

## **Agrarianism in American Society**

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**ABSTRACT** Sociological studies indicate that adherence to the tenets of agrarianism is still widespread in American society. But efforts to identify the structural roots of agrarianism have been only partially successful in that only a small portion of the variation in support of agrarianism can be explained thereby. The multidimensionality of agrarian beliefs and the linkages with underlying values prevalent in American society are explored with data drawn from a national sample of adults. Results indicate that tenets of the agrarian creed are widely endorsed by the American public as a whole. Moreover, beliefs are organized in the form of attitudinal (factor) dimensions corresponding to four of the five tenets of agrarianism identified by Flinn and Johnson (1974): family farm, agrarian fundamentalism, yeomanship (independence), and farm life style. The analysis of scale scores for the first three dimensions indicates that each expresses a different social ethic that is revealed in the unique configuration of American values to which it is significantly related.

### ***Introduction***

Substantial portions of the agrarian myth (Johnstone 1938; Rohrer and Douglas 1969) are strongly ensconced not merely among American farmers but also the public at large (Flinn and Johnson 1974; Buttel and Flinn 1975; Carlson and MacLeod 1978; Singer and de Sousa 1983; Molnar and Wu 1989). Both the persistence of agrarian beliefs among farmers as well as their appeal to all classes of farmers indicates stability, rather than disappearance, in adherence to these beliefs (Singer and de Sousa 1983; Coughenour 1987). Moreover, there is little evidence that the persistence of agrarianism is a response of refugists (from middle-class urban society) or of lower class false consciousness that inhibits support for real interests (Singer and de Sousa 1983). Failure to find support for such hypothesized explanations of contemporary agrarianism led Singer and de Sousa (1983: 304) to conclude that “. . . agrarianism’s persistence at least partially stems from sociocultural sources largely independent of changes in economic relations.” Taking up this theme, Molnar and Wu (1989) argue that in symbolizing important social values and national character traits the family farm is a national icon.

The nature of the linkage of agrarian beliefs and major American values has never been systematically examined, however. On one hand, the structure of agrarianism itself is in doubt because some researchers have found only one dimension of meaning with some

samples and particular sets of items (Flinn and Johnson 1974; Singer and de Sousa 1983), while other researchers have found two dimensions with different samples and items (Buttel and Flinn 1975; Molnar and Wu 1989). Moreover, the issue of the relationships of such dimensions to major American values has never been examined. Surely, the greater the number of dimensions of agrarian beliefs, the greater must be the complexity of relationships with underlying values.

Using national sample data, this paper seeks answers to three questions. First, what is the structure of agrarian beliefs? Second, how widespread is the support for these dimensions in the American public? Third, to what extent are agrarian beliefs related to fundamental American values, and, if they are, to what major American values is each dimension of agrarianism related?

### *Conceptual perspective*

Initially, Jeffersonian agrarianism contained three components (Rohrer and Douglas 1969)—agriculture is the basic industry; the farmer is self-sufficient and, therefore, independent; and, farm life is natural and good. Together these tenets undergirded the image of the independent yeoman, the new political-economic person who would make democracy secure indefinitely. This soft agrarian image (Hofstadter 1956) fueled the movements of the Grangers, the populists, and more recently some parts of the environmental movement (Berry 1977).

The notion of the yeoman as the bastion of democracy, never supported by historical fact (Griswold 1947), died with the political defeat of the populists. But, the notion of the yeoman as manifesting integrity and independence continued to resonate with primordial American values. The family occasionally surfaced in the early rhetoric of agrarianism as a source of labor and as the principal consumer of subsistence production, but, most importantly, as the instrument for raising up new generations of honest, hard working, and independent-minded citizens. After World War II, however, the family farm became enshrined as the centerpost of farm policy by Congress who envisioned a future agricultural economy composed of commercial family farms (Brewster 1979). This mid-twentieth century farm family, in the view of policy makers, exemplified the hard side of the agrarian tradition—family operated businesses committed to technological progress and pressure politics (Hofstadter 1956; McConnell 1977). In the public mind both images—the yeoman and the agribusinessperson—are represented symbolically.

In seeking to measure agrarianism, Flinn and Johnson (1974) argued that the literature on agrarian life gave expression to five themes or tenets: agrarian fundamentalism, agricultural naturalism, economic independence, hard work, and the family farm as the bulwark of

democracy. Whether agrarianism is adequately represented by these themes is open to debate, of course. We do not wish to engage in such a discussion, however, because our objective is to replicate much of Flinn and Johnson's methodology, including most of their attitudinal items. We examine the structure of agrarianism among adult Americans and its relationship to American values.

