2) *JBV* requires certain formatting conventions in addition to those expected by Elsevier Science; and

3) The particular *JBV* issue targeted by our BFC report, a “Special Issue on Small Business Entrepreneurship,” established additional content parameters for those articles submitted.

The following discussion illuminates what *JBV* editors and readers prefer.
Publishing with Elsevier Science

Elsevier Science prides itself on academic rigor. Its Web site contains twelve pages of instructions for prospective authors and four pages of instructions for authors after they have submitted an article. On a Web page entitled “Why publish with Elsevier?” it states,

Elsevier Science’s primary research journals are peer reviewed and independently edited by acknowledged experts in their fields, thereby certifying the integrity of the information. Our rigorous publishing process assures excellence not only on the editorial level but in physical production as well. Quality control at all stages of the publishing process guarantees our customers a superior product. (2002, my emphasis)

Given such a description, it is no surprise that Elsevier Science defines “integrity of the information” as that which has been verified through the scientific method. It is important to note the academic cultural values embedded in the “rigor” and “integrity” that Elsevier promotes.

Professional communication scholar Linda Brodkey (1987) uses the terms “analytical” and “interpretive” to distinguish between the two most common traditions in academic research. While analytical research assumes the existence of a reality that can be discovered and proven by mathematical probability, interpretive research assumes that a “reality” is constructed by a researcher’s method and “proven” by the strength of the researcher’s claim. As Brodkey explains, analytical methods, with their quantitative rigor, imply a “guarantee that the time and energy spent in production is positively correlated with output.” In other words, an audience trained in the analytical research tradition sees a relationship between the effort required in completing a scientifically empirical study and the validity of the study’s results. And because Elsevier Science equates analytical research methods with “rigor,” it
follows that its *JBV* audience would be more likely to believe an article featuring such methods.

Furthermore, Brodkey states that presenting the results via certain organizational components (i.e., "problem, methods, results, and conclusions") helps to establish the study as analytically sound (p. 45). The idea that writing components contribute to an article's appearance of scientific objectivity also appears in the work of linguistics scholar John Swales (1990), who states that "the research article ... [is] so cunningly engineered by rhetorical machining that it somehow still gives an impression of being but a simple description of relatively untransmuted raw material" (p. 125). In other words, a scholar can strengthen the appearance of research rigor in his/her work by using those written components historically associated with scientific empiricism.

**Publishing in *JBV***

In addition to the sixteen pages of instructions for publishing in Elsevier Science, the portion of Elsevier's Web site devoted specifically to *JBV* contains four pages of instructions for article submission; these requirements are meant to promote "the dissemination of superior empirical and rigorously developed theoretical findings that advance our knowledge in four key areas: Entrepreneurship, new business development, industry evolution, and technology management" (*The Journal*, 2002). Note the repetition of Elsevier Science's insistence on "rigor," again confirming the importance of scientific empiricism.

In addition, article submissions undergo a strict review process. As one of my
interview participants explained, the journal’s senior editor receives a submission, reviews it, and if he determines that “this is within [the journal’s] scope,” distributes the text to those editors whose background best matches the submission’s content; each submission is then reviewed by a three-member group of editors. If the editors determine that the text has merit, it typically is returned to the writer with revision suggestions, and the writer is expected to revise the text and resubmit it as soon as possible. Those texts without merit are returned with rejection letters (H. Sapienza, personal communication, November 25, 2002).

**Publishing in the Special Issue**

The Call for Papers specific to *JBP*’s Special Issue includes one page of author instructions in addition to those already established by Elsevier Science in general and *JBP* in particular. Although no mention is made of “rigor” here, as with any refereed journal each article submission was assessed in a blind review. Specifically, authors were encouraged to focus their submissions on “family connections and their effects on businesses” (J. Baker, personal communication, December 6, 2001).

Ultimately, the BFC report we submitted for publication was filtered through a top-down hierarchical system—first tested against formatting requirements and the empirical standards of scientific “rigor,” then the more focused expectations of the document’s related discipline, and finally the topic-specific nature of the Special Issue (Figure 4.1).
As stated earlier, during the report's first three drafts Mike and I tried to revise the text into a more acceptable academic model (i.e., references to another author's work in this area, implications for further research), but we believed that the report's content required no changes.

We were surprised, then, when on June 16 Mike received a form rejection letter from the *Journal of Business Venturing*. The *JBV* editors' comments focused on aspects that did
not fit the Elsevier Science hierarchy, particularly the article’s formatting. Specifically, all three of the *JB V* editors who reviewed the BFC report noted the absence of a literature review (see Appendix B), suggesting that an unconventional format is a mistake in a prospective academic business article.

After receiving the rejection letter, Mike, John and I met for a fourth time in early July to discuss the next step for our report; we decided that our next revision should focus exclusively upon one particular journal and its target audience, rather than trying to simultaneously accommodate numerous, disparate audiences.

**FOURTH DRAFT: JULY 2, 2002**

Mike and John are having a grand ol’ time as they sit in the back conference room of Curtiss Hall. “So tell me, John, about how hard you’ve been working,” Mike teases. “Look at that tan! Have you been on the golf course?”

Dead serious, John replies, “Let me tell you where I got this tan. This tan is from pouring concrete into a driveway all weekend. This tan is from putting up studs for a new garage.” They continue to go back and forth, joking about the perils of putting up wallpaper and the happy way in which beer can make a job seem less difficult.

I sit back and listen. Usually, sitting at a table and listening to a couple of guys razz each other is one of my favorite past-times. I’d spent my entire childhood watching such scenes—and, if I was lucky, I’d get invited to join in the fun. “Tell your uncle he’s full of shit,” my grandfather would say to me after fifteen minutes of arguing with one of his sons. I’d happily oblige, and everyone would laugh at the
Today, though, I’m too tired to enjoy the banter. And I’m frustrated. *The Journal of Business Venturing* has rejected our report on farm succession and even rubbed salt in the wound with some rather catty revision suggestions. I’m the only one to blame for the rejection, as I am the only one who wrote the report. Still, it stings a little, mostly because of the rejection’s implications for my future success as an academic. And as a rhetorician.

I should have listened to my gut instinct, the one that told me that satisfying both farmers’ expectations and academics’ demands was impossible. Wasn’t my entire life a cautionary example of this tension? From my family’s contempt of my scholarship to my classmates’ elitist attitude toward manual labor, the proof was right there in front of me. If I were any kind of student, I’d learn my lesson, pick my poison, and be done with it.

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**FOUR FARMERS, THREE EDITORS, TWO READERS, ONE RESEARCHER**

As the previous sections described, *Farm Succession in Iowa*, as a document of coordination, was an unusual phenomenon in that it attempted to negotiate the typical rhetorical rules for strong writing (i.e., a targeted audience, a primary purpose, and a static context). In the case of the BFC, there is nothing typical or fixed about its documents of coordination; these documents’ purposes are determined by audiences and contexts that are anything but static. As the writer of the *Farm Succession in Iowa* report, I viewed this document of coordination’s unique rhetorical situation as a reason to play with the aforementioned rules of academic publication; however, the very fluidity of these rules also
made the construction of the report a difficult challenge.

To guide me, I based my writing decisions about *Farm Succession in Iowa* largely upon my understanding of the BFC report's various audiences. The following rhetorical analysis of these audiences sheds light on the specific places where these groups conflicted most—those places where *Farm Succession in Iowa* needed to mediate. The nature of these particular audiences, farming and academic, suggests the broad range of demographics the report needed to bridge to be successful as a document of coordination.

Specifically, during my work on the BFC report I came to realize that in fact it targets four audiences:

1) Farmers with concrete retirement plans,

2) farmers without any retirement plans (as Mike had explained),

3) the *JBV* editorial board who would first encounter the report as an article submission, and

4) the typical readers of the journal, whom the editors would have in mind as they read through submissions.

As such, I pursued interviews with representatives of all four groups in an attempt to understand their specific needs from a document such as *Farm Succession in Iowa*.

**Interviewing Farmers**

During interviews with Maurice Moffitt and David Hummell (the farmer interview participants in Chapter 3), both men told me that they were farmers because of the joy of being free from what they saw as the confining context of the conventional business setting. As Moffitt said, "You probably work more hours than your town counterparts, but you get to pick when" (personal communication, September 12, 2002). Or, as Hummell echoed
definitively, "I don’t have to wear a suit and tie. I can set my own hours. I don’t have to sit in front of a computer. I can come and go as I want" (personal communication, September 9, 2002). Given these farmers’ resistance to such traditional Western business constructs, I wondered whether this farming/traditional business split affected how farmers approach the issue of retirement and researched this idea so that I could competently pursue it during interviews with the farmer participants cited in this chapter.

Like any business owners, farmers work to fulfill typical Western economic demands, such as support of the family and maintenance of the home. However, as rural scholars Osha Gray Davidson (1996), Stephen Bloom (2000), and John Fraser Hart (1998) have documented, in a farm setting these roles promote values other than materialism. In addition, such nonmaterialist values often are culturally devalued by their dissonance with and the pervasiveness of more conventional, materialist economic consumption. Journalist Laura Billings’s (2002) comments about the late Senator Paul Wellstone illustrate just how outmoded nonmaterialist values appear in the eyes of traditional American industry (as distinguished from rural business in Chapter 1):

His populism sometimes seemed out of step with the economic boom of the 90s. But now, when fear of terrorism and talk of war overrides the protections of our personal freedoms, now when a wounded economy makes regular people worry about their Social Security, health care, and the cost of retirement, it seems that Paul Wellstone's issues were about to come back into fashion. (p. 6)

Writer William Hazelgrove (2002) echoes how the American value for wealth accumulation and conspicuous consumption in turn labels anyone who acts differently:

[My father] is sixty-five and life hasn't given him what he thought it should. He still has to work and didn't plan for retirement. He talked of the untold many who were making the easy money. His heroes are the men of millions and now he is just another spectator in the crowd watching [the men of millions] rush to the goldmines of IPOs and soaring stocks. Yet he raised a family of four and provided well for us.
But he is a failure.

Because farmers’ heroes, unlike the senior Hargrove, are not “the men of millions,” their actions as businesspeople as a result tend to promote their nonconventional values. In fact, a study conducted by rural scholar David Symes (1991) found that farmers begin to focus on and make decisions about more conventional, materialist economic concerns only when influences outside of the farm are brought consistently into the farm setting—or what Symes calls “a closer convergence of the social world of farming with the ‘external environments’ of demographic change, regional economic development and changing global values” (p. 85). Most often this occurs when the farmer, spouse, or both are forced to work at a job off the farm.

Whenever different variables “converge,” though, there is bound to be some conflict before a full synthesis is achieved. And when farmers’ values converge with the economic values of industrial Western business, it would appear that the farmers prefer to redefine industrial values for themselves rather than appropriating them in toto. For instance, Purdue University researcher Sharon DeVaney found during her study of farmer retirement that “most farm families think about growing the family business and improving the farm business, as opposed to putting money in a mutual fund or an IRA” (“Web Site,” 2002). And Patricia Hippie, who has extensively researched values that exist in farming and rural contexts, discovered during a 1990 Cornell University survey that the top three values privileged by family farmers were being “productive,” “innovative,” and “business-oriented” (2000, p. 14). Despite these values’ seeming similarity to those of larger Western industry, however, in fact they were redefined to accommodate farmers’ pre-existing situations. Being “productive,” for instance, was defined as winning “the state corn yield contest two years in
a row, and the national contest two years after that,” and aiming “for high production rather than least-cost in-puts” (p. 14). In other words, the strong sense of community ties and pride in a quality product—two historical non-materialist values in rural living—shaped the Western industrial values so much as to rewrite them.

Given this research, during my interviews with farmer participants I attempted to discover the governing structures that most informed their retirement decisions and their approach to retirement-planning documents such as the BFC report. In addition, because the BFC report’s farming audience would know of the report’s existence only after reading the 2001 Planning for the Future brochure, I first presented the brochure to each farmer interview participant to see if he would read it and request more information from the BFC. If the respondent claimed that he would in fact take advantage of the contact information in the brochure, I then would show him the report document and ask for his reaction (see Appendix B for the interview questions).

**Interviewing Academics**

My interview questions with this particular audience, while open-ended, were shaped by the comments Mike, John and I had received on our BFC report submission to the *JBV*. Two issues in particular affected my questions, the first being the *JBV* editors’ comments about our report’s formatting (i.e., the lack of a literature review). I consequently asked the academic interview participants about the format conventions of their field’s professional journals.

Second, as aforementioned, when writing the BFC report I attempted to emphasize a research issue that indicated a significant, overlooked problem: “Even though respondents
[small-scale Iowa farmers] indicated an average retirement age of 66, nearly three-quarters (71 percent) of them still had not chosen any successor to their operations. Given that participants’ average age was 54, only 12 years remain for development of a successful retirement plan” (Duffy, Baker and Lamberti, 2002, p. 7). This effort to distinguish our research from others’ in the field is a staple of many academic publications, regardless of the discipline.

Such efforts at distinction have intensified as the national economy has weakened and university budgets have shrunk, despite warnings that “specialized training ... [does not] correlate with job satisfaction” (Smith, Pedersen-Gallegos, and Riegle-Crumb, 2002, p. 1081). But proving that one is intellectually special and therefore indispensable to scholarship can increase an academic’s job security, a perk that apparently trumps job satisfaction in today’s uncertain world.

Academic specialization can be seen in the way some authors use writing conventions in their articles. One such convention, known by the acronym CARS (“create a research space”) often is found in the introductory section of a traditional academic publication; the CARS tool entails reviewing literature connected to the article’s topic, “establishing a niche” by pointing out the contradictions or omissions in the relevant literature, then “occupying the niche” by demonstrating how the article resolves contradictions or addresses omissions (Swales, 1990, pp. 140-1). An author who wishes to acknowledge his/her colleagues in the field while showcasing his/her own intellectual uniqueness could use the CARS tool to focus on a special issue or phenomenon.

Because JBV is an academic medium (edited by and for academics) and one that privileges research in the scientific tradition, authors would be wise to employ such
conventional strategies as the CARS model when composing an article. As sociologist Roma Hanks (1993) warns, one of the common “fatal mistakes” academic writers make is to fail to “demonstrate that the author has done her or his ‘homework’ and clearly establish the gaps filled or new issues addressed in the work” (p. 16). In fact, article conventions such as the CARS model are so privileged in academic journals, according to professor Felix M. Berardo (1989), that scholars under “the intense pressure to get one’s work into print” often will implement these conventions even if they “distort” an article’s information (p. 119).

Because all three of the JBV editors who reviewed the report used the word “interesting” to describe the niche I’d tried to create in the BFC report, I asked my academic interview participants about the issues in their field that would most likely be noticed by professional journal editors and followed by readers.

AUDIENCE #1: FINDING THE FARMERS WITH RETIREMENT PLANS

Finding interview participants who possessed retirement plans and represented the BFC report’s targeted farm audience was quite simple. Because the BFC’s annual AgLink workshop is geared toward farmers with concrete retirement plans, I contacted the 2001 workshop participants and asked them for an interview. While most of the workshop participants either lived almost three hours away, were too busy with holiday plans, or did not wish to be interviewed, two farmers, Glen Dezwarte and John Cannon, lived within a two-hour driving distance and agreed to meet with me on their farms.

The Farmer Participants

As a fifty-two year-old Iowa farmer, Glen Dezwarte matches the farm audience
demographics targeted by the BFC’s report. In the 1970s, Dezwarte gradually began to take
over his family’s farm near the tiny town of Sully in south-central Iowa, and since then he
has expanded its acreage; now he raises 360 acres of corn and soybeans and manages hogs as
well. Dezwarte also custom-bales 40 acres of hay in addition to his own farm’s work.
Farming clearly is his passion (“When I was a kid, I loved driving the tractor,” he attested),
and during our December 2002 meeting Dezwarte spoke proudly about his family’s long
history in agriculture, both in America and in the Netherlands.

Forty-eight year-old John Cannon commutes daily from his 230-acre farm in Newton
to his Ankeny job as a high school geography teacher. He used to raise hogs, and he still
raises both row crops and stock cows, and he collaborates with his two college-age sons,
each of whom has his own agricultural enterprise (row crops and Charolais cattle): “What
we’re trying to do is have three different operations on a fairly small scale,” he told me.

**Glen Dezwarte**

As I learned, Dezwarte’s initial retirement plan consisted of passing his operation to
his son; consequently, both attended the first meeting of the 2001 AgLink workshop. It was
after this meeting when Dezwarte’s son decided that taking over the family farm “wasn’t in
the cards” for him; consequently, Dezwarte’s retirement plans had to change. Several factors
guided Dezwarte in the revision of his future plans, and in turn his response to a professional
document that discusses retirement.

“If one of our kids wanted it, that’d be an option,” he told me. “If somehow our son
came home to farm, I would not be [the type who’d give] the handshake and say, ‘See you,
Son, I’m outta here,’ but I’d like to be closer to that than ‘You know, son, you should...’”
Dezwarte’s reluctance to take a formal, micro-managed approach to retiring and overseeing his successor comes from his personal experience: “I know too many farmers and their sons and daughters-in-law that had major, major problems. My father could not have treated my wife any better. He doesn’t make [my farm] his business, and even though for a long time we rented off of my father and my mom, that wasn’t ever an issue... So I want to keep that. I want to remember what my father told me.” Dezwarte illustrated his comments with several neighborhood anecdotes about retired farmers who insisted on over-managing their farms’ successors, resulting in personal and financial catastrophes.

Dezwarte also clarified that when it comes to passing down his farm, he distinguishes between the formality of retirement paperwork and a more personal approach: “I think the business part of it should be in black and white. Not only so we know where the other’s at, but if something happened to my wife and I, and he gets an estate... I really think it’s as much protection for the young guy coming up, that it would be more protection for my son than it would be for me.” In other words, Dezwarte saw a formal business plan as a fail-safe against increasingly powerful legal influences that can create conflict within a farm family. “I’d think you’d be inviting problems not to [have paperwork],” he said. “Years ago, business was done a lot more on a handshake. Now we have seen lawsuits, many of them may be frivolous, so we have seen families that all of a sudden have just fallen apart.”

When presented with the tri-fold brochure, Dezwarte proclaimed it irrelevant for two reasons. First, the “Beginning Farmer Center” logo on the front of the tri-fold brochure “sounds great, but see, I’m not a beginning farmer so it doesn’t say ‘Pay attention to me.’” He also pointed out that the brochure’s headings did not get his attention and instead need to be phrased in the form of a question, such as “What are your future plans?” As he explained,
If you’re sending this to kids like my son, yeah, because that’s what he’s looking for. But if you’re aiming it at me, if I’m really thinking about retiring [it might seem relevant], but at fifty-two years old, [seeing the] Beginning Farmer Center [logo], hey, man, retirement? I’m only fifty-two. And I think once you get into [the brochure], it’s okay. But there’s not enough [on the cover] to get a fifty-two year-old man into it. (personal communication, December 14, 2002)

Furthermore, Dezwarte added that the tri-fold brochure seemed irrelevant to him because it does not address the potential family conflict surrounding a farmer’s retirement. As a farmer who has both witnessed and experienced the resulting tension when a farmer divides his farm among successors, Dezwarte saw this issue as one that cannot be omitted from any text that discusses farm retirement. Because of this apparent irrelevance and Dezwarte’s consequential decision not to read through the entire document, he would not be prompted to request the BFC report.

**John Cannon**

Like Dezwarte, Cannon’s decision to formalize his retirement planning was based upon his personal experience:

The lawyer that runs that AgLink [John Baker], you know, [he told] that story about the young farmer syndrome, [where] the dad’s 85 and the son’s 60, and “Next year he’ll be ready to take over.” My father’s very much like that, and I was very, very determined that I wasn’t going to be. So I’ve really tried to get these guys [his sons] started with their own enterprises at an early age.

Cannon’s experience as a high school teacher also influenced his decision to take a more formal approach to retirement planning. “Because of that [job], I’ve got my retirement,” he said. “I don’t have to have the farm as an income. I’ve been able to pick up fifteen or twenty years from what the normal [farmer would be able to save for retirement].... I spend my days with urbanâtes. I spend my days with professionals.” Ultimately, then, while Cannon’s
farm experience incited him to develop a more formal retirement plan, it was his non-farm experience that gave shape to the particular approach he decided to pursue, i.e., an educational workshop and official retirement paperwork.

Also like Dezwarte, Cannon chose a formal plan for retirement not because he believes this route is intrinsically better, but because such official paperwork can protect today's farmer from outside forces, in this case economic: “Because we're on such a small scale, we probably have to have a better plan than a lot of people do,” Cannon explained. “The size we are, the mistakes show up very rapidly.”

When presented with the tri-fold brochure, Cannon explained that the content of the brochure was not attractive, although he would look through it because he did have sons who wanted to farm: “I think you need something there that grabs somebody’s attention a bit more. I think maybe you could get some other statistics out there.” Otherwise, “I'm 48, so if I didn't have sons, I'd be out there wanting to farm that farm until I was 80 years old [i.e., a document about retiring would seem irrelevant]. But right now in my life, we did this because I knew the BFC would have an excellent plan for [retirement planning].”

Consequently, Cannon would not request the BFC report both because he'd already attended the AgLink workshop and because “I’m in that 23 percent [of farmers who’ve already selected a successor to their operations].” He elaborated:

As it gets closer and closer to where each of [the sons] is going to be out of college, there’s no way the farm is going to maintain two people full-time and somebody part-time. It’s just a question of how we’re going to grow this thing so that it is viable. You know, are two of us going to work off-farm, and then one guy is going to be able to be there full-time, and then, work together? Who is that guy going to be? How are we going to value all these different labors? It’s very, very difficult. (personal communication, December 17, 2002)

To Cannon, answering those questions is best accomplished via face-to-face communication
Dezwarte and Cannon worked in non-farming environments and adopted the formal paperwork necessary for the West’s information proliferation (an assemblage discussed in Chapter 3). However, both nonetheless regarded such paperwork as representative of outside forces; when it came to internal issues, such as the relationship with their successors, Dezwarte and Cannon continued to rely upon their personal, experiential knowledge. As I would discover, this privileging of personal experience also was dominant among farmers without retirement plans.

**OCTOBER 2002**

The Holsteins are gone. I can’t believe it. My uncle Joe has been complaining about them for years, to the point where he, his cows, and his complaints have melded together in my mind. I thought they were inseparable.

Had the decision been Joe’s alone, I have a feeling the cows would still be around, trudging slowly into his spotless barn twice a day. But Joe has been laid up for two weeks with what will prove to be prostate cancer, moaning and groaning on the living room sofa, and my aunt Joanne is fed up. It’s bad enough that she has to put in time at the local Wal-Mart, but the twice-daily milkings are just too much added work for her. The cows have to go.

I should have seen it coming. Milk prices bottomed out months ago, but the FSA has yet to mail any Milk Income Loss Contract compensatory checks. And at the county fair, Joe had treated us to a fifteen-minute, obscenity-punctuated
monologue about how the government, the corporate farms, and the world in
general were plotting to bring down the dairy farmers. Apparently anyone who
wasn’t a dairy farmer was a goddamned sonofabitch. In truth, he’d been more
entertaining than the fair.

Joe is almost seventy, but as with all of my aunts and uncles, whenever I look
at him I still see the same person from my childhood—active, healthy, invincible. He
is a good-humored, quick-tempered man, the one who most resembles my
grandfather. And as with Granddad, I think it’s going to kill Joe to let go of his cattle.

The moment he retired from his 30-year stint at Firestone Tires, Joe gave
himself over entirely to his farm. My aunt once told us how she spotted Joe one
night at sundown, leaning against the fence, smoking and gazing at the cows. Just
standing there, gazing.

Only a farmer would find such an act enjoyable. I never sit and gaze lovingly
at a pile of students’ papers. I never reflect fondly about the classes I’ve taught.
There’s something about a farmer’s life-work that gets tangled up with the farmer
until the two become inseparable—like Joe, his cows and his complaints.

So I wonder, when the inseparable are suddenly yanked apart, what happens
next?

****

AUDIENCE #2: FINDING THE FARMERS WITHOUT RETIREMENT PLANS

When it came to locating farmers who had not planned for retirement, I was on my
own, as the BFC knew only of those farmers who’d made retirement plans. At first, it was a
challenge to find such farmers. The typical audience members targeted by the BFC report
would share the survey respondents’ demographics, i.e., in their late-fifties to mid-sixties and planning to retire within an average of twelve years (“AgLink”); but anyone who knows an Iowa farmer with these characteristics also knows that this farmer is not likely to freely share such personal information as his/her (lack of business plans and strategies, especially to a younger, female academic with a tape recorder. I therefore put out “feelers” to my friends and family, asking them if they knew of a farmer who would be willing to talk to me about their (lack of) retirement plans. Their input, plus the gossip intrinsic to small-town Iowa, eventually connected me with Dean Fischer and Ron Young, both of whom invited me to their farms.

The Farmer Participants

My relatives were full of suggestions of prospective interviewees who “had no head for planning,” but given my family’s own lack of foresight, I took their suggestions with a grain of salt. It was a non-farmer friend of mine who connected me with 60-year-old Dean Fischer from Neola, Iowa. My friend had heard from the town’s indiscreet banker that Fischer had not made any concrete financial plans for his upcoming retirement (thank heavens, I thought, for small-town gossip.) Fischer, the fourth generation of his family to live on his 420-acre Iowa Century farm, raised hogs for years and continues to raise corn, soybeans, hay, oats and crossbred beef cattle. He now runs the operation with his son, Brian, who in five years is supposed to fully take over the farm. Because Fischer hopes to retire so soon, yet has done no concrete planning, he well represents the farming audience the BFC hoped to warn and educate with its report. Fischer spoke at length with me on his farm in early December 2002 (Brian, with a terrified expression, vanished the moment I pulled out
Soon after I interviewed Fischer, I was commiserating with a Ph.D.-student friend of mine who had been raised on a small family farm in Carson, Iowa. Amy asked me, “Would you like to interview my dad? He’s 63 and the most retirement planning he’s done is to say now and then, ‘Well, maybe we should be thinking about retiring.’” Accordingly, I traveled to Iowa’s western border to interview Ron Young, who with his brother Harold raises 400 acres of soybeans, 400 acres of corn, and use 60 acres of pasture ground for their feeder cattle. Despite being near retirement age, Young told me that he’s not ready “to give up his toys yet.”

