

IMPLEMENTING AND MAINTAINING NEOLIBERAL AGRICULTURE IN AUSTRALIA.

PART II

STRATEGIES FOR SECURING NEOLIBERALISM

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Introduction

The formal attachment to this [multilateral agricultural liberalisation] agenda has displayed a quality akin to religious fervour, unqualified by the details of experience (Jones 1994:1).

During the 1960s and 1970s there was a seismic shift in the intellectual environment of the discipline of agricultural economics in Australia. The discipline as a whole became more centred on the influence of the Chicago School paradigm, which emphasised the social benefits of free markets. By the 1980s, these views had inculcated key policy arenas within the Australian Government. In combination with a reformist Labour Party administration which sought to challenge the policy authority of National Party influence in rural affairs,¹ these perspectives gained centrality as a guiding vision for public policy interests in agriculture. The first instalment of this two-part series of articles (Pritchard, 2005a) detailed how, by the end of the 1990s, this intellectual juggernaut had radically transformed the relationships between the state and market within Australia's rural economy. In this article, attention is focused to the issue of how these policy prescriptions have been maintained and justified. Such a focus is extremely timely, coming approximately ten years after the formation of the WTO. The Australian Government's advocacy of market liberalisation in agriculture is extremely influential within that body. In her history of Australia and the world trading system, for example, Capling (2001:2) argues "Australia has wielded far more influence in multilateral trade institutions than is warranted by its size and power in the global economy". So what arguments have been used by the proponents of market liberalisation in Australian agriculture to have created these perspectives as a largely unchallenged ideology for Australian agricultural policy?

This article argues that the maintenance and justification of market liberal agriculture has been built upon three dominant characteristics within the Australian agricultural policy discourse. First, econometric modelling has been employed to build anticipations of future imminent wealth arising from the implementation of these policies. Second, policy analysts and mainstream agricultural economists have shown relatively little interest in debating the distributional outcomes of liberalisation, thus (advertently or inadvertently) creating policy silences over this entire set of questions. Finally, an absence of 'market distortions' has been developed to provide a normative benchmark for the preferred political relations between food, agriculture and society. The cumulative impact of these three discursive themes has been to normalise market liberalisation as 'apolitical', while at the same time constructing alternative policy visions as 'politically interventionist'.

¹ The National Party represents rural interests within the political coalition that constitutes the conservative side of Australia's two-party political divide.

In contextual terms, the focus in this article on examining the justificatory discourses of liberalisation builds upon recent literatures in the social sciences on policy discourse and its relationship to state action (Larner 2003; Larner and Le Heron 2002; Peck and Tickell 2002). Following Koc's (1994) comparable discussion of 'globalisation as a discourse' more than a decade ago, these literatures argue that an understanding of state policies must involve not just the analysis of material outcomes from particular actions, but the underlying ideologies and rationales that shape decision-making processes.

The messenger is the message: legitimising policy through the lens of econometric modelling

Fifteen years later, some of the farm groups question just whether the benefits were as great as expected (Perrett 2001:50). (Media commentary on the fifteenth anniversary of the launch of the Uruguay Round.)

Australia's decision to unilaterally liberalise agriculture during the 1980s and 1990s reverberates across national agricultural policy discourse. By 'going alone' ahead of the normal bounds of reciprocity in trade relations, policy makers in Australia anticipated they would be setting an example upon which the rest of the world would see merit and follow. However, the intervening years have not witnessed the liberalisation of agricultural trade to the degree earlier anticipated, leaving Australian policy makers with few 'policy levers' to assist the domestic farm sector and an international trade policy environment that diverges considerably from the free trade model. This dilemma has generated the need for a *culture of expectation* to infuse policy discourse. Because there is minimal evidence of the benefits accruing to Australia from 'going alone', the focus of policy discourse necessarily has emphasised an allegedly forthcoming economic windfall to farmers from the supposedly 'brave' position Australia has taken.

The ballast for this policy discourse has been a heavy weight of reports and publications on the merits of trade liberalisation. Since 1996, economic and trade agencies of the Australian Government have published over 100 research documents advocating trade liberalisation in agriculture. A number of these documents have been published in multilingual formats reflecting Australia's attempt to gain high moral ground as world leader of the trade liberalisation project. Their common critique is summed up most memorably by Reason versus Emotion (Stoekel and Corbet 1999), an edited collection of like-minded studies into global trade reform. As suggested explicitly in its title, this publication suggests that the trade policy choice is between the supposed rational logic of multilateralism, and ill-informed 'emotionalism'. In another instance, in 1998 the Minister for Trade initiated a Parliamentary inquiry into trade liberalisation but gave terms of reference for Committee members to investigate the "benefits"—not the "impacts"—of these policies. Oddly in the face of a veritable avalanche of funded research in this area, a key conclusion from that Inquiry was that trade liberalisation had not been 'sold' by the Government strongly enough (Pritchard 2000).

Caught within the pincers of a deregulated economy and the failure of the rest of the world to follow suit, it is not surprising that the Australian Government has taken pains to play its only policy card. However of more pressing relevance to the topic of this article is the question of whether it has been over-played.

At face value there appear entirely legitimate national interest grounds for advocating agricultural trade liberalisation. It is widely accepted in Australia that agricultural trade liberalisation has and will generate substantial national economic gains. This popular wisdom is built from the commonsensical proposition that if other countries liberalise their agricultural import regimes or stop subsidising their own farmers, then Australian producers will be able to sell more product. However like many pieces of popular wisdom, the narrative in its simplest sense obscures a more complex reality. Closer investigation

reveals a discrepancy between the forecast sizes of national benefits that would flow to Australia from agricultural liberalisation, compared to what their centrality to policy might suggest.

Successive Trade Ministers and bureaucratic agencies ‘play the liberalisation card’ through their energetic citation of dollar value estimates of the size of national benefits Australia will gain through these policies. Mostly these estimates originate from analysis that uses ABARE’s Global Trade and Environment Model (GTEM), a computable general equilibrium model (DFAT 2001a:163). Based on this approach, the Australian Government has argued that a halving of all forms of trade protection would generate global economic gains of US\$400 billion, with US\$90 billion of this being generated from agriculture (DFAT 1999: iv). In the contemporary Australian context, the use of GTEM has allowed the Australian Government to assert that if the Cairns Group proposal to the Doha Round is accepted, Australian gross national product will increase by AUD\$2.1 billion per year by the year 2010 (Andrews et al. 2003:258).

A striking discursive strategy that accompanies the citation of these estimates across many Government publications is that these dollar value estimates tend to be quoted in isolation and as authoritative. With reference to the former, very rarely are dollar estimates put into context. For example, the suggestion that world GDP could be enlarged by US\$90 billion from agricultural liberalisation seems superficially impressive, but consideration needs to be given of the denominator (i.e., “US\$90 billion of what?”). World GDP currently exceeds US\$30,000 billion. Therefore, expressed as a percentage of world GDP, agricultural trade liberalisation might be expected to generate (an upper bound) boost to the global economy of approximately 0.3%. Similarly, the estimated AUD\$2.1 billion boost to the Australian economy from the Cairns Group position being adopted in the Doha Round translates to an anticipated improvement to GDP of less than 0.24% in 2010. As suggested by Thurow (1996:132) when discussing a comparable situation, such gains “are so small that they are within rounding error—no one will ever know whether they really existed or not”. Furthermore, the considerable investment made by the Australian Government in generating the computational and technical expertise to make these kinds of forecasts is not matched by comparable investment in the analysis of distributional impacts arising from anticipated changes. This is discussed in greater detail in the following section, but for the moment it should be noted that national wellbeing is calibrated simplistically with the maximisation of GDP, with no explicit regard to the question of who might benefit; nor what environmental resources might need to be employed or exploited in order to achieve those gains.

A related issue here is the assumption that ABARE’s forecasted estimates amount to an authoritative and accurate account on which policy can be set. The econometric modeling profession is oriented to an ex-ante (forward looking) frame of reference, with a somewhat weaker focus on ex post validation of results. Yet when comparative ex-post assessment is undertaken, the inconsistencies and contradictions within models are exposed. In an important study that considers the utility of nine econometric models seeking to forecast the outcomes for developing nations from the Uruguay Round, it is concluded:

If as a developing country negotiator, one wanted to draw upon the model results [undertaken during the Uruguay Round] to support or help frame a negotiating position for the next round, seemingly there is support for almost anything one wanted to argue. The gains to developing nations could be large or small; agriculture could be the most important issue, or it could be services. Impacts on individual countries could be positive or negative, large or small (Whalley 2000:1-2).

Evidently, the veracity of economic models is only as good as the assumptions on which they depend. But because critical debate on these issues (to the extent that this exists) is technically complex and

imbued with mathematical language, these issues are largely impenetrable for media commentators, trade sceptics and the general public. Consequently, debate on economic models has largely escaped serious policy review and contestation within the Australian polity. (A notable exception being during the Senate debate on the Australia-US Free Trade Agreement in 2004, when two different models produced vastly different conclusions and the legitimacy of the economic defence of the Agreement hung on the question of ‘which model was correct’.) This has led to the situation where the politics of justifying an entire field of public policy in Australia is reduced to an assumed and uncontested status as demonstrably in ‘the national interest’, with impressive dollar value signifiers of this placed strategically within the ‘sound bites’ of politicians’ media engagements.

Considered more generally, the way that Australian agricultural policies have been legitimated by econometric models reflects the tendency towards a narrowing of bureaucratic discourse towards more technical and abstracted conceptions of ‘the national interest’ or ‘the public good’. The emphasis on these abstracted notions underscores the role of ‘global imaginaries’ (Larner and Le Heron 2002) in neoliberalism; ideal end-states upon which policy visions are anchored. Writing with regards to the comparable set of processes that justified National Competition Policy, Morgan (2003:109) argues that the interest groups that tend to extract most benefit from NCP bureaucracies were those that “had access to the technical and intellectual expertise that allowed them to perform the job of ‘translating’ their aspirations into the language and techniques of the presently dominant paradigm”. Econometric modeling is therefore a justificatory discourse with great strategic relevance for the maintenance of Australia’s neoliberal agricultural policies. Its ‘black box’ of impenetrability gives authority to its results, which are presented in absolute terms and in isolation. The significance of econometric modeling, therefore, is exaggerated and de-contextualised, with ‘the national interest’ presented as a dollar value separated from the politics from which it is assumed to derive.

Silences on the social implications of policy

Fundamental to the Australian Government’s ability to persuasively advance the cause of agricultural trade liberalisation at a global level is the perception that these same policies have been successful domestically. In this regard, there is profound importance in examining the record of Australian agriculture over recent decades, and how this has been incorporated into policy discourses within Government.

Over the past 50 years Australia’s total agricultural production has risen steadily, but the number of farms has declined progressively, by about 1.3% per year (Lawrence and Gray 2000:38). Family structures continue to provide the ownership vehicles for 98% of farms (Garnaut and Lim-Applegate 1998) however there is considerable debate as to whether family farming can continue to survive. During the 1990s, approximately 80% of Australian broadacre agriculture was unprofitable (Robertson 1997), and in 1994-95 the sale of farm products accounted for only 37% of farm families’ income, with the remainder coming from off-farm activities or non-traditional uses of farm land (for example, farm tourism) (Lawrence and Gray 2000:39). Therefore:

The divide between the well-off 20% and the rest is marked. Farms with incomes in the lowest 20% are living in poverty and the middle [approximate] 50% are using pluriactivity [income from non-farming sources] to survive (Alston 2004:41).