The delineation of various conceptual tenets of agrarianism does not presume that the system of public beliefs is structured accordingly. Neither Flinn and Johnson (1974) in the original study of Wisconsin farmers nor Molnar and Wu (1989) factor analyzed the attitudinal structure of the full set of items. Each research group concludes from the inter-item correlations that particular combinations of items comprise satisfactory attitudinal scales. With a related set of items and a rural-urban Wisconsin sample, Buttel and Flinn (1975) found two dimensions, but they did not attempt to discern their substantive meanings. Consequently, the issue of the structure of agrarian beliefs or attitudes, especially among American society generally, is unresolved.

The likelihood that there are multiple dimensions of agrarianism, such as have been used by Molnar and Wu (1989), presents an explanatory problem. They demonstrate, as one would expect from social movement theory and the nature of public beliefs (Converse 1964), that a variable, which they label agrarianism, and a family farm variable are both anchored in farm and rural groups of whites with low education and income. The structural relationship cannot in itself account for the existence of the two dimensions; the multivariate character of agrarian beliefs cannot be explained by a singular structural anchor.

We examine two related theoretical relationships. First, each dimension of agrarian beliefs is significantly related to major American values. Second, each dimension of agrarianism is anchored in a distinctive configuration of values. Following Rokeach (1968) and others, we consider beliefs to be propositional statements linking objects and/or behavior. Such statements (e.g., the family farm is efficient, the family farm is the best place to live, and the family farm should be preserved) illustrate existential, evaluative, and normative belief statements, respectively.

Values, on the other hand, are general ideals that are not tied to any specific object or situation but rather comprise the basis of choice among "modes, means, and ends of action" (Kluckhohn 1952:395). On one hand, as generalized criteria of choice, values are implicit in evaluative and normative statements (Rokeach 1968). On the other hand, symbolic images such as the family farm are cultural vehicles that give expression to values in everyday life (Charon 1985). This linkage of value and symbol, we argue, is what gives agrarian beliefs such enduring vitality.

Although originally agrarianism arguably expressed such dominant values as liberty, equality, and progress, in recent years it has become associated with freedom, independence, equality, and anti-urbanism. The particular linkages, however, are not given but must be explored empirically. The development of large-scale corporate agriculture, for example, has been protested precisely because of the perceived threat to the system of independent family farms (Heffernan 1972; Merrill 1976; Rodefeld et al. 1978; de Janvry 1980; U.S. Department of Agriculture 1981). The yeoman image—agrarianism's soft side—has been incorporated in the radical agricultural movement, which seeks a renaissance of the self-sufficient, craftsman naturalist who manages sustainable ecosystems (Berry 1977; Merrill 1976). It is found too in the environmental movement ideology (Buttel 1980; Burch 1971) and more recently in the responses and policy recommendations emanating from the 1980s farm crisis (e.g., Heffernan and Heffernan 1986). The hard side (agribusiness) of agrarianism was expressed in the aims of the American Agricultural Movement. We expect, in fact, that agrarianism is multidimensional and related in a complex way to American values. Unfortunately, due to the uncertainty with respect to the number and nature of the dimensions of agrarianism as well as the structure of American values, more powerful hypotheses, which predict precise relationships, cannot be formulated. Hence, our approach is exploratory.

### *Methods*

Data were obtained by a questionnaire mailed to a national sample of the adult population in the contiguous states (Molnar 1986). Forty-four percent of the questionnaires were returned. The effective sample, after weighting for oversampling seven states, is 3,135 respondents.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the sample was weighted to correct for apparent biases after comparisons with 1980 decennial census distributions on age, sex, education, and race. In the analysis, measures of agrarian beliefs are treated as dependent variables in multiple regressions, with a number of value and demographic items as independent variables.

### *Agrarianism*

Agrarian beliefs were modeled by responses to 12 Likert-type items with five possible responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Eight of the items were drawn from the 1974 Flinn and Johnson study, and the remaining items, which reflect independence

<sup>1</sup> Alabama, Florida, Michigan, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Oklahoma were over-sampled to permit state analyses. Weighting procedures were used to bring the total sample to a proportional representation of the states.

and family farm orientations, were drawn from the *Farming in American Life Survey*.<sup>2</sup>

*Structure of agrarianism.* The structure of agrarianism is explored by factor analyzing the 12 items using the SPSS-X principal axes varimax solution. The initial analysis indicates that 58.5 percent of the total item variance can be explained by four factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0. The rotated varimax solution is given in Table 1.