Dean Fischer

Like the other two farmers’ observations of events in their local community, Fischer tended to rely primarily upon on his personal experience; in his case, a change in his community’s values. As Fischer explained, he used to enjoy a less-materialist farming culture resembling those described by Davidson (1996), Bloom (2000), and Hart (1998). Now, though, Fischer sees his community as irrevocably changed for the worse. For instance, 600 acres he once rented were sold without anyone having notified Fischer of the sale—and thus the opportunity to bid on the land. “If something’s up for rent, you don’t dare tell your neighbor, or your best friend, because he’ll go rent it from [under] you,” he said, citing the increased emphasis on efficiency as the cause of such cutthroat competition among farmers. Like Dezwarte, Fischer blamed outside forces for this change, saying,

Since 1980, [the values have] been terrible. Eighty-three to ’85, it was noticeable. Everybody got so disgusted and frustrated with 22 percent interest, devaluation of property, which we had no control over, neither one of them, and a lot of people went
bankrupt over it. And in the meantime, their word wasn’t any good. And if they
pulled through it, their word still wasn’t any good ‘cause they’re greedy. That’s why
there isn’t any community anymore. There’s no such thing anymore, even amongst
good friends. They’ll cut your throat for a nickel. (my emphasis)

Observations from his personal experience also dictated how Fischer thought about
his retirement. At the time of our interview, Fischer and his wife had merely discussed the
idea of retiring, nothing more. He planned to pass the machinery onto his successor via
verbal agreement. “That’s how my brother and I got it. When my dad got up around 60, 65
years old, he quit buying machinery. And if we wanted something, he said, ‘Take it and use
it, and if it doesn’t work, trade it off.’ So he got out from underneath all his machinery
before he passed away. We just traded it off.”

In keeping with his reliance upon his personal experience, Fischer stated that while he
“reads all the farm magazines” such as Successful Farming, he doesn’t “take a lot of truth in
‘em. They’re just an article. They’re just papers. I don’t take a lot of it to heart. Use your
own judgment.” And when presented with the tri-fold brochure and BFC report, Fischer said
that he would read both documents “because I’ve got boys that want to farm and I’m about
retirement age. And it interests me,” particularly since he served for 12 years on the local
Extension Council. As he explained, he sorts documents that arrive in the mail by “what the
need is, what I want. If it’s something that I need or I want or I’m interested in, I’ll look at it.
If it’s a Blue Cross-Blue Shield ad, I round-file it. If it has something to do with agriculture,
soil conservation, water quality, air quality... (Fischer is the Pottawattamie County chairman
for the Iowa Soil and Water Conservation Board)” (personal communication, December 7,
2002).
Ron Young

With his wife Joy occasionally joining the conversation, Young lamented how most Iowa farms are 5000-plus acre corporations, and like the other three farmer interview participants, cited outside factors as the reason:

Farming just hasn’t paid that good for as hard as you have to work. And the jobs have changed. There are a lot better paying jobs than there used to be. Wages have gone up quite a bit more than the farming has. And we’ve got to depend on the government programs. We’ve either got to pay for the food, or the government’s got to pay us.

However, despite the large-scale corporate farm competition, low pay, and lack of viable successors, Young remains in farming. “We don’t have good enough plans for [retirement],” he said. “We’re both still fairly healthy, and as long as I’m healthy, I enjoy farming.”

Young’s approach to retirement planning mirrors Cannon’s; while outside factors have given shape to the nature of Young’s intended retirement income, personal experience has influenced his lack of concrete, scheduled plans. “My dad never really retired [after selling his farm],” Young said. “He taught us how to do everything.” Nor has Young ever asked either of his grown children if they’d like to operate the farm upon his retirement.

“When I turn 65 and a half, it’s a lot easier to start drawing Social Security,” Young added. But at his current age of 63, I have to turn in all my tax reports and everything, so I probably won’t retire until I’m at least 65 and a half. Every year, we pay some expenses. We have all our seed corn and fertilizer bought for the next year [2003], and write it off [on their 2002 taxes]. Well, if we rent out the farm, we won’t have that expense, and so that would double up our income in 2002. And then, if we have a farm sale, anything we get out of machinery would add onto that. Tax reasons are a real problem.

Interestingly, Young’s approach to retirement apparently has not been informed by
his wife's own planning. Like Dezwarte and Cannon, Joy Young works in a non-farm environment as a nurse in nearby Omaha, and her future plans have taken shape via the retirement paperwork required by the job. As she said, "The stock market influences your decision [as to] when you retire. I've been working and putting my money in a tax-sheltered annuity, and now my money's gone." Ron Young, however, never referred to these non-farm factors when discussing his own retirement.

Despite his seeming nonchalance about concrete retirement planning, Young said that he would take the time to examine the BFC's tri-fold brochure. "It would be my interest to have somebody take over the operation. But that's another problem, is a lot of young farmers say 'I want to farm,' but they haven't got anything to begin [i.e., startup money for overhead costs]." The Youngs are concerned about the difficulty young farmers have in obtaining an operation, both because they unsuccessfully tried to bring a young relative into their farm operation and because they have witnessed similar failures in their rural community.

Because of these experiences, Young said that he would request and begin to read the BFC's report, but he would not finish it because of the text's level of complexity and because of its focus on what he saw as irrelevant information, such as the demographics of the survey participants. "I just happened to open to the center section here," he said after skimming through the whole document, "and there's stuff here that doesn't pertain to retirement. It says, 'Comparison of location between survey and Census of Agriculture respondents,' and that doesn't have nothing to do with retirement.... Maybe I'm looking at it from the wrong direction, but it looks like quite a bit of it is on surveys and stuff like that" (personal communication, January 12, 2002).
Although Dezwarte, Cannon, Fischer and Young all had thought about retirement and farm succession, their planning processes shared only one trait: A belief that formal retirement paperwork is inferior to personal experience. To these farmers, retirement is still an issue dictated by their insular communities (especially families) as opposed to outside authority, such as attorneys or stock-brokers. Even Dezwarte and Cannon, who possessed black-and-white retirement plans, looked to their experiential knowledge when it came to dealing with issues on their farm. For instance, the farmers’ relationships with their fathers appeared to hold sway (either as a model or a cautionary example) when it came to dealing with the farm successors.

While many people, farmers or not, rely upon personal experience to make decisions, here the significance is in how these farmers’ personal experience fed their ambivalence toward formal retirement paperwork, and by extension their view of the BFC report. Even those participants who were willing to read the BFC report were cautious (Fischer) or skeptical (Young). Like legal documents and retirement forms, the BFC report represented an outsider’s perspective—and all four participants clearly felt that outsiders already had enough say in a farmer’s life. Paperwork might be a necessary evil in contemporary agriculture, but that did not mean that farmers had to embrace every piece of paper they encountered.

AUDIENCE #3: FINDING THE JBV EDITORS

There are fifty-four editors of the JBV, all professors who work at universities throughout the country. Certain schools, however, have a notably larger presence on the
editorial board, namely Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, the University of Minnesota, and East Coast Ivy League universities. I consequently viewed the editors from these schools as representative of the board’s viewpoint. Of those RPI/UM/Ivy League editors who responded to my inquiries, three, Robert Baron, Harry Sapienza, and Murray Low, were able to speak with me before the end of the 2002 winter semester. I conducted all three interviews by telephone, as their location made face-to-face meetings prohibitive.

The Editor Participants

Behavioral psychology professor Robert Baron has served on the editorial board for two years and is a Wellington Chair (endowed by community entrepreneurs) at RPI. Harry Sapienza has reviewed articles for the JBV for twelve years and has officially served on the editorial board for six; he is the Carlson Chair in Entrepreneurship at the University of Minnesota’s Carlson School of Management. Murray Low has served for six years as a JBV editor and is the Executive Director of the Eugene M. Lang Center for Entrepreneurship at Columbia University’s Graduate School of Business. During our interviews, all three men spoke enthusiastically about their responsibilities as JBV editors.

Robert Baron

Baron explained that the senior editor, who serves a five-year term, chooses who will serve on the JBV editorial board. “[The senior editor has] to know who you are. First, you have to be active in the field; you have to be networked, you have to be published, you have to go to conferences.” In other words, JBV editors all are academics who establish their credibility through conventional academic behaviors. Despite the solely academic nature of
the board, though, Baron stated that

the [senior] editor tries to achieve a balance of people from different backgrounds so that they can handle almost anything that comes in [as submissions for articles].... Entrepreneurship is a hybrid. You have a stream from economics, you have a stream from what's called strategy, strategic management, you have a stream from behavioral sciences, you have a stream from other branches in management.... There are currents and cross-currents. You know, the people from behavioral sciences are data crunchers. But then there are the people from strategy and management who would say, "No, we don't need this [quantitative evidence]."

In fact, the different fields represented by JBV editorial board parallels the changing field of entrepreneurship. Early in the interview, Baron stated, "Entrepreneurship is such a new field. It's really defining itself right now. We haven't even decided what an 'entrepreneur' is yet!" However, he later said, "The field of entrepreneurship has to be an applied field by definition. You're talking about the people who are out there doing this [entrepreneurial business start-ups]." Additionally, Baron told me that initially the field of entrepreneurship was subsumed under and claimed by the more qualitative strategic management field. Now, though, "there's been a big infusion of psychologists and sociologists in the field. It's changing for the better." In other words, while there is yet no consensus as to the definition of entrepreneurship, the JBV editors nonetheless have defined how it should be studied; Baron's preference for quantitative behaviorism reflects how the field has moved toward a harder, statistical approach.

Baron's subsequent comments confirmed that a qualified JBV article submission needs to be attached to already-established research within the scientific method framework. As he stated, for a prospective JBV author, finding a niche is "not a problem" because the author typically situates his/her work within previous scholarship. "Now and then," he added, "you'll get something that's seminal work, that's brand new, and people will have no
framework for interpreting it” (personal communication, November 22, 2002).

**Harry Sapienza**

Like Baron, Sapienza believed that that as a representative of entrepreneurship, *JBV* focuses on “an interdisciplinary field, [so] it’s likely that the breadth of the journal is larger than any individual editor.” He added that “most journals have similar things they’re looking for, [such as] theory development [and] an interesting and important topic, and for entrepreneurship it would be something about high potential ventures.” *JBV*, according to Sapienza, accepts “both conceptual and empirical work.” While conceptual work is strictly theoretical, empirical work “would advance theory to some extent, [but] there would have to be valid [research] measures and a contribution to the literature.”

However, also like Baron, Sapienza defined the “interdisciplinarity,” “empirical” work, and “valid” research methods of “most journals” as predominantly quantitative, with the controllability and replicability of the scientific method (in fact, Sapienza also used the word “framework” during our interview). “*JBV* leans in the direction of quantitative,” he stated. Sapienza then added, “It’s easier to convince people when you have larger samples and quantitative data. I think there’s a general bias in the field for quantitative work.” And, in an echo of Baron’s distinction between the strategy management and behavioral psychology disciplines within the business field, Sapienza explained that while some studies in “strategy-level” business would use what he called “secondary data,” the norm for studies submitted to the *JBV* was to use “primary data,” or quantitative empiricism (personal communication, November 25, 2002).
Murray Low

Low echoed the two other editors’ view that entrepreneurship is currently undergoing change, but unlike his colleagues, he sees entrepreneurship “not [as] a discipline; it’s a field of inquiry, a phenomenon that you study from a variety of disciplines.” He elaborated, “There is no widespread agreement about what entrepreneurship is or what its boundaries are,” but he directed me to the “subset of phenomenon” (entrepreneurship, new business development, industry evolution, and technology management) listed in every journal issue, which he believed characterizes JBV’s particular definition of the term.

Also like his fellow editors, Low labeled JBV’s preferred research method as “scientific: [Articles] could be experimental, they could be simulation-based, they could be empirical...” When asked to define “scientific,” he explained, “You state a problem, generate a hypothesis or theory, and somehow systematically investigate to shed light on the theory or problem.”

Low’s use of “systematic” is important, for it reveals the JBV editors’ mindset when they read article submissions. As he said, “There are exploratory studies that are not theory-driven, but the work has to be intellectually rigorous with the purpose of developing a theory for investigation” in the future. In other words, the information in an acceptable JBV article is a result of a central idea, rather than, for example, the “emergence” approach embraced by some ethnographers. Low approved of this “rigorous” approach, stating, “The standards for research are becoming higher” (personal communication, December 4, 2002).

1 Unlike the hypothesis-driven research process embraced by the JBV editors and readers, ethnographers Taylor and Bogdan (1998) promote a method of research they term “emergent,” whereby a researcher develops a major concept after data has been collected. The ethnographers also repeatedly warn neophyte scholars about the widespread academic resistance to this research approach, as it contrasts so markedly with the conventional scientific method.
Ultimately, then, once the *JBV* editors assess submissions for their structural formatting and research approach, those articles that are accepted for publication overwhelmingly promote scientific empiricism. And unlike the personal experience privileged by the farmer participants, the data published in *JBV* must be obtained via "rigorous" strategies—replicable and controllable.

AUDIENCE #4: FINDING THE *JBV* READERS

As with its editorial board, the *JBV*’s readership is a predominantly academic one (while practitioners do comprise a portion of the audience, the format of the journal distinguishes them from academic readers with an occasional "practitioners' forum" special issue that discusses innovations in entrepreneurship). But unlike its editorial board, it was fairly simple to locate *JBV* readers who were willing to speak with me; Iowa State University’s Business College includes several scholars who also affiliate themselves with the sub-disciplines addressed in the *JBV*, such as finance, economics, accounting, and management. After inquiring among proximate universities’ business departments and haunting the ISU College of Business, I discovered two ISU professors who were enthusiastic readers of the *JBV* and very gracious interview participants; I spoke with them in their campus offices.

The Reader Participants

In terms of the representative reader of *JBV*, ISU management professors Brad Shrader and David Hunger talked extensively with me about their views on business journals. Shrader is a management professor who reads the *JBV* and also publishes in such
field journals as *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice* and *Corporate Governance*. Hunger too is an ISU management professor and subscribes to *JBV*, calling it his "journal of choice."

**Brad Shrader**

As a reader of *JBV*, Shrader was very specific in explaining the difference between business journals that are academic-oriented and those that are practitioner-oriented; this difference largely was in the type of research considered “acceptable” for publication. As he explained, a journal aimed at a “general business [practitioner] audience for executives” would have “less theory and more reflective observation, more application of ideas, more examples, more cases,” and cited as an example an article in the *Academy of Management Executives*, where the authors used the Battle of Trafalgar as a metaphor to explain an emerging business concept. Academic journals such as *JBV*, however, would not have considered this use of metaphor a valid writing strategy. Shrader said, “If I did a conceptual paper [for an academic journal], I would need to have some theoretical backing, and would need to set up arguments. If I had an empirical piece, I would need to present the literature review and the research question, and the method, and the references, just like any other academic would.” He elaborated,

> How do I know that I’m making a good case? I tend to follow what most scientists follow, some sort of general statement of what we’re interested in looking at, and then do a literature review that goes from general to specific research questions, and then I would indicate how I would test that—talking about the method and the sample—and then I would implement the test, and discuss that, ‘I applied this statistical, multi-variate technique,’ whatever it is, and make a case for that being appropriate, giving the type of data I have, and then present the results and discuss the implications.

For a field that is fragmented into many sub-disciplines, including management,
economics, finance, and the newly-independent field of entrepreneurship, the influence of the scientific method nevertheless appears consistently in journals across these disciplines:

I view the way we [management scholars] write and set up papers [as being] very similar to ... things I've seen in economics. I think the articles we would see in the Academy of Management journal would look very much like Administrative Science Quarterly or the Bell Journal of Economics. As you get more toward the economics and finance side of disciplines, you'd probably find more quantitative articles, more of a mathematical orientation.... [As for] the management side, where you're looking at organization behavior and structure, and human behavior, you'll see things that look very much like sociology and psychology papers.... Business is interdisciplinary.

"I don't think I was ever specifically taught how to write a paper," Shrader added. But during his doctoral coursework, "I was just steeped. We read article after article, and I think that over time, you get the point. You see so many, and how they're put together" (personal communication, November 13, 2002). Consequently, in a field where the articles mostly follow the scientific method no matter the academic journals in which they appear, it follows that business students would learn to perpetuate this structure when writing their own articles, even in a newly-burgeoning field such as entrepreneurship.

David Hunger

Like the editors of his "journal of choice," JBV subscriber Hunger believes that entrepreneurship is distinct from other business issues and elaborated on the nature of this difference: "The traditional way of looking at business is a functional approach [i.e., the requirements of producing a product and placing it on the economic market]." In comparison, entrepreneurship is more phenomenal in approach, in that it "is a study of a kind of business. It asks, 'What is it about these new ventures?' It looks at the new kinds of things that are being done in business." Consequently, he stated that "you cannot place
entrepreneurship” in an exclusive category as with more functional business issues such as accounting, finance, marketing, manufacturing, research and development.

Whether termed a “phenomenon,” a “field of inquiry,” or a “discipline,” Hunger also agreed that the emergence of entrepreneurship as an issue unto itself has impacted the *Journal of Business Venturing’s* approach. He explained that as entrepreneurship has changed, much of the related research has moved from anecdotal “stories based on our personal experiences” to the development of case studies and finally to the empiricism of the scientific method. As a starting point in entrepreneurship research, “anecdotal is great in giving us an idea of where we should look” in terms of subsequent research topics,” he stated. But as acceptable research, it was clear from Hunger’s description of the *JBV*’s empirical leanings that stories alone are not considered valid data.

Hunger added that as a result of the shift in entrepreneurship research, the *JBV* now is “the most rigorous journal in the theory of entrepreneurship. It’s much more empirical, hypothesis-testing..., more demanding of rigorous inquiry. You couldn’t just go interview a bunch of people then write some stuff about them.” By encouraging writers to use the scientific method in their research, *JBV* thus accrued a great amount of academic credibility (personal communication, December 5, 2002).

As almost all of the editors and readers of the *JBV* testified, the research and writing conventions being used to explore entrepreneurship are bolstered by their dominance and widespread use in journal publications. Given the shift in the entrepreneurship field to a more quantitative approach and the way in which the traditional nature of the business field lends itself to a conventional academic article format, it is no surprise that the BFC report,
with its hit-and-miss structural format, was not accepted for publication.

**Academic Assemblage**

Despite the farmer participants’ reliance upon personal experience as a governing structure in their retirement planning, no over-arching assemblages surfaced during our interviews. My conversations with the *JBV* editors and readers, however, resulted in a very different conclusion.

As both the *JBV* editors and readers indicated, the journal focuses on the breaking-away of entrepreneurship from the umbrella discipline of business. This tendency toward disciplinary specialization is a common construct; academics largely achieve tenure on their ability to contribute “new” information to their field. Recently, the phenomenon of academic specialization has resembled a larger, Western trend to distinguish, define, and separate. Specialization is now so prevalent across economic, social, and cultural contexts that it qualifies as an assemblage.

Economically, the trend in specialization has exploded and is referred to, among other labels, as “niche markets,” “value-added” products, and “diversification.” Whether it’s developing specially-flavored pork using “advanced Dutch genetics” (“Dalland Value,” 2002), focusing on a “market [that] is under-served and ready for the taking” by publishing a magazine for “middle-to-upper-income African Americans in Los Angeles County” (“Prospering,” 2002), or “promoting [jute,] one of the most versatile natural fibres which [is] annually renewable and bio degradable” (“National Centre,” 2002), opportunists have been taking advantage of the 1990s-era increase in conspicuous consumption by developing products that are offshoots of mainstream items.
Such specialization is an almost certain money-maker once the product secures a devoted consumer base, for many specialized products also necessitate unique—and usually expensive—maintenance strategies, repair tools, and accessories (Howe, 2002, p. 105). Target, for example, included in its Summer 2002 line of toys a package of chalk that children could use for creating sidewalk murals—and separately sold a plastic chalk holder, tacitly implying that the human hand was an insufficient tool. And Martha Stewart repeatedly touts “the right tool for the right job,” meaning that the same spatula must not be used across a range of activities; instead, the proper cook should purchase a broad (and expensive) variety of cooking utensils (“Martha Stewart Omnimedia,” 2003).

Socially and culturally, specialization also has strengthened as a trend. In an age of identity politics, many Americans now are trying not to resemble one another but to make explicit their differences. Native Americans (Lennon, 2002), the elderly (Smith “Respecting,” 2002), and the denomination-affiliated (Horrigan, 2002) are just three groups that have worked to distinguish themselves as different from the mainstream, and in doing so demonstrate how specialization in a socio-cultural context often means being defined the Other. Some sociologists even have taken advantage of this trend by studying cohorts that are defined by identity and developing theories about race and gender influences across these identities (see Allan, 2001; McCall, 2001).

NEITHER HERE NOR THERE: THE BFC’S 2001 DOCUMENT OF COORDINATION

As the above interviews and research suggest, there is a significant difference between the farmers’ and academics’ approach to paperwork—and thus to Farm Succession in Iowa. Unlike the farmer participants (who used fluid, unpredictable personal experience
to rewrite the influences from non-farm retirement authorities), the academics’ desire to explore entrepreneurship as an independent discipline is pursued by traditional (i.e., largely fixed and predictable) methods of publication and research. To use a cliché, the academics associated with *JBV* are attempting to “take apart the master’s house by using the master’s tools.” Even those academics (Baron, Shrader) who claimed that entrepreneurship was open to the influence of interdisciplinarity went on to support the classic genre of a published academic article. Ultimately, the vast difference between the contexts influencing the farmers and academics makes *Farm Succession in Iowa*’s failure unsurprising.

**How It Happened**

When the idea for *Farm Succession in Iowa* was first developed, it was the result of several political and cultural factors that were negatively impacting Extension’s services. Because Mike, John and I believed that a well-written document spelled good public relations for the Beginning Farmer Center, it made sense to develop a text that would perform damage control while continuing to serve the BFC’s farmer clientele. And because Mike and John, as members of a research institution, believed that an academic journal was the best forum in which to firm up the BFC’s reputation, *Farm Succession in Iowa* consequently became cast in the challenging role of a document of coordination—complete with myriad audiences, purposes and contexts.

These varying rhetorical situations resulted in a report with unconventional formatting and content. The absence of a literature review (a violation of the academic research report format convention), meant that the research niche so important to the *JBV* editors and readers was not sufficiently highlighted. At the same time, however, the niche
that did exist in the BFC report so overly focused its content that it omitted information the farmers viewed as relevant to their retirement plans. Or, as Fischer said (twice, in fact), “You’ve got to write a report the majority of people are interested in, not just a small group—target that” (personal communication, December 7, 2002).

The Consequences

In the spirit of a document of coordination, the results of Farm Succession in Iowa’s failure also are varied. First, because the unconventional structural formatting of the report did not make it into a widespread publication, it failed to resist the power structures that are embedded in (academic) professional communication. In fact, Mike’s July 2002 decision to more pointedly revise the rejected manuscript for an academic audience only perpetuates dominant communication structures.

In addition, because the BFC report was unsuccessful with its farmer audience, it could not convey the help many farmers need in planning for retirement. This result truly is unfortunate, as retirement is a complex, confusing and often contentious process; and, given the increasing numbers of farmers who soon will retire, a process that will become even more of a pressing issue for Iowa.

As Chapter 5 will demonstrate, however, there was a silver lining to the Farm Succession in Iowa situation. Since 1996, the Beginning Farmer Center had been publishing documents of coordination, with mixed to negative results. But on the heels of Farm Succession in Iowa, the BFC’s next publication not only would be a marked success among its target audiences, but would revise the definition of a document of coordination altogether into a concept that holds promise for professional communication.
CHAPTER 5:

TENUOUS LEGACIES: FARM SUCESSION IN TEXT
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2002

Mike Duffy is having one helluva year. First, he breaks his arm, then the legislature kills the Leopold Center's funding, and today, in response to my unsuspecting "How are you?" Mike reveals that he has suffered recently not only through a double-stented angioplasty but a brief hospitalization, where his heart flat-lined not once but twice. Yet here he sits in his Leopold Center office in Curtiss Hall, which seems increasingly bare each time I visit. Today it smells like a state fair livestock barn—not just manure, but manure mixed with very dry straw and silage feed and summer heat. Mike must have his field boots stored in here somewhere.

We talk about his heart condition, the abysmal state of health insurance, and his now cancelled plans to leave this afternoon for a conference out of state. Mike likes to chat, and interviewing him is much more relaxed than my anxious interactions with farmer participants. I don't even draft preliminary interview questions for him anymore, because we inevitably stray from them—and usually I wind up learning a lot more that way.

I learn that the Des Moines Register claims that Iowa is falling behind in biotechnological progress. That the Leopold Center continues "talks" with Cargill about funding opportunities. And that the Beginning Farmer Center no longer plans to pull any punches when it comes to its small farm agenda. Diplomacy, it seems, has gotten the BFC nowhere. Plain talking is the new game plan.