The social realities of Australian farm restructuring documented by rural sociologists and geographers however tend to struggle to find space within the dominant account of agricultural change authored within the Canberra bureaucracy. Of course to some extent there is a natural inclination for Governments of any persuasion to de-emphasise negative social impacts within society. However under the influence of neoliberalism, this lack of regard goes further and takes on strategic meaning. Firstly,

there is a philosophical disinterest within neoliberalism over social costs and distributional issues in general because, as far as neoliberal theory is concerned, self-correcting markets will address those issues over time. Second, there is a dominant ideological-political view that efficiency and equity are separate policies fields, and that the former should be given priority. This is captured by Morgan's (2003:6) observation that contemporary mainstream political dialogue "increasingly consists of arguments about which means will most effectively achieve a shared goal of increasing growth and productivity", as opposed to wider framings of the 'national interest'. The general tenor through which this discourse usually runs is that the efficiency gains to the national economy allegedly made possible through liberal market rationalities will boost national income and thus offer more potential scope for Governments to address any so-called 'distributional costs'. Given the institutional divisions within the bureaucracy however, the policy advocates usually making these claims are rarely the same ones responsible for advocating or implementing 'distributional' policies. This reflects a separation between the 'efficiency logics' that dominate the more insular central agency and economic portfolios, and the more holistic perspectives that tend to find favour in service portfolios. As Thurow (1996:69) comments with regards to the theory of comparative advantage:

... the theory holds is that those who gain from international trade receive enough extra income from their activities that they could compensate those who lose when international trade commences. If that compensation isn't actually paid (and it almost never is), then those who lose are quite rational to oppose international trade.

With regards to these issues, it is sometimes questionable whether the mainstream advocates of liberalisation connect the politics of trade liberalisation with the grounded socio-economic conditions facing farm families. The neoliberal consensus would seem to be that family farming should persist only to the extent that it is sustained by the market, and the primary role of Government should be to ensure that liberal market conditions are upheld. This perspective is consistent with a pervasive attitude in ABARE research outputs that interprets unequal financial performance in Australian farming solely within the lens of 'efficiency' considerations. A recent discussion of these issues by ABARE blankly stated that "there are no economic reasons" to believe that the substantial consolidation of agricultural production into a fewer number of larger economic units will not continue, without any recognition of the social implications that may follow from this conclusion (Hooper et al. 2002:500). Moreover, when these implications *are* acknowledged, the advice tends to be brutal. In 1998 the Executive Director of ABARE simply suggested that family farmers facing financial hardship should obtain welfare and counselling, and then sell their farms (Gray and Lawrence 2001:39).

Close examination of commentary from ABARE regarding the beef industry exemplifies the tendency to 'write out' the social and distributional implications of policy. In ABARE's 2003 beef survey (Gleeson et al. 2003:40), data is presented that indicates that large beef farm properties generate financial rates of return that are considerably higher than small properties; that the difference in rates of return between small and large properties is getting wider, and that the vast majority of properties with herds less than 1,000 cattle have received a zero or negative rate of return in most years of the past decade. At face value these data would appear to carry profoundly important implications. They show that despite a massive growth in Australian beef exports since the 1980s, most beef farmers have faced considerable financial difficulties, and this is being reflected in a gradual evolution towards an industry dominated increasingly by large (often corporate-owned) properties. For evidence-based social scientists seeking to 'join the dots' linking social/economic performance and policy, the obvious implication arising from ABARE's data is that the social and economic vulnerabilities of smaller beef properties have magnified precisely at a time when the industry has trumpeted an impressive expansion based pivotally on trade liberalisation decisions in Japan, Korea and, to a lesser extent, the US. Applying this

logic to current policy settings leads to the conclusion that more liberalisation may be a misplaced or even counter-productive strategy for improving the fortunes of the 96% of specialist beef properties in Australia with herds of less than 1,000 cattle.

Yet the ABARE authors of the report fail to acknowledge these implications, and indeed, normalise the results within efficiency considerations. Their discussion of the data suggests:

In the beef sector, as in most agricultural industries, there is a strong link between property size (measured here as herd size) and rate of return. In most years, properties with large herd sizes generate higher rates of return than smaller properties. Low rates of return for small specialist beef properties are partly a consequence of their location in closer settled areas where property values per hectare are high, where there is greater emphasis on the 'lifestyle' aspects of farming and where there is greater accessibility to off-farm employment (Gleeson et al. 2003:40).

For the substantive arguments of this article, this text is illuminating for both its emphases and silences. Firstly, it under-emphasises and normalises the outcomes revealed by the relevant statistical data. Larger properties are said to receive higher returns “[I]n most years” (when in fact, this is a long-term structural condition of the industry) and the low rates of return for smaller properties are explained through recourse to social processes (‘lifestyle’, ‘access to off-farm work’, etc). The ABARE authors introduce these sociological explanations with no supporting evidence or interpretation whatsoever. It implies a causality such that the availability of off-farm work leads to the situation where farm families on smaller beef properties ‘can get by’ with lower rates of return, and hence it is of no cause for concern. However, the direction of this causality can be disputed: perhaps off-farm work has proven necessary *because* of low rates of return in farming. An extensive literature on farm families, pluriactivity and women in farming suggests a range of hypotheses about these relationships (Alston 2004; Argent 1999; Special Issues of *Sociologia Ruralis* 38(3), 1998; *Rural Society* 8(3), 1998). Palpably, the ABARE authors resort to this shorthand and unsubstantiated sociological explanation as justificatory window-dressing to avert attention from the reality that Australian agriculture is systematically generating highly uneven economic outcomes.

Inevitably, most of the purported benefits from global beef sector liberalisation will flow to a minority of larger-scale interests. In an environment where a minority of larger producers account for a majority of output, *ceteris paribus* they will receive the lion’s share of any benefits from trade liberalisation. However, a central characteristic of ABARE’s discourse around these issues is to ensure that these distributional issues are not given prominence.² For example, in a recent article that seeks to document the gains to agriculture from trade liberalisation, ABARE notes that the net cash income for the ‘average beef farm’ would be anticipated to increase by AUD\$8,200 annually from the year 2010, if the Cairns Group Doha Round proposal is accepted (Andrews et al. 2003:258). However as indicated above, bifurcation in the Australian beef industry between large-scale properties and ‘others’ renders the concept of ‘the average farm’ as an increasingly mythological concept. Evidently, ABARE cultivates the faux-egalitarian (“Dad and Dave”) construct of ‘the average farm’ in order to present trade liberalisation as having ‘national’ and not sectional benefits. By way of contrast, simple extrapolation of ABARE’s own data suggests that if the gains to liberalisation are spread equally across the Australian beef sector (which, as discussed immediately below, is a doubtful proposition in any case), then the net cash incomes of corporate-owned beef farms might be expected to increase by \$145,573 each; the average net

² In contrast to its discussion of EU and US agricultural subsidies, as discussed below, where for reasons of political strategy these same issues are given prominence.

cash incomes of the top 10% of family-owned beef farms would increase by \$25,712; and the net cash incomes of 'all other' beef farms might be expected to increase by just \$3,204.³

But moreover, it is probable that any gains from trade liberalisation would be skewed across the beef industry to an even greater degree than suggested above. Neoliberal analysts tend to present arguments about the benefits from trade liberalisation utilising assumptions of scale-neutrality; that it works independently from structural changes in industries so that increased market opportunities offered by trade reform will assist all producers equally. One recently published ABARE paper expresses this perspective in the following way:

When discussing the likely impact of trade reforms, it is important to note that any permanent or sustained increase in farm gate returns will lead to resources shifting into agricultural production from other sectors. At the same time, the number and structure of agricultural enterprises in Australia will continue to be influenced by other factors, including technology change, economic growth and incomes in other sectors and lifestyle choices. However, in general, sustained higher and more stable farm gate prices in Australia brought about by agricultural trade reforms will lead to higher and more stable farm incomes. This will clearly be beneficial to agricultural producers, along with rural communities more generally (Sheales and McDonald 2003:7–8).⁴

But this assumption glosses over the reality of how industries adjust to changing circumstances. In the contemporary context, it is more than likely that increased export opportunities in Australian agriculture would not be scale-neutral in their effects, but would provide proportionately greater advantages to larger and more sophisticated participants better able to capture market advantages. This is evidenced strongly in recent research on the broadly comparable case of supermarket-led agricultural restructuring (Reardon and Berdegue 2002) and moreover, has been apparent in the Australian beef industry itself, where increased export opportunities to Japan in the early 1990s arising from trade liberalisation were accompanied by considerable industry concentration and the emergence of new supply chain mechanisms based around the tight vertical coordination of large-scale producers (Pritchard 2005b). It would seem that neoliberal analysts choose not to address these issues for a combination of ideological and strategic rationales. Ideologically, the recognition of these dynamics would fly in the face of their predilection to assume competitive behaviour in markets and to downplay the institutional realities of market power, information asymmetry, and the possibilities of firms to use international size and scope as elements of competitive advantage. Strategically, the dominant neoliberal mainstream would seem to not wish discussion of these issues because they would complicate the cultivated narrative about trade liberalisation being consistent with the 'national interest'. Effectively, neoliberal analysis as practiced by the Australian Government skirts around the entire issue of who benefits from trade liberalization and how.

This neglect of distributional issues within Australian agriculture is all the more striking, moreover, because of the Australian Government's explicit interest in documenting such issues in other countries. A key plank of the dominant research paradigm in support of agricultural liberalisation has been to document the distributional impacts of agricultural support policies in Europe, the US and Japan (Podbury 2000). Not surprisingly, research projects funded by the Australian Government tend to conclude that these policies are ineffective in their goals (although Pritchard and Burch (2003:163–64)

³ These calculations are based on the fact that ABARE's estimate is that 'average farms' would see an increase of \$8,200 on a net cash income of \$70,900 (Andrews et al. 2003:258). This ratio of gain is extrapolated to average net cash incomes for each of the three categories of farms cited, based on data in Gleeson et al. 2003:41) for the period 1999-2002.

⁴ These same words are repeated identically in another ABARE publication: Andrews et al. (2003:258).

dispute this for the European case). Evidently, the international politics of liberalisation would seem to encourage the distributional implications of policy to be silenced in the domestic context, but underlined for calculated strategic purpose in other contexts.

Defining the politics of food, agriculture and society through the conception of ‘market distortions’

If Australia’s agricultural policy discourse is to be believed, the fundamental issue at hand for world agriculture is a choice between the adoption of ‘market distorting’ and ‘market liberal’ policies. A common refrain within Australian agricultural policy discourse is how the ‘market distorting’ policies of other countries represent political interventions that deny more prosperous national futures.

But what is a ‘market distortion’? Neoliberal economists calibrate such measures against the assumption of a free market equilibrium that would evolve in the absence of ‘distortions’. However, what is missing from this conception is recognition that all markets are necessarily embedded in political and social formations. Following the vein of institutional approaches in economics and sociology, the abstraction of markets from their grounded contexts denies the concrete realities of social life. Ultimately, the operation of markets depends on politically enacted relationships between markets and citizenship. Laws on the abolition of slavery and child labour, seen from particular perspectives, might be regarded as ‘market distortions’, as do restrictions on immigration and regulations on food safety. Hence, the concept of ‘market distortions’ is political. It is bereft of meaning outside of the political assumptions on which it is constructed.