As each agrarianism item primarily correlates (loads) with only one of the four factor dimensions, the meaning of each factor can be readily determined. Factor 1 displays high factor loadings (greater than 0.3) on the three items that are indicative of attitudes about the family farm and one item earlier thought to indicate independence. Its association with the other family farm items suggests that a free market economy is associated with family farming in the public mind.

High loadings of Factor 2 on two items suggest that it primarily taps agrarian fundamentalism (i.e., agriculture is the most basic industry). Factor 3 shows high loadings on two of the three original Flinn-Johnson items designed to measure economic independence. And Factor 4 loads highly on three items that initially were thought to reflect economic independence, agriculture as a natural way of life, and a work ethic characteristic of farmers. Americans, however, apparently responded to these three items as indicators of a farm life style (i.e., agrarian naturalism).

Except for the fourth dimension, the substantive structure of American agrarian attitudes closely resembles three of the tenets of agrarianism delineated by Flinn and Johnson (1974) even though the un-

<sup>2</sup> The items, grouped according to the tenets they were designed to represent, are agricultural fundamentalism (Agriculture is the most basic occupation in our society, and almost all other occupations depend on it. A depression in agriculture is likely to cause a depression in the entire country.); agricultural naturalism (Farming involves understanding and working with nature; therefore it is a much more satisfying occupation than others. We hear so much about crime and corruption today because our nation is becoming so urbanized); farmers are independent (Farming should be an occupation where farmers can make their economic decisions independently. A farmer should be proud if he can say that he owes money to no one. Farmers ought to appreciate farming as a good way of life and be less concerned about their cash income.); work ethic (Farmers should raise all of the crops and livestock possible as long as there are hungry people.). The following item, which reflects economic independence, was selected from the larger *Farming in American Life Survey*: Farmers should compete in a free market without government support. One item constructed by Flinn and Johnson (1974) to measure the work ethic and two items designed to measure the importance of the family farm for democracy were rejected on the basis of the lack of face validity. Support for the family farm, as essential to the agricultural economy and American society, is measured by responses to three items (The family farm must be preserved because it is a vital part of our heritage. Family farms should be supported even if it means higher food prices. Government should have a special policy to ensure that family farms survive.).

Table 1. Rotated factor matrix of agrarianism items

| Agrarian items  | Factor 1  | Factor 2 | Factor 3 | Factor 4 |
|---|-----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Government should have a special policy to ensure that family farms survive.  | 0.71437*  | 0.12151  | -0.09654 | 0.07102  |
| Family farms should be supported even if it means higher food prices.   | 0.44356*  | 0.20691  | 0.09832  | 0.25288  |
| The family farm must be preserved because it is a vital part of our heritage.   | 0.52892*  | 0.05738  | 0.17330  | -0.07676 |
| Agriculture is the most basic occupation in our society, and almost all other occupations depend on it.                 | 0.19214   | 0.68177* | 0.02143  | 0.14030  |
| A depression in agriculture is likely to cause a depression in the entire country.                                      | 0.19045   | 0.75528* | 0.12659  | 0.03886  |
| Farming should be an occupation where farmers can make their economic decisions independently.                          | -0.05481  | -0.05825 | 0.72896* | -0.00075 |
| A farmer should be proud if he can say that he owes money to no one.  | -0.01910  | 0.15530  | 0.50418* | -0.11008 |
| Farmers should compete in a free market without government support.   | -0.56970* | -0.14097 | 0.24429  | 0.08842  |
| Farming involves understanding and working with nature; therefore, it is a much more satisfying occupation than others. | 0.19015   | 0.27052  | 0.20927  | 0.39009* |
| We hear so much about crime and corruption today because our nation is becoming so urbanized.                           | 0.23709   | 0.11257  | 0.27983  | 0.21962  |
| Farmers ought to appreciate farming as a good life, and be less concerned about their cash income.                      | -0.06452  | -0.10976 | -0.19539 | 0.71800* |
| Farmers should raise all of the crops and livestock possible as long as there are hungry people.                        | -0.01979  | 0.21020  | -0.00812 | 0.33129* |

derlying meaning of some of the items differs from what Flinn and Johnson originally intended. While they did not test the multidimensional structure of agrarianism among Wisconsin farmers, the factor analysis done here elaborates the conclusion of other studies; among Americans generally, agrarian beliefs comprise different attitudinal orientations that correspond generally to the tenets of the agrarian creed identified by Flinn and Johnson. One should expect, therefore, that various attitudinal dimensions of agrarianism would be related to American values and to opinions about issues of public policy in complex ways.