"Now, looking into the future," Mike explains, "we plan to be much more transparent. For example, the legal aspects of agriculture: What changes can be made in the law to help beginning farmers? We're going to be asking more direct
questions like that."

That might explain the unapologetic tone of the new publications on the BFC's Web site. The current *Leopold Letter*, a newsletter chronicling the Leopold Center and the programs under its umbrella, features "an open letter to the citizens of Iowa" from director Fred Kirschenmann; in his letter, Kirschenmann denounces the state legislature's decision to pull the Center's funding, implies none-too-subtly that the legislators are clueless when it comes to Iowa's agricultural future, and refuses to surrender his director position and return defeated to his farm in North Dakota.

And then there's the one-page flyer that in 1996 had been tailored to a wide variety of audiences—a bona fide *document of coordination*. But the 2002 version of this flyer, according to the BFC's Web site, was exclusively "presented to the Legislature" and features a new Recommendations section about farm bills under consideration. When I ask Mike why the flyer was revised to focus on just one audience, he yells, "The state legislature wasn't listening to us!"

And then there's the North Central Small Farms Initiative, a coalition of Midwestern agricultural interests, which just issued public kudos to Nebraska's version of the BFC and its strong influence over state legislation. In contrast, the Iowa legislature seems deaf to any recommendations coming out of the Leopold's programs.

On the heels of all this bad news, an overhaul of the BFC's professional documents seems to be the organization's latest attempt to justify its existence.

As I leave Mike's office and work my way down the stairs in Curtiss, I ponder the BFC's latest professional communication strategy—another incident to parse
through my constant comparative method. It's obvious that its initial documents of coordination were a fiasco. The state budget gets leaner and leaner. And letting a corporation like Cargill call the shots at a sustainable agriculture organization seems about as wise as giving the state fire marshal's job to a known arsonist. Basically, I can't decide whether the BFC is an eternally optimistic organization, or just another farming program in denial of the inevitable.

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BACKGROUND

As chronicled in Chapters 3 and 4, the historical role of Iowa's extension programs as a portal for information transference between academic and layperson groups, despite decades of success, came increasingly under siege as the state's agricultural economy worsened during the 1990s. And in a wider context, changes in agriculture over the past few decades (described in Chapter 1) had been so swift that groups affiliated with farming found themselves on the edge of obsolescence. For instance, Utah State "rangeland resource" scholars Regina Peterson and D. Layne Coppock (2001) claim that in response to these changes, farmers' "demand for information and technology can be episodic due to coincident economic, demographic, and policy factors, which also implies that applied research, extension, and policy formulation need to be more opportunistic in response to change" (p. 106). In other words, non-profit groups in agriculture needed to change their methods, but few had the time or money to experiment with new ideas.

The Beginning Farmer Center's responses (i.e., its mission and clientele changes, chronicled in Chapter 1) to its precarious situation were followed by a change in its publications—from small-farmer-focused to documents of coordination, which
simultaneously targeted several audiences with conflicting interests. As Chapters 3 and 4 demonstrated, however, the BFC’s attempts in 1996 and 2001 at this new type of professional communication failed to connect with its audiences.

Clearly, the concept of documents of coordination as defined by Charles Bazerman (1998) was not working within the BFC’s organizational context. Consequently, after the 1996 flyer and brochure and 2001 Farm Succession in Iowa research report were disseminated, the BFC found itself in a difficult rhetorical situation: The documents of coordination weren’t successful, yet the organization’s slim budget did not allow for single-audience documents. The BFC needed to develop another comparatively inexpensive, more innovative publication approach that somehow continued to transcend audience boundaries.

**SO YOU HAVE INHERITED A FARM...: REINVENTING A DOCUMENT OF COORDINATION**

The Beginning Farmer Center’s response to its dilemma resulted in a new approach to its publications. Such a move had some precedent, as the BFC had been redefining slightly the concept of documents of coordination with each successive publication, with the resulting incantations looking less like Bazerman’s version of a document of coordination (where the conflicting audiences are distinguished by demographics and by their respective purposes in using a document.) Specifically, when the organization first attempted to create documents of coordination in 1996, the targeted audiences (farmer, politician, and banker) were demographically disparate (see Chapter 3). But in 2001, the BFC’s next document of coordination focused on a single event (retirement) that potentially was relevant to disparate academic and farming audiences (see Chapter 4).

Later in 2001, after the Farm Succession in Iowa report was submitted for publication
to (and rejected by) the *Journal of Business Venturing*, the BFC released a fact sheet entitled, *So You Have Inherited a Farm*... The fact sheet represented an important moment in the BFC's professional communication history. With this particular publication, the role of a BFC document of coordination again changed, this time to focus on audiences who already experienced a particular event—the succession of a farming operation to an heir. By targeting those audiences affected by a past event, the new BFC document of coordination had a greater chance of success; its previous documents pertained to audiences that possibly shared an interest in and consequently a relevance to a particular topic, but an event-oriented document would target an audience that, having experienced the event, most certainly would possess a relevance. Such added certainty was a necessity for the BFC's publications, given their past lack of impact on the organization's audiences.

At first glance, there appears to be only one primary audience for the fact sheet, as implied by the title (i.e., successors to a farm operation), thus conflicting with the idea of a document of coordination as a document that mediates among several, contentious audiences. Mike clarified, however, that the audience of *So You Have Inherited* in fact is extremely diverse, fragmented, and contentious; it includes the succeeding farmer, his/her siblings, and the surviving spouse (usually a widow). "I get calls all the time," Mike attested. "People want to know their options [when they inherit a farm]. Most of them aren't planning to farm the place." According to Mike, the differences among these audiences lie in their response to the question, "What are we going to do with this animal?" (personal communication, September 16, 2002).
FLASH POINTS IN FARM SUCCESSION

In Iowa, farm succession is an explosive issue—and given the statistics, one that promises only to intensify in the coming decade. With the help of the Iowa Agricultural Statistics Service, in the spring of 2000 the BFC surveyed over 1500 Iowa farmers whose operations represented Iowa’s nine crop reporting districts. Results from the four hundred-plus returned surveys indicated that

- Iowa farmers’ average age was fifty-four;
- the average age at which these farmers planned to retire was sixty-six, and
- almost three quarters of respondents had yet made no retirement plans for their operation ("Farm Succession Survey," 2000).

In other words, these farmers had only twelve more years to figure out their succession plan—a plan so legally and financially complicated, Mike told me, that they should have started it a decade ago. Add the successors’ conflicting interests and intentions for the farm to this complicated paperwork, and the result can easily deteriorate into chaos. As business trade magazines such as Successful Farming and Personal Investor describe, a farm operation’s succession often is characterized by “bitterness,” “disputes, and … high inheritance taxes” (Slamet, 1999). For instance, during my interview with David Hummell, the young farmer from Chapter 3, he discussed the dynamics of a family-run business:

It goes back to when being father and son stops, and [when you’re] being business partners. They’re flowing in together all the time, and how do you sort that out? Now we’re father and son at the dinner table, but during the day we’re business partners. You get pissed off at ‘em during the day, but then you go to dinner with ‘em…. And each person thinks his point is right, and you can’t get through to the other one, so they don’t communicate, they don’t say anything; it just makes hard feelings, yet the next day you still gotta work with ‘em. (personal communication, September 9, 2002)
University of Plymouth (UK) Andrew Errington’s large body of work similarly chronicles the succession process as one fraught with conflict and tension. During his study of 3500 family farms during the 1990s, Errington discovered that “responsibility for technical or husbandry matters tends to be passed on to the succeeding generation much earlier than financial matters” (1998, p. 132). The result is what Errington terms the “farm boy” syndrome: During the process of transferring a farm, the farmer continues to hold ultimate authority over the operation and allocates mostly labor, rather than managerial, tasks to the successor—a situation that understandably can incite resentment from the successor, who feels more like a hired hand than a farmer in his own right.

While there are many texts that discuss conflict during the business succession process, it is significant that most of them focus on the explicit, tangible issues and avoid the underlying motivations for such conflict: Value clashes. In fact, those few texts that do mention values define them in terms of a stable, almost tangible construct. A recent article in the Atlanta Business Chronicle, for instance, argues that a strong successor will have familiarized him/herself with the company’s values to ensure a smooth transaction (Lea, 2001). Similarly, Leon Danco’s (1995) advice in Agency Sales Magazine warns that those who marry into a family-owned business would do well to assimilate into the pre-existing value system. True to the more scientific paradigm typical of non-farm industry, in these business texts the issue of values is cast as a predictable phenomenon, a controlled variable that can be factored into the business operation process.

There also are many resources that discuss the more focused issue of farm business succession, but they, too, are mostly silent when it comes to values. Neil E. Harl’s Farm
Estate & Business Planning (2000), for instance, discusses such legal concerns as state and federal tax laws, wills, trusts, and payment plans; the text is a highly pragmatic one, and is now in its fifteenth edition—but it doesn’t discuss values.

Those resources that refer to values do so in a rather broad, theoretical manner. Sociological studies such as David G. Francis’s Family Agriculture: Tradition and Transformation (1995), and Stephen John Gross’s “Handing down the Farm” (1996), tend to focus on the impact of succession planning across marital, family and community values. In Successful Farming columnist Don Jonovic’s workbook, The Ultimate Legacy: How Owners of Family and Closely-Held Businesses Can Achieve Their Real Purpose, “values” are defined in terms of classic economics, where “a business is an investment of precious capital for the purpose of achieving a return on that investment” (1997). It would appear that the academy is reluctant to leave the helpful guidance of both sociological case studies and economic modeling to understand the act of succession planning; however, these paradigms are not equipped (nor is their purpose) to discuss specific ways in which values play a part.

Those texts that do not invoke the paradigm of sociological research tend toward the purely anecdotal. One example is Jonovic’s Passing Down the Farm: The Other Farm Crisis (1986). For the bulk of this text, Jonovic relies on hypothetical thoughts of the “typical” farmer to approximate value clashes within the small-farm family. For instance, a chapter subsection entitled, “[The Daughter-in-Law’s] Problems—and Some She Causes” examines how a new wife (especially one without a farming background) may have a very different estimate than her father-in-law regarding the amount of inheritance “owed” to her husband. As Jonovic explains, a wife might view her husband’s inheritance as payment for his work on the farm, while the father-in-law would view that work as a necessary part of the
operation, not a service to be compensated. Jonovic's writings are quite popular among family farmers, as evinced by their feedback to his Successful Farm editorials—suggesting that his approach to farm values is more authentic to the farm succession process than that taken by general business or academic resources.

Even though the new look of the BFC's documents of coordination demographically made a publication's audiences much more similar to one another than those of the 1996 flyer and brochure and the 2001 research report, the So You Have Inherited audiences nonetheless embodied different roles in relationship to their farm (i.e., farmer, non-farming sibling, spouse) and therefore different value systems—guaranteeing that the BFC's defined document of coordination still had a great deal of mediation work to do.

October 2002

The email message from my aunt Rosemary is as frightening as a middle-of-the-night phone call: "Hope you're praying for your uncle. I'm on my way to the hospital now." I stare at the computer screen, trying to glean more information from its sparseness. I email back: "What happened?? What are you talking about?? What's going on??!!" I call my mother at work. No answer. I call my brother's cell. No answer. I begin to work my way down the family tree, calling and calling and calling. No answers anywhere.

Eight hours later, Rosemary calls. My uncle Pat is in the hospital. He collapsed the night before, lying helplessly on the living room floor, paralyzed on the
left side. My brother just happened to go into the house and found Pat there.

The doctor's initial thoughts? "It's odd. We're not sure what it is." Very comforting.

Pat is scheduled for exploratory brain surgery. He can barely speak. He can't move. Stricken with stroke-like symptoms, he cries, chokingly and unwillingly. Somehow, a crying, sixty-year-old farmer scares me more than the paralysis. During the operation, the surgeon discovers an AV malformation in my uncle's brain. Two otherwise normal cranial blood vessels just arbitrarily decided to clot one night. The condition is a congenital one.

It seems like such an anticlimactic diagnosis for a man who spent his whole life working with dangerous machinery and large, nervous livestock.

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JANUARY 2003

The only thing Americans like to lose is weight. Otherwise loss is always seen as a negative, something to be avoided. Maybe that's why our funerals are so ritualistic, gilded in flowers and cards and sermons and processions. The frippery blunts the reality. You can practically hear the sigh of relief when Pat's coffin closes and no one has to look at the reminder anymore.

Bucking the familial and national tendency, I attempt to reflect on and make sense of my loss. At first, this is restricted to silly pattern-making: Granddad died when I was one semester into my graduate schoolwork. Pat died one semester from its conclusion. Granddad's funeral occurred on a bitter, unseasonably cold day. After Pat's funeral, I go outside in short-sleeves and plant daffodil bulbs. Those two
never did agree on anything.

Our farm is now in the murky waters of legal probate, which looks something like this:

Before his surgery, Pat changed his will so that my brother would inherit the farm. But the farm wasn’t Pat’s to will; it is Grandma’s. So who will get to run the farm?

My aunt Rosemary wants my brother Matt to run the farm.

My mother wants my brother to run the farm.

My brother wants to run the farm.

Grandma wants my uncle Jerry to run the farm.

Jerry doesn’t want to run the farm.

But he doesn’t want Matt to run it, either.

My uncle Joe supports whatever Jerry wants.

My aunt Jeanette refuses to speak to us.

My cousin Rod threatens to contest Pat’s will.

My grandfather is spinning in his grave.

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THREE NON-FARMING SIBLINGS, TWO FARMING SIBLINGS, TWO SPOUSES, ONE RESEARCHER

Obviously, the conflict among a farm operation’s various successors renders the So You Have Inherited a Farm... fact sheet a document of coordination. Each successor’s value system exists in a context that largely prohibits expression of such personal feelings (the “culture of silence” explored in Chapter 2). But the specific nature of these concerns among
farming successors, non-farming successors, and succeeding spouses (the three most common heirs to a farm operation) should be explored, to better understand the situation which *So You Have Inherited a Farm*...needed to mediate. In particular, when pursuing interviews with representatives of each target audience, I was influenced by two major values that historically have led to conflict during the farm succession process: *Equality* and *success*.

**Equal Versus Equitable**

The value of "fair" treatment of a farmer’s heirs often becomes a source of conflict during a farm operation’s succession. During the Beginning Farmer Center’s AgLink workshops (for those farmers who are planning to retire and those beginning farmers who will assume the farm operation), Mike repeatedly tells the workshop participants, “Equal is not necessarily equitable.” As Mike argues, dividing the farm “equally” among successors is not always the fairest or best decision—especially if one of the successors has remained on the farm to work it while the others have left to pursue their own interests (personal communication, September 16, 2002). This is a controversial viewpoint; the AgLink participants often respond with suspicion and resistance when they first hear Mike’s comment.

The issue of fairness, however, is so frequent a problem among farm families that it increasingly appears on the “Transitions” electronic bulletin board of *Agriculture Online* (the companion Web site to *Successful Farming* magazine.) As one poster commented,

> How come it seems the kids who stay around the farm are always taken for granted? And the ones who move away are the golden ones? If my parents ask me to do another project and I say get one of your other kids, I’m told, “Oh, but they have
families.” If I say get each one of your kids to work one weekend on the farm, I'm told it's unfair to them. So it frosts me when I get told that everything has to be even and everything will be split in equal thirds. (Jonovic, 2000, p. 16)

Success Versus Money

Another common source of conflict in farm succession is Westerners’ varying definitions of “success,” particularly what counts as successful management of an inherited farm operation. The conventional idea of success in Western business has been tied to profit-making and general financial solvency. A family-business consulting firm, for instance, told a retirement-age man to “put the business first” when deciding which of his two feuding sons should inherit the business, even while admitting that such a choice would “cause a family schism” (Hausner and Davidow, 1992, p. 55).

Only recently has this equation of success with finance been challenged. David Sylvester, financial writer at the San Jose Mercury News, describes how Americans associated success with their financial status before 9/11, when the economy was strong:

We’ve been through a bubble, and the bubble has both an economic and social context to it. The economic context, of course, is that the stock market was pretty much out of control, and people had a lot of money in their 401ks, so economically, these people did very well. At the same time, people’s beliefs and attitudes, the way they approached their jobs and the way they worked, that all began to change too in the bubble.

Now, we’re in the post-bubble period, in which suddenly that sense of reality has vanished, and at the same time, psychologically and socially, they’re having to work harder, not hope so much, it’s had a whole change in attitude. (“The View from Silicon Valley,” December 8, 2002)

A 2002 editorial in the Des Moines Register similarly noted a need for “change in thinking about how to make Iowa grow and prosper…. Not enough emphasis has been placed on enhancing the quality of life, on simply making Iowa a more enjoyable place to live.” While acknowledging the dominance of traditional economic strategies (i.e., “to try to sweeten the
‘business climate’ with various tax cuts and incentives”), the editors nonetheless conclude: “All well and good, but it hasn’t worked” (“Best Business,” p. 1OP).

Not surprisingly, farmers’ definition of success historically has differed from the conventional, in that financial and material gain is not as important. For instance, an article in USA Today featuring “farm vacations” includes glowing quotes from tourists who enjoy the novelty of physical labor and the lack of conspicuous consumption: “‘The marketing [at a traditional vacation spot such as Disneyland] is so fierce....’ In farm country, by contrast, no one is trying to sell you anything” (Sloan, 2001, p. 4D). And a study of a 145-acre family farm by sociologist Michael Mascarenhas (2001) shows that “it is through flexible diversification [diversifying the farm’s crops] that Titus Farms has imbued stability and sustainability seldom seen by similar family farms of this type, and for that reason alone, Titus Farms is a successful enterprise” (p. 391). In other words, it was the farm’s survival in the face of large-scale competition, rather than a flood of profits, that shaped the family’s idea of success.

Young farmers, however, seem to adhere more closely to the “success=money” value. For example, a 2002 study by agriculture economists Mike Duffy and Virginie Nanhou revealed that those Iowa farmers who both viewed themselves as “successful” and operated farms with a high profit index tended to be “younger and better educated,” as opposed to the age of those farmers who viewed themselves as “successful” although their farms ranked lower on the profit index (p. 10).

The Duffy and Nanhou report suggests that this generation gap in the value of success (within a farming context) is a result of historical changes. According to scholars William Strauss and Neil Howe (1991), young farmers born between 1961 and 1981 belong to a
generation characterized by "pragmatism" and a capability for entrepreneurship: "A popular putdown [by this generation] is 'That's history,' translated to mean 'That's irrelevant'" (p. 12). In fact, an article in *The Journal of Development Economics* argues that a farmer's decision to pass down the farm should be determined by his "utility function," a variable that is "country/culture-specific" (Miljkovic, 2000, p. 544). In other words, if an American is no longer a "functional" part of a business operation, then s/he has become irrelevant and is obligated to transfer the operation to someone with more "utility function." Given the relentless emphasis on volume in today's economy, it is not surprising that traditional economic values preoccupy farmers who are just beginning their business operations. If young farmers' more conventional definition of success is one of "the needs, historical events ... mind-sets and feelings of a generation ... [that] motivates people" (Kilen, 2002, p. 2E), then this shifting value will play an important factor in the upcoming wave of family farm transfers that will take place in Iowa. This trend, coupled with the overall silence concerning values in business succession resources (such as How-To texts), could become a significant problem. In fact, the potential value clashes during a farm's succession can become so profound that they destroy not only the business but the family itself.

Because the manner in which each *So You Have Inherited* audience understood equality and success could affect its rhetorical needs from a document such as *So You Have Inherited*, I accordingly investigated how farmers, non-farming siblings, and spouses viewed their farms' successions, the major issues that influenced each group's decision-making process, and the resources that helped them to make these decisions. Also, by chronicling the audiences' reactions to a resource such as *So You Have Inherited a Farm...*, this chapter
reveals the efficacy of the BFC’s “new” document of coordination.

March 15, 2003

The weatherman promised a high of 65 degrees today. Good. The better the weather, the more people at our auction.

I scan the crowd and spot my brother, one of the few men not wearing Oakleys and Carhartts. Instead, Matt has chosen the alternative farming outfit, overalls. He moves constantly, shaking hands, smiling stiffly, reciting, “Thanks for coming.”

My cousin Jeff is working the crowd from the east end of the barn, while Mom and Rosemary set up a mini-garage sale near the house. Rosemary tells me that they’ve already sold lots of Pat’s clothes. “Some of them were brand new,” she states.

I haven’t seen my uncles Jerry and Joe yet. Not that I care, but it’s good to know where your adversaries are located.

Old farmers are pawing through the tools laid out on the hayracks, while the younger men congregate at the Morton building and inspect the machinery. I’m by far one of the youngest people here, and one of the few women. But that’s not why people are eyeing me curiously. *Fine, I think. Look all you want. And while you’re at it, take a look at my family. We’re your cautionary example.*

An experienced rhetorician, the auctioneer knows that his audience is here for the large equipment, so he moves quickly through the tools. Some sell for much
more than we expected. The curries and rope halters I used as a 4-Her are piled in
a five-gallon bucket, tangled with some old, broken metalwork.

On the porch, I run into Matt, who is carrying a big red toolbox. “These sales
are addicting,” he says. He looks at the toolbox, adding, “Nothing like buying
something that should have been mine in the first place.” He stomps out the door.

Mom sends me on an errand to the Morton building, and as I cross the west
lawn it hits me. I can’t do this. I can’t give this place up. I can’t do this. I can’t, I
can’t. I rack my mind for ideas. I could take out a loan. I could buy out everyone’s
shares of the farm. It would mean hundreds of thousands of debt, but who cares.
What do I have to lose?

By the time I break though the lilac bushes, the bout of insanity has passed,
and I continue to plod toward the Morton building.

Pat’s truck sells for a song, but the big John Deere gets a good price. Matt
has consigned his own feed grinder to the auction, but won’t explain why. It sells
low.

Next in the auction comes the old International, by now a collector’s item. My
eighty-one year-old great-uncle, Vincent, steps close and puts his hand on the rear
wheel.

“Is that Vincent’s tractor?” I ask Mom.

She keeps her eyes fixed on the auction. “No. It used to be Leo’s, then Pat
bought it off his estate.”

I stare at Vincent. He is selling a tractor that belonged first to his brother,
then his nephew. Now both are dead. Vincent feeds encouraging information about
the machine to the auctioneer. It fetches a decent price, and my great-uncle shuffles
to his truck, gets in, and drives away.

   The auction finally ends and strangers drive away with pieces of our farm.
   Joe leaves without saying goodbye to any of us.
   Rosemary and Jerry get into an argument.
   Jerry tells Rosemary to kiss his ass.
   Rosemary kicks at it instead.
   Jeff and Mom have to separate the two.
   The next day, my cousin Rod files a grievance against the attorney handling
Pat’s estate, contesting the will.
   Let the games begin.

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AUDIENCE #1: FINDING THE NON-FARMING SIBLINGS

In January 2003, over 250 people attended the visitation service for my uncle Pat.
Farmers and former farm kids from Iowa and the greater Midwest attended the service, but at
the time my research was the last thing on my mind. Later, I realized that there had been
literally hundreds of people who represented the So You Have Inherited a Farm... target
audiences, all in the same room, and that perhaps the only good to come from my uncle’s
death would be the opportunity to learn from these folks. I began to make phone calls.

Although the majority of people who attended Pat’s visitation were farmers, they
inadvertently helped me to locate non-farming heirs. During polite conversation with the
visitors, I was told many anecdotes about “So-and-so, who did this-and-that with the farm
when their parents died.” I then began to call each “So-and-so.” Ethnographers Steven
Taylor and Robert Bogdan (1998) refer to this technique as “snowballing—getting to know some informants and having them introduce you to others” (p. 93). While this technique at first glance may seem to have questionable validity as a research method, in this case the act of gathering stories about neighbors and acquaintances in fact honors important rural values of community and anecdote.

Taylor and Bogdan do warn, however, that snowballing can “limit the diversity of your informants” (p. 93); I consequently made sure to learn about each “So-and-so” I called, seeking an interview with only those successors who represented various occupations and geographic locations. Consequently, the demographics of my interview participants is in keeping with the representative audience of *So You Have Inherited a Farm...*; the few demographic restrictions included

1) age; most successors are usually middle-aged or older, as they tend to inherit upon the (natural) death of a farming parent, and

2) gender; Iowa farmers with no male heirs only recently have considered willing their operations to daughters, rather than selling the farms upon retirement (Perkins, 2002). Consequently, the heirs to a farming operation won’t be heterogeneous in gender for a few more decades, which means that the majority of those people who currently are inheriting their parents’ operations are male.

**The Sibling Participants**

Ultimately, the process of speaking to a variety of people and determining representative interview participants led me to Jim Cain, Vernon King, and Helen Ney. While all three grew up in central Iowa, their experiences with a farm operation were
Sixty-three year-old Cain grew up on a 147-acre cattle, hog and crop farm near Churchville (south-central Iowa); he and his brother inherited the operation in late 2002. And like his brother, Cain has not worked on the farm since graduating from college in 1962, when he began a career as a teacher, guidance counselor, and coach. I visited with Cain about his experiences at his Norwalk home in March 2003.

King, in his late forties, also is a teacher and coach and does not farm; he and his sister inherited their Winterset (central Iowa) 121-acre crop farm three years ago. While the King children still own the operation, they currently are mulling over the option of selling. I interviewed King at his Altoona home in March 2003.

Sixty-seven year-old Ney, in contrast, did not grow up on her family’s 192-acre farm in Spring Hill (central Iowa) but became very involved in its crop decisions upon inheriting it with her sister. She does not actually farm the ground itself, but has hired a farm manager instead. “It’s a pretty wonderful thing [to inherit a farm],” she told me. Now retired, Ney used to work as a school librarian in Des Moines. She talked with me at her West Des Moines home in March 2003.