In the case at hand, the Australian Government has strategically sought to construct a version of the concept of ‘market distortions’ that fits its own trade interests. Fundamental to this agenda has been an attempt to gain widespread acceptance of a ‘minimalist’ definition that gives attenuated regard for the sovereign rights of other countries to determine national specific formulations of the relationships between agriculture, food and society. To pursue this agenda, Australia has been a strong advocate for the WTO to measure ‘market distortions’ on an ongoing basis. The genesis of this agenda can be traced to 1983 at least, when the Director-General of the GATT formed a seven-person committee proposing “international surveillance” of countries’ trade policies (Spriggs 1990:57). Following this initiative, an Australian team of economists proposed a similar set of ideas in 1987, at the outset of the Uruguay Round. That committee argued that such an international project should be modelled on Australia’s Industries Assistance Commission (IAC, the fore-runner of the Productivity Commission) (Spriggs 1990:59). Over time, these ideas fermented into the WTO’s Trade Policy Review Mechanism (TPRM). Australia exercised an integral role in the formation of the TPRM, which now regularly reviews individual countries’ performances in liberalising trade. Analysis of a country’s performance against the criteria of the TPRM carries no sanctions, but has an important role in ‘public shaming’ (Morgan 2003:28) that reinforces the terms of global trade discourse in favour of Australia’s interests. Former members of Australia’s Productivity Commission provided an initial corpus of professional staff expertise within the TPRM, and the body used the Productivity Commission’s procedures as a template (Morgan 2003:11). Broadly, the development of the TPRM provides a mirror reflection on the international stage of the (domestic) processes described in Pritchard (2005). The explicit politics of this agenda are described bluntly in a recent policy document for the Australian Government authored by a leading economist, formerly of ABARE but now with a private-sector think-tank, who advocates a wider and more formal role for the TPRM on account of two reasons:

The first is to include economy-wide analysis of the costs and benefits of the trade policy measures of the country under review. The second is to change the review process ... The main element of this... [recommendation] is an open, independent and

*transparent analysis, repeated systematically on a regular basis in each of the capitals of members countries. Economy-wide analysis **combined** with due process changes the **politics of protection**. It makes sense — it is basic good governance — and it has been shown to work in securing trade liberalisation in other countries (Stoekel 2004:xiii) (emphasis in original).*

Yet a profound irony circumscribes the Australian agricultural trade policy agenda in this regard. To the outside world, the Australian Government likes to promote the impression it is a full and consistent supporter of the market regulation of agriculture. To domestic audiences however, the maintenance of policy requires that slightly different signals are sent out. Perhaps sending out different messages to different audiences is all part and parcel of trade policy. Nevertheless, the contradictions within these stances deserve exposure. Of particular note, although the Australian Government's overarching approach to agricultural policy is heavily laden with neo-liberal ideology, it still intervenes opportunistically in order to satisfy particular political agendas.

This capacity was illustrated most obviously in the 2004 assistance package for the sugar industry. Significant quantities of sugar cane are grown in tropical and sub-tropical coastal areas of eastern Australia. For a number of years, farmers in this industry have faced difficult economic conditions. During the 1990s, the Australian Government implemented reforms that liberalised the Australian sugar market, so that domestic prices were equivalent to the world market price. However, because of extensive subsidisation by the US and EU, world market prices in the sugar sector are extremely low, and have fallen by about 50% since the early 1990s (Garnaut 2004). Consistent with the general character of Australian agriculture, the Government eliminated all economic support for the sector, but at the same time, argued that global trade reform in the sugar sector was close at hand, and this would lead to improved international market conditions and thus revive their economic fortunes. To this end, in 2003 when bilateral trade negotiations commenced with the US towards an Australia-US Free Trade Agreement, the Australian Government lobbied strongly for a comprehensive deal that would provide Australian sugar producers with significant US market access. (The US sugar market is heavily protected via producer subsidies and border restrictions.)

However, this strategy failed. The Agreement concluded in early 2004 provided no preferential market access for Australian sugar, and this provoked massive protest from Australian sugar producers. Critically for the Australian Government, this occurred in a Federal election year in a context where the Government's re-election chances were perceived to hinge on its ability to retain seven electorates with significant numbers of sugar farmers. Consequently, in April 2004 the Australian Government announced a sugar industry assistance package worth AUD\$444 million, equating to approximately AUD\$67,000 per sugar farm and also including assistance to sugar mills to improve their sustainability and funding for projects to develop new markets for sugar. Furthermore, this package came after three previous packages during the past decade, that together were worth AUD\$202 million (Gordon 2004).

Of course the Australian Government's largesse with regards to sugar producers is exactly the same kind of policy that, if implemented in the US, EU or Japan, would have elicited a storm of accusation. In this respect, the only defence offered by the Australian Government is that the package was WTO compliant. In practice however, this was achieved through the micro-scale legal detail of the package, as opposed to its basic intent. The Australian Government structured its assistance payments to sugar farmers on the basis of each farmer's previous three years of production. Through this mechanism, payments were technically de-coupled from current production levels, thus providing no incentive for farmers to increase production and hence run foul of WTO Agreements (Ludlow with AAP 2004).

Yet while the sugar package appears to remain WTO compliant, it is obviously inconsistent with the philosophical spirit of neoliberalism that Australia adopts more generally. A useful comparison is

Australia's 'technically legal' sugar package and its response when, in 2003, Japan used provisions of the WTO Safeguards Agreement to increase beef tariffs from 38.5% to 50%. On that later occasion, the Australian Government begrudgingly accepted Japan's legal right to this policy, however placed significant diplomatic pressure on her to reconsider. The Australian Government argued that Japan was acting within the letter, but not the spirit, of the WTO. According to the Australian Minister for Trade: "We will be doing everything we possibly can to convince the Japanese government that this is not fair" (House of Representatives 2003:11254). This, of course is a very curious definition of 'fairness'. If Australia is to criticise other countries' protectionist policies—even when they are consistent with WTO Agreements—moral equivalence should suggest that it desists from policies themselves that might be within the letter, but not the spirit, of WTO Agreements.

This inconsistency also brings into focus another aspect of the persistence of Australian agriculture resting on the vision of multilateral liberalisation. For the US, sugar is a politically strategic commodity. This is true both of domestic politics—in the 2004 Presidential election year, the economic health of the industry was seen as vital for President Bush's ability to "retain" Florida—and international politics. Not coincidentally, just a few months after rejecting Australia's claim for special access into the US sugar market, the US offered considerable market access concessions to a host of developing countries in the context of upcoming WTO talks to restart the Doha Round, previously stalled following the collapse of the Cancun Ministerial in September 2003. Granting special access to Australia would have limited America's scope to offer this "sugar-coated bait" (Sharma 2004) and thus win over the support of key developing countries.

Although the most visible of such initiatives, the 2004 sugar package nevertheless represents the tip of an iceberg of agricultural policy practices that, if pursued by other countries, in all probability would be pilloried by the Australian agricultural trade policy mainstream for their alleged 'market distorting' nature. First, since 1992 the Australian Government has operated a set of policies aiming to facilitate agri-food exports under the heading of the *Agri-Food Strategy* (1992-96), the *Supermarket to Asia* (1996-2001) and the *National Food Industry Strategy* (2002 onwards). Given the nature of Australia's two-party democracy and the political importance of marginal electoral seats in many rural areas, these programs can be understood as responding to a political motivation for the Australian Government 'to be seen to be doing something' to assist Australian agri-food exporters (Pritchard 1999). Broadly under the terms of these successive programs, Government funds are available upon application to assist would-be exporters to develop marketing plans, undertake overseas trade studies, develop supply chain coordination, and to develop export 'readiness'. The current *National Food Industry Strategy* appropriates AUD\$102.5 million over five years in funding for these purposes. Many of these programs skirt a fine line in complying with Australia's WTO commitments (which prohibit subsidies being made under particular defined headings), and it is understood that various initiatives under these successive programs have been required to seek detailed legal advice from the Attorney-General on their WTO compliance.

Biosecurity is another key area that problematises Australia's advocacy of neoliberal agricultural policies. Australia is a biophysically-isolated island continent with a rich and diverse fauna and flora. For this reason, it has invested considerable financial and legal resources to establish a comprehensive quarantine regime. Under the Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Agreement of the WTO, such arrangements are allowable only to the extent that they are based on the rule of science. However, international disagreement over what is considered to be scientific rationality has opened Australia's quarantine system to litigious challenge. In a succession of cases (salmon imports from Canada; apple imports from New Zealand; banana imports from the Philippines), Australia has been required to justify the ongoing existence of quarantine measures (and in the case of Canadian salmon, these measures were

found to be in breach of WTO obligations). This exposes an obvious policy tension between, on the one hand, advocating agricultural liberalisation and, on the other, maintaining the importance of restricting imports because of biosecurity.

Moreover, this challenge is rendered difficult because the SPS Agreement is imprecise in relevant sections. The Agreement indicates that restrictions cannot be maintained ‘without sufficient scientific evidence’ (SPS Article 2.2) but scientific considerations are not necessarily subject to definitive conclusion. Moreover, Governments have considerable freedoms in determining what is to be regarded as an ‘acceptable’ risk; it might be that for in a particular case, zero risk is deemed appropriate. Evidently, the concept of what level of risk Governments should adhere to is not reducible to black and white scientific assessment.

This ambiguity poses a real dilemma for Australian trade negotiators. Under a different set of circumstances, the biological and environmental uniqueness of the island-continent presumably would lead Australia towards an expansive definition of biosecurity acceptability, which was malleable and sensitive to national circumstances. Yet to be consistent with the overarching role of neoliberalism as a ‘meta-regulation’ for trade policy positions, Australia seeks to construct increasingly narrow conceptions of acceptable risk. An example of how these tensions translate into a cascading set of contradictory policy discourses is illustrated in the following quote from DFAT, which suggests (i) that minimalist, ‘science-based’ risk methodologies are not political but other approaches are; (ii) that ‘environmental’ considerations are ‘subjective’ and non-scientific, and (iii) that political decisions over environment, society and culture, rooted in national sovereignties, have no place in world trade:

*[I]t seems clear that [the EU’s] objective is to inject social and cultural factors into the process of risk assessment and risk management, turning the decision-making process into a ‘political appraisal’. Clearly, acceptance of the EU’s proposal on precaution could have potentially very wide-ranging policy consequences for Australian interests. [The EU perspective] could dilute the notion of risk assessment, moving it away from a focus on science to non-scientific factors. This could conceivably lead to future negotiations on agriculture being not so much about market opening, but more about the extent to which environmental **and other subjective**, non-scientific factors should dictate world trade (DFAT 2001b) (emphasis added).*

Conclusion

As way of summation, it is pertinent to observe that Australia’s political and economic history provided a fertile soil for *a particular kind* of agricultural politics to flourish. Compared with much of the rest of the world, the relationships between food, agriculture and society in Australia can be said to have been *exceptional*. The country was colonised by the British with an explicit objective to become an agricultural export platform. This dependence on the British market, in turn, was related to the enactment of the ‘Corn Laws’ which liberalised British domestic agriculture, and therefore, agricultural development in Australia has always been a highly industrialised, capitalist operation. Correspondingly, Australian Governments have viewed rural landscapes mainly in terms of their productive capacities, and have constructed agricultural policies almost wholly through the prism of international competitiveness. This represents a quite unsophisticated policy framework compared with how most countries of the world have constructed the political relationships between food, agriculture and citizenship. It is profoundly ironic, therefore, that Australia’s agricultural exceptionism has provided an alleged blueprint for the rest of the world. Without a nuanced appreciation of the complexities of food,

agriculture and citizenship in particular sovereign spaces (whether this be the role of rice in Japanese national identity or the cultural centrality of village community life in Europe), Australian policy makers rely on a stylised and ultimately partial set of perspectives from which they construct new global imaginaries that understand the politics of food solely as a market relation.