If the item responses for each factor are sufficiently coherent, the data can be reduced for further analysis to scores on each of the factor dimensions. The items with high loadings on each factor were analyzed using Armor's (1974) factor scaling techniques. The items comprise a satisfactory index if they continue to exhibit unidimensionality and are reliable as an additive index.

Factor scaling shows that the first three of the four dimensions uncovered in the factor analysis—the family farm (FAMFARM), agrarian fundamentalism (AGBASIC), and farmer independence (YEOMANSHIP) dimensions—exhibit sufficiently robust reliabilities to constitute additive indexes. FAMFARM explains 49.3 percent of the variation among the four items, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.655; AGBASIC explains 78.0 percent of the variation of the two items, with an alpha of 0.718, and YEOMANSHIP explains 69.9 percent of the variation with an alpha of 0.569. However, GOODLIFE only explains 47.0 percent of the variance, and Cronbach's alpha is only 0.426. Thus, the latter dimension is dropped from further analysis.

*American values.* Values in American life were modeled by responses to items developed by Christenson and Yang (1976) to represent Williams' (1970) dominant value-orientations in American society. For questionnaire purposes, these values were expressed as getting ahead in life, honesty, being practical and efficient, national progress, being an independent person, personal freedom, material comfort, racial equality, sexual equality, patriotism, political democracy, work, my standing with God, helping others, and leisure and free time. Respondents checked the importance of each value for themselves on a 5-point scale ranging from none to most.<sup>3</sup> The percentage of

<sup>3</sup> The selection of a measurement instrument was constrained both by conceptual and methodological considerations. Sociologists differ in the conceptions of value, especially in the level of abstraction; whether the referent is an individual, group, or society; and the variety of values identified. Since we have several tenets of agrarianism, it is desirable from a methodological standpoint to have a conceptualization of values that conveys a broad range of bases of choice. Moreover, since data were to be obtained by questionnaire, values measurement must be possible using this method. Williams' (1970:443) definition of values as "*conceptions of desirable states of affairs that are utilized in selective conduct as criteria for preference or choice or as justifications for proposed*

the sample regarding each of the value items as more or most important ranged from 51.6 percent for material comfort to 96.7 percent for honesty. The average more/most important percentage was 73.7, indicating, as expected, that these are widely held social values.

For analytical purposes, the agrarianism dimensions are regressed on the entire set of values. There are several reasons for this strategy. The first is the inevitable loss of information and resultant loss of predictability. The entire block of items relates much more strongly to each dimension of agrarianism than any single value. This also applies, we argue, in determining the substantive meanings of the agrarianism-values relationships, which is the second and most important reason for not reducing the values to generalized dimensions. That is, we want to know that particular configuration of values to which each agrarianism dimension is related since that most clearly reflects its symbolic meaning.<sup>4</sup> Finally, a factor analysis of the values in fact does little to increase understanding of these values.<sup>5</sup>

*Other control variables.* Molnar and Wu (1989) have shown that agrarianism (a composite variable of nonfamily farm items) and family farm beliefs are significantly related to current residence, education, income, age, and gender of respondent. These structural and individual variables thus must be controlled to assess the relationship between the two dimensions of agrarianism and American values. Current residence (LIVENOW RURAL) and where one grew up (GREWUP RURAL) are measured by a modified ecological-hierarchy scale (Hines et al. 1975) in which respondents checked one of the following (coded 1 through 6, respectively): large metropolitan city (over 500,000 in

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or actual behavior" is at a satisfactory level of generality, and his list of dominant American values provides a varied set of criteria for determining linkages with agrarian beliefs. Fortunately, Christenson and Yang (1976) have developed and tested questionnaire items derived from the Williams' value orientations. None of the other conceptualizations with which we are familiar (e.g., Robinson and Shaver 1969) satisfies these requirements as well.