While discussing their succession experiences, the three sibling participants distinguished the decisions necessary for inheriting a farm into types, and valued different types of information for each type. When making operational decisions, the sibling heirs privileged advice that came from farmers’ experiential knowledge—but the heirs believed that this type of knowledge was insufficient when they needed to make financial decisions. These values and how they shaped decision-making in turn affected the heirs’ response to the *So You Have Inherited a Farm*... fact sheet.
Jim Cain

In 1956, when he was a sophomore in high school, Cain and his brother became responsible for running his family's farm when their father suddenly passed away. The two Cain boys continued to farm through high school and then college. After Cain graduated from college, his mother rented the land to another farmer and handled the operation's business paperwork. "Mom was always the person in charge of the operation," he said. "Neither my brother and I had any interest in farming. I had a college education, and he had a CPA ... I think Mom wanted to keep the farm simply because it was hers, and she had a place to live; it was a material thing and she could have some income off of it."

When Cain and his brother inherited the farm, they decided that selling the operation will be the best option once their mother's estate is settled (neither of the Cains have heirs who are interested in farming.) Their decision to sell was shaped by the market value of the land, which has been driven up by current popular land use practices among non-farmers:

It's amazing now that there seems to be more interest in the bottom land and the timber land, which I refer to as "waste land," because there's a lot more interest in people wanting to buy that and using it for conservation and wetlands on the [river] bottom, and using it for hunting. There's probably about thirty acres of good hill ground, farm ground, there, that someone may want, and the bottom land is kind of iffy. There's probably two years where you get a full crop, [then] two years where you'd get a partial crop, [then] a year where there'd be flooding.

And, because this land is located in close proximity to Des Moines, there is a surfeit of potential suburban buyers who would like to use it as a hunting area or country retreat.

In addition to the incentive of selling at a good price, Cain said that "at my point in life now [he is retired], I have no interest in doing more with the farm. I want to kind of be able to have time to travel and do the things that you're looking for at retirement. The big thing is to be able to have someone [occupy] the [now empty] house." Although Cain
wouldn’t object to letting the current renter continue to farm the land, ultimately he wants the freedom of “going where I want to go and doing what I want to do,” and selling would give him that freedom.

Even though Cain has decided to sell and soon will have no connection to the farm, he still would be willing to read the So You Have Inherited a Farm...fact sheet. “Oh, yeah, because I still have an interest in the farming, because even though there’s a good chance we’ll sell it, if you can’t find a buyer that’s willing to purchase it for a reasonable price, I would go ahead and keep [the farm],” he said. Two other reasons influenced Cain’s interest in the document: “One, I’m interested in farming, so I’m still interested in finding out what they’re saying, what their ideas are. Number two, if we didn’t sell the farm, there might be some things in there that might be helpful down the road.” In other words, because his farm is still in legal probate, Cain found relevance in the options listed in the fact sheet.

Cain’s willingness to view a paper document as a potentially credible resource is shaped by “where it’s coming from, like if it’s coming from a government agency, a school or university, I would read it and take it with a little more authority [than a document from an unknown organization]. To me, having been in education for forty years, if I looked at it and saw ‘Iowa State University,’ I would feel that’s a reliable source of information.” Interestingly, a document from an unknown organization would prompt Cain to investigate the organization further, rather than discard the document altogether.

That Cain saw paper resources as viable sources of knowledge suggests an interesting change in the type of information needed to make farm business decisions. Specifically, in 1956 Cain and his brother relied upon relatives and neighbors to advise them after their father’s death. But in 2003 the farming decisions Cain must make (especially regarding the
federal Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service requirements) until the operation is out of legal probate necessitate more information than just that provided by the neighbors. As he said, “[If] you’re going to be actively involved in the farming ... the decision is number one, do you have a tenant that’s competent and doing a good job, and number two, ... it’s a matter of planting corn and beans and rotating the crops, and number three, trying to be somewhat familiar and keep up-to-date with the current government rules.”

Cain added that if he planned to continue owning the farm for years, he would more thoroughly research his options by consulting farming acquaintances and “colleges and universities that have an agricultural background, like Iowa State” (personal communication, March 1, 2003).

Vernon King

The King family made plans for their farm’s succession before Vernon King’s parents passed away. As King explained, “when Dad retired, we decided that we would switch [the farm] over to our name so that there wouldn’t be any limits in how much money we could make off the farm.” Although this decision gave King and his sister legal carte blanche, their parents continued to live on and work the farm, and the whole family made subsequent operational decisions together. Some of these decisions included selling the livestock and renting the land to a neighbor to farm.

There were several influences from within the family that helped King to make these decisions. First, “Dad was the one who was up on [succession planning]. He was an Agricultural Stabilization manager, so he knew all about the ins and outs of farming and farm responsibilities.” The fact that King’s father’s job entailed working “with all these other
farmers and ... [they] talked about retirement and what worked best and what he should do” validated the senior King’s advice in Vernon King’s eyes. “You know how farmers are when they get together,” King laughed. “They chatter away.”

In addition to the above decisions, when their mother passed away, King’s sister moved from the farm into town and they sold the house and barn. King encouraged this move because otherwise “I would have had to go out there all the time to do repair work.” King and his sister still own the land, though, because “it’s good to have some land, something to fall back on if you ever need it. Maybe in the future, [because] my daughter’s twelve years old, and we may need that money for college.”

While family shaped his operational decisions, non-family influences played a role in King’s decisions to keep the land. Two of his teaching colleagues who also sell real estate told him to hang onto the farm; and because they were “friends with knowledge,” King listened to their advice. He did add, however, that he would have sold the farm if he lived out of state, as keeping it would have been an inconvenience; but because King lives only twenty-five miles away, “for me it isn’t [an undertaking], because I’ve got neighbors and friends out there.”

The fact that he still owned the operation made King amenable to the So You Have Inherited a Farm...fact sheet: “I would read it if I’d [received] it a month or two after [inheriting] the land, just to see if there was something that I didn’t understand or didn’t know.” He added, “there’s just so much legislature that keeps changing laws, that it’s hard to keep up on [owning a farm] unless you know somebody that works with it every day;” King thus saw documentation as a viable resource for learning about the legal issues of farm succession.
King cited other aspects of the fact sheet, such as the photograph of the farm on the cover and the *So You Have Inherited a Farm...* heading, as drawing him into the document:

And then, what I did was just skim through the headings—you went from “Introduction” to “Location” to “Value” to “Taxes,” just to see [what was in the document], and I think if some of those catch your eye, then you might stop and read those, and before long you’re reading the entire document. Like, the [heading] right here that catches my attention right now is “Leasing,” because we’re renting for right now.

In addition, these headings gave the fact sheet the appearance of being “very concise. It isn’t something that overwhelms you, that makes you think, ‘Oh, it’s gonna take me three days to read this.... ’ I’d rather just [read] the information and not have all the glitter.”

Despite the good impression made by the *So You Have Inherited a Farm...* fact sheet, “I think the document would just be the starting point, and you would see this, and if there were something you didn’t understand or made you curious, then you would go and ask somebody for help.” This view (of paperwork) suggests that King defines reliable resources in a very specific way. As he explained, he would more likely trust information coming from a face-to-face meeting with an expert, because “your live source could bring up points that maybe you don’t think about, and that sort of leads you on to other areas.”

Furthermore, “expertise” also is specifically defined. King listened to his teaching colleagues’ advice, for instance, because of their professional experience as real estate agents; and when asked if he’d similarly trust someone who only had personal (i.e., not professional) experience in farm succession, he said, “I don’t think so, because I think each case, each sale, each transaction is different.” In other words, King saw someone with professional experience as having sufficiently generalized knowledge to span the uniqueness of each farm succession situation, and their knowledge trumped what a paper document
could offer. "I think teachers rely on the Internet, or books, or pamphlets, or research topics [mostly just] to get started, anyway," he added (personal communication, March 6, 2003).

**Helen Ney**

While Ney grew up in town with her parents (who owned the farm), her aunt and uncle lived on and ran the operation. After her aunt and uncle passed away, Ney’s parents hired another couple to run the farm. “It’s kind of an odd thing,” Ney explained. “I never actually lived on that farm. The only time I would help with it would be at harvest time.”

After she inherited the farm, Ney oversaw the farm’s management paperwork; she’d been prepared for this responsibility, having helped her mother with the farm business for a few years. “And then, I went to work, and I was raising a young family, and working, and trying to keep up with crop prices and government programs. I was going crazy,” Ney told me. “And my husband said, ‘Something has to go here,’ so we hired a farm manager.”

Meanwhile, Ney’s attorney cousin occasionally gave legal advice on issues such as accident liability; he had been legal counsel for her parents and knew the farm’s history. “I just continued [with him] because it just made sense,” she said. “That made it a lot easier.”

When it came to operational decisions, however, Ney, like King, relied on advice from people with farming experience:

My cousin is very knowledgeable—he’s a legal counsel mostly for people who farm. But when it comes to pricing, oh, well, he probably could have advised me about liming, [in dubious tone] but chemicals, and what kind of seed...

My father worked for Laverty’s [a co-op], and I was on real good terms with all the people that worked there. So mainly they were the ones that I would turn to if I needed some kind of advice, and I would say, ‘What do you think about this price?’ or ‘Is it time for us to lime?’ That kind of thing. I trusted them because my dad had worked for them for fifteen, twenty years.
In addition, Ney’s father’s value for land conservation also was a strong influence over her operational decisions. “You can either take care of the land the right way, or you can just let it go, like some people do, and trash it out,” she told me. It consequently is no surprise that Ney and her sister decided to plant five thousand black walnut trees on ten acres; this idea was suggested by Ney’s brother-in-law (her sister’s husband), who was a professor of forestry in Arizona. “It was his idea to leave a legacy,” she explained. “We did it to establish a forest, a place for the animals. It was a family project. And the kids worked on it—they’re the ones that are going to inherit it and gain the money from it.” Furthermore, upon the advice of their farm manager and the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS) staff, the Ney sisters also decided to turn thirty-two acres into watershed under the federal Crop Reserve Program (CRP).

Intrigued by the difference between Ney’s nonconventional decisions and those of Cain and King, I frankly asked if her comparative lack of involvement on the farm enabled her to ponder other options upon inheriting the operation. Ney paused for a moment, then said, “That very likely would be right. You know, I hadn’t really thought about that, but yes, that would be. And you know, farms were having trouble, and people were looking for alternative crops, and we found out that trees qualified [under the CRP program].” While Ney’s limited personal experience in farming made her more amenable to alternative crop ideas, then, the financial incentive of conservation planning and the high value of a black walnut crop seem to have been the deciding factors.

Ney cited other decision-making influences that distinguished her from the male interview participants. For instance, she has not sold her family’s farm because “it’s an emotional thing on my part.... I used to tag along with my dad, every chance I got, to go out
to the farm. So it meant more emotionally to me. I have a lot of really good memories of being with my dad and the farm.” Unlike Cain and King, who see their farms in primarily financial terms, Ney balances the financial return of farming with the personal ties to her land.

Although the issues that influenced Ney’s inheritance decisions made her unique among my sibling interview participants, her reaction to the *So You Have Inherited a Farm...* fact sheet resembled those of Cain and King. Ney said that she would read the fact sheet if it arrived in her mailbox, “first of all, [because] I’m a librarian, and a librarian is always interested in learning something new. I usually read most things that come [in the mail].” Ney stated that the fact sheet is “easy to read,” largely due to the “eye appeal” and “attractiveness” of the photographs; she even pointed out how the pictures represented “different kinds of farming,” including a cattle operation and a tree crop. The text headings also caught her attention. “These are the things that, to someone inheriting the farm, if they were like we were, kind of ignorant, they’d be very valuable,” she said. To Ney, then, the photographs and headings visually demonstrated the document’s relevance to her situation.

Ney’s trust in written resources was first generated by her personal experiences—and how those experiences shaped what Ney counted as valid knowledge. “My parents read a lot, because my mother was a teacher, and my dad liked to read. They read all the farm news in the paper, and I’m sure that that’s how he kept track of the prices. I was raised with reading. It was always important in our family.” She then added, “I had more knowledge when I was actually running [the farm.] It’s so complicated now, with all the government programs, and the paperwork, and so forth, that it would be very difficult for someone that didn’t have a degree in agriculture to keep up with—unless you’d done it all your life”
While these three sibling participants' operational decisions were influenced by people with farming experience, when it came to financial decisions, all three believed that other resources, including information in paper form, were more reliable. As the following section chronicles, this compartmentalization of what constitutes "valid" knowledge was not shared by those sibling heirs who themselves are farmers.

AUDIENCE #2: FINDING THE FARMING SIBLINGS

One of the many farmers to attend my uncle Pat's visitation was Dick Pool. He'd been a lifelong member of the neighborhood, but I knew him only well enough to say hello. Later, however, Pool's name was mentioned as a result of my snowballing strategy, so I contacted him for an interview and he graciously agreed.

Similarly, I knew Richard Dunn only by name, as he lived near my family's farm and interacted with other area farmers, but I met him personally one November evening when he approached me in the local grocery store and asked after Pat. When I later heard that Dunn, his brother and two sisters recently had inherited their Norwalk (central Iowa) 600-acre crop farm, I asked him for an interview.

The Sibling Participants

One of four children to inherit his family's sixty-two acre farm near Indianola (south-central Iowa) four years ago, Dick Pool, in his late sixties, co-farms the operation with his brother (an arrangement they'd made in 1984 when their parents retired and moved to town.)
Pool also farms his own 48-acre corn, beans and hay operation, having sold his Holstein dairy herd two years ago. Pool by far was my most difficult interview participant, if only because of his intense shyness and reticence; he nervously petted his dog, Guinness, throughout the entire interview. I talked with him at his farm on a bitter February 2003 afternoon while Guinness barked at my tape recorder.

Forty-five year-old Richard Dunn operates a farm (co-owned with his brother) in addition to running his family’s farm. These arrangements might change soon, however, as his mother’s estate (including the family farm) is still in probate. I spoke with Dunn about his complicated situation at his home in March 2003.

Overall, the farming siblings displayed a value for keeping the business within the family, both figuratively and literally. The farmers privileged their own and their families’ knowledge when it came to making decisions (both operational and financial), and consequently exhibited reluctance about consulting other sources of information such as an attorney, a banker, or a paper document like the *So You Have Inherited* fact sheet.

**Dick Pool**

When Pool and his three siblings inherited the operation, the attorney who handled Pool’s mother’s estate advised them to sell. “I don’t really know why, unless he thought it would get more complicated as we went down through the years, with more kids [becoming] involved,” Pool said. Furthermore, “I think a lot of [the reason for the attorney’s advice] had to do with land values in this area going up.”

Despite the attorney’s advice, the Pools sat down as a family, discussed the idea, and finally decided to keep the farm. The fact that Pool and his brother farmed the operation
before inheriting lent weight to this decision, as Pool’s two (non-farmer) sisters were inclined to sell it. “We just decided to keep it awhile,” he said. “We was already farming it, so we just kept [the arrangement].” Pool also cited the farm’s history in the family (they’ve owned it since 1920) and his parents’ wish “that we’d keep it” as influences: “They’d worked pretty hard for it.” And pragmatically, Pool’s own operation has “only got about twelve acres of farm ground on it, so we needed the [additional] land.”

When asked why some farmers would heed their attorneys’ advice, Pool said, “I suppose it’s so one [heir] can’t go in and take it all.” That the Pools themselves could come to consensus about their farm, however, was more important than the suggestions of an outsider.

Although Pool looked to his family first when making decisions about the operation, he said that he would read the So You Have Inherited a Farm... fact sheet. Pool has observed how other retirement-planning resources “tell you how you could hang onto it and not lose it. You know of cases where they’ve inherited and blew it.” He consequently assumed that the fact sheet would take the same approach; once he skimmed the document, Pool mentioned that the headings seemed to adequately address the process of keeping a farm operation.

Pool explained that he reads “somewhat” when preparing to make a business decision; specifically, he resorts to written resources only when his personal experience (“I think age has a lot to do with it”) can’t help in making a decision. “[Farming has] just changed so much,” he said. “We started farming in ’57, and the things that worked back then are unheard of now.” And when he does read about contemporary farming practices, “maybe you wonder if you’re doing it right.”

Furthermore, when Pool chooses to read written resources, “most of [the selection] is
[based on] whether you can make any money at it” (personal communication, February 2, 2003). In other words, resources that explain strategies for business success, such as *Successful Farming*, are the most likely to get his attention.

**Richard Dunn**

When Dunn’s father recently passed away, the family decided to put their farm in a trust “so the government doesn’t just come in [and take the assets]. That’s what we’re worried about. We just don’t know how to move it along. We’re trying to get away from the inheritance and capital gains and a lot of things.” Dunn added that this decision also buys the heirs time to figure out how the inheritance should be distributed. Because one of his (non-farmer) sisters would prefer that the family sell the operation, the estate has yet to be settled.

An attorney helped the Dunns to choose among their options; rather than keeping the decision-making process within the family, Dunn said that they went to a lawyer “for the tax purposes, how we could all win through the process of it. That’s what we’re after—us to get it, without us having to sell it to pay the inheritance or the capital gains. And we still don’t know if the trust is the right thing. I mean, it’s keeping it out of [the government’s] hands for right now.” Furthermore, the fact that this same attorney wrote the senior Dunn’s will made him more amenable to the family.

Interestingly, advice from Dunn’s farming colleagues also encouraged him to seek a resource outside of the family:

I asked [a colleague] if he had an advisor for his farming operation, and he said he did. We was thinking about hiring one, and we need somebody right in this area. I mean, we’re just too close to Des Moines, we’re not in a farming community anymore. I mean, the banker is loaning money for houses—he’s not loaning money for farms. We were looking for somebody to help us financially for the farming...
operation. If [the financial advisor] was in a bank in northern Iowa, he would understand the farming business more than our bank does. Because how many farmers are left in this area?

In other words, even though outside, non-farm forces are encroaching upon Dunn’s farm, he nevertheless continues to look first to his farming community to make decisions (much like the farmer participants in Chapter 3).

“Because I’m in this position,” Dunn said that he would read the *So You Have Inherited a Farm*... fact sheet. Dunn’s willingness to look to paperwork for information comes from the fact that “farming’s changing so fast. And our problem is we’re living in an area where land prices, you can ask whatever you want.” Dunn also cited aspects of the fact sheet that signal its credibility and relevance to his situation, such as the Iowa State University logo and the *So You Have Inherited a Farm*... heading; these features in turn would prompt him to read the document thoroughly. “That’s how I read the paper. I skim two, three paragraphs, and if I’m interested in the article, I’ll read it.”

Dunn added that paperwork is a necessary evil for farmers who don’t want to lose their operation, both in terms of keeping business paperwork on the farm and keeping up with information found in paper format:

I would say most farmers trying to stay in the business would read [the fact sheet]. [Not keeping up with farming information] was probably good twenty years ago, but I don’t think it is now, because of the government intervention into it. I mean, they take, what is it, forty to sixty percent [in inheritance taxes].... It’s not the government’s, it’s ours.... We’re always trying to catch up, and it’s starting to wear on our nerves. I don’t wanna quit, we’re too far into it now, we can’t quit, but I don’t want my fifteen-year-old farming it. Dad wanted him to farm, and I said, “No, he’s not gonna starve like we have.” (personal communication, March 19, 2003)

Unlike the non-farming siblings, Pool and Dunn first consulted with family or other farmers in the process of making both operational and financial decisions. Although both
farmers eventually met with outside, non-farmer authorities, Pool and Dunn appear to see outsiders as necessary evils for being successful in contemporary farming, rather than as reliable resources in their own right. Specifically, both Pool and Dunn cited not just government policy but intra-family disagreement (e.g., their siblings want to make different financial decisions with their inheritance) as contemporary farming pressures that can be mitigated by outside resources. In turn, these farmers’ aversion regarding non-farming resources seems to extend to paper documents—not because they’re “interested” (like the non-farming sibling interview participants) but because they are trying to hang onto their inheritance.

MARCH 2003

Grandma looks better than she has in years. The undertaker did a wonderful job. She’d picked out her “burial dress” years ago, and clutched in her hands is her ever-present rosary.

During the Mass, befuddled Protestants watch as we Catholics stand and sit, kneel and stand. “Why did she insist on having O Beautiful Mother?” Mom complains. “Everyone already thinks that Catholics worship Mary, and that song just made it worse.”

My aunt Jeanette refuses to sit with the family.

Jeanette’s son, my cousin Rod, doesn’t attend.

My cousins Jeff and Steve are not speaking to each other. They’d argued over Rod’s behavior.

My aunt Rosemary cries so often that Mom calls her “Old Faithful.”
Rosemary replies that Mom is acting like Jeanette.

Mom gets mad at Rosemary.

I finally get home, climb into bed, grab the blanket, and pull it over my head.

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AUDIENCE #3: FINDING THE SPOUSES

Iowa's countryside is rife with farmers' widows, but the Midwestern "culture of silence" (Chapter 2) that surrounds private issues like death and widowhood made it difficult to find willing interview participants. Fortunately, in the fall of 2002 an attorney who worked with clients throughout western Iowa connected me with 65-year-old Esther Schmidt of Baxter (in east-central Iowa) and assured me that she would be an ideal interview participant. As a teenager, the attorney had spent an entire summer as a hired hand on the Schmidt farm and as such knew the family well; Esther inherited the family's farm operation when a tractor rolled over and killed her husband. I toured her farm on a fine day in November 2002.

Mary Schimelfenig, the second spouse interview participant, is in her mid-eighties but is shockingly energetic and active. As a family in the dairy business, the Schimelfenig name was familiar to me, but I first met Mary personally when she attended my uncle Pat's visitation. Her loyalty to families in the dairy industry made her willing to speak with me, and I visited her farm on a January 2003 afternoon.

The Spouse Participants

Esther Schmidt was the perfect target for the BFC's flyer. When she was widowed, Schmidt decided to cash-rent her 165 acres to her youngest son and continue to live on the
farm, rather than sell the operation altogether; she is sharp, opinionated, and shrewd about her business decisions. For example, when discussing the dispersal of her Holstein herd, Esther explained how the highest producers were sold as dairy cows, but “we picked a few out and cross-bred with a beef bull” to begin a solid beef herd.

Mary Schimelfenig similarly is a strong representative of the BFC flyer’s (spouse) audience. When her husband Harold died a few years ago, their son Jim, having been Harold’s business partner for years, fully took over their Spring Hill (central Iowa) dairy, beans and hay operation. Mary decided to continue living on the 210-acre farm after she was widowed, despite her cronies’ pressure to “move to town,” and she keeps apprised of the farm’s day-to-day operations.

The spouses’ value systems seemed to be an amalgam of the non-farming and farming interview participants’ values. While the women held a family-first approach to making operational and financial decisions, their reactions to the So You Have Inherited fact sheet were shaped by one major influence (gender roles) that transcended the farm family’s boundaries.

Esther Schmidt

The decisions Schmidt made upon inheriting a farm largely were influenced by her history there. When Schmidt came to the farm as a bride in 1956, her husband and father-in-law already had a partnership in place. As the only son (of three) who was interested in dairy cattle, Schmidt’s husband gradually assumed the farm operation from his retiring father after returning from military service in the 1950s. This change in authority was smooth, both because the father-son team worked harmoniously, and because “when you’re in dairy, there
aren't going to be too many changes you're going to make [since there are limited options for feeding and caring for dairy cattle]"

Over time, Schmidt's husband decided to add a new Harvestore and cement lots to the farm, but only after they had purchased the farm from her father-in-law. "As long as he didn't have to do the work, he didn't care" about the changes, Schmidt stated. "It was ours—we could do what we wanted with it after we bought it. I never heard him say that he disapproved of anything."

While Schmidt's husband was still living, he rented the farm to their youngest son, "because he was the one who was still interested" in farming. This renting situation remained the same after Schmidt's husband died, and like her father-in-law, she does not challenge her son's managerial decisions. "When you're raised with [a certain way of doing business], you follow along with what your parents have done," she told me, then added:

He can decide what he wants to plant. Why would I want to be involved in that? But I know that there are some [widows] right in this neighborhood and it creates problems, particularly when the lady is alone and she's got to [decide], "Well, do I sell my beans now, do I sell my corn, do I store it, have I got fuel in the thing to dry the corn" ... Well, I don't have to do any of that worrying. My philosophy is if you want your children to farm, but you don't have enough trust in them to do that, well... [shakes her head].

This reliance on the tried-and-true informed Schmidt's reaction to the documents she reads. She cited trade journals as a primary source she relies on (in her case, dairy magazines such as *Hoard's Dairyman* and *Holstein World*), along with the local veterinarian and Extension office. While examining at the *So You Have Inherited a Farm...* fact sheet, Schmidt even referred to the Extension logo: "That's going to be something that going to catch your eye, when it's labeled like that. And also, when you skim through it and find a name or contact number, that's like somebody who knows."
Schmidt also values the same feature in her resources as the farming interview participants in Chapter 4: Relevance. As Schmidt explained, “Chances are, I’m not going to get information [i.e., receive unsolicited mail] on raising hogs. You can always submit your name to the Extension office and get any kind of information [on your particular operation]” (personal communication, November 17, 2002). She therefore would read So You Have Inherited a Farm... if it unexpectedly arrived in the mail, because she assumes that Extension would send only information that was specific to her particular operation.

Mary Schimelfenig

Schimelfenig’s story closely resembles Schmidt’s, both in history and in the decisions Schimelfenig made upon inheriting the operation. Like Schmidt’s son, Schimelfenig’s son, Jim, entered a farming partnership with his father as a young man. Because Mr. and Mrs. Schimelfenig spent extended vacations in the South, they both trusted Jim to operate the farm in their absence and without their advice: “We were ready to let him make his own judgments. He and his dad were kind of a special pair. They worked together well. It was a good partnership.”