Fundamentally, this article and its predecessor have been prompted by political concerns relating to the focus and direction of mainstream agricultural analysis in Australia. A stark dichotomy exists between the tendency of much agricultural economic analysis to celebrate the efficiency of Australian agriculture, and the disclosure by many social scientific studies of considerable economic deprivation and social problems in rural Australia. Economic analyses that conclude rural producers will be better off in liberalised market conditions appear *prima facie* at odds with the robust opposition to these reforms by many rural producers (Pritchard 2000). This article does not argue against liberal market agriculture *per se*, but suggests that neo-liberal theory has considerable (and at times, exclusionary) purchase within Australian agricultural policy institutions, with the effect of encouraging exaggerated interpretations of the benefits of these policies based on political-ideological renditions of what constitutes the ‘national interest’. The legitimising, triumphal and non-critical terms of this debate ultimately narrows Australia’s policy options and delimits public debate. This article has sought to compile arguments in favour of a more pluralist and inclusive debate on agricultural policy in Australia, by exploring the basis upon which currently dominant mainstream perspectives have been developed and are maintained. As suggested by Margaret Alston:

A move away from neo-liberal market mantra appears necessary to ensure a viable future for rural people and rural communities. In making this move, it may be necessary for Australia to refocus its response to WTO rhetoric by incorporating support for regional areas into its policy initiatives (Alston 2004:44).

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THE RISE AND RISE OF EUREPGAP: EUROPEAN (RE)INVENTION OF COLONIAL FOOD RELATIONS?¹

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Introduction: The Significance of EurepGAP

The regulation and governance of a wide ranging 'European agricultural project' is the subject of active academic debate in rural sociology. A selected range of research themes includes agri-environmental policy, support for organic agriculture, the EU LEADER initiative, the policy of multifunctionality of rural space, agricultural trade politics, rural policy and, most recently, slow foods and *terroir*. Observing from outside Europe, this work traces a particular regulatory path to a specific European mode of rural development. The structural consequences of such developments, however, extend well beyond the targeted locale. For all the claimed uniqueness of the European agricultural project in recent times, Europe was also previously at the centre of wide-ranging colonial relations at a global scale. Even in the post-colonial age, this prior epoch is inscribed across the power relations of the global food system. Positioned from the periphery, this article investigates the unintended effects of one of the latest and most vigorous European experiments in agriculture and food governance. All but invisible to European consumers, EurepGAP² is a new audit of food safety and agricultural sustainability whose authority spans continental divides. This article written 'through New Zealand eyes', uncovers both its intended effects and its unintended, Antipodean significance.³

EurepGAP can be argued to be a new form of social authority.⁴ Its constituent partners are not publicly controlled but privately owned and it is not a form of state or supra-state regulation. Rather, it is an alliance of food retailers, NGOs, producer organisations, consumer groups, agri-industry and the science community – ordered at the European level. Consequently, while the parts of EurepGAP are constituted at a (private) level below the nation state, they are collectively organised at a level beyond it. As such EurepGAP is an important exemplar of virtual governance organised outside the traditional sphere of mass democratic authority. The contours of this complexity are inscribed in its name: EU=Euro (being European not EU); RE=Retailer (and implicitly the associated consumer); P=Produce (implying an agricultural producer); and GAP=Good Agricultural Practice (implying a moral or elite ordering of agri-culture). All these levels operate outside the realm of state and supra-state governance.

¹ Key ideas in this paper were presented at a plenary panel on multifunctional agriculture at the IRSA World Congress in July 2004. I would like to thank Mark Shucksmith for the invitation to participate in that panel and to Harriet Friedmann and Philip McMichael for their very useful comments on that paper. I would also like to thank Stephen Horton, Anne Murcott, Carmen McLeod and Chris Rosin for their comments and help in preparing this article.

² EUro-REtailers working group: Produce - protocols for Good Agricultural Practice.

³ Just as Paul Cloke conducted his influential analysis of agricultural restructuring in New Zealand gazing 'through European eyes' (Cloke 1996).

⁴ Due to its comparative novelty, rural sociologists have yet to fully analyse EurepGAP. The first sociological analyses of EurepGAP are provided by Campbell et al. (2005; Forthcoming) and Busch and Bain (2005).

In the last decade, social researchers have become interested in a new form of governance structure emerging in post-industrial societies: which they term ‘audit culture’.⁵ This article seeks to understand the transformative effect and consequences of audit culture in the context of global food regulation and trade politics. The following account is situated within the agri-food approach and strongly influenced by regulationist analyses of the changing structure of both Antipodean primary production sectors and external agri-food linkages that situate endogenous effects in the Antipodes within wider structural shifts in the regulation and politics of global food systems.⁶ The attempt to examine new forms of agri-food governance in the specific context of New Zealand is not unique. In a key article on agri-food governance in New Zealand, Le Heron (2003) strongly suggests that broad dynamics in the ‘re-regulation’ of agriculture post de-regulation are influential across all New Zealand’s food export chains. Le Heron (2003; 2005), Larner and Le Heron (2004) and Busch and Bain (2005) all argue that private audit forms of governance are a consequence of neo-liberal reform with a shift in governance from state organisations to the globalising private sphere. Campbell et al. (Forthcoming) and Burch and Lawrence (2004) also suggest that the rise of private regulation and audit culture, and the increasing power of retailers, is linked to a reduction in state regulation of agriculture. Apart from these preliminary suggestions of a potentially important relationship between neoliberalism and audit culture, the agri-food dynamics of such a relationship remain, to date, under-researched.⁷

Having establishing the wider significance of neo-liberalism as a context for examining audit culture, EurepGAP is, nonetheless, more than just an exemplar of this contextual relationship. It also demonstrates a highly ambitious internal agenda that combines auditing of *food safety* standards with protocols for *sustainable food production*. EurepGAP is, thus, not only an exemplar of new audit culture, it is also directly implicated in changing definitions of agricultural sustainability. While the first generation of ‘green’ products to enter European supermarkets was audited as ‘certified organic’, EurepGAP strongly endorses Integrated systems as an alternative to the organic approach. Growing out of Integrated Pest Management⁸, ‘Integrated systems’ conceives of sustainability in terms of processes and outputs. It licences a wide range of agricultural practice *if* it can be sustained over time. Thus the audit logic of the two systems is strikingly different. Certified organic audits the disqualification of certain inputs into production, while Integrated systems seek to organise (and measure) processes and beneficial effects/outcomes. While they share many broad cultural and political intentions (sustainable agriculture, safe food), how they set about achieving and auditing these intentions are very different.⁹

⁵ The benchmark collection edited by Strathern in 2000 provides the best exemplar of this wider interest in audit. See Campbell et al. (Forthcoming) for a fuller discussion of the rise of audit culture.

⁶ For a comprehensive review of Antipodean work situated in this theoretical tradition, see Campbell and Lawrence, (2003).

⁷ A point that is strongly reinforced in the work of Le Heron and Larner which clearly establishes a strong research agenda around new governance systems in neo-liberalising economies like New Zealand (see Le Heron 2003; 2005; Larner and Le Heron 2004).

⁸ Commencing with Integrated Pest Management, the Integrated approach was an international science initiative to reduce pesticide usage in horticulture. Integrated approaches initially relied on targeted (usually ‘soft’) pesticides, only applying pesticides when need was proven, encouraging biological predation of pests, and close monitoring of orchard activities. For a discussion of its European uptake by industries see Morris and Winter (1999).

⁹ See Campbell et al. (2005) for a fuller discussion of the tensions between organic and Integrated systems in New Zealand.

For EurepGAP the debate over how to achieve sustainability is not just influenced by the suitability of different styles of audit. The following narrative will show how key strategic decisions within the EurepGAP alliance had important implications for how sustainable agriculture would emerge in Europe and many of its wider trading partners. The context of the alliance's choice is set by the strategic interests of its senior partners, namely large food retailers. Strategic choices by EurepGAP, therefore, arise in the general context of the commercial development of supermarkets. It is not argued that retail interests determine in a linear fashion the strategic choices of the broad alliance. It is, however, suggested that they do define a field within which EurepGAP protocols must be negotiated.¹⁰

To uncover the key relations posited in this introduction – the relationship between neoliberal governance and audit culture, audit in the context of retailer strategy, and audit as part of the wider European move towards narrowing the gateway of entry to the domestic food market – a case study is presented to adduce these structural effects. A single EurepGAP accredited producer – kiwifruit giant Zespri International Ltd (Zespri) in New Zealand – is examined to both expose the requirements of the audit regime and, by extension, to specify the nature of that obstruction which EurepGAP potentially constitutes for global agriculture. As one of the first foreign producers to accede to EurepGAP status, Zespri both sets the benchmark for entry and is reflective of the very ideal of the initiative. As the very model of a EurepGAP producer, Zespri International Ltd has much to reveal about the *ideal* of food safety and sustainable agriculture embodied in the alliance, and the nature of the obstruction it may constitute for international producers (especially in the Third World). In particular, this case demonstrates how the key structural relationships around EurepGAP become amplified and entrenched as they resonate at two wider levels: the idealised world of the European rural imaginary, and the real consequences of colonial economic and ecological imperialism.

Inventing EurepGAP: Risk, Regulation and Retail

The social and political context from which EurepGAP emerged in Europe has been dramatically evolving over the last two decades. Campbell et al. (forthcoming) review the broad background of rising consumer risk perception, food scares and retailer responses that led major supermarket chains in Europe to commence the development of 'safe' and 'sustainable' labelling of food during the 1990s. These retailer strategies emerged in a wider context of EU regulatory evolution of food safety legislation as well as higher level political responses to the liberalisation of international trade – particularly at the conclusion of the Uruguay Round of GATT (see Campbell and Coombes 1999). Subsequently, the interaction of all these regulatory, social and economic dynamics became the base on which large food retailers constructed an alliance for the retail and production of safe, sustainable food.

Before 1997, European retailers responded to emerging food anxiety with an array of firm-specific protocols around 'safe' production systems (McKenna et al. 1998). Part of this engagement involved organic agriculture. Supermarket chains and cooperatives negotiated supply arrangements with producers, working also with private and commercial organic certification organizations who were mostly operating

¹⁰ This is not the only key influence. EurepGAP has emerged in the context of wider European regulatory politics and initiatives like the 'green protectionism' strategy by EU governments in the post-GATT era (as discussed in Campbell and Coombes 1999). Campbell et al. (forthcoming) provide a fuller discussion of this contextual relationship.

under the aegis of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements. As part of a wider pattern of product differentiation, a growing niche for organic products opened on the market floor.¹¹ In the contemporary supermarket, traditional mass product lines are being replaced by a mosaic of differentiated products. Brands produced for particular supermarket chains, and sometimes differentiated mostly at the level of packaging, are at the centre of this development (see Burch and Lawrence 2004).

Despite the strong consumer appeal of organic product, and numerous EU states subsidising conversion to organic production, as a production sector organic remains small and marginal. In the face of such local supply constriction, the main organic sourcing strategy for many supermarkets has been to import organic product from countries like New Zealand. In the struggle for ‘green’ product, and in light of the relative niche size of organic supply, large retailers discovered and developed a new source of supply that had the potential to provide much greater volumes into the green market (McKenna et al. 1998; McKenna and Campbell 2003). In essence, large retailers worked with non-family, corporate agriculture to develop a system of production that, if not purely organic in origin, was at least, via audit, claiming the two key desirable consumer attributes of organics: food safety and environmental sustainability. This new production was organised as an ‘Integrated system(s)’. It followed in the footsteps of Integrated Pest Management (IPM), the pioneer of ‘residue-free’ produce. Through the mid-90s, many suppliers around the world established Integrated production systems to provide fruit and vegetables free of pesticide residues.¹² The exact level of chemical sanction, permitted inputs and tolerance levels were negotiated between suppliers and the purchasing agents of individual supermarket chains and cooperatives. All of these systems operated within audit systems that were developed by individual retailer chains. Each chain established its own protocols to either supply product under ‘own brand’ labels or as the minimum requirement for independent wholesale brands.