And while Mr. Schimelfenig was living, external influences held only minimal sway over the decisions made about the farm. The family’s attorney had suggested that the Schimelfenigs declare their farm a corporation, with each family member in possession of a certain percentage of the operation. Mary Schimelfenig decided,

Well, I didn’t want to do that, because that would make me the middle-man [between her husband and son.] And when it came to making the final decision [i.e., breaking a tied vote], it would have had to been me. I said to Jim, “Would you be mad if I voted against you?” and he said he wouldn’t like it, and I said to Harold, “Would you be mad if I voted against you?” and he said he wouldn’t like it, so I didn’t want that.
So we didn’t go that route. We just kept it as it was.

Once she was widowed, Schimelfenig continued to maintain the farm and family’s status quo and was influenced only minimally by outsider authority (such as tax laws.) In Iowa, a parent can give a maximum of $10,000 tax-free per year from his/her estate to a child, so each year Schimelfenig gave Jim the equivalent value in farm equipment over the course of eight years. “That way, I didn’t have to pay for the repairs, and if he wanted to buy a new piece of machinery, he would have the [old] machinery to trade in.”

Furthermore, “I didn’t need to stay in the business. I had worked in town and I was on Social Security from Harold [her husband].... And my son wanted to farm, and he was capable—he’d had good training from his dad—so I more or less just turned it over to him.”

As she elaborated,

That was one reason why I could just let him take over. [Her husband and son] ran the business, and [Jim] wanted the farm, so I sold him the cows and gave him the machinery [she inherited].... Ours actually is an unusual arrangement, that I’ve turned the whole thing over to Jim before I died, the business end of it. And he keeps up all the fences, he does all of the repair work, so in the long run, I am getting something in return. [But] not cash. As I say, I didn’t need the cash.

Given Schimelfenig’s privileging of family influence when making decisions about her inheritance, her reaction to written documents such as the *So You Have Inherited a Farm*... fact sheet is not surprising. Typically, the written word does not hold much authority in Schimelfenig’s view: “Rather than get a book and read about it or something ... I get more out of a discussion than I do out of reading something, as a rule.” When Schimelfenig does happen to encounter written resources, “I’m a very independent person. I might not get more from it, but it would give me something to think about. Just because I read something, I’m not going to be of the same opinion [as the writer] always,” she said.
Interestingly, when asked how she knows whether to trust what she reads, Schimelfenig replied, “Experience.” Without any prompting, she went on to firmly defend this process: “Our decisions, from [the perspective of a] person looking from the outside, might say, ‘That’s wrong.’ But for me, it might work.” Consequently, her experiences as someone who has inherited a farm and as someone who wants her son to inherit would prompt her to read the fact sheet in the following manner:

I would probably scan first, and if there was something that caught my eye, something that I might run into or had run into, then I would read it in detail…. The fact that Jim wants to farm and I’m trying to keep the ground so he can inherit it—that may not be possible—it makes you wonder whether it’s really what you ought to do or not. (personal communication, January 31, 2003)

Like the farming interview participants, Schmidt and Schimelfenig first looked to farm and family authorities when making their operational and financial decisions, with Schimelfenig occasionally referring to tax law. However, unlike the farming interview participants, Schmidt’s and Schimelfenig’s decisions seem largely to be influenced by an additional factor: Gender roles. While each socio-political-cultural context obviously defines its gender roles differently, gender itself is so pervasive across all contexts as to qualify as an assemblage.

**Spouses’ Assemblage**

Schmidt’s comment about being a lone woman on a farm operation is reminiscent of rural studies scholar David Symes’s (2002) study of the impact of gender on the family farm. As Symes claims,

Under conditions of productionist agriculture the lives of farm women have been largely subordinated to the needs of the farm business and have been relatively
untouched by changes to the demographic, economic and social worlds beyond the farm gate. On small farms their labour potential has been exploited without proper financial reward or legal recognition. (p. 85)

Similarly, Centre for Rural Studies scholars Michael Winter and Ruth Gasson (1992) draw upon their study of 300 farm families to argue that “it is not pluriactivity per se which affects gender roles and power relationships in farm households but associated differences in backgrounds of farm husbands and wives” (p. 387). In other words, whether or not farming men and women also held off-farm jobs (“pluriactivity”) did not affect the noted power imbalance between them; men continued to possess managerial and operational authority on the farm.

Farm wife Lois Stark (1992), whose anecdotes comprised a long-running column in a Wisconsin newspaper, explains this gender role in this manner:

Every prospective farm bride should take a course in “How to Keep a Meal Warm and Eatable for Two Hours.” Sometimes I can understand. Having been out there myself, I know what it’s like to want to finish that field or get that last bolt in place. But sometimes the delay could be avoided with a little effort or forethought. There are days I feel taken advantage of. (p. 10)

That Stark performed the same tasks as her husband did not excuse her from the additional domestic responsibilities of the traditional homemaker. And, as she makes clear in Once Upon a Farm: Through the Eyes of a Wife, her “farm wife” role meant that she lived according to the rules and schedule established by her husband.

In an article on gender and agriculture in the Journal of Rural Studies, writers Forrest A. Deseran and Neller Ree Simpkins (1991) attribute this gendering of farm labor to the “patriarchal capitalism model,” i.e., an economic situation where the male’s earning capacity awards him dominant social status (p. 91). That the patriarchal model is an assemblage existing across disciplinary boundaries already has been fully explored in scholarly and
popular resources. But relevant to the spouse interview participants' situation is that, in the absence of equitable monetary compensation for their labor, the way in which some women consequently approach the world of business differently than men. As Schimelfenig told me,

I think the thing that shocked me when I inherited was the fact that I didn’t own anything. I thought we were in a partnership. But all the machinery, all of the grain, all of the stock, was [Harold’s], and I had to inherit it. If you’re a wife on the farm, you’re not [makes gesture for quotation marks] “bringing in a paycheck.” You drove the tractor, you went to the fields. We all did. But you’re not “bringing in a paycheck.” (personal communication, January 31, 2003)

Administration scholars Louise Cadieux, Jean Lorrain, and Pierre Hugron (2002) found that in the scant scholarship discussing woman-run businesses, “women see their business operations and the business itself as a cooperative network of relationships rather than simply a profit center” (p. 19). The scholars add that this so-called “feminine” approach to business also occurs in a context where the majority of women who work outside the home nonetheless continue to perform the majority of domestic tasks inside the home. The result of this situation is that the “mothers and children ... transpose their methods of communication, their way of being, the manner in which they have developed mutual trust, and their way of interacting into their business relationship” (p. 26).

Even though Cadieux et al.'s study focused on four women who owned non-farm businesses, their findings help explain Schmidt's and Schimelfenig's reactions to inheriting a farm. Both women performed highly gendered domestic tasks in addition to their farming and off-farm jobs (Schimelfenig worked at Meredith Corporation and Solars for several years in Des Moines), while the sons worked in an established farming partnership arrangement with the fathers. Both women were used to putting full trust in their sons and preferred family cohesiveness to monetary reward, as seen with Schmidt's pride in her son and
Schimelfenig's refusal to be a "middle-man." It is not surprising, then, that upon inheriting a farm, both women immediately handed the reins over to their sons and carried on as usual, thus "transposing" the domestic situation onto the professional—an act that honored "feminine" business values.

**BULL'S-EYE: THE BFC'S 2001 DOCUMENT OF COORDINATION**

Unlike the Beginning Farmer Center's previous attempts at documents of coordination, it would seem that the organization's new version resulted in a successful endeavor in *So You Have Inherited a Farm*... All of the interview participants, regardless of their occupation, age, or gender, said they would read the fact sheet. While the reasons among these participant cohorts differed, the fact that all of the audiences found relevance in the document suggests that defining a document of coordination's audiences according to events already experienced was the key in securing the fact sheet's success.

The *So You Have Inherited a Farm*... document's relevance for audiences that each rely upon different resources for information (i.e., family influence, personal experience, professional experience) is significant. When making operational and financial decisions about their inheritance, the non-farmer siblings compartmentalized how "valid" knowledge was defined, the farmers privileged farming resources over the authority of "outsiders" (non-farmers), and the spouses, influenced by their gender, looked to their personal experiences within the family. Yet none of these influences were strong enough to prohibit the audiences from considering a written document as a potential resource.

This last fact sheds light on how the BFC's documents of coordination function as rhetorical tools. While the non-farmer siblings already see paper resources as viable,
interviews with participants in Chapters 3 and 4 revealed that documents still can be suspect in the eyes of a farming audience. The reaction of this chapter's farming participants, however, suggests that the “right” type of paper resource is more amenable. In turn, as a rhetorical object, the BFC’s new version of a document of coordination may make the influence of “outsider” authority (as represented on paper) more amenable to farmers as well—possibly resulting in an influx of ideas into agriculture that could affect how farm succession is handled in the future.
CHAPTER 6:

IN CONCLUSION
What is so wrong with being "personal," anyway? I mean, whatever else anything is, it ought to begin by being personal (You've Got Mail).

Figure 6.1: My grandfather etched this characteristic commentary ("dry as hell") on a makeshift well cover in 1956; the county water inspector deemed the cover "inappropriate" and made Granddad replace it. The cover was discovered under a pile of debris on our farm in 2002.

Summer 2003

A friend of mine read my Tarot cards shortly before I finished this dissertation. Not surprisingly, an "intellectual endeavor" was occupying the center of my life. And losing influence, according to the cards, was a significant female figure.

Perhaps, then, it is no coincidence that I think of our farm in largely female—and misogynist—terms. She is the Other Woman who in our family boasts two broken marriages to her credit. She is the Siren that kept me tied to Iowa while my friends fled. She's a Tease who may or may not reward you. And she's always a bitch.

Conversely, the Tarot cards also claimed that a "significant male" was going
to be influential, someone connected to the “intellectual endeavor.”

A significant male? I was stumped. My father is supportive of my work, but not enough to actually be interested in it. My uncles think I am a freak. My brother is so busy that I almost never see him, even when we’re both occupying Mom’s house.

I didn’t think of my grandfather until a few weeks later, when I dreamed about him again. I hadn’t dreamed about Granddad until I began to write my dissertation; that was when, to quote my favorite author, “in the night the dead companioned me.”

I don’t need a dream interpreter. Granddad has returned, and he’s not pleased about what we’ve done with his legacy. We’re killing his farm. Granted, it’s over a century old—but it hasn’t aged with the easy, gracious golden years of retired seniority. It’s haggard and pained, and gasps hoarsely for each breath.

I almost wish he’d stayed silent. I’m busy enough fielding all the unsolicited opinions of my living relatives. But my grandfather wasn’t exactly the reserved type—_plainspoken_ is a diplomatic way of putting it—so I should have known that he wouldn’t just sit there and observe passively as we on the other side of the Other Side tear apart his farm and his family.

Now, whenever I go into the barn I feel like I’m being watched, and not just by the cats. _You’re being overdramatic_, I tell myself, quoting my mother. _Knock it off._ But someday I’ll turn a corner, and maybe he’ll be there, swearing over the rubbish in the corners, searching vainly for the long-gone stanchions, shaking his head over the ghost-town atmosphere of a place gone to hell in a hand basket. He’d hung onto this farm despite the Depression, his old man’s drinking and gambling, the deaths of
three children, cash-flow problems, Reaganomics, broken health. How could this have happened?

Grandma and my uncle Pat are far too practical to waste time on hauntings. But Granddad's tie to this place was different, it was internal, it was so flesh-and-bone that even death wouldn't fully cut the connection. So his reappearance makes sense to me, sort of like that bumper sticker, **God is coming, and is He pissed.** My grandfather left a lot of loose ends on our farm and trusted us to take care of them. In the writing of this dissertation, I've conjured Granddad's return. And in concluding this work, I am forced to admit that his business too is one step closer to being finished. But I am unsure exactly how this story will end.

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**Revisiting the Research Questions**

The following section revisits how the Beginning Farmer Center's documents of coordination illuminate the research questions posed in Chapter 1, and it measures the overall potential of the *document of coordination* concept for Extension publications.

**As Professional Communications, How Do Documents of Coordination Reify or Challenge the Audiences' Value Systems?**

The one-page flyer and the brochure representing the BFC's initial documents of coordination did little to affect their various target audiences (farmers, politicians, and bankers.) The documents' lack of visual appeal and overly general content meant that those assemblages important to the audiences also were lacking. As a result, the farmers,
politicians and bankers did not read the texts when they arrived in the mail, and the flyer and brochure never had a chance to make a difference. The unread documents, consequently, *neither reified nor challenged any of the audiences' value systems.*

**How Do Documents of Coordination Perpetuate or Resist Power Structures that Are Embedded in Professional Communication?**

As agricultural and state budget conditions worsened after 1996, the BFC needed to reaffirm its own relevance to agriculture; one of its methods for doing so involved the *Farm Succession in Iowa* research report. This document of coordination was unsuccessful on two fronts. First, its rejection by the *Journal of Business Venturing* meant that the report, with its unconventional structural formatting, failed to resist the (academic) professional communication power structures as embodied by *JBV.* Second, because the report also was rejected by its farming audience, it failed to challenge conventional (retirement-focused) professional communications. Because a power structure is a rhetorical construct, it follows that any change to a structure must be a rhetorical act—and since *Farm Succession in Iowa* failed rhetorically, *these structures continued unaltered.*

**How Do the BFC’s Documents of Coordination Function as Rhetorical Tools?**

In 2001, the bleak results of the BFC’s previous publications incited a redefinition of *documents of coordination,* and with it a successful publication. Initially, a document of coordination’s audiences were selected according to the document’s primary purpose; for example, the one-page flyer needed to promote the BFC as an organization critical to Iowa’s agricultural world—an argument that farmers, politicians, and bankers (the major players in
state agricultural affairs) needed to accept in order to secure the BFC’s fiscal future.

But unlike the flyer, brochure, and research report, the *So You Have Inherited a Farm...* fact sheet embodied the redefinition of documents of coordination. While the documents’ audiences remained varied and possibly contentious, they now would be targeted by a shared past event, in this case, the inheritance of a farm operation. As the interview participants’ responses in Chapter 5 demonstrate, the BFC’s redefined document of coordination was rhetorically successful; even those audiences who did not privilege print material (and the non-farm, “outsider” authority” it represented) as an informational resource nevertheless said they would read the fact sheet. As a rhetorical tool, then, *the fact sheet functioned epistemologically, in that certain reading populations that valued non-print forms of knowledge-making (such as story-telling, etc.) nonetheless would read this particular document as well.*

**SUMMARY**

The Beginning Farmer Center staff had the organization’s best interests in mind when the flyer, the brochure, and the research report were written and distributed. However, despite these good intentions, it seems that the BFC’s clients were simply too oppositional to be addressed by a *document of coordination* (as defined by Charles Bazerman [1998]). Every audience targeted by these documents probably would have agreed with the idea that they are “interested in” or “connected to” agriculture, but this single commonality could not overcome their differences—a fact underestimated by the BFC’s writers. Fortunately, the new look of a BFC document of coordination, represented by the *So You Have Inherited* fact sheet, enabled the organization to print only one document while targeting several groups
connected to farming.

However, even if all of the Beginning Farmer Center's texts had failed, it is doubtful that documents of coordination would have disappeared entirely from the organization's publication process. Despite the public claims of endurance surrounding Iowa State University Extension's 100th anniversary, as an Extension program the BFC's existence is no longer determined mostly by farmers, rather Iowans who possess a variety of viewpoints about agriculture. Or, as ISU vice provost Stanley Johnson recently warned, Extension's "heritage and tradition [in agriculture] are simultaneously a source of strength and an impediment to change" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p. M1). And so, with a shrinking budget and an increasingly heterogeneous readership, the BFC must continue to embrace several audiences with each publication.

The Roles of Context

Given the BFC's publication history, it would be easy to dismiss the organization's professional communications as examples of rhetorical failure. Scholastically, however, these documents of coordination can in fact be considered a success in their illumination of an important research method. Specifically, my study of the BFC's publications ultimately suggests alternative ways in which context can be used as a research tool in professional communication scholarship. The following section reviews how context is currently represented in communication, agriculture, and agricultural communication scholarship, and the potential consequences of revising this concept.
Context in Professional Communication Scholarship

That context (or what scholar James R. Andrews [1993] calls “contextual potency”) is a component of any communication’s rhetorical situation is a given in the professional communication discipline. However, “there is little agreement about what constitutes context as a theoretical construct” (Chin, 1994, p. 445). Perhaps as a result, some communication studies oversimplify the idea of context by seeing it as a relatively static phenomenon—even as a document moves from construction to consumption. A recent study of environmental health documents, for instance, looked at a variety of materials “in the context of safety and health promotion or as an adjunct to enforcement activities.” This context, however, proved to be influential only during the writing of the documents, not during their consumption by the audience. In fact, the authors recommend using materials from a variety of “external sources”—which presumably are closer to the materials’ audience in demographics and needs—rather than from one specific in-house publication department. Such advice suggests the importance of understanding context as a rhetorical phenomenon that can change during a communication act (Harvey and Fleming, 2003).

Other scholars decry such oversimplification of context. For example, pragmatics scholar Jeff Coulter (1996) distinguishes between a person’s capacity to recognize a context and his/her conscious act of contextualizing, and suggests that researchers often conflate the two when studying a text: “‘Knowing what the relevant context is for what one is doing’ is not to be construed as ‘making or having an interpretation of that context’” (1994, cited in 1996, p. 442). Similarly, rhetorician Ann Blakeslee (1997) emphasizes why the influence of context should not be underestimated in her study of three physicists’ writing processes. By invoking an activity theory framework, Blakeslee sees “social and cognitive components of
learning ... as two sides of the same coin instead of as dichotomous or mutually exclusive perspectives”—a framework that reveals the sites (contexts) of her subjects’ learning curves as fluid and multi-faceted (p. 126).

**Context in Agriculture Scholarship**

Compared with its use in professional communication scholarship, *context* looks very different in agriculture scholarship, most likely because the larger concept of *rhetoric* often is used synonymously with falsity or spin-doctoring—something in contrast with *reality* or *truth*; this negative connotation is similar to most references to rhetoric in public texts (in fact, a recent article in *Mother Jones*, discussing President George [W.] Bush’s derogatory use of the word, pondered, “Maybe he’s not sure what ‘rhetoric’ means?” [“Tax Cut Rhetoric,” 2003].) An article on biotechnology, for instance, compares “the *actual* impact of risk regulation on industry strategies” against “the rhetoric of industry lobbyists” (Chataway and Tait, 1993, p. 263; my emphasis). Similarly, an article about ecology and community contrasts “rhetoric” with the “*actual* [economic] opportunities” available to an impoverished South African province (Brennan, Allen, and Harrison, 2001, p. 203; my emphasis). And a third article critiques how the international G8 Program, designed to better regulate the logging industry, “has considerable potential, but so far its implementation has been limited to rhetoric” (Palo and Mery, 2001, p. 165). As long as this binary between rhetoric and “reality” is sustained, rhetorical analysis in agricultural scholarship remains limited as well. In other words, the understanding of rhetoric as mere spin-doctoring in turn narrows the definitions of rhetorical terms such as audience, purpose—or *context*.

One of the most common uses of context is in reference to computer software
programs. For example, one pair of computer programmers cast the written description of their software as a mere "support document" (in comparison to the more important computer technology). Given their view of written documentation as something "lesser," it is not surprising that context is defined not in terms of the written work, but as the data used to build the program (Racin and Colbert, 1995, p. i). This understanding of context reappears in other software descriptions, such as that of a "crop water requirements" program (Annandale et al., 2002), and a geographic information system designed to monitor irrigation (Vaughan et al., 1996). It seems that a more rhetorical approach to context conflicts with the jargon in computer programming, where context refers to fixed variables that can be input into a software language.

Elsewhere in agriculture research, context is used in terms of the surroundings in which a scholarly document (e.g., a journal article) is written. One scholar uses "the evolution of science and the international scientific context" to chronicle the history of ecology journals (Aussenac, 2002, p. 789). Another researcher introduces his book on agricultural technology by situating the text's construction within a particular research context (Mango, 2002, p. xx). Yet a third scholar studies public arguments about food fortification in the context of the European Commission's 2000 policies on the issue (Gray, 1999, p. 97S). While this use of context is more rhetorical than studies of agricultural computer technology, the concept nonetheless is conceptualized as being separate from the writing process—an issue that is briefly described, then forgotten.

*Context in Agricultural Communication Scholarship*

Despite these a-rhetorical definitions, when professional communication within the
agricultural field is discussed, context becomes more complex, and therefore has more potential as a research tool. For instance, one scholar in forestry recently investigated how the jargon used in his field's research changes across "location, time, and societal use.... agencies, regions, and nations" (Helms, 2002, p. 15). Another agriculture scholar tracks how the "'rhetoric of participation' extends the horizons of agricultural research and extension beyond technical problem-solving" and discusses how this rhetoric is contingent upon a view of context as "set in time"—ephemeral, fluid, and complicated (Cornwall et al., 1994, p. 38). And a recent book on environment and sustainable development examines how a government body can actually "create a context in which environmental issues are analyzed and addressed"; this study sees context not just as space existing but as space potentially created for rhetorical moves made by political representatives (Cistulli, 2002, p. x).

Unlike the uses of context that dominate in other scholarship in agriculture, research in agricultural communication appears to more closely approximate the rhetorical understanding of the term found in professional communication literature. This dissertation is an attempt to extend the understanding of context as a rhetorical phenomenon, one that goes beyond quantifiable computer data and a context-versus-writing-process binary.

Widening the Concept of Context

Writer Fran Lebowitz (2003) recently commented, "This is a strident, blatant era in which the lines are drawn in such a heavy hand that there is hardly room between them" (p. 192). In contrast, two revelations about context arising from this study of the BFC's
publications promote a wider, more encompassing understanding of how people act in and react to their surroundings. Such alternative understandings of the environment in which people encounter documents can assist professional communication scholars in their studies of a text's construction and consumption.

**Distinguishing Identification of from Identification with**

Post-process theorist Nancy C. DeJoy (1999) states that often during the writing process, "identification of [certain assumptions about a text's audience is] supposed to lead to prose identified with those stereotypes" (p. 172). In other words, a writer's assumptions about the reader, including his/her reading context, usually resulted in a trite text—one that perpetuates inappropriate beliefs and images.

This writing process, DeJoy states, leads to communication scholarship that is based upon a too-narrow belief about audience and context: "Identification of dominant cultural assumptions and/or processes and products which valorize identification with those assumptions is the only, or over-valorized, route to literate subjectivity" (p. 169). As she explains, often when a scholar studies a text, s/he rhetorically analyzes its contextual traits, believing that the only way in which the document's audience can connect successfully with the text is via those same contextual traits.

For example, the trajectory of this dissertation's study embodies this distinction between identification of and identification with. In Chapter 1, the BFC documents of coordination's rhetorical situations (bridging the nonconventional and conventional Western discourses used by disparate audiences) were analyzed using a rather simple understanding of context (a phenomenon that remains fixed as a document moves from construction to
consumption).

However, via articulation and assemblaging methods, it was revealed that these initial predictions about the documents of coordination's contexts in fact were not the same contexts that influenced each audience upon consuming the BFC publications. In Chapter 3 the younger farmer interview participants did their work with an eye toward product volume. In Chapter 4, the academic interview participants privileged quantitative empiricism when weighing article submissions. And in Chapter 5, the spouse participants were guided by traditional gender roles to make operational decisions. These findings argue for a revised version of context that comes not only from the researcher but from the participants as well.

**Between Identification of and Identification with**

It is the space between a scholar's "identification of" a context and the context an audience "identifies with" that deserves closer investigation in professional communication research. As cited in Chapter 2, regionalism scholar Cheryl Herr (1996) argues that the "interspace" between assemblages are "thick with possibilities for manipulating absence and presence" (p. 8). DeJoy expands upon these "possibilities" by describing specific lenses a scholar can don to study this space.

One of these approaches, "dis-identification with ... generalized exclusion," is especially relevant to communication scholarship, both within agricultural situations and for the larger professional communication discipline. As DeJoy explains, when a certain group has been "historically positioned as excluded from dominant constructions of self-hood," the people involved may define themselves via conscious "dis-identification" with the larger population (1999, p. 174). For farmers and many rural residents, whose upbringing and
epistemologies may clash against larger Western cultural and educational ideals, often the result is a prideful dis-identification with these dominant constructs. For instance, as farmer Pat Hoover stated in Chapter 1, "You know, I'm in the field, I've run the hay baler day after day after day, whereas [for engineers], it's all hypothetical. They're inside the company trying to project what'll probably happen" (personal communication, February 22, 1999). Here Hoover clearly rejects the engineers' assumptions about a machine's audience and context (dominant Western scientific knowledge) in favor of his personal experience (nonconventional knowledge.)

Using an investigative lens such as dis-identification can illuminate communications such as those used by farmers—or, for that matter, any discourse that exists on the boundary. Furthermore, scholars can employ this lens to study how dominant communications encourage/enable the boundary group's dis-identification as well. This approach is just one way in which a widened concept of context can benefit contemporary professional communication research.