The success of the Integrated initiative brought problems. By the mid-90s, a very high volume of product from Integrated systems was entering the supply chains, and there was a bewildering proliferation of Integrated production profiles. The safer greener food brand was becoming an administrative liability. A group of large European retailers, strongly encouraged by at least one agri-chemical company, began discussion on what was initially called Integrated Crop Management (Howley 1997). The task was to consolidate ‘Integrated’ protocol into a single regulatory definition that would licence, with suitable modification, mainstream farming.¹³ The twin goal was to create an ‘environmentally virtuous’ audit system, but to make such virtue achievable by mainstream farmers, thus increasing the supply of suitable product. In 1997 the EUro-REtailer working group: Produce, operating under the acronym EUREP, was established (Campbell et al. 2005). This exercise in harmonisation between multiple Integrated systems was a major achievement in itself; however, it became only the starting point for an even more ambitious agenda for EUREP. While producing ‘safe’ food, Integrated systems did not resonate as strongly as organic with

¹¹ A similar process was happening in other first world markets like California (Guthman 2004).

¹² ‘Residue Free’ is a legally contested term because *all* living tissue is now contaminated with trace levels of pesticide residues making a truly ‘residue free’ item of fruit and vegetable produce a legal impossibility. One regulatory strategy to try and overcome this problem was to define ‘residue free’ as being <5% of the legally established Maximum Residue Level permissible under national regulations.

¹³ Implicitly meaning European farming in its new ‘greener’ form, drawing strong comparison to, in particular, mainstream US farm practice.

wider anxieties about the environment. The brand lacked the environmental credentials and brand recognition of organic production and was almost invisible to consumers. Integrated systems had, however, pioneered the use of broader audit systems like Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP). This provided the opportunity to create a ‘super-audit’ which synthesised both established HACCP-based food safety protocols and a rigorous evaluation of measurable practices that would contribute to ‘on-farm’ sustainable practice. On this basis EUREP conceived of protocols of Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) for the ‘green’ production of fruit and vegetables. EurepGAP could provide ‘assurance’ that would stretch from farm field to supermarket and was translatable, via HACCP, into almost all existing mainstream food and agricultural audit systems.¹⁴ While this agenda was ambitious, the possible pay-off was significant. Beyond fundamental (retail) returns-to-brand, GAP had the potential to harmonise the multiple supply chains of members; to increase certainty for suppliers; to increase the supply of ‘safe’ food; and to reduce the costs of purchasing agents by devolving the management of a standardised supply chain audit to an external, non-profit organisation. While organic had the brand recognition, the strategy of EUREP was to capture and monopolise the behind-the-scenes architecture of ‘safe’ and ‘sustainable’ food auditing.

Forms of EurepGAP Regulation

EurepGAP regulation took shape in a series of negotiations between 1997 and 1999. The key GAP protocols are designed by Technical Standards Committees (TSCs), which include representatives of a wide range of food system stakeholders. These representatives are drawn from retailers, consumer groups, agro-science, agro-industry, environmental groups, other related NGOs, government agencies and producer organizations. EurepGAP membership fees are rebated and some travel support is provided for NGOs to ensure balanced representation at ‘standard setting’ meetings. The TSCs operate through consensus to design GAP protocols that are both acceptable to financial stakeholders and legitimate in the eyes of the wider stakeholder community (<http://www.eurep.org/Languages/English/about.html>). TSC consensus building is framed in a HACCP-based audit of food supply from farm production to supermarket point of sale. The HACCP process allows for flexibility in the definition of critical points. Some controls are deemed less necessary than others. Thus, for example, the HACCP analysis of fruit and vegetable production identifies three levels of compliance, which are listed below.

Critical Control Point – importance of compliance	Number of Control Points	Strength of compliance
Major Must	47	100%
Minor Must	98	95%
Recommended	65	Not compulsory, but desirable. Must produce evidence of movement towards compliance.

Source: EurepGAP 2004(a)

¹⁴ A similar effect can be created by software programmers in deciding to use Microsoft Windows as an operating platform – instant integration with the mainstream industry. The idiosyncratic development of organic audit processes, within this analogy, parallels the idealistic and marginalised aspirations of Linux programmers.

Virtually every European ‘Integrated’ producer of fruit and vegetables extant in 1999 - when EUREP launched its first Good Agricultural Practice protocol - easily met enough ‘Major Must’ and ‘Minor Must’ compliance control points to enter EurepGAP without any significant alteration of existing practice. For existing Integrated production, entry to the EurepGAP alliance required no more than paying the modest licence fee and re-aligning the technical specifications of an existing audit into the language and form of the new EurepGAP system.¹⁵ The protocols also enabled almost all the existing professional agri-food audit organisations to register and offer auditing services (<http://www.eurep.org/Languages/English/about.html>). To oversee the audit services, an independent (super) audit bureau named FoodPLUS GmbH was created. A not-for-profit organisation FoodPLUS, based in Cologne, not only watches the watchers but also has executive responsibility for the operation of the EurepGAP Secretariat (which emerged out of the earlier EUREP negotiations) and the Technical Standards Committees. Around 11 full time staff, and an ‘independent Chairman’ are funded through audit levies and the membership fees of the constituent organisations of EurepGAP. This discussion of the rationalisation, harmonisation and streamlining of audit under EurepGAP falls short, however, of appraising the most striking feature of the alliance: its ethos and sense of cultural mission.

Ideals of EurepGAP

The EurepGAP Mission

A desire to reassure consumers. Following food safety scares such as BSE (Mad Cow Disease), pesticide concerns and the rapid introduction of GM foods, consumers throughout the world are asking how food is produced: and they need reassuring that it is both safe and sustainable. (Source: <http://www.eurep.org>).

EurepGAP conceives the chief beneficiary of its initiative to be the consumer, but not in the traditional mode of supermarket retailing strategy. Rather, EurepGAP proposes to add value in the mind of the consumer. At the heart of its mission is the production of a virtual image; an imagined countryside. Beyond the technique of audit it proposes to conjure a vision of the growing and eating of food that will operate as ‘safe’ well beyond the technical requirements of a HACCP system.

EUREPGAP Terms of Reference

Respond to Consumer Concerns on Food Safety, Animal Welfare, Environmental Protection and Worker Welfare by:

- Encouraging adoption of commercially viable Farm Assurance Schemes, which promote the minimisation of agrochemical inputs, within Europe and world wide.
- Developing a Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) Framework for benchmarking existing Assurance Schemes and Standards including traceability.
- Providing guidance for continuous improvement and the development and understanding of best practice.
- Establishing a single, recognised framework for independent verification.

¹⁵ An added incentive, as discussed in Campbell et al. (2005), is that companies could retain their own ‘in-house brands’ even after aligning to EurepGAP audit. There was no desire to create a new brand, rather to underwrite the range of existing eco-brands in supermarkets. There is no evidence to date as to whether this has significantly improved, retained or reduced the level of adherence to environmental requirements.

- Communicating and consulting openly with consumers and key partners, including producers, exporters and importers.

Source: <http://www.eurep.org>

EurepGAP identifies four key themes that lie behind a brand image for 'safe' farming. They are food safety, environmental protection, occupational health, safety and welfare, and animal welfare. Only the first is concerned with food-as-such. Here the alliance proposes 'commercially viable' production with the 'minimisation of agro-chemical inputs'. Between the broad lines of these references is space for commercial 'Integrated systems' production: EurepGAP's new system of systems, 'Integrated Farm Assurance'. The remaining thematic areas EurepGAP proposes, in order of presumed importance, are protocols for environmental, worker and animal welfare. These policies affect not so much the physical nature of food, as its production and distribution context. In short, these policies are concerned with the production of a reassuring mental construct. Their virtual objective is to evoke an agriculture suffused with welfare.

In contrast to many other exercises in harmonisation between audits, from the very beginning EurepGAP¹⁶ positioned itself as more than a technical watchdog of safe-food supply. Instead, it sought to clearly embed this new audit system with a wider values system. In comparison, many international forums and strategic action groups have simply sought to harmonise audits and processes, ranging from standardisation of IT formats and media (VHS videos, CD manufacture, HTML programming), to international border control protocols. None of these has strayed into the 'values' terrain as EurepGAP has done. Although a European alliance of private interests, it conceives its mission in global and historic terms. In its vision of itself, as written in its logo, EurepGAP is part of a progressive future.

EurepGAP: 'The Global Partnership for Safe and Sustainable Agriculture'

EurepGAP's sense of moral mission is not only designed for consumers. It has been internalised by its constituent members. The strength of the idea of EurepGAP as the true pathway to agricultural sustainability has been such that, since its inception five years ago, no dispute over protocols has become so intractable as to cause a group to withdraw from EurepGAP. This is in stark contrast to the bitter wrangling that sometimes characterises parallel organizations like the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements.

In order to substantiate the claim that EurepGAP is operating as 'more than just an audit system', the next section will investigate details of EurepGAP protocols more closely. At face value these appear to be merely procedural audit protocols. Closer inspection demonstrates how they operate as audit culture and how this culture strongly privileges some suppliers while excluding others. Operating at the level of whole agri-cultures, such exclusion can start to resemble the broader terrain of exclusion between First and Third World agriculture.

EurepGAP Protocols

In its mission statement the alliance defines its Triple Bottom Line as "people, planet and profit" and commits to a social, environmental and economic audit of

¹⁶ See the EurepGAP Newsletters (June 2003; November 2003; May 2004).

sustainability. In so doing, it defines an extensive field in which the model of audit is data-intensive and premised on the need to make farming practices measurable.¹⁷

Extracts from the general protocols for vegetable and fruit production (EurepGAP, 2001. See also 2004b, 2004c, nd.) suggest the level of complexity of planning, testing and audit required of EurepGAP producers.¹⁸

3.b Seed Quality	#1 Seed quality should be known before use and a record of the variety name, variety purity, batch number and seed vendor should be kept in a crop diary. Where available, seed certification should be retained.
3.e Nursery Stock	#1 Purchased nursery stock must be accompanied by officially recognised plant health certification, such as Plant Passports which exist under the EU Plant Health Directive or similar for countries outside the European Union, where available. #2 Plants should be free of visible signs of pest and disease. #3 Quality guarantees or certified production guarantees must be kept in the crop diary. #4 Plant health quality control systems must be operational for private or in-house nursery propagation.

(Source: EurepGAP 2001).

These requirements of seed certification immediately presuppose a commercial market for seed with a high level of accessible certification and standards. Further, crop diaries must be kept. Of the four requirements, only #2 relating to visible signs of pest and disease would be readily achievable for many Third World producers.¹⁹

4.a. Site History:	#1 A recording system must be established for each field, orchard or greenhouse to provide a permanent record of the crops and agronomic activities undertaken at those locations. #2 A visual identification or reference system for each field, orchard or greenhouse must be established. #3 For all new agricultural sites, a risk assessment must be undertaken, taking into account the prior use of the land and all potential impacts of the production on adjacent crops and other areas. #4. The results of the risk assessment analysis must be recorded and used to justify that the site in question is suitable for agricultural production. #5 A corrective action plan must be developed setting out strategies to minimise all identified risks in new agricultural sites, such as spray drift or water table contamination.
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Source: EurepGAP 2001.

¹⁷ What Larner and Le Heron (2004) describe as: 'calculative practice'.

¹⁸ To see all the protocols, go to www.eurep.org

¹⁹ Leaving aside the question of where newly entered EU agricultural producers in former communist countries might fit into these requirements.

The above site history requirements necessitate a level of audit and recording that would be onerous even among First World producers. The protocols intrinsically operate around a very dense level of audit, traceability and proof of compliance.