**Final Thoughts**

This dissertation's study of a particular type of agricultural communication has chronicled the efficacy of the concept of documents of coordination, and by extension the potential of context as revealed via the documents' circulation among a variety of audiences, purposes, and contexts. Although further research on these issues is warranted, it is hoped that this study will prove useful to scholarship on nonconventional discourses and to the professional communication discipline as a whole.
APPENDIX A:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS, BEGINNING FARMER CENTER BI-FOLD BROCHURE, AND BEGINNING FARMER CENTER ONE-PAGE FLYER
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following pages contain pre-established questions that I asked during interviews. Note that these questions differ among participants according to two factors (Mike Duffy, who was an information provider rather than an interview participant in this study, was asked an altogether different set of questions):

1) While the telephone and face-to-face interviews began with more general questions to help "break the ice," e-mail interviews were more concise per participants' request; these questions focused exclusively on the two documents of coordination discussed in Chapter Three (the one-page flyer and bi-fold brochure).

2) If the participants were involved with the Beginning Farmer Center since its creation, I asked four additional questions regarding their relationship to the organization.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TO MIKE DUFFY, MAY 24, 2002

1) Who requested that these documents be written?

2) Who all was involved in creating the documents?

3) What were these documents supposed to accomplish?

4) Where were they written?

5) Who were they written for?

6) How did you distribute these documents?

7) What feedback did you receive from these documents?

8) How did this feedback affect the way subsequent documents at the BFC?
E-MAIL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TO PATTY JUDGE, MAY 25, 2002

1) As a representative of the legislative community, what is most memorable about the creation of the Leopold Center/BFC and why?

2) What did the state legislature hope would be accomplished by the creation of these organizations?

3) When you first received these documents (in 1996/97), what information did you look for?

4) Having read through them, what were your reactions?

5) How did these documents affect your perspective of the BFC?

6) How did these documents affect your political stance toward the BFC and toward agriculture in Iowa?

7) Do you have any general comments about the relationship between the political and agricultural communities in Iowa that would help me to understand the context in which these documents were created?

8) As a member of the legislative community, would you comment on what you typically look for when you receive documents such as these? In other words, what would you need to know that, in turn, would make you willing to spend some time reading through such documents?

TELEPHONE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TO JOHN NORRIS, JULY 2, 2002

1) What is your particular line of work in politics?

2) Why did you decide to become a politician?
3) What is it like to be in politics? How would you describe it to someone who doesn’t know anything about the political field?

4) What things have changed in politics?

5) How as a politician have you responded to these changes?

6) What larger national, social, or cultural trends have filtered down into politics?

7) How would you characterize the way politicians communicate?

8) Having read through the documents, what are your general reactions?

9) How do these documents affect your perspective of the BFC?

10) How do these documents affect your political stance toward the BFC and toward agriculture in Iowa?

11) Do you have any general comments about the relationship between the political and agricultural communities in Iowa that would help me to understand the context in which these documents were created?

12) As a member of the legislative community, would you comment on what you typically look for when you receive documents such as these? In other words, what would you need to know that, in turn, would make you willing to spend some time reading through such documents?

**Telephone Interview Questions to Mike Bobst, July 12, 2002**

1) What is your particular line of work in the banking industry

2) Why did you decide to become a banker

3) What is it like to be in the banking industry? How would you describe it to someone who doesn’t know anything about banking?
4) What things have changed in the banking industry?

5) How as a banker have you responded to these changes?

6) What larger national, social, or cultural trends have filtered down into banking?

7) How would you characterize the way bankers communicate?

8) As a representative of the financial community, what to you is most memorable about the creation of the Leopold Center/BFC and why?

9) What did you hope would be accomplished by the creation of these organizations?

E-MAIL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TO MIKE BOBST, JULY 12, 2002

1) When you received these documents when they were first published in 1996/97, what information did you look for in them?

2) Having read through the documents, what were your general reactions?

3) How did these documents affect your perspective of the BFC?

4) How was the perspective that you formed from these documents affected/changed/rounded out by your professional relationship with the BFC?

5) How did these documents affect your stance as a financial representative toward the BFC and toward agriculture in Iowa?

6) Do you have any general comments about the relationship between the financial and agricultural communities in Iowa that would help me to understand the context in which these documents were created?

7) As a member of the financial community, would you comment on what you typically look for when you receive documents such as these? In other words, what would you
need to know that, in turn, would make you willing to spend some time reading through such documents?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TO DWIGHT FREITAG, AUGUST 1, 2002

1) What is your particular line of work in the banking industry?
2) Why did you decide to become a banker?
3) What is it like to be in the banking industry? How would you describe it to someone who doesn't know anything about banking?
4) What things have changed in the banking industry?
5) How as a banker have you responded to these changes?
6) What larger national, social, or cultural trends have filtered down into banking?
7) How would you characterize the way bankers communicate?
8) Having read through the documents, what are your general reactions?
9) How do these documents affect your perspective of the BFC?
10) How do these documents affect your stance as a financial representative toward the BFC and toward agriculture in Iowa?
11) Do you have any general comments about the relationship between the financial and agricultural communities in Iowa that would help me to understand the context in which these documents were created?
12) As a member of the financial community, would you comment on what you typically look for when you receive documents such as these? In other words, what would you need to know that, in turn, would make you willing to spend some time reading through such documents?
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TO MAURICE MOFFITT, SEPTEMBER 12, 2002

1) What do you raise?

2) Why did you decide to become a farmer?

3) What is it like to be a farmer? How would you describe it to someone who doesn't know anything about farming?

4) How have things changed in farming over the years?

5) How as a farmer have you responded to these changes?

6) What larger national, social, or cultural trends have filtered down into farming?

7) How would you characterize the way farmers communicate?

8) As a representative of the farm community, what to you is most memorable about the creation of the Leopold Center/BFC and why?

9) What did you hope would be accomplished by the creation of these organizations?

10) When you received these documents when they were first published in 1996/97, what information did you look for in them?

11) Having read through the documents, what are your general reactions?

12) How do these documents affect your perspective of the BFC?

13) How do these documents affect your stance as a farmer toward the BFC and toward agriculture in Iowa?

14) Do you have any general comments about agricultural communities in Iowa that would help me to understand the context in which these documents were created?

15) As a member of the farming community, would you comment on what you typically look for when you receive documents such as these? In other words, what would you need to
know that, in turn, would make you willing to spend some time reading through such
documents?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TO DAVID HUMMELL, SEPTEMBER 9, 2002

1) What do you raise?

2) Why did you decide to become a farmer?

3) What is it like to be a farmer? How would you describe it to someone who doesn't know
   anything about farming?

4) How have things changed in farming since you were a kid?

5) How as a farmer have you responded to these changes?

6) What larger national, social, or cultural trends have filtered down into farming?

7) How would you characterize the way farmers communicate?

8) As a representative of the farm community, what to you is most memorable about the
   creation of the Leopold Center/BFC and why?

9) What did you hope would be accomplished by the creation of these organizations?

10) When you received these documents when they were first published in 1996/97, what
    information did you look for in them?

11) Having read through the documents, what are your general reactions?

12) How do these documents affect your perspective of the BFC?

13) How do these documents affect your stance as a farmer toward the BFC and toward
    agriculture in Iowa?

14) Do you have any general comments about agricultural communities in Iowa that would
    help me to understand the context in which these documents were created?
15) As a member of the farming community, would you comment on what you typically look for when you receive documents such as these? In other words, what would you need to know that, in turn, would make you willing to spend some time reading through such documents?

BEGINNING FARMER CENTER BI-FOLD BROCHURE

The following is one of the first BFC documents of coordination, a bi-fold brochure published in 1996.
The Beginning Farmer Center has received international inquiries and recognition. Other states have similar programs, but only in Iowa is support for beginning farmers a matter of public policy. The center is operated by Iowa State University Extension and administered by the Iowa Concern Hotline.

Beginning Farmer Center

Iowa State University

Outreach Center

2020 DMACC Blvd.

Ankeny, Iowa 50021

1-800-447-1985

Agriculture and farmers face big challenges. We can accept things as they are and say they can't be changed, or we can help shape Iowa's agricultural future.

Figure A.1: Outside panels of the Beginning Farmer Center bi-fold brochure
A model for others

The Beginning Farmer Center has received international inquiries and recognition. Other states have similar programs, but only in Iowa is support for beginning farmers a matter of public policy. The center is operated by Iowa State University Extension and administered by the Iowa Concern Hotline.

Beginning Farmer Center
Iowa State University
Outreach Center
2020 DMACC Blvd.
Ankeny, Iowa 50021
1-800-447-1985

Beginning Farmer Center

Resources to help our next generation of farmers

Agriculture and farmers face big challenges. We can accept things as they are and say they can't be changed, or we can help shape Iowa's agricultural future.

...and justice for all

The Iowa Cooperative Extension Service's programs and policies are consistent with pertinent federal and state laws and regulations on nondiscrimination. Many materials can be made available in alternative formats for ADA clients.


Figure A.2: Inside panels of the Beginning Farmer Center bi-fold brochure
BEGINNING FARMER CENTER ONE-PAGE FLYER

The following is an early BFC document of coordination, a one-page flyer published in 1996.
Objectives
The Beginning Farmer Center (BFC) was established by the 1994 General Assembly. Objectives include:
• coordinating educational programs and services for beginning farmers;
• assessing needs of beginning and retiring farmers to identify opportunities for programs and services, and
• developing statewide programs to educate beginning and retiring farm families.

Organization
The Center is a joint effort between the College of Agriculture Experiment Station and Iowa State University Extension, which delivers the Center's programs and activities.

The ISU Department of Economics provides a professor-in-charge of the center, and the administrator is the attorney for the Iowa Concern Hotline. In addition to a part-time associate, 18 associates throughout the state provide services on an as-needed basis.

Major activities
The Center has undertaken a variety of education and programming activities since its inception. Major activities in 1996 included the following projects.

FarmOn
The Center provides basic funding for the FarmOn program, designed to match retiring farmers with young people who want to get into agriculture. To provide opportunities for potential matches, one-day workshops are hosted throughout Iowa about issues related to farm transitions. FarmOn's active file contains data on 630 potential beginning farmers and 132 landowners. To date, 70 matches have been made.

Ag Link
Ag Link is a two-day seminar for ISU juniors and seniors who plan to join their family farm operations after they graduate. Family members and others in the operation also attend the seminar, offered by the ISU Department of Agricultural Education. Topics include conflict resolution, goal setting, business analysis, farm planning, and management, which are viewed differently because of distinct—and sometimes conflicting—goals and endowments of capital, labor, technical knowledge, and management expertise. Last year, seminars were offered on two weekends, attended by 60 people, including 19 students who intend to return to their family farms.

Individual farm analysis
The Center supports the analysis of individual farm situations using the FINPACK computer program. Extension FarmAid associates perform the analysis in individual sessions with farm families.

Northeast Iowa dairy project
The Center supports a part-time analyst who works with northeast Iowa dairy farmers preparing to transfer their operations to new operators. The analyst consults individually with these families. As part of this project, seminars also have been held for two-generation dairy farmers and lawyers, accountants, lenders, and other professionals who help them.

Beginning Farmer manual
Development of a manual for beginning farmers, exiting farmers, and educators has been another major Center activity. The manual outlines a process for the transition of a farm business to the succeeding generation. It will be used by vocational agriculture teachers, community college instructors, and Extension staff to present programs for new farmers or those who wish to transfer a farming operation to another person.

Videotapes
Two videotapes are now available. "The Beginning Farmer" targets young audiences with information...
on business and financial planning. "FarmOn: Your Best Choice" describes the benefits a landowner may experience by participating in FarmOn.

**Agricultural Transition Alliance**

The Center was instrumental in forming and providing coordination and logistical support for a new organization this past year, the Agricultural Transition Alliance (ATA). Approximately 30 member organizations represent all major agricultural concerns. Its purpose is to promote efforts that help young people enter agriculture.

**Leveraging the advantages**

The FarmOn program and the Beginning Farmer Center are among the first in the nation to address the critical issue of future caretakers of farmland and successful ways to transfer operations to succeeding generations. The Center’s administrator has become a nationally recognized expert in this area. Last year, he presented information in Massachusetts, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, as well as throughout Iowa. Materials developed by the Center have been distributed nationally.

The BFC works closely with the Drake University Ag Law Center to employ two legal students part-time as back-up for the Iowa Concern attorney (also the Center administrator) when conducting Center business. The BFC also provides speakers and materials for the Iowa Bar Association and a conference sponsored by the Drake Ag Law Center. The Center, through its contacts with the Agricultural Education Department, has worked closely with Iowa's vocational agriculture instructors, who received copies of the Center's new videotapes. At least 60 instructors have indicated an interest in using the new manual.

An important feature of the Center’s activities was to create an awareness of this resource and to get help for beginning farmers. A FarmOn display at the 1996 Farm Progress Show near the Amanas reached many people, and the BFC has been represented at numerous trade shows and conferences throughout Iowa.

**Future plans**

The Center plans to continue funding and support for FarmOn and Ag Link programs. We also are exploring ways to increase the use of the existing part-time FarmOn associates to promote the program and deliver its services.

The Center also hopes to integrate its resources to supplement existing efforts already underway that may help beginning farmers. Two examples would be the Center's work with Team Pork and organizations in the Agricultural Transition Alliance.

Future plans also include exploring ways to increase the motivation of existing farmers to pass on the farm as one unit, rather than dividing it among several heirs. Additionally, research is needed for development and analysis of alternative strategies for both beginning and exiting farmers that more accurately reflect the full range of situations that exist.

In the coming year, the Center plans to promote and distribute the new videotapes and resource manual.
APPENDIX B:
EXCERPT FROM SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE RESEARCH AND
EDUCATION REPORT, INTERVIEW QUESTIONS, JOURNAL OF BUSINESS
VENTURING CALL FOR PAPERS, FARM SUCESSION IN IOWA DRAFTS,
JOURNAL OF BUSINESS VENTURING EDITORS' FEEDBACK, AND BEGINNING
FARMER CENTER TRI-FOLD BROCHURE
SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE RESEARCH AND EDUCATION REPORT EXCERPT

The following two pages are a representative excerpt from the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Extension program's report; a reference to this report appears in Chapter 4.
organic production

"Natural" Pork from Sows in Deep Straw Captures Guaranteed Price

When he was still in high school, Dave Serfling began raising hogs differently from the conventional confinement system. The family's herd had contracted gastroenteritis and a veterinarian had suggested farrowing the hogs outside. The sows finished the season in fine health, but Serfling no longer wanted to work indoors. The time-consuming crate system was a lot of work, with few rewards. Close to 30 years later, Serfling is perfecting an indoor deep-straw system—with the help of two SARE producer grants—to lower the cost of producing pork and earn a premium on the retail market. One grant helped him convert an old building into a pre-wean-to-finishing unit, where Serfling houses sows with three- and four-week-old piglets through weaning and finishing. With two sow groups a year, Serfling has raised up to 180 pigs in a system that requires no supplemental heat because the straw, manure and heat from the animals keeps them warm—even on days when the Minnesota farm records 30 degrees below zero—and requires little manure management. In his other project, Serfling collaborates with three other hog producers to test farrowing in straw during the winter. Groups of 18 sows farrow every six weeks, including litters in the winter, a schedule that plays into Niman Ranch's recent push for sustainably raised pork. The winter-raised piglets supply pork in the summer when the fresh pork market tends to run dry, prompting Niman, an upscale marketer of meat, to pay top dollar to Serfling and other pork producers. Niman's guaranteed price brings 40 cents per pound or six cents above market share, depending on the market. In return, the company requires quality, taste and good husbandry from producers. "We think a lot of the conventional pork from confinement barns is too lean and dry," Serfling said. "Niman" rewards juicy and flavorful product and offers it to the consumers who care about how we raise them." The price guarantees provide Serfling with an average $10,000 annual premium—and the peace of mind that his methods can feed his family and create a more humane environment for his hogs. [For more information, go to www.sare.org/projects and search for ENSC98-208 and ENSC02-379]

SARE 2002 — practical new ideas in agriculture

Figure B.1: Page 10 from SARE report
A widespread sweet corn pest, corn earworm moths seek the sweet odor of corn silk to lay their eggs, prompting producers nationwide to accept wormy corn or apply broad-spectrum pesticides three to 10 times per crop. Organic growers, in particular, are forced to offer one of their most profitable summer crops complete with extra, unwanted protein. "When the earworm hit, sales would drop considerably," said Steve Mong, a Stow, Mass., vegetable grower. "We would leave a knife on the table so anyone who didn't want to take a worm home with them could cut it out." Now, thanks to work headed by SARE-funded researcher Ruth Hazard at the University of Massachusetts, Mong and other growers use new, effective biological controls to fight the earworm—corn oil and Bacillus thuringiensis (Bt). Hazard's technique, a practice that evolved over a decade, calls for applying Bt and corn oil to the top of each ear during the formative stage, causing earworms that crawl into the ear to suffocate. In collaborative research at the University of Massachusetts, Anne Carter found that just one treatment will keep working until harvest. Eight farmers from Vermont to Connecticut found that the oil controlled ear damage in 85 percent of their trial plots in 2000. The idea came from a grower participating in a SARE-funded forum 10 years ago; his neighbor had applied mineral oil to control earworms in the 1940s. "We've taken the concept and brought in new, safer materials," Hazard said. To cut down on labor costs, Hazard worked with students from Hampshire College and her university to invent a hand-held oil applicator, patent it and find a manufacturer. The well-respected Johnny's Selected Seeds catalogue company offers the product and moved 50 off the shelves the first year. Dubbed the Zea-later, the device cuts the labor involved to about eight hours an acre, meaning a grower with 10 acres of sweet corn could handle the job over a few days, then find himself worm-free for the entire season. [For more information, go to www.sare.org/projects and search for LNE99-118]
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following pages contain two sets of pre-established questions that I asked during interviews: The first set of questions was asked during face-to-face interviews with farmer participants, while the second set of questions was asked via telephone to Journal of Business Venturing editor participants and via face-to-face to JBV readers.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TO FARMER PARTICIPANTS

1) What size is your farm, and what do you raise?
2) Did your parents farm this operation?
3) When did you begin to farm this operation?
4) Why did you decide to become a farmer?
5) Do you also hold a job off the farm, and if so, what is it and how long have you worked at it?
6) How long do you intend to farm?
7) What influenced you to make that decision (re: how long you intend to farm)?
8) What did your parents do when they stopped farming?
9) When you stop farming, what will happen to your operation?
10) What influenced you to make that decision (re: what will happen when you stop farming)?
11) In general, how do you sort through and pick out the mail that you will take the time to read?
12) The Beginning Farmer Center distributes this brochure to farmers who are nearing retirement age. Please take a moment to look through this brochure. If it arrived in the mail and you hadn’t requested it, do you think you’d read it? Why/why not?

13) (If the participant answers “Yes” to question 12.) Do you think you would request the report mentioned on the back panel of this brochure? Why/why not?

14) (If the participant answers “Yes” to question 13). If you requested the report, this is what you would receive in the mail. Do you think you would read through it? Why/why not?

TELEPHONE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TO JOURNAL OF BUSINESS VENTURING EDITOR PARTICIPANTS

1) What title do you hold at (participant’s) university?

2) How long have you held this title?

3) What are the major fields in the business discipline?

4) How would you characterize the typical research methods in these fields?

5) What is your field of research in this discipline?

6) What are some of the major issues being researched in your particular field right now?

7) What are the issues you are researching right now?

8) How would you characterize the typical research methods in your field?

9) What methods do you typically use in your research?

10) How long have you served as an editor of the Journal of Business Venturing?

11) As an editor, what issues catch your attention when reading prospective articles?

12) Why are these issues important to the JBV?

13) What are the typical research methods used in these prospective articles?
14) How would you characterize the typical research methods published in the *JBV*?

**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TO *JOURNAL OF BUSINESS VENTURING* READER PARTICIPANTS**

1) What title do you hold at Iowa State?

2) How long have you held this title?

3) What are the major fields in the business discipline?

4) How would you characterize the typical research methods in these fields?

5) What is your field of research in this discipline?

6) What are some of the major issues being researched in your particular field right now?

7) What are some of the issues you are researching right now?

8) How would you characterize the typical research methods in your field?

9) What methods do you typically use in your research?

10) How long have you been a reader of the *Journal of Business Venturing*?

11) As a reader, what issues catch your attention when reading the *JBV*’s articles?

12) Why are these issues important to you?

13) How would you characterize the typical research methods in the *JBV* articles?

14) What other professional journals do you read on a regular basis?

15) What issues catch your attention when reading those journals?

16) How would you characterize the typical research methods in these journals?

**JOURNAL OF BUSINESS VENTURING SPECIAL ISSUE CALL FOR PAPERS**

In early December 2001, John Baker, attorney for the Beginning Farmer Center, received via e-mail the following call for papers to the *Journal of Business Venturing*’s
special issue on "The Evolving Family/Entrepreneurial Business Relationship." A draft of
the BFC report was sent to the journal for consideration.

Call for Papers
Journal of Business Venturing
Special Issue: "The Evolving Family/Entrepreneurial Business Relationship"
Manuscripts due by January 15, 2002; Accepted manuscripts published January 2003

Changes in technology, family structure, work patterns, and business creation (among others)
have led and will continue to lead to major changes in the relationship between
entrepreneurial business ventures and families. At every stage of a venture, the family
connection is a key influence. The sharing of resources, including social networks, between
the family and business can be a major influences on each's ability to thrive.

The bottom line for most businesses, today, as always, is that the business cannot start, grow,
mature, and transition effectively/successfully without the mobilization of family forces.
Conversely, families who own and manage businesses thrive best when the family can
effectively mobilize the business for its well-being. Businesses and families are invariably
and inextricably, interlocking and overlapping systems which can best be viewed, studied
and understood in relationship to one another. The emphasis of this special journal issue will
be to explore these family connections and their effects on businesses.

Manuscript may address any phase of the business such as start-up, growth, management,
and transitioning relative to broader influences and in particular the owning family. The
following are examples of family/entrepreneurial business relationships which might serve as
research foci for submitted papers:

1. Family "angels" and/or family-backed loan guarantees for business start-ups or growth.
2. The effects of family social networks on business strategy, resources, and outcomes.
3. How business start-ups are influenced by family members and/or workers.
4. What types of families are more likely to foster/support an entrepreneurial effect.
5. Effects of family issues on business growth (i.e., effects of an impending divorce on a
strategic planning.)
6. Integration/coordination of nonfamily and family workers, managers, owners, and board
members relative to the business and its growth.
7. Family influences relative to IPOs.
8. The family dimensions of business transitions and exit strategies (i.e., harvesting vs.
succession issues.)

A double-blind review process will be employed to select manuscripts for publication. Each
manuscript will be reviewed by three reviewers as well as topical considerations will be
made by the guest editors. The length of the manuscript should not exceed 25 pages in
length including all references, tables, or figures. Submitted manuscripts should follow the
guidelines provided on the back cover of the Journal. Please submit 4 copies of the manuscript by January 15, 2002 to either Guest Editor below. Subsequent to the review process, electronic files will only be required for accepted papers. Final accepted papers will be published as a Special Issue for Journal of Business Venturing in January 2003. For additional information about this Special Issue, please email either Guest Editor:

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**FARM SUCCESSION IN IOWA DRAFTS**

The following pages include the four *Farm Succession in Iowa* report drafts described in Chapter 4. The fourth report draft was discussed during interviews with farmer participants.
Farm Succession in Iowa

Dr. Michael Duffy
Professor
Department of Agriculture Economics
Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa

Adrienne Lamberti (?)
Graduate Assistant
Department of English
Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
Introduction

In the future, who will farm the land? Under what conditions will it be farmed? Will there be any young farmers left? These are tough questions and ones for which there are no solid answers. One thing is for certain, however; Iowa and its farmers will look different in the years ahead, and their future demographics make the above questions even more urgent.

The answers to these questions largely are contingent on how current farmers are handling their estate planning: Who will take over the farms they have worked their whole lives to develop? To examine these questions, in February, March and April 2000 the Iowa Agricultural Statistic Service conducted a survey of Iowa farmers to understand the common succession plans being implemented throughout the state. Four hundred eighteen viable responses (27% response rate) were returned and subsequently used to draw conclusions about farmers' retirement decisions. This publication presents (1) the results of the survey, (2) FORECAST REMAINING SECTIONS HERE.

The Survey

The primary goal of this survey was to understand how Iowa farmers were planning their retirement and the role farm succession in these plans. It also was hoped that the survey would surface those issues Iowa farmers see as most pressing when it comes to retirement and farm succession, issues that Iowa State University Extension in turn could address when working with its farm clientele.

Survey Design. The questions requested both closed-ended, Likert-scale responses and open-ended commentary from the participants. These were divided into three sections: 1) General Farm Information, which asked about the proportions of the farms' livestock and grain products; 2) Demographic Information, which sought the number of family members on each farm and their ages; and 3) Retirement Plans, which inquired about the manner in which farmers chose and trained their successors.

Recipient Demographics. The survey recipients were selected so as to mirror the demographics suggested by the Census of Agriculture (Tables 1-3). The majority of respondents owned and rented between 180-499 acres, averaged 54 years of age, and managed cash grain (64%) and beef cow (24%) operations. Furthermore, the respondents were selected so as to be representative of Iowa's nine planting regions. These statistics are in keeping with common lore concerning the rapid aging not only of the state's farmers but the overall population.
TABLE 1. COMPARISON OF ACREAGE DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN SURVEY AND CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE RESPONDENTS

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<th>Acreage Range</th>
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TABLE 2. COMPARISON OF LOCATIONS BETWEEN SURVEY AND CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE RESPONDENTS

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**Survey Process.** The Iowa Agricultural Statistic Service was responsible for the construction and distribution of the survey. This organization is a State Statistical Office of the National Agricultural Statistics Service under the United States Department of Agriculture. It is responsible for gathering crop, land and livestock data and functioning in other capacities as directed by the USDA. The surveys were distributed (HOW MANY?) by mail to participants during February, March and April 2000; that this time frame immediately precedes Iowa’s planting season may account for the 27% (418 surveys) return rate. These participants were not notified ahead of time that they were to receive the survey; nor were any incentives promised on the condition of the surveys’ return. XXX

**The Respondents and Responses**

**Respondent Demographics.** The demographics of those 27% who responded suggest that Iowa’s farming population largely is comprised of middle-aged males who have sole proprietorship of their operations. XXX

Most significant about these demographics is their implications for retirement plans. A full 27% of respondents stated that they intended never to retire, while the remaining cited plans for full or semi-retirement. Those with retirement inclinations cited Social Security, private retirement plans, and their farms as intended sources of income.