5.a. Soil Type Mapping:	#1 Soil maps should be prepared for the farm, which can then be used to plan rotations, planting programmes and growing programmes.
6.a. Nutrient Requirement	#1 A cropping or soil care plan should be developed to ensure that nutrient loss is minimised. #2 The application of fertilisers should be based on nutrient requirements of the crop and on appropriate routine analysis of nutrient levels in the soil, the crop or the nutrient solution.
6.g: Organic Manure	#2 The use of raw untreated human sewage sludge is prohibited. Any use of treated human sewage sludge on land destined for agricultural production must be supported by data and/or recognised codes of practice which demonstrate that any carry-over of pathogenic organisms and other components which may have an adverse effect on human health, the quality of the soil, the groundwater or the wildlife are controlled to maintain risks at the lowest possible level.
7.c Quality of Irrigation Water	#1 Untreated sewage water must never be used for irrigation. #2 Based upon risk assessments, irrigation water sources should be analysed at least once a year for microbial, chemical and mineral pollutants by a suitable laboratory. The analysis results should be compared against accepted standards and adverse results acted upon.

Source: EurepGAP 2001.

The EurepGAP restriction on the use of manures is contentious. Practices that are routine elsewhere in the world – such as the use of human manures – are forbidden or heavily restricted on the grounds of food safety. Open field manuring requires complex nutrient budgeting plans, with laboratory testing at key stages of the process.

This audit depends upon and assumes a mode of agriculture that is structured, technically sophisticated and closely monitored. The information intensive requirements of EUREP make computer capacity an implicit necessity. Without computers the registration, update and storage of detailed farm plans, soil maps, spray diaries and other audit records is virtually impossible. EurepGAP protocols are built on the record-keeping legacy of Europe's Common Agricultural Policy: a legacy that passes smoothly into the wider realm of emergent audit culture. As such EurepGAP is founded on, and perpetuates, a particular Euro-centric model of farming. This cultural specificity is clearly reflected in farm labour standards.

8.f: Protective Clothing	#1 Workers must be equipped with suitable protective clothing in accordance with label instructions and appropriate to the posed health and safety risks.
9.a: Hygiene	#2 Workers must have access to clean toilet and washing facilities in the vicinity of their work.
12.b: Training	#1 Formal training must be given to all appropriate workers

	<p>operating dangerous or complex equipment.</p> <p>#2 Records of training for each employee should be kept in the interests of operator safety.</p> <p>#3 Workers trained in First Aid should be present in both field and pack-house.</p> <p>#4 Accident and emergency procedures must exist and instructions must be clearly understood by all workers.</p> <p>#5 Accident procedures should be visually displayed and in the appropriate language of the workforce.</p>
12.c. Facilities and Equipment:	<p>#1 First Aid boxes must be present at all permanent sites and in the vicinity of field work.</p> <p>#2 Hazards should be clearly identified by warning signs where appropriate.</p>

Source: EurepGAP 2001

In the many peasant-based agricultural settings of the world such requirements are likely to be prohibitively expensive if not impossible. The EurepGAP labour standards, moreover, ignore the social context of much global agriculture production. Third World labour is often intertwined with kinship obligation, rendering the concept of (bureaucratically defined) labour ‘rights’ as contentious as, for example, children’s rights in Europe. The ethnocentricity of EUREP is particularly apparent in its failure to address the issue of gender in agricultural labour. The impact of commercialised export supply chains on the gendered division of labour in some Third World societies requires the urgent attention of any audit of sustainable agriculture (see Barrientos et al. 2001; Cavalcanti 2004).

All this would be of reduced importance were EurepGAP merely one amongst many competing food audit systems. The recent spectacular growth in the alliance suggests the opposite. Since the launch of EUREP Good Agricultural Practice protocols in 1999, the alliance has grown rapidly to include nearly all leading European supermarket, cooperative and food retail chains (30 retail chains are members of the Fruit and Vegetable audit system in 2005). In addition, a significant number of commercial auditing organisations have registered with EurepGAP, as have a number of NGOs, agro-input companies and science organisations. At the production pole, over 12,000 growers had, by 2003, adopted EurepGAP protocols (EurepGAP Newsletter, November 2003). In short, EurepGAP has – in only four years – become the gold standard of European food audits.

Table 1: European Supermarket Membership of EUREP-GAP in 2003

ASDA/Walmart	Kesco	Safeway
Albert Heijm	KF	Spar Austria
COOP Italia	Laurus	Superunie
COOP Norge	Marks and Spencer	Superquinn
COOP Switzerland	McDonalds Europe	Somerfield
DelHaize	Metro	Tesco
Eroski	Migros	TSN
Fedis/D.R.C.	Pick ‘n’ Pay	Waitrose
ICA Hanlarna	Sainsbury	

Source: Campbell et al. Forthcoming – 2006.

The above analysis traces the impacts of EUREP audit on the suppliers of food.²⁰ It suggests a (niche) market induced shift in the strict definition of environmentally virtuous farming to facilitate the supply of Integrated systems produce. Examination of the protocols shows that the required social, environmental and commercial accounting is barely conceivable outside a technologically sophisticated mode of agriculture embedded in a modern social formation. The key conclusion is that the structural or unintended effect of EurepGAP, in securing the commercial supply of safe food, is the reproduction of a European farmscape.²¹ Such discussion of the technical components of the EurepGAP audit system bring us to the key analytical insight of this article. To fully understand the success of EurepGAP in forming powerful supply relations at a global level (and the utter impediment that EurepGAP poses to suppliers in some countries), we need to understand EurepGAP as an audit culture with global-scale historical resonance.

EurepGAP: The Narrow Gate to Market.

Having argued that EurepGAP is more than just another audit, and is driven by “a desire to reassure consumers”, the consequences of the operation of EurepGAP as audit culture need to be addressed. The following sections outline the way in which EurepGAP has become a narrow gate to the European food market. While the Euro-centric character of this audit system has important consequences for how EurepGAP operates for European consumers, it has very uneven consequences for those who supply food to Europe.

This unevenness is clearly evident in the case of the New Zealand kiwifruit industry. Organised under the brand name ‘Zespri’, the New Zealand kiwifruit industry was among the first non-European producers received into EurepGAP and was the first global supplier to be granted the right to establish a Technical Working Group outside Europe. Zespri brought with it an unspoken and, even, previously unthought of image of its agricultural and sociological context. By induction, it is suggested this image, being among the first freely adopted and trusted by the alliance, is paradigmatic of EurepGAP’s concept of safe, sustainable agriculture. Behind this success lies both the adeptness of Zespri in promoting itself as a model pupil of the EurepGAP way, but also the much deeper ecological structuring of this advantage through New Zealand’s ‘fortunate’ position as the colonial recipient of a European farmscape.

Colonial Context: The Eco-Agricultural Imprinting of New Zealand

Colonial New Zealand found its identity in the latter half of the 19th Century. As Britain’s ‘farm in the South Pacific’ its landscape is stamped with ‘ecological imperialism’ (Crosby 1993). The ramifications of ecological imperialism, and its relationship to the formation of New Zealand as an agricultural export society, have been discussed in depth elsewhere (particularly Brooking and Pawson 2003). In brief, the indigenous grasslands of the Canterbury Plains and South Island tussock country were brought into sheep production. Native grasses were progressively replaced with perennial English pastures of clover and ryegrass (complete with British honeybees

²⁰ Commencing with Fruit and Vegetable protocols in 1999, and now incorporating cut flowers, coffee and, soon, livestock production.

²¹ The term ‘farmscape’ incorporates the combined social and environmental assemblage that constitutes a farmed landscape in its broadest sense.

for pollination). Subsequently, large bushland areas of the North Island were felled to create patchworks of family farms producing the traditional European staples of butter, sheepmeat, wheat and wool. Around the margins of pastoral production, other features of agrarian Europe were introduced: apples, pears, gooseberries, stonefruit, beef cattle and arable mainstays such as barley and oats. The mode of farming was singularly British, with limited field rotations of stock and crops organised around family-sized farms. The climate of New Zealand resembled – in parts – the expectations of the settlers from Britain and once the pasture had been recolonised by familiar grasses and other plants (including silverweed and ragwort) all that remained was to furnish the surrounding countryside with British trees, hedges (in particular, blackberry and gorse), game (rabbits, trout, salmon, deer, gamebirds) and other associated species (ferrets, stoats).

At the distance of narrative the Antipodean land appears as an ideal landscape – much of the historical analysis of colonial New Zealand dwells on these themes of the Antipodean Arcadia (Fairburn 1989). Central to the Arcadian vision was the freely owned family farm, enclosed fields of crops, grazing flocks, small rural villages and a patchwork landscape of fields and streams, bordered in the distance by impressive vistas of untamed nature (see also Brooking 1996; Brooking and Pawson 2003). The notion of New Zealand as Britain's farm in the South Pacific was clearly cultural as well as ecological.

Through the 20th Century, the special economic and cultural ties between the New Zealand farmscape and Europe were reinscribed at various historical moments. The Ottawa Agreement of 1932 formally enshrined New Zealand's place in the global division of labour in agriculture. De-colonising sentiment post-WWII led to a period of open debate over the future of New Zealand farming. This was firmly rebuffed by government, industry and agricultural science in favour of an ongoing commitment to feeding Britain (and by extension Europe) in the challenging post-war years (Stuart and Campbell 2005).

Privileged access to the British market survived the initial British engagement with the EEC. It was only in 1973 with the full entry of British agriculture into the EEC that the special economic relationship between colony and 'mother country' was broken. New Zealand's position as Britain's 'farm in the South Pacific' was, apparently, at an end.

New Zealand remained, however, an exotic curiosity. The legacy of imported European flora and fauna, of transformed agro-ecological systems and of adopted British social and political structures endured. While change did not cease in the New Zealand countryside, the possibilities of innovation were strongly circumscribed by a predominately temperate climate and a history of British colonialism.²² The absence of European-style heavy industry (at least, in the culturally imagined New Zealand) left a potent cultural legacy – the European-style farmscape of pre-industrial nostalgia.²³ It is in this context that the kiwifruit was introduced into New Zealand, where it flourished, faltered and, finally, found its way to EurepGAP.

²² The neighbouring colony of Australia also had its influences – particularly in the introduction of the possum and the widespread presence of Australian eucalypts among the British exotic trees.

²³ There has been a considerable discussion of the cultural project of rurality in Europe. Interestingly, leading commentators like Paul Cloke recognise many scales in the circulation of ideas of idyllic rurality and broader rural culture, while falling short of seeing the international dimension to cultural economies of rurality operating between Europe and its colonies (for a review of the European debate see Cloke and Milbourne 1992).

From Kiwifruit to Zespri: the economics of sustainability

The Chinese Gooseberry was brought to New Zealand at the turn of the 20th Century. For decades it grew, with blackberry and others, in the kitchen gardens of family homes. Commercial export production of the renamed 'kiwifruit' commenced in the late 1950s (NZ Kiwifruit Journal, 2004). European-style vine management, pest control and orchard production were successfully introduced and developed with distinctive local innovations. These innovations included the pergola and T-bar vine support structures, vine pruning systems, and the breeding of the key commercial kiwifruit varieties (Campbell et al. 1997).

In the 1970s the New Zealand system of mass kiwifruit production was (re)exported back to Europe, where it was readily adopted by vine-based producers. The model then found its way to the vineyards of California and Chile. In 1989, Italy overtook New Zealand as the largest kiwifruit producer in the world. In the face of intensive price competition, the New Zealand (export) industry became financially insolvent in 1991 (Campbell et al. 1997). After forty years of relying on mass production for a global market, the New Zealand kiwifruit industry had to develop a new approach or cease to exist.