For the latter group, post-retirement income from their farms by necessity requires a successor to the operation. However, even though the average age of respondents’ intended retirement is 66, the majority (71%) had not yet chosen a successor. Given that the participants averaged the age of 54, then, only twelve years are left for development
of a successful retirement plan. Further discussion of this issue can be found in the section “National Comparison of Intra-Family Farm Succession.”

**Dominant Retirement Plans.** The overwhelming majority of participants with retirement intentions looked to their Social Security benefits as a component of their income, yet the majority of the retirement income was expected to come from the farm itself.

**Intra-family Succession.** Of those mere 29% of respondents who had identified a potential successor to their operations, the majority (79%) named their sons, while 6% named their daughters and another 6% their sons- or daughters-in-law. The final 8% listed “Other” in naming their successors, but this report is concerned with the majority decision to keep the farm within the family unit.

**Farm Succession within the Family**

**Method of Entry of Younger Generation.** When it comes to learning the management knowledge necessary to a farm’s success, there was an unexpected similarity between the survey participants’ education and that of their successors. Specifically, while 26% of respondents reported having some college education or a degree, 23% of their successors were listed as being students at the time of the survey. Interestingly, 45% of respondents had been educated at a technical or trade school, while 37% of their successors either were working on the family’s farm or managing his/her own farm. These numbers contradict the popular assumption that farming increasingly has become a discipline best learned in a formalized educational institution rather than through experiential lessons. However, given that overall the majority of non-student farm successors (62%) were employed outside of their family’s operation, it may be suggested that this knowledge is being gained in a wide variety of job experiences, farming or otherwise. As Harrington (2000) suggests in his study of intergeneration farm transfer, "As farm businesses become more management oriented and less production oriented, many members of both generations see considerable advantage in allowing or requiring the younger generation to work at some other job before returning to the farm" (p. 10).

**The Entry Process.** That three-quarters of the survey participants assume sole proprietorship of their operations and over half of their successors are employed elsewhere suggests complications for the process by which the successors will assume management of these farms—particularly considering that over half of the respondents claimed to have not discussed their retirement plans with anyone, family, legal or otherwise. For those 14% of successors who currently worked full-time on the farm, assuming sole or majority proprietorship would seem to be worked out during the course of day-to-day farmer-successor interaction. As the survey results suggest, however, the current proprietors continue to assume responsibility for most of the decisions made in the farm’s operation.

**Authority and Decision-Making.** Half of the survey participants claimed to make
decisions about their operation by themselves, the majority of these lone decisions (58%) concerning sources of financing and loan negotiations. Those decisions least decided by the farmer alone—deciding the amount/quality of work and determining the method in which jobs were performed—seem more due to the unpredictable nature of farm work rather than any necessity on the farmer’s part to solicit a second opinion.

It is unsurprising that a farm's sole proprietor would be in the habit of assuming responsibility for making financial and legal decisions; it is a habit borne of years of experience and bolstered by the largely solitary nature of farm work. However, this tradition in turn may hamper the education a successor needs to ensure a smooth transition upon the farmer's retirement. Only 10% of decisions were made by the successors alone. Supervision of employees most often fell to the successor's discretion, which is unsurprising given that the successors themselves were employees. For those decisions that were a result of collaboration between farmer and successor, 33% were most influenced mostly by the farmer. XXX
Errington, A. Identifying the locus of managerial control in the farm family business: The case of intergenerational farm transfers. Paper submitted to Sociologia Ruralis.


FARM SUCCESSION IN IOWA

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Iowa State University Extension  
Beginning Farmer Center Working Paper  
Fall 2001
FARM SUCCESSION IN IOWA

Introduction

In the future, who will farm the land? Under what conditions will it be farmed? Will there be any young farmers left? These are tough questions and ones for which there are no solid answers. One thing is for certain, however: Iowa and its farmers will look different in the years ahead, and their future demographics make the above questions even more urgent.

The answers to these questions largely are contingent on how current farmers are handling their estate planning: Who will take over the farms they have worked their whole lives to develop? To examine these questions, in February, March and April 2000 Iowa State University's Beginning Farmer Center (BFC), through the Iowa Agricultural Statistic Service, conducted a survey of Iowa farmers to understand the common succession plans being implemented throughout the state. Four hundred eighteen viable responses (27% response rate) were returned and subsequently used to draw conclusions about farmers' retirement decisions. This publication presents 1) a description of the survey objectives and its targeted audience; 2) a summary of the retirement trends suggested by the survey responses; 3) an analysis of the process by which farmers are succeeding their operations to the next generation; 4) a comparison of these trends with those in England, France, and Canada; and 5) a discussion of the survey results' implications for Iowa farmers' retirement plans and future research.

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**Farm Succession within the Family**

![Diagram](image)

**FIG. 1. COMPARISON AMONG NUMBER OF FARMERS WHO ARE HOLDING FARMS, TRANSFERRING FARMS AND HAVE PASSED FARMS TO SUCCEEDING GENERATION**

**Method of Entry of Younger Generation.** When it comes to learning the management knowledge necessary to a farm's success, there was an unexpected similarity between the survey participants' education and that of their successors. Specifically, while 26% of respondents reported having some college education or a degree, 23% of their successors were listed as being students at the time of the survey. Interestingly, 45% of respondents had been educated at a technical or trade school, while 37% of their successors either were working on the family's farm or managing his/her own farm. These numbers contradict the popular assumption that farming increasingly has become a discipline best learned in a formalized educational institution rather than through experiential lessons. However, given that overall the majority of non-student farm successors (62%) were employed outside of their family's operation, it may be suggested that this knowledge is being gained in a wide variety of job experiences, farming or otherwise. As Harrington (2000) suggests in his study of intergeneration farm transfer, "As farm businesses become
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decisions that were a result of collaboration between farmer and successor, 33% were
most influenced mostly by the farmer. XXX

_National Comparison of Intra-Family Farm Succession_

Given the survey results, it would appear that Iowa farmers' visions of retirement and
their farms' future are similar to those throughout American agricultural life. LaDue and
Crispell's (1990) study of farming-together relationships, for example, confirm farmers'heavy reliance upon their sons to inherit the operation and keep the farm within the
family structure. However, fewer discussions have occurred comparing American
farmers' retirement plans with those in other countries. The following looks at studies of
British, French and Canadian farm families and the strategies commonly employed during
the process of farm succession.
Errington’s study of intergenerational transfer. Throughout the 1990s, University of Plymouth professor Andrew Errington undertook a series of surveys with the objective of comparing farm transfer between familial generations in England, France and Canada. The results since have been published (1998 and 1999) with an additional article currently under consideration. Errington’s findings are significant not only because they illuminate farm succession differences across continents and within the UK Dominion, but they enable a clearer understanding of the extent to which these differences are influenced culturally. Among the results, Errington makes several points in the conclusion of his 1999 article that suggest opportune places for comparison with American farmers’ retirement trends.

Length of semi-retirement. Rather than abruptly distinguishing between work as it exists on the farm and retirement as the cessation of such work, Errington notes that British and Canadian farmers are more likely to undertake a lengthy process of semi-retirement, as opposed to French farmers. He muses that this difference may be ascribed to the smaller size of French farms, which could prohibit co-existence of the farmer and successor on the operation, or France’s lucrative state retirement pensions.

Meanwhile, as noted earlier, the survey of Iowa farmers shows that 14% of farmers currently worked alongside their successors and of these relationships, over half of the managerial decisions continued to be made solely by the farmer. This yen for prolonging authority over the operation might suggest that American farmers possess a similar preference for semi-retirement. Considering that almost three-quarters of the survey respondents intended to draw some income from their farms after they had retired (as opposed to selling their land and livestock altogether), it might be concluded that letting go of the farm cannot be defined with a work/retirement binary.

Managerial issues during transfer. Errington notes that British farmers take a markedly greater length of time to complete the process of farm succession than in Canada and France, perhaps due to the aforementioned restrictive size of French farms and the tendency for Canadian successors to be occupied off the farm, often in agricultural-related activities. Using what he terms the “succession ladder,” Errington explains that a successor’s increasing authority during a farm transfer is represented by the type of decisions (each “rung” on the ladder) he is allowed to make and the extent to which he makes these decisions sans collaboration with the farmer. The ladder’s rungs, from most to least authoritative, are represented as technical, tactical, strategic planning, supervisory/managerial, financial, and most importantly, what Errington calls “control of the purse strings.” French and Canadian successors move comparably rapidly up this ladder while British successors are accorded increasing amounts of authorial control only gradually.

Here American farm transfers appear to most resemble England’s. As noted earlier, the majority of financial decisions (58%)—the top “rungs” of the succession ladder—continued to be made solely by those farmers who worked side by side with their successors. Interestingly, the majority of decisions made solely by the successor
(supervising employees) placed them in the *middle* of the ladder; they are not being relegated to low-rung technical decisions only. XXX

*Sources of retirement income.*

*Implications*
FARM SUCCESSION IN IOWA

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In the future, who will farm the land? Under what conditions will it be farmed? Will there be any young farmers at all? These are tough questions for which there are no solid answers. The answers to these critical questions depend largely on how current farmers handle their business succession: Who will take over the farms they have worked their whole lives to develop? One thing is certain, Iowa and its farmer population will look different in the years ahead.

In an effort to explore these questions, Iowa State University's Beginning Farmer Center (BFC), through the Iowa Agricultural Statistics Service, surveyed over 1500 Iowa farmers in February, March, and April 2000. The survey examined common succession plans being implemented throughout the state. Four hundred and eighteen viable responses (a 27 percent response rate) were returned and subsequently used to draw conclusions about farmers' retirement decisions.

This paper presents 1) a description of the survey objectives and its targeted audience; 2) a summary of the retirement trends suggested by the survey responses; 3) an analysis of the process by which farmers are passing along their operations to the next generation; 4) a comparison of Iowa trends with those in England, France, and Canada; and 5) implications for Iowa farmers' retirement plans.

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The primary goal of this survey was to determine how Iowa farmers were planning their retirements and the role farm succession plays in these plans. It also was hoped that the survey would illuminate the most pressing issues regarding retirement and farm succession, issues that the BFC in turn could address when working with its farm clientele. The overall survey was modeled on a design by University of Plymouth (UK) professor Andrew Errington. He conducted a series of surveys throughout the 1990s to study farm transfer between familial generations and compare transfer methods among British, French and Canadian farm families.

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FIG. 1. COMPARISON OF ACRES OWNED BY SURVEY AND CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE RESPONDENTS

FIG. 2. COMPARISON OF LOCATION BETWEEN SURVEY AND CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE RESPONDENTS
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Respondent Demographics. The demographics of those farmers who responded suggest that Iowa's farming population is comprised largely of middle-aged males who are the sole proprietors of their businesses. This age demographic has significant implications for farmers' retirement plans. Twenty-seven percent of respondents stated that they intended never to retire, while the remainder cited plans for full or semi-retirement.

Dominant Retirement Plans. While many participants with retirement intentions looked to their Social Security benefits as a component of their income, the majority of their
retirement income was expected to come from the continued operation or sale of the farm. Private retirement plans also were listed as a preferred income source (Figure 4).

**FIG. 4. POST-RETIREMENT SOURCES OF INCOME AMONG FARMERS WHO WILL SEMI- OR FULLY RETIRE**

The respondents' intentions to continue receiving income from their operations after retirement suggest that farmers would have a post-retirement plan of action. However, even though respondents indicated an average retirement age of 66, nearly three-quarters (71 percent) of them still had not chosen any successor to their operations. Given that participants' average the age was 54, only 12 years remain for development of a successful retirement plan. Further discussion of this issue can be found in the section “National Comparison of Intra-Family Farm Succession.”

**Intra-Family Succession.** Of the 29 percent of respondents who had identified a potential successor to their operations, the majority (79 percent) named their sons, while 6 percent named their daughters and another 6 percent their sons- or daughters-in-law. The final 8 percent listed “Other” in naming their successors. This report focuses only on those maintaining the farm within the family unit. Figure 5 shows the number of respondents who remain in charge (holding onto their farms), who are in the process of transferring their farms to a successor, and who already have passed their farms down to a succeeding generation.
The Succession Process

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For the 14 percent of successors currently employed full-time on the farm, the details of assuming sole or majority proprietorship may be worked out during the course of day-to-day farmer-successor interaction. As the survey results suggest, however, the current proprietors continue to assume responsibility for most of the farm operation decisions.

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It is not surprising that a sole proprietor would be in the habit of assuming responsibility for making financial and legal decisions. It is a habit borne of years of experience and bolstered by the largely solitary nature of farm work.

The survey notes that only 10 percent of decisions were made by the successors alone. However, this tradition in turn may hamper the education a successor needs to ensure a smooth transition upon the farmer's retirement. The successor was most likely to handle employee supervision. For those decisions when farmer and successor collaborated, 33 percent were most influenced by the farmer.

**National Comparison of Intra-Family Farm Succession**

These survey results imply that Iowa farmers' visions of retirement and their farms' futures are similar to others in American agriculture. LaDue and Crispell's (1990) study of farming-together relationships, for example, confirm farmers' heavy reliance upon
their sons to inherit the operation and keep the farm within the family. However, there are few comparisons of American farmers' retirement plans with those in other countries. Following is a look at British, French and Canadian farm families and the strategies commonly employed during the process of farm succession.

Errington's Study of Intergenerational Transfer. In the 1990s, University of Plymouth (UK) professor Andrew Errington studied methods of farm transfer between familial generations and compared these methods among England, France and Canada. His results were published in 1998 and 1999 with an additional article currently under consideration for publication. Errington's findings are significant not only because they illuminate farm succession differences across continents and within the UK Dominion, but because they provide a clearer understanding of the extent to which these differences are influenced culturally. Errington makes several points in the conclusion of his 1999 article that suggest opportune places for comparison with American farmers' retirement trends.

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American farm transfers appear to most resemble England's. As noted earlier, the majority (58 percent) of financial decisions—the top "rungs" of the succession ladder—continue to be made solely by those farmers while working side-by-side with their successors. Interestingly, the majority of decisions made solely by the successor
(supervising employees) placed them in the middle of the ladder; they are not being relegated entirely to low-rung technical decisions.

Sources of Retirement Income. Both the Beginning Farmer Center and Errington distinguished between the semi-retired and fully-retired farmers' retirement income sources. Surprisingly, the data suggest a major difference not between fully-retired American farmers and those of Errington's survey, but between North American and European farmers. Compared to their British and French counterparts, many more American and Canadian farmers eyeing full retirement expected the sale of their farms to provide income. Furthermore, American, Canadian and British retirees expected their farm sales to provide a greater proportion of their income (25 percent among all three nationalities) than did European, fully-retired farmers. Perhaps American and Dominion government pensions contributed to this difference.

Respondents with plans for semi-retirement, however, were more alike in the two surveys. Although American and Canadian farmers in this category continued to anticipate selling their farms for income, Errington found that semi-retired farmers, especially older respondents, demonstrated a greater reliance upon government pensions. Errington suggests that "the expansion of private pension schemes among the farming community in more recent years" (1999) may account for this trend.

Implications for Iowa Farmers

After years of hard work and dedication to their operations, most Iowa farmers hope to retire some day. Unfortunately, the Beginning Farmer Center's survey suggests that that day will take many of them by surprise. The majority of farmers offer no evidence of action plans for retirement, and have only a few years remaining to develop such strategies. Even those farmers who have broached the issue of retirement have done so only with family members, as opposed to outside sources who could assist in developing financial portfolios, IRAs, etc.

Nor do family discussions appear to help the process of farm transfer among generations. The small number of farmers who have chosen a successor nonetheless continue to hold onto their farms or, at the very least, are in the midst of transferring the operation to the successor. While some scholars believe these data demonstrate farmers' recognition of the shift from production- to management-based farming, survey respondents' managerial and decision-making behaviors suggest that farmers also are simply reluctant to give up the authority they have worked so hard to establish.

These trends in estate planning and farm succession appear to be international. Errington's studies (1998, 1999) suggest that American and Dominion (excluding Quebec) farmers have approached retirement slowly and pass authority to their successors with equal deliberation. These farmers also tend to rely more heavily upon government subsidies and their own farms for retirement income, whereas European and Quebec farmers move more quickly into the farm transfer and retirement processes.

Perhaps, then, the correlation among government involvement, farm transfer and estate planning warrants further scrutiny. Ironically, farmers who have benefited from substantial government intervention during their careers may, once their careers have ended, find themselves in a situation without solid financial support. Furthermore, this problem is bound to intensify with time, as the average age of Iowa's farmers rises each
year. Because our state’s agricultural stability relies heavily upon the survival of farm operations, our farmers in turn require the support and resources that will assist them in retirement and transfer of their farms to the next generation.
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FARM SUCCESSION IN IOWA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The rapidly changing agricultural climate in Iowa has raised questions about the manner in which the state’s farms are being passed down to a new generation of farmers. In February, March, and April 2000, Iowa State University’s Beginning Farmer Center (BFC), through the Iowa Agricultural Statistics Service, surveyed over 1500 Iowa farmers; the survey examined common succession plans being implemented throughout the state. The survey questions requested both closed-ended, Likert-scale responses and open-ended commentary from the participants. The primary goal of this survey was to determine how Iowa farmers were planning their retirements and the role farm succession plays in these plans. It also was hoped that the survey would surface the most pressing issues regarding retirement and farm succession, issues that the BFC in turn could address when working with its farm clientele.

This paper therefore presents 1) a description of the survey objectives and its targeted audience; 2) a summary of the retirement trends suggested by the survey responses; 3) an analysis of the process by which farmers are passing along their operations to the next generation; 4) a comparison of Iowa trends with those in England, France, and Canada; and 5) implications for Iowa farmers’ retirement plans.

Of the surveys, four hundred and eighteen viable responses (a 27 percent response rate) were returned and subsequently used to determine trends in Iowa farmers’ retirement decisions and to understand trend differences from those in British, French and Canadian farm successions.

Practitioners will find several areas ripe for further research in the survey results, including the revelation that little time (12 years on average) remains for Iowa farmers to plan their retirement. Aside from the nearly one-third of respondents who claimed that they intended never to retire, other feedback suggests that current retirement decisions may lead to financial and familial conflict, particularly retirees’ intentions to draw retirement income from the continued operation or sale of their farm. In addition, responsibility for managerial decisions between retirees and their successors appears to be unevenly distributed, perhaps due to the philosophical differences between historical, production-based and current, management-based farming.

Further research also will help to understand the differences between North American and European farmers. When results from the BFC survey are compared to that of its model, constructed by University of Plymouth (UK) professor Andrew Errington, notable comparisons arise. In particular, American and Dominion (excluding Quebec) farmers would seem to approach retirement slowly and to pass authority to their successors with equal deliberation. These farmers also tend to rely more heavily upon government subsidies and their own farms for retirement income, whereas European and Quebec farmers move more quickly into the farm transfer and retirement processes. This correlation among extensive government involvement, the rapidity of a farm’s transfer, and the thoroughness of a farmer’s estate plan warrants further scrutiny, so that a retirement plan that benefits both farmers and successors might be developed.
ABSTRACT

In early 2000, Iowa State University’s Beginning Farmer Center (BFC) surveyed over 1500 Iowa farmers to discover succession plans that are being implemented throughout the state and to specify the most pressing issues affecting farmers’ retirement and succession decisions. Four hundred and eighteen viable responses (a 27 percent response rate) were returned and compared to the results from a survey administered to British, French and Canadian farmers. The results suggest a correlation among the extent of government involvement, the rapidity of a farm’s transfer, and the thoroughness of a farmer’s estate plan. Further research into the nature of this multi-party correlation is recommended so that a retirement plan that benefits both farmers and successors might be developed.
FARM SUCCESSION IN IOWA

Introduction

In the future, who will farm the land? Under what conditions will it be farmed? Will there be any young farmers at all? These are tough questions for which there are no solid answers. The answers to these critical questions depend largely on how current farmers handle their business succession: Who will take over the farms they have worked their whole lives to develop? One thing is certain, Iowa and its farmer population will look different in the years ahead.

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Recipient Demographics. The survey was designed to mirror the Census of Agriculture demographics (Figures 1-3) and to represent Iowa's nine crop reporting districts. The majority of respondents owned and rented between 180-499 acres, averaged 54 years of age, and managed cash grain (64 percent) or beef cow (24 percent) operations.
Fig. 1. Comparison of acres owned by survey and Census of Agriculture respondents.
Fig. 2. Comparison of location between survey and census of agriculture respondents.

The diagram shows the percentage distribution of respondents across different Iowa crop reporting districts. The bars indicate the census data, while the horizontal lines represent the survey data.
FIG. 3. COMPARISON OF AGE DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN SURVEY AND CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE RESPONDENTS
Survey Process. The Beginning Farmer Center, with assistance from the Iowa Agricultural Statistics Service, was responsible for the construction and distribution of the survey. The latter organization is a state statistical office of the National Agricultural Statistics Service under the United States Department of Agriculture; its responsibilities include crop, land and livestock data and functioning in other capacities as directed by the USDA. More than 1500 surveys were distributed by mail to participants during February, March and April 2000. The proximity to Iowa’s planting season may account for the 27 percent (418 surveys) return rate. These participants were not notified ahead of time that they were to receive the survey; nor were any incentives promised for returning the surveys.

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FIG. 4. POST-RETIREMENT SOURCES OF INCOME AMONG FARMERS WHO WILL SEMI- OR FULLY RETIRE

![Chart showing post-retirement income sources among farmers who will semi- or fully retire.]{-}
The respondents’ intentions to continue receiving income from their operations after retirement suggest that farmers would have a post-retirement plan of action. However, even though respondents indicated an average retirement age of 66, nearly three-quarters (71 percent) of them still had not chosen any successor to their operations. Given that participants’ average the age was 54, only 12 years remain for development of a successful retirement plan. Further discussion of this issue can be found in the section “National Comparison of Intra-Family Farm Succession.”

**Intra-Family Succession.** Of the 29 percent of respondents who had identified a potential successor to their operations, the majority (79 percent) named their sons, while 6 percent named their daughters and another 6 percent their sons- or daughters-in-law. The final 8 percent listed “Other” in naming their successors. This report focuses only on those maintaining the farm within the family unit. Figure 5 shows the number of respondents who remain in charge (*holding* onto their farms), who are in the process of *transferring* their farms to a successor, and who already have *passed* their farms down to a succeeding generation.
FIG. 5. COMPARISON AMONG NUMBER OF FARMERS WHO ARE HOLDING FARMS, TRANSFERRING FARMS AND HAVE PASSED FARMS TO SUCCEEDING GENERATION

- Not Ranked: 16%
- Holding: 17%
- Passed: 37%
- Transferred: 36%
The Succession Process

Method of Entry of Younger Generation. When it came to learning the management skills necessary to farm successfully, there was an unexpected similarity between the survey participants' education levels and those of their successors. Specifically, while 26 percent of respondents reported having some college education or a degree, 23 percent of their successors were listed as being college students at the time of the survey. Forty-five percent of the respondents had been educated at a technical or trade school, while 37 percent of their successors either were working on the family's farm or managing their own farms. These numbers contradict the popular assumption that farming increasingly has become a discipline best learned in a formalized educational institution rather than through experiential lessons. However, given that the majority of non-student farm successors (62 percent) were employed outside of their family's operation, perhaps their knowledge is being gained in a wide variety of job experiences on and off the farm. This unconventional learning process seems to mirror the unconventional nature of farm business. As Errington argues about farming,

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FIG. 6. THOSE WITH WHOM FARMERS HAVE DISCUSSED THEIR RETIREMENT PLANS

- Family
- Lawyer
- Banker
- Farm consultant
- Accountant
- Another advisor
- Other
- No one
For the 14 percent of successors currently employed full-time on the farm, the details of assuming sole or majority proprietorship may be worked out during the course of day-to-day farmer-successor interaction. As the survey results suggest, however, the current proprietors continue to assume responsibility for most of the farm operation decisions. Authority and Decision-Making. Half of the survey participants claimed to make decisions about their operation by themselves. The majority of these lone decisions (58 percent) concerned sources of financing and loan negotiations. Those decisions least likely to be decided by the farmer alone—the amount/quality of work and the method by which jobs were performed—seemed to relate to the unpredictable nature of farm work rather than the farmer's need to solicit a second opinion.

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JOURNAL OF BUSINESS VENTURING EDITORS' FEEDBACK

The following are comments from three Journal of Business Venturing editors in response to the Farm Succession in Iowa submission.
The subject matter is important, and the findings can be useful. However, the article needs considerable refinement. Here are some suggestions/examples:

1. The data should be treated with greater precision—not just "most" "the majority".
2. The actual findings should be included in a table or tables.
3. If possible, the questionnaire should be included.
4. In many cases, hard to tell whether a % applied to all respondents or to a subset.
5. References to "trends"—but the data do not lend themselves to trend (longitudinal) analysis.
6. Data missing on Figure 1.
7. Figure 6 shows 80% discussed with family and 50% discussed with no one. Both cannot be true.
8. On p. 10, what is "preferred income source"?
9. Include some non-farm references to leadership succession.
Farm Succession in IOWA

This study has an interesting topic that compares succession process and retirement plans between Iowa with England, France, and Canada. However, the paper needs more work

1. Overall, the format and structure of the paper is not well organized. To be a qualified paper, the paper needs to find more recent related references, it should be reorganize the paper structure, add related theory, literature review etc.