Industry leaders concluded that if the total market was approaching its limits, opportunity yet remained in the development of a quality market. The development of a 'higher value' kiwifruit market started with standards for size and freshness, progressed to safety (eg. residue free) and culminated in 'moral value'. Along with the supermarkets of Europe, the New Zealand kiwifruit industry saw commercial opportunity in niche marketing based around, and charging for, both material and ideal quality (Campbell et al. 1997). The first step in the construction of idea-logical value was to rebrand the product. New Zealand growers renamed the fruit and their organisation *Zespri*. In so doing they abandoned the national icon of 'kiwi' in favour of a neologism with mythic connotations.²⁴ A parallel and related development was the breeding of new varieties of kiwifruit. The production of a golden (coloured) Zespri soon followed as, in a reversal of traditional causality, ideal quality determined material form. The highly popular 'gold' fruit has a sweeter taste, with overtones of pineapples and other tropical fruit: sensorial qualities that have been key in opening up important new markets in Asia.

A key part of this 'quality shift' was to improve the environmental image of kiwifruit. Between 1994 and 1998, kiwifruit production was transformed from bulk commodity production, under intensive vine management, to 'environmentally friendly' Zespri horticulture using organic and Integrated management systems. This shift coincided with moves towards 'green protectionism' (state regulation) and 'green food' (retailer requirement) in the two most important kiwifruit markets in the world – Europe and Japan (Campbell and Coombes 1999). Thus, Zespri innovation was in step with the emergence of an elite niche in the mass market, and readily compliant with new international trade requirements. The industry implemented significant levels of audit around organic production, Integrated systems production, taste, appearance, size and storageability. The new audits were phased in through a range of both voluntary and compulsory mechanisms (Campbell et al. 1997). In a near-revolution of kiwifruit production, a once highly intensive production sector

²⁴ This new brand was directly targeted at Europe. The logic of the neologism Zespri was to resonate with the distinctive New Zealand 'Z', the English word 'zesty' and the French word 'esprit'.

(circa 1992-4) became, by 1998, fully organic or Integrated (McKenna and Campbell 2003).

Zespri and EurepGAP: The Importance of Audit Culture

When EurepGAP launched in 1999, Zespri found its key European retailers to be part of the new alliance. Zespri saw this as its opportunity to consolidate all the production audits and environmental quality standards demanded by European retailers (Campbell et al. 2005). By 2003, Zespri had converted its entire audit and production to comply with EurepGAP. In addition it produced its own specialised version of the EurepGAP standards as the compulsory minimum standard for any growers wishing to supply the European market. On this basis Zespri positioned itself to chair EurepGAP's first extra-European Technical Working Group, forming an alliance across horticultural exporters in New Zealand (EurepGAP 2004d).

Zespri's success as one of the first non-European members of EurepGAP also reflects, amongst other things, the importance of size in the commercial production of safe and sustainable food. Zespri is a monopoly, the only conduit for organic and Integrated kiwifruit out of New Zealand and onto the international market. From its position of privilege Zespri is able to channel a large volume of fully compliant product to European retail chains. In short, it is part of the structural preference of EurepGAP for large producers, consolidated audits, mass buyers and large supermarket chains. If, on the one hand, the alliance has embraced the close inspection of the process of production and the end product, it has also turned away from traditional small scale organic farming to the economies of scale of Integrated systems production, and mass wholesale and retail.

It is also significant that, prior to EurepGAP, the kiwifruit industry in New Zealand had already instituted rigorous systems of environmental audit around organic and Integrated systems. To meet EurepGAP's requirements, Zespri converted its existing environmental audit into the language of the new protocols. It did not, however, have to make any substantial change to its systems of production. This harmony between the New Zealand kiwifruit industry and EurepGAP was no coincidence. The same commercial factors that triggered the formation of EUREP were influential in the prior development of environmental systems in kiwifruit production (see Campbell and Coombes 1999; Campbell et al. 1997).

While EurepGAP protocols required little additional environmental initiative from New Zealand kiwifruit growers, the density of the new audit system proved challenging. Complex worker welfare requirements and the detailed monitoring of all procedures are central to EurepGAP audits. Management plans for many parts of farm operation, including the protection and conservation of any resident wildlife, are also desirable. All of these programmes and audits are designed to be implemented by a farm operator/manager operating in a highly literate social environment, using skilled and literate labour, and able to interpret the intent behind some of the more obscure aspects of the regulations. The kiwifruit industry in New Zealand is part of a modern eco-agricultural environment that in technique and social context resembles the long term structure of European agriculture. This legacy of colonial history is highly advantageous. It has enabled New Zealand growers to understand, comply and even excel at the EurepGAP audit (NZ Kiwifruit Journal, 2004).²⁵ In the ten years after launching the newly branded, environmentally auditable kiwifruit, Zespri doubled the

²⁵ For a discussion of some of the grower-level responses to EurepGAP see Campbell et al. (2005; forthcoming).

export value of the New Zealand kiwifruit crop and ushered in a new era of prosperity for the industry.

EurepGAP proved to be a portal for the New Zealand kiwifruit industry (and in its wake, the wider horticultural export sector) into the kind of privileged supply relationship previously enjoyed by colonial New Zealand. The old colonial food relationship has found new life. The socio-ecological arc of modernity found in the 19th Century colony has facilitated Zespri's ready compliance with the organizational requirements of the European model of agriculture embedded in EurepGAP. Less obvious (but as important) beyond the realm of audit, the alliance's desire to reassure consumers finds its ideal in the virtual familiarity of the farmscape of New Zealand. In the cultural imaginary of agriculture, the Zespri kiwifruit comes from a clean and green simulacrum of rural England as it was (imagined) before the ravages of industrialisation. The green or golden fruit is both safe to eat and part of a virtuous landscape of sustainable production. Thus, if colonial New Zealand agriculture was originally structured to mass produce food for the mother country, it now serves as a virtual inscription of the moral qualities of a particular European view of sustainable agriculture. Britain's farm has become Europe's farm in the South Pacific.

Conclusion

The longer term synergies that enabled such a strong relationship between Zespri and EurepGAP are embedded in a long history of cultural and politico-ecological interaction between Europe and its Antipodean colonies. As a governance structure, however, EurepGAP signals a bold new experimental form indicating the vigour of audit culture under neoliberal forms of governance. In a fragmenting market, large retailers perceived an opportunity in 'green and healthy' food. Consolidating the organizational heights and the moral middle ground, EurepGAP assembled a broad alliance to develop an audit of the production and supply of environmentally virtuous food. The EurepGAP audit, based on 'Integrated systems', readily included extant safe food production and, in the expanded market of the alliance, opened greater opportunity for growers in general and large production units in particular.

Beyond its foreseeable commercial impacts, EurepGAP had important unintended consequences. From the beginning the ambition of the alliance was to move beyond narrowly defined 'safe', or residue-free, food. Its system was premised on meeting the moral/cultural concerns of shoppers. Adding Triple Bottom Line accounting and HACCP food safety procedures to 'Integrated systems' production, the alliance defined a suite of practices and measures delineating sustainable agriculture. Analysis shows the logic and possibility of such a regime of sustainability are founded in the social context and practices of European farming. Large farms in private ownership, a high level of technological sophistication, a history of information, and literate wage labour are among the contextual assumptions. A Euro-centric ideal, in short, defines the narrow gate leading into EurepGAP and its European customers.

Analysis that delves into the idealised landscape of colonial New Zealand suggests an imagined landscape of European provenance: Britain's 'farm in the South Pacific'. The biophysical lineaments of this landscape endure to this day, providing the physical and social context for kiwifruit production. The Zespri example - as a high profile early foreign entrant in EurepGAP - casts a clearer light on the uneven development consequent upon EurepGAP. The highly successful relationship between Zespri and EurepGAP is premised on a set of cultural and ecological

resonances that are highly specific to a particular style of temperate agriculture. But, by answering the question as to why Zespri became such a successful early entrant into EurepGAP, an even more challenging question arises. For most of the Third World, it will be extremely difficult to realise such easy resonance, even if it were only a question of meeting the technical standards of work process and product. The very factors that lead to the success of Zespri suggest the opposite result for less culturally resonant supply zones.

These resonances are elements of the friction of history: part cultural legacy, part structural inequity, and part the ecological legacy of colonial relations. For most Third World producers, a completely different and more challenging political dynamic is created by the narrow gate of EurepGAP. Europe will need its tropical supply zones to negotiate entry into the alliance, but the easy achievements of temperate New Zealand can in no way suggest similar ease of entry for Third World producers. Inside the gate, residue-free food is grown in an evermore sustainable process that culturally resonates with Europe and is technically valorised through audit. Isolated on the outside, inhabiting the wrong kind of cultural and ecological farmscape, a far more complex and uncertain future awaits other supply zones. The result is the further uneven development of the global landscape of production - into spaces of environmental virtue and ecological vice.

EurepGAP may thus be seen as part of a re-invention, or perhaps better a re-inscription, of part of the old European colonial food order. A re-inscribing that, in so far as it cites the text of the past, not only widens traditional distances but fixes them in ever deeper cleavages. The private sector is central to the new order. EurepGAP represents a new mode of authority outside the conventional democratic nation state. The decisive influence constituted in and advanced by the alliance is large retail capital. The other major economic beneficiaries are, as the Zespri example suggests, monopoly suppliers and large producers – all of whom stand to gain from a monopolising tendency within audit systems. Freed within neo-liberal polities from the operation of government influences in the food chain, the ethos embedded in this audit alliance's protocols are founded in the European middle class consumer's ideal of safe food and sustainable agriculture. EurepGAP, in sum, is an extra-democratic authority that marries the economic interests of large capital with the ideological persuasions of the middle class consumer. Such a socio-economic impulse, this article suggests, is a central dynamic in reinscribing parts of the old colonial food order.

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BOOK REVIEW:

FARMING FOR US ALL: PRACTICAL AGRICULTURE AND THE CULTIVATION OF SUSTAINABILITY BY MICHAEL MEYERFIELD BELL. PUBLISHED IN 2004 BY PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS, STATE COLLEGE, PA. ISBN: 0-271-02386-4 (HARDBACK), 0271023872 (PAPERBACK), 296 PAGES

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The concept of sustainability is one that is both rich in promise (Brundtland 1987; UNCED 1992) and fraught with contention (for a review see Newton and Freyfogel 2005). As a goal, management of a resource that facilitates its continued capacity to provide benefits for future generations is certainly desirable and subject to little debate. What sustainability entails exactly is, however, a contentious topic. A particularly telling critique of the concept involves the difficulties in sufficiently accounting for the various aspects of sustainability ranging from the ecological to the economic and to the social relations associated with the use of a given resource. Several questions arise that illustrate the complexity of attempts to assess or demonstrate sustainability. Is a given management practice sustainable if, despite ensuring future access to a resource, it does not allow for viable economic and social reproduction? What social conditions are necessary in order to promote and enable more sustainable management of a resource?

It is in reference to the latter question that *Farming for Us All* offers a welcome addition to the spectrum of literature on sustainable agriculture. In the book, Michael Bell provides an analysis of sustainable agriculture that both informs and challenges the academic reader. By linking an analysis of farmers' access to agricultural knowledge to their adoption of management practices of varying sustainability, the book provides a wide-ranging examination of the factors surrounding agricultural production and adeptly relates these to the discussion of social sustainability. The resulting presentation moves our understanding of the social aspects of sustainable practice from an exclusive focus on nature-society relationships to include greater awareness of relevant societal relations as well. For Bell, social sustainability involves the farmers' ability to engage as actors in the construction and development of knowledge around agriculture.

The book excels in its presentation of factors which make high input, high subsidy agriculture socially unsustainable. The issue of environmental sustainability—an analysis that is arguably beyond the scope of the book—is, however, treated in a less comprehensive manner. The basis for Bell's analysis is a series of interviews conducted with farmers in the State of Iowa (USA). A team of researchers associated with Bell interviewed both a number of farmers who were entrenched within the dominant production paradigm driven by high inputs and government subsidies as well as a group (the Practical Farmer of Iowa, PFI) that was exploring alternative practices. The latter group, Bell argues, have found a means to approach a socially sustainable agriculture defined by dialogic knowledge that incorporates multiple

sources information. He further implies that, as an alternative to what is widely held to be an unsustainable agricultural system, this group's practices are environmentally sustainable.

Bell establishes the structure of his discussion through a comparison of the approach to farming adopted by the majority of farmers in Iowa (in that sense, conventional farm practice) and that of PFI farmers. The introduction provides a brief presentation of the 'solutions' promoted within PFI as well as context to explain the objectives and the methodology of the research. The goal of the book is the development of a new system of knowledge from which to approach sustainable agriculture—one that is based on the concept of conversation and dialogic exchange that Bell draws from the work of Bakhtin. Finally, the introduction prepares the reader for the somewhat unconventional structure of the book, which confines the discussion of theory and methodology to 'intermezzos' inserted in breaks in the presentation of data. Bell suggests that this allows the non-academic reader to focus on the narrative behind his argument by simply ignoring the intermezzo sections. Those readers intent on following the theoretical and methodological logic that Bell employs are invited to do so in the intermezzos.

The first section includes three chapters which define the parameters of unsustainable farming in Iowa. The chapters in the section are distinguished by their relative scope, ranging from a broader scale of national agricultural policy and its localised impacts, to that of rural communities, and, finally that of farm households. The first two chapters provide relatively familiar perspectives on the constraints within US agricultural policy that promote unsustainable practice and the impacts of the changing sociology and geography of farming on the sustainability of rural communities. The third chapter focuses more exclusively on the tensions and stresses within farm households that result from existing conditions of farming.

The second section of the book includes two chapters, both of which explore the identities and systems of knowledge employed by conventional and PFI farmers in Iowa. This section traces the emergence of an agricultural knowledge system that is more dialogic in nature and transcends more familiar presentations of sustainable agriculture. The identity of the conventional farmer is deeply embedded in external definitions of good agricultural practice received from 'experts' who prescribe findings and recommendations without facilitating a reciprocal exchange with the farmers. As a result, the conventional farmers pursue strategies—including the pursuit of larger farms, larger machinery, and more effective chemical inputs—that provide them with a sense of control and self awareness. Farmers following PFI strategies are shown to have similar objectives of control and identity, but are less likely to be defined by reliance on established structures of knowledge creation. The identity of the successful PFI farmer is defined by an active engagement with knowledge—both in locating its sources and in creating it. Of particular interest is the capacity of PFI farmers to locate valuable knowledge from 'conventional' as well as alternative sources. What determines the value of such knowledge is not its source, but the ability of the recipient to actively engage with its implications and apply it to a given situation.

The final three chapters of *Farming for Us All* describe the pathways by which participants engage the practices and approaches of PFI: the transition as farmers realised the need for change and saw the promise of the PFI approach; the

development of new, more sustainable, approaches to farming; and the development of the new farming identities that emerge within the PFI approach. The principal factor in this process is the cultivation of a farmer's ability to access relevant information and to experiment and develop practices and technologies appropriate to the capabilities and objectives of the farm household. Not only are different practices employed, but the rationale for adopting these practices is not defined by conventional aspects of farming identity.

The intermezzos that interrupt the Bell's presentation of the conditions of agricultural production (both sustainable and unsustainable) in Iowa, while unconventional, contribute to the goal of encouraging dialogue with the text. By introducing commentary on the methods and theory underlying the research only after the reader has been drawn in by the narrative structure of the book, Bell encourages the reader to contemplate and assess the value and accuracy of the book's statements. The relatively brief academic asides provide intriguing nuggets leaving the reader clamouring for more. Rather than signifying an lack of completeness, the intermezzos as written further contribute to a strategy of eliciting active response to the knowledge that is presented.

In his conclusion, Bell challenges his readers to engage in several responses, which he expects will contribute to a more sustainable agriculture. The simplest challenge to the academic reader interested in agricultural sustainability is that of becoming a more conscientious consumer of agricultural products. In Bell's terms, this is an integral step towards developing a more dialogic agriculture, facilitating interaction with the producers and processors of what we consume. Through this process, preferences regarding the product can be expressed, and the conditions which limit or facilitate conformance with such demands can be understood. The greater challenges arise in his admonition to bring a similar dialogic approach to research and the representation of that research. This involves, on the one hand, assuming a more humble attitude toward our knowledge and toward the subjects of our research. On the other hand, it also involves a more pragmatic approach to the creation of knowledge and theory which discourages monolithic and entrenched theoretical and methodological approaches. Part of this process includes an acknowledgement of the potential value to sustainable management of knowledge systems embedded in conventional agriculture. *Farming for Us All* is itself an attempt at a more inclusive form of knowledge production, speaking first to a more popular audience and asking the academic reader to go along for the ride. As much as dialogue is the goal, however, the constraints to this objective inherent in a published work are also evident, readers being unable to immediately engage the author and, thus, the research.

Overall, *Farming for Us All* provides an accessible and engaging vehicle with which to approach the concept of social sustainability in the agricultural sector. Whereas the specific case study is somewhat dependent on the structural context of Iowa agriculture, the conclusions which Bell derives should resonate in a variety of situations. In particular, his plea for more open exchange between research on agriculture and the objects of that research identifies a tool for the promotion of sustainability. As such, the book should assume an essential place in the library of anyone interested in the analysis or promotion of sustainable agricultural management. It would also be an excellent addition to the reading list for upper level undergraduate and (likely with more emphasis on the intermezzo sections) post-graduate courses on rural sustainability. As a classroom text, it would complement a

group of readings more specifically addressing environmental and economic aspects of sustainability as well as those employing social capital, sense of place and triple bottom line as alternative approaches to social sustainability.

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BOOK REVIEW:

FOOD WARS: THE GLOBAL BATTLE FOR MOUTHS, MINDS AND MARKETS BY TIM LANG AND MICHAEL HEASMAN. PUBLISHED IN 2004 BY EARTHSCAN, LONDON. ISBN 1-85383-702-4 (PAPERBACK), 365 PAGES

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This is a splendid book – one that manages successfully to blend rigorous social science with strong critical insights into the ways corporate capital is dominating the contemporary agri-food sector. It is written in a lively, engaging, style but provides pages of references and notes for those desiring further information. The book's premise is that there is a crisis in the global food industry and the authors' task is to explain why. They do so by linking five main elements – public health, the commercial/business sector, consumer culture, the environment and food governance. According to Lang and Heasman the characteristics of the modern food chain are: the domination of farming by off-farm, corporate, forces; the growing power held by the food retailers; the diverging interests of the public for safe and healthy foods versus the corporate sector for profits and control; and, the marginalisation of health issues in relation to food production and supply. Many other agri-food authors have written about these topics: the importance of Lang and Heasman's contribution is to theorise why these characteristics have become part of the modern food system and to investigate the policy options that would lead to the evolution of a more fair, healthy and environmentally sustainable system of food production, distribution and consumption.

They begin by identifying various 'paradigms' for food production and distribution. The productivist paradigm, which currently dominates the agri-food sector, is one based upon the use of synthetic chemicals, monocultures, intensive animal production, increasing mechanization, fossil fuels and a focus upon efficiency and productivity. It arose in the context of the application of science to agriculture that has occurred since the 18th Century and has 'triumphed' in the mid-20th Century when issues of food scarcity and starvation created the need for food supply to match world population growth. Yet, today, with one third of the world's peoples remaining largely untouched by the technological advances of productivism, and productivism's 'dark side' – environmental pollution, land and water degradation, animal welfare concerns, and so forth – now clearly visible to all, this paradigm is under serious threat. Its emphasis upon quantity over quality – including an assumption that maximization of food output should somehow equate to consumer health benefits – together with a growing understanding about the need for sustainable development, is leading to concerted challenges.

The authors identify two new paradigms that, in predictable Kuhnian style, have arisen to confront the dominant paradigm of productivism. The first of these is labeled the Life Sciences Integrated paradigm – one characterized by the application of the

new biotechnologies to food and fibre production. This is much more than the genetic engineering of plants and animals and includes many new biological processes in the food manufacturing industry and applications (such as biopesticides) in agriculture. Nutrigenomics (an understanding of the ways gene functioning and nutrition are related) is viewed as means of addressing disease and matching food with body type. The creation of 'new' (functional) foods with altered characteristics that may impart particular health benefits is also a promise of the Life Sciences approach. The second challenge comes from the Ecologically Integrated paradigm, one based upon notions of agro-ecology and sustainability. Here, farmers eschew synthetic agri-chemicals, monocultures and other components of industrial agriculture and seek 'natural' means of controlling pests, look to local knowledge to solve problems, appreciate the biological importance of regional ecosystems, and attempt to reduce 'food miles' by growing for local markets. The emphasis is upon nutrient recycling, natural bio-control of pests and weeds, biodiversity, and the preservation of natural resources. The 'ideal type' is that of organics, but there are other low-input systems that also seek to reduce impacts on the environment and deliver fresh and healthy foods to consumers.

Food wars are being fought out between the three paradigms, with current national and global food policy a direct outcome of the 'battles' that occur on a regular basis. While productivism has been the dominant paradigm, the food system from which it springs has moved from crisis to crisis. How, then, is it possible for food policy to create and maintain nutritious diets in a world where 'obesity is a *leitmotif* for the modern food age, a symbol of surplus among hunger'? The answer lies, the authors contend, in all sectors of the food industry, and governments, accepting that there is an urgent need to integrate public policy – that is, to develop food policy across portfolios such as health, environment, agriculture, education, and transport and to have policies that move across various layers of governance (from local to regional to national to global). Population health must be better linked to citizens' rights, farmers must be paid a fair price for foods, and consumers must be guaranteed that the foods they consume arise from sustainable production systems. The lead has already been taken, they suggest, by food companies that have created, and have signed up to, EUREP-GAP. Governments must also assist by creating 'visionary' food and nutrition plans. Ultimately, the Ecological Integrated paradigm is the one that will deliver the best benefits to the peoples of the world.

Clearly, the authors are painting a grand and optimistic picture. In doing so they sometimes gloss over issues that might otherwise have been contentious. First, the idea that third party accreditation and auditing systems such as EUREP-GAP can create a basis for sustainable production and the delivery of increasingly nutritious foods has been questioned. In its present form EUREP-GAP looks very much like a means for supermarkets to limit their exposure to high levels of risk under neoliberalism through imposing new requirements on suppliers. There is a growing cost for producers to 'self regulate' – something that is likely to marginalize, rather than support, smaller farmers. Second, although the authors fully recognize the potential of the Life Sciences Integrated paradigm to 'chain' consumers to science (in much the same way as the productivist paradigm chained farmers to a technological treadmill) they are reluctant to identify the Life Sciences Integrated paradigm as simply an extension of productivism. Yet, a case could be mounted to suggest that biotechnology is the next silver bullet in the armory of productivism and is not a paradigm in its own right. Third, is the productivist paradigm currently under threat?

The answer would seem to be yes, and no. Yes, because consumers in the West are demanding clean, green and healthy foods and supermarkets are ‘reading’ such demands and responding to them by providing organic and other healthy food options. But no, in the sense that the juggernaut of agribusiness continues to dominate food production and supply throughout the world. The authors may be somewhat naïve in considering that new forms of agri-food governance will elevate the Ecologically Integrated paradigm over productivism in the near future.

These concerns aside, the ‘food wars thesis’ is a clever and novel way of understanding the pertinent agri-food issues of our time. The authors are to be congratulated for writing such a provocative and fascinating account of the agri-food sector. It should be essential reading for RC 40 members as well as academics and students involved in agriculture, ecology, food policy, health, and consumer and agribusiness studies. Let us hope, too, that it finds its way into the corridors of power in government and the corporate sector.