2. Abstract is not adequate. The important results need to be added and the purpose of this study to be cleared.

3. The significance and design of the research lacks quality. For example, this paper doesn’t discuss any related theory, background, and literature review. Should be numbered and Fig. 1 was not shown on the paper.

4. The survey session and characteristics of respondents are too long. Although you described this session in detail but it did not show the major characteristics. Reduce this session with important characteristics and results of your study.

5. You haven’t done any literature review of farm succession and retirement, but only discussed the comparison Errington’s Study and your results. The related literature review needs to be added.

6. What is the reason to use only Errington’s Study for comparison study?

7. Present the Figures based on the important results instead of survey and characteristics of respondents.

8. The results and discussion parts of this research lacks quality. The purpose of the paper is to compare the farm succession of Iowa farm trends with those in England, France, and Canada. And what is the conclusion? There are differences but are you concluding that this framework applies in different countries or not? It is not fully discussed.

9. Needs to be expanded discussion and implication based on statistics. Current discussion and implication section is mixed with conclusion and recommendation. Adding a conclusion, discussion, and recommendations section is recommended.

10. In the references section, add recent related references.
I enjoyed reading the paper because succession is a valuable topic and this one presents some interesting results. It was well-written and readable.

I believe the paper would be strengthened by inclusion of a literature review that examines some of what already has been done in this area. Much as been written on this topic. In what way did it contribute to this paper? In particular, I wondered what theory exists that relates to successful/unsuccessful succession planning. How do your results build that theory? How do your results add to the body of existing literature?

Your results indicate that slightly over half of the respondents had discussed their retirement plans with no one; as you point out, this is a somewhat surprising finding considering that the average age of your respondents was 54. But I also believe it would be interesting to readers of this special issue on evolving family/entrepreneurial business relationships to emphasize that relationship whenever possible. One example is your finding that of those respondents who had discussed retirement plans with others, 80% had had discussions with their families. The closest discussant category to this one was accountants, but only about 30% had had discussions with accountants, so family members were well ahead of all others. This is important in terms of thinking more generally about family-business relationships.

You might also clarify that the correlations to which you refer in the Executive Summary and Abstract are correlations that are implied from the reported survey results.

More specific suggestions:

Please number all pages.

p. 3, (Executive Summary): Last sentence, first paragraph: Insert “future” before “retirees”; and after “distributed,” add “with future retirees making most of the decisions. Same page, insert “apparent” before “correlation” in last sentence.

p. 4: (Abstract): Make clear that correlations among variables is apparent, not reported. You might also want to mention here the international comparisons you made, especially since you say that few studies exist in this area.

p. 12 (no page number): 5th line, eliminate “the” before age

p. 14 (no page number): 5th line. Sentence confusing. Maybe reconstruct it slightly and put it after the next sentence for clarity.

p. 17 (no page number): last paragraph under Authority and Decision-Making: 1st line—what kind of decisions—business? succession?. The sentence “The successor was most likely to handle employee supervision.” When? Currently? Or in succession plans?
p. 19, Managerial Issues, line 6: s/he rather than “he is”? Line 7: she/he rather than “he makes”? Line 8: “from least to most” rather than the reverse?
BEGINNING FARMER CENTER TRI-FOLD BROCHURE

The following is a copy of the Beginning Farmer Center brochure, *Planning for the Future*. This brochure was discussed during interviews with farmer participants.
Contact Information
A more detailed report about Iowa farmers’ retirement plans is available upon request. For more information about this survey or the Beginning Farmer Center's programs, please contact

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www.extension.iastate.edu/Pages/bfc

Study Conducted By:
Beginning Farmer Center

Figure B.3: Outside panels of Beginning Farmer Center tri-fold brochure
The Future of Iowa
Many recent economic and political changes have raised questions about our state's agricultural future: Who will farm the land? Under what conditions will it be farmed? Iowa State University Extension's Beginning Farmer Center sought answers in early 2000, when it surveyed Iowa farmers about their retirement plans. Over 400 farmers responded, proving the importance of addressing these concerns and maintaining the health of Iowa's agricultural system.

Time's Running Out
Feedback from the survey suggested that many farmers have not planned for their retirement, even though the average respondent's age was 52.

Other results revealed that
- less than a third of respondents had a successor for their farm
- less than half of respondents had an estate plan
- almost three-fourths of respondents intended to draw income from their farms after they retired
- only a third of respondents planned to move from their farms after retirement

Naming a Successor
Our state's farmers are the backbone of Iowa's agricultural system. But as the survey results suggest, too many farmers shut off the combine in the fall and intend to retire, yet do not have a workable retirement plan in place.

The Beginning Farmer Center recognizes that it takes time and energy to develop a sound retirement plan. Several programs are available to assist farmers with their future:
- The FarmOn program helps to match retiring farmers with young people who are interested in an agricultural career
- The AgLink seminar includes workshops for Iowa State upperclass students who plan to join their family farm operation after they graduate
- An individual farm analysis is available to any farmer who wishes to personally discuss their operation and plans

In addition, the Beginning Farmer Center is working with local, national and international partners to strengthen its farm succession programs.

Figure B.4: Inside panels of Beginning Farmer Center tri-fold brochure
APPENDIX C:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND SO YOU HAVE INHERITED A FARM...

FACT SHEET
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following is a list of pre-established questions that I asked during face-to-face interviews with

- farmers who had inherited a farm;
- non-farmers who had inherited a farm; and
- heirs who had inherited a farm upon the death of their spouse.

1) When did you inherit your farm/land?

2) How many acres were on your farm when you inherited? What crops/livestock were on it?

3) Did you grow up on this farm? If so, what were your chores/responsibilities?

4) Did anyone else inherit the farm along with you?

5) When you inherited, what decisions did you have to make?

6) How did you decide to make those decisions?

7) What resources did you study to help you to make these decisions?

8) How did you find these resources, and how did you know that they were reliable?

9) How did you handle any conflicts that arose after you inherited the farm?

10) Why did you not simply sell the farm after inheriting it?

11) When you receive information in the mail, how do you decide what to throw away and what to read?

12) For the documents you decide to read, do you typically skim through it first, or do you read it in depth?
13) (If participant skims:) What helps you to decide to read a document in depth?

14) (Showing the "So You’ve Inherited a Farm..." newsletter:) If you received this document in the mail without requesting it, do you think you'd read through it?

   Why/why not?

15) Do you ever refer to print documents when trying to make a decision? Why/why not?

16) What about this document catches your attention?

17) Is there anything else that you think I should know about inheriting a farm?

**SO YOU HAVE INHERITED A FARM... FACT SHEET**

The following is the *So You Have Inherited a Farm...* fact sheet, which was shown to farming heirs, non-farming heirs, and spouse interview participants.
So you have inherited a farm . . .

Inheriting a farm can be both exciting and frustrating. Some people know exactly what they would like to do with the farm, but many do not. A number of questions and issues must be addressed before the final decisions are made.

INTRODUCTION

Over the next several years the question of what to do with inherited farmland will become increasingly important. The average age of farmers continues to increase. More significantly, a recent Iowa survey showed that more than one-third of the farmland is owned by people age 65 or older.

Farmland prices have changed dramatically since the 1970s. At that time, land values were increasing at an unprecedented rate. They continued this climb until the early 1980s, at which point they began an unprecedented decline. Iowa land values dropped 67 percent from 1981 to 1986, the largest drop ever recorded in such a short period. Since then land prices again have begun an upward trend.

Today the agricultural land market is influenced by many factors. The single biggest factor is government payments to farmers. It is not known how long and at what level these payments will continue. This uncertainty clouds the picture of what to do with the inherited farm.

Individual circumstances also dictate the most prudent course of action. In some cases the land already may be farmed by the individual who inherited it, and the decision is relatively simple. In other cases, the land may be inherited by someone who knows little about modern agriculture and has no idea what to do with the farm.

Finally, the farm may be jointly inherited and the wishes of all parties influence what to do with the farm.

Regardless of the circumstances, it is important to think carefully about the farm before making decisions. This publication is designed to raise questions that need to be asked and to direct heirs to specific information that might suit their circumstances.

Before making any decisions, it is important to know the farm—in other words, know what you have inherited. In most cases this will determine the best course of action. The second major factor is whether the farm was inherited by one individual or a group. The more people involved with the inheritance, the more complicated the decisions.
This publication is an update of an earlier work with the same title. That publication, authored by E. G. Stoneberg, was written in the 1970s. (Stoneberg, E. G., *Getting Started in Farming: So You Have Inherited a Farm*, North Central Regional Extension Publication 85, University of Missouri-Columbia, undated). This update relies heavily on the previous work. Many of the ideas presented are similar because the basis for good farmland decision-making has not changed. Attribution is made in a general sense and will not be made throughout to avoid disrupting the flow of the publication.

What E. G. Stoneberg said in the original piece on inheriting farmland is as true today as it was then:

**Before making major decisions, appraise your situation. The first step in making a sound decision (the right one for you) is a systematic, careful appraisal. This evaluation should include three major parts: you, the real estate inherited, and the current economic conditions.**

**THE INHERITANCE**

**Location**

An old adage in real estate appraisal says that the three most important factors in determining the value of a parcel of real estate are location, location, location. Although an inherited farm involves many factors, the location is still the key to its value. The location determines the farm’s current and best use and as well as its future use. For example, land situated near an expanding metropolitan area has potentially greater value than similar land located elsewhere.

**Income**

After location, the property's potential income is the most important indicator of value. Figuring the farm’s potential income will help in estimating the value as well as provide information to help make the final decision of what to do with the farm.

The present use of the farm (or land) is determined by many factors. It is important not to assume that the current use is the best use for the land, especially under new ownership. The current use of the land is a good starting point in estimating the potential income from the land, however.

It also is important to be aware of any contracts, leases, zoning regulations, or other easements connected with the farm. Such arrangements limit the potential uses of the property.

Estimating the potential income is not a simple matter. The inherent productivity of the soil will help in estimating the expected yield for different crops and cropping systems. Iowa State University Extension can provide estimated production costs and potential yields. The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service can provide advice on the most appropriate uses for the land, given its natural limitations. NRCS also can help develop a soil conservation plan if necessary.

Income from livestock can play an important role in determining the potential income from the property. For example, land that is in permanent pasture or hay will be used primarily for beef, sheep, or dairy cattle. In this case, animal income will determine the value of the land. Animals also can play an important role in determining the value of the land if there are extensive livestock facilities on the property. The age and condition of these facilities will determine their relative value and the contribution they can make to the value of the property.

Several government and private organizations offer programs that can affect the income from a farm, depending on the type of farm and its location. The Farm Service Agency can provide information about the current government programs and the farm's eligibility for these programs. In addition, several resource conservation groups, such as the American Farmland Trust, the Nature Conservancy, and Ducks Unlimited, offer programs that might affect the farm.

**Value**

To learn the true value of a farm, a full appraisal is needed. However, there are other means available for estimates. Whether or not these are appropriate depends on the desired degree of accuracy.

In estimating the value of the farm, the heir must consider any buildings and improvements. In some cases, these buildings can add considerable value to the property and significantly influence how
it will be used. A dwelling on the property also can influence the property’s use. In any case, the condition of these buildings, dwellings, or improvements should be known. In some cases, old dilapidated facilities actually may decrease the value of the farm.

In many cases, the farm will have sentimental value. This becomes much harder to quantify, but it will still enter into the decision. However, one heir’s sentimental value will not be the same as that of others.

The size of the farm also influences the decision of what to do with it. Not only does the size determine the value of the inheritance, but it determines the feasibility of earning a living from the farm. In many cases, the farm is left to someone who is already farming the land. Regardless, the size of the farm is an important consideration.

**Taxes**

Estate and inheritance taxes at both the state and federal level are important considerations. Minimizing these taxes can increase the value of the inheritance, but simply minimizing the taxes may not produce the best use, given individual circumstances.

The size of the estate, how the assets were owned or leased, and what is done with the property determine the amount of the taxes. If a high proportion of the inheritance is in land, it might be necessary to sell some of the assets or borrow money just to settle the estate.

In some cases, the inheritance may come under “special use” valuation. In this situation, there may be restrictions on how long the property may be farmed in order to maintain that special use valuation.

In some special cases, the property can be sold and the proceeds reinvested without triggering tax consequences.

If the farm is held as an investment, who farms it and whether or not material participation occurs can be important in determining the amount of inheritance tax.

It is not possible to examine all of the details and circumstances of taxes in this publication. Farmland heirs should seek sound legal advice regarding the inheritance to determine which of the special provisions it qualifies for and what restrictions there are on the use of the property. In some cases, it will be better to pay the taxes, but in other cases, it will be better to alter the uses or disposition of the farm in order to lessen the tax burden.

If taxes are owed, the new owner should be able to borrow funds to pay them by using the property as collateral.

Whether a farm is inherited by an individual or a group, there are three basic options available to each heir: farm the land, keep the land as an Investment, or sell the farm.

**OPTIONS FOR THE FARM**

**Farming the Land**

Farming the land is a complex decision that will involve a number of considerations. One of the first questions is whether or not the heir has the necessary skills and resources.
If the heir already is farming, then the question becomes one of how the farm fits within his or her current operation. In these circumstances, heirs may opt to add the land to what they are currently farming and farm it as one unit, or they may sell one of the farms and consolidate around the other farm. That decision rests on a number of factors. How close is the inherited property to the current property? Will the size of the new operation generate an adequate income? Will the heir be able to manage it? Will it require new or different machinery? These and many other questions must be answered prior to making the decision about farming the inherited property or combining it with an existing operation.

If the heir is not currently farming but would like to start, there are numerous family decisions regarding the change in lifestyle that farming would entail. It might be easy to get caught up in the allure of farming or being on the land, but this is a decision that requires careful consideration.

The key factor is generating an income that will allow the heir and his or her family to live in the lifestyle to which they are accustomed or aspire. Will a farming operation provide that level of income? For new farmers there is a learning curve or start-up time. One of the considerations is the opportunity for off-farm employment to help during the start-up time. Off-farm income also can be used to supplement expected farm income so family income is satisfactory.

Once the heir has decided to farm the land, he or she must decide whether to raise crops, livestock, or both. Iowa State University Extension offers many publications explaining which crops can be grown across the state as well as estimates of the crops’ production costs. This information can be used to estimate the potential income from the inherited farm. The choice of crop and livestock enterprises is sometimes complementary. For example, one option is to raise crops that will be fed to livestock.

Production agriculture involves more than just owning the land. It also includes labor, capital, and management. The amount of capital required in production agriculture varies by the system chosen. Many of the systems in use today rely heavily on purchased inputs and therefore require a significant amount of capital. Other systems rely more heavily on labor, management, or marketing skills.

Regardless of the system, there will be machinery requirements. Modern farming machinery can be expensive and requires skill to operate it safely. Owning the machinery is one option. Today, many farmers use leasing or custom hire as a means of machinery management. This is especially beneficial for the higher priced, seldom-used pieces of equipment.

Management is a key skill needed to run a profitable farming operation. Many of the skills are similar to other businesses, but other aspects, such as certain risk management techniques, are unique to farming.

The decision whether or not to farm inherited land is not one to be made lightly, and each situation is different. The major consideration is the estimated income that can be generated from the farm and whether or not that is sufficient for the heir. Additionally, reserves should be available to help get the farm started under new management.
Holding the Land
Holding the land as an investment is another option for heirs. Those who opt to hold the land can choose from several different ways to handle the farm, each of which involves different amounts of time and effort. Some people enjoy being active in running the farm and others prefer not to be involved.

Leasing
Leasing land to others is a viable and common option today. In Iowa, a recent estimate showed that more than 60 percent of the land is leased. A number of lease arrangements are available. In general, they fall into the categories of cash rent or crop share. In a cash situation, the tenant bears the risk, whereas in a crop share arrangement, the production and price risk are shared.

Cash renting is one of the least demanding options for the owner. This arrangement involves finding a tenant, paying taxes, and a few other minor ownership duties. The most important decision is determining the fair level of cash rent. In a crop-share lease, the tenant and landlord split some of the expenses and the yield. The exact division is a matter of negotiation. There are many variations of this type of lease arrangement, including a flexible lease, which can be a combination of both the cash and crop-share features.

The best rental arrangement is an individual matter. In some cases, there may be other factors outside the rented property to consider, such as snow removal, property upkeep, and maintenance. ISU Extension offers publications that provide estimates of the current cash rent and information on how to establish the division between yield and costs.

Custom Farming
Custom farming is another option that has become more popular in recent years. In this arrangement the owner contracts for all the field work to be performed. Some custom arrangements also include storage and hauling. In either case, the owner of the land makes the decisions about the crop, inputs, and marketing, but hires others to perform the actual work.

Hiring a Professional Manager
Another option for those who want to keep the farm as an investment is to hire a professional farm manager. While each arrangement varies, in most cases the owner makes no business decisions but hires a professional farm manager to run the farm. The owner simply receives a check and the farm management firm receives a percent of the gross income.

The return to land as an investment is generally thought of in two components. The first is the yearly cash return, which varies according to the use of the land and the type of lease arrangement. It is subject to weather and other production risks as well as price risks. In the past the annual cash return to land has varied considerably, but it usually averages 5 to 8 percent after property taxes and before income taxes.

The second component to the return to land is the increase in value or capital gains. Land generally increases in value 2 to 3 percent per year, although land values have fluctuated widely in the past few decades. For example, in Iowa land values almost doubled from $218 per acre in 1950 to $419 in 1970. During the 1970s, however, land values increased almost fivefold, rising from $419 per acre to $2,066 in 1980. Then, during the 1980s, farmland lost almost 60 percent of its value, falling from $2,066 per acre to $1,214 in 1990. The 1990s have shown a recovery to $1,781 per acre in 1999.

Land as an investment offers portfolio diversification. In addition, it offers investors a tangible asset.

Selling the Land
The final option is simply to sell the farm. This option is especially appealing to those who want the proceeds of the inheritance for other uses.

There are many considerations in the decision to sell the property. Tax consequences from the sale depend on several factors: the amount of the sale, the income tax basis of the property, and, in some cases, the method of sale. Selling the property under contract can spread out the reportable gain over several years, lowering the tax burden but postponing the use of the funds for other purposes.
Those who decide to sell the land must consider the method of sale. Most use a licensed real estate broker. However, in some cases, heirs sell the land either to someone who knows the land or through classified advertisements.

It is possible to divide a large property into smaller tracts for auction. For instance, heirs may decide to sell the building site and keep the cropland.

Another method of selling the farm is to hold a land auction. It is uncertain which method produces the highest price. One option for those who hold land auctions is to set a minimum price. If the auction produces a higher price the land is sold, but if the minimum price is not met the owner can reassess the sale method or his or her expectations.

Many heirs who decide to sell the land do not know a good selling price. The land market is not well-defined as are other more frequently traded commodities. Farmland heirs should obtain a professional appraisal to help establish the value of the land and assist in setting the right selling price. It also is important to remember that an heir's sentimentality for the farm is not translated into value for someone else.

Cash Sale
A cash sale is one way to sell the inherited property. A cash sale immediately produces the proceeds from the sale for other uses. It also minimizes the risk to the seller. However, a cash sale also reduces the number of potential buyers because most buyers will need some type of financing. Fewer buyers could mean a lower selling price.

Contract Sale
A contract sale is another option, in which the buyer provides a down payment and then makes payments on the land. The advantage to the buyer is the need for less money up front. The seller's advantages include the option of reporting the gain on an installment basis and lowering the overall tax consequences.

A contract sale does expose the seller to the risk of default from the buyer. However, the increased risk means the seller usually can receive higher interest. Additionally, offering a favorable contract will increase the number of potential buyers and provide the opportunity for a better price.

Trade
Trading the property is another option that may be appealing in some circumstances. This is especially true for an heir who is already farming but in another area. By trading the property to someone who owns or can buy property closer to their existing farm, the heir can avoid taxes that could be generated from the sale. Trading farmland for other rental property is another possibility.

Gift
Giving the property to a non-profit organization as a gift is another alternative to selling it. This usually occurs when the property has unique wildlife or scenic value and is desirable to organizations such as the Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, or Pheasants Forever. This option also allows heirs to avoid tax consequences.

HOW THE FARM HAS BEEN INHERITED

Alone
Inheriting the farm alone is the easiest of the two scenarios. In this case, any decisions will be based upon the individual heir's circumstances without dealing with others' expectations and desires.
Inheriting the farm as an individual still leaves the same basic options and alternatives: whether to sell the farm, keep it as an investment, or farm the land.

If the heir currently is farming, deciding what to do with the inherited farm is simply a matter of deciding how the farm fits within the current operation and goals. The farm operation can be consolidated by selling the inherited farm and buying one closer to home without triggering tax liabilities.

If the heir currently is not farming, the earlier discussed pitfalls and considerations apply. Heirs must remember not to let the romantic notion of farming cloud their considerations and to estimate the expected income from all sources.

If the heir keeps the land as an investment, he or she must decide how much time and energy to devote to it. Depending on how it is handled, land ownership can involve considerably more time than conventional assets. Farmland heirs also must determine how much and which type of risk they are willing to bear.

Individual tax consequences probably will guide the decisions about selling the land. Many alternatives exist and should be considered carefully. In addition, options exist to postpone or eliminate the tax burden, depending on how the property is sold.

With Others
Inheriting a farm with other people complicates the decisions. Each heir has different goals and needs. However, blindly pursuing what is in one heir's best interest can lower the returns to everyone. Heirs should think as a group and strive for compromises. Open communication is essential.

Ideally, the individual who left the farm to the heirs has made all the considerations for fairness. However, in some cases an equitable distribution was the guiding force. In these cases, fairness becomes an individual consideration.

A complication arises if the farm is currently operated by one of the heirs. It is important to remember that the decisions made by the non-farming heirs can substantially influence the ability of the farming heir to continue. If the heirs want to sell, the farming heir may not have the capital or be in a position to take over the entire farm alone. This may be true if one of the heirs wants to start farming but the others do not.

If the decision is to keep the farm as an investment property, the heirs must agree on how to do so. In many cases, it is easier for a professional farm manager to handle the investment to avoid complications. Regardless of the method chosen, some means of decision-making must be established. One heir must not be able to influence the return to the investment without the consent of the others.

The sale of a farm with multiple heirs should meet the goals and needs of the heirs and minimize the collective tax liability. If the heirs are in different financial positions, it might be possible to make arrangements to maximize the return from the entire inheritance but not necessarily in one party's best interest.

Again, communication is the key. Groups of heirs must communicate their needs and desires. They must listen to the others and try to work toward mutually beneficial compromises. The options of farming, keeping, or selling remain the same. However, multiple heirs must consider the whole inheritance, not just the individual pieces.

CONCLUSION
Inheriting a farm can be very exciting and rewarding. More than likely the inheritance will hold some sentimental value.

Inheriting the farm alone or with others changes the complexity of the alternatives, but it does not change the basics of the decision. The first step is to accurately assess the inheritance. This determines the options and helps evaluate the alternatives.

An accurate professional appraisal will determine the size of the inheritance. The current use will help determine the potential income from the farm. ISU Extension and other organizations can help with the decisions about the options and alternatives for the inherited farm.
Farmland heirs have three choices of what to do with an inherited farm: farm the land, keep it as an investment, or sell it. A number of options are available within each of these three alternatives.

Heirs must remember that there can be significant differences in the tax consequences of the various options. Legal counsel should be obtained before deciding what to do with an inherited farm.

References
Every state has a Cooperative Extension Service with many helpful publications for the first-time landowner. The publications usually are divided into topics such as buildings, crops, livestock, machinery, management, marketing, pesticides, soil, sustainable agriculture, and weeds. In addition, the federal government offers publications through the USDA's Farm Service Agency, Economic Research Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and National Agricultural Statistics Service. The state departments of agriculture, local conservation agencies, and soil and water districts also are sources of information to aid in making decisions.

The following list of publications from Iowa State University Extension and the North Central Region is a sampling of management publications available.

*Estimated Costs of Crop Production,* FM 1712, ISU Extension publication, updated annually.
*Estimated Costs of Pasture and Hay Production,* AG 96, ISU Extension publication, updated periodically.
*Livestock Enterprise Budgets,* FM 1815, ISU Extension publication, updated annually.
*Iowa Land Values,* FM 1825, ISU Extension publication, updated annually.
*Iowa Cash Rental Rates,* FM 1851, ISU Extension publication, updated annually.
*Variable Cash Leases,* FM 1724, ISU Extension publication, updated periodically.
*Iowa Farm Costs and Returns,* FM 1789, ISU Extension publication, updated annually.
*Cash Farm Lease,* NCR 76, NCR publication, updated periodically.
*Livestock Share Rental Agreement,* NCR 107, NCR publication, updated periodically.
*Crop Share,* NCR 77, NCR publication, updated periodically.

Prepared by Mike Duffy, ISU Extension economist, and John Baker, ISU Beginning Farmer Center. This publication is an update of earlier work with the same title. That publication, authored by E. G. Stoneberg, was written in the 1970s. (Stoneberg, E. G., *Getting Started in Farming: So You Have Inherited a Farm,* North Central Regional Extension Publication 85, University of Missouri-Columbia, undated). This update relies heavily on the previous work. Many of the ideas presented will be similar because the basis for good farmland decision-making has not changed. Attribution is made in a general sense and will not be made throughout to avoid disrupting the flow of the publication.

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