<sup>4</sup> Although most of the values items stand alone (in terms of face validity) as indicators of particular value orientations, this is not the case for the agrarianism items. None of the agrarianism items by itself captures the essence of what is meant by agrarianism. Consequently, the scales based on sets of agrarian items are the best measures of the various agrarian tenets.

<sup>5</sup> The values were factor analyzed, but the resulting information is not incorporated into the analysis. While data reduction of this sort often can enhance the interpretability of the results, it also may reduce much of the overall explanation. The explanatory power of the values dropped greatly when such data reduction occurred. For example, the R-square for the FAMFARM variable dropped from 0.281 to 0.171 when four values indexes are used in place of the 15 individual values; for YEOMANSHIP the drop was from 0.248 to 0.099. Thus data reduction in this instance is equivalent to explanation reduction. Furthermore, part of our intent is to see to what extent agrarianism is an expression of traditional American values. To knowingly reduce the number of value orientations that may be related is counterintuitive.



population), medium-sized city (50,000 to 499,999 in population), smaller city (10,000 to 49,999 in population), town or village (under 10,000 in population), in the country (outside of town but not on a farm), or on a farm or ranch.

Age was measured in years; females were coded as 1 and males as 0. Education was measured on a 6-point scale from less than high school to college graduate, and income from all sources was measured on a 9-point scale from under \$5,000 (1) to \$60,000 or more (9).

## **Results**

### *Support for agrarianism*

The initial step in the analysis is to assess the extent to which agrarian beliefs still are widely held by the American public. If they are not widely held, then the importance of a linkage with underlying values of American society is greatly reduced. However, the beliefs contained in the evaluative statements comprising the three agrarianism scales continue to have wide public support. On a 5-point scale with strongly agree scored as five, undecided three, and strongly disagree as one, the means of the eight items in the FAMFARM, AGBASIC, and YEOMANSHIP scales ranged from 3.0 for "farmers should compete in a free market without government support" to 4.2 for "a farmer should be proud if he can say that he owes money to no one." Put another way, support for these beliefs among the American public ranges from a simple plurality expressing agreement to a very large majority.

The distributions of the scale scores on the three agrarianism scales indicates that the majority of American adults endorse these generalized attitudinal orientations. The scores for FAMFARM ranged from 4 to 20, with a mean of 13.73. The mid-point of the range—indicating ambivalence—is 12. In that about 70 percent of the national population scored above the mid-point on support of family farming, public support of family farming is quite widespread. On the AGBASIC scale, the scores ranged from 3 to 10, with a mean of 7.75. The midpoint of the range is 6. About 82 percent of Americans scored above the mid-point, suggesting a high level of support for agrarian fundamentalism. The mid-point of the YEOMANSHIP scale is 6; scores of respondents ranged from 3 to 10, with a mean of 7.90. About 85 percent of the sample had scores greater than 6.0, indicating support by a substantial majority of adult Americans.

The indices were also examined by place of residence (rural to urban) and whether the respondent owned or operated a farm or ranch. Although there are differences among the sub-group means on the four scales, with those living in a rural area or on a farm/ranch having the strongest agrarian attitudes and urban or nonfarm residents having the weakest agrarian attitudes, majorities in even

the latter areas are supportive of these three agrarian orientations. Consequently, although there is evidence that these attitudinal orientations have roots in particular social groups in American society as reported by Molnar and Wu (1989), these belief systems or orientations are much more widespread than the social groups themselves and thus serve wider interests and/or values than the narrow interests of such groups.

#### *Agrarianism and American values*

The hypothesis that agrarian beliefs express underlying values is examined by regressing each of the agrarianism indexes on the values and control variables.<sup>6</sup> Probably the most salient feature of this analysis is the adjusted R-square reported for each model, as well as the part of the total explanation (R-square change) represented by the values as a group. These coefficients indicate the relative importance of values to understanding each dimension of agrarianism. Second, the specific relationship of each of the values to each agrarian index indicates the particular configuration of values that each agrarian index symbolizes (i.e., the underlying values embedded in each tenet of agrarianism).

*Family farm.* With the FAMFARM index as the dependent variable, American values and the control variables together explain 27.3 percent of the variance (Table 2). The R-square change when dropping the 15 values was 0.157. In other words, by taking the values into consideration the amount of variation in attitudes toward the family farm that can be explained is increased by 74 percent.<sup>7</sup>

The multiple partial R (mpR) and multiple partial R-square (mpR<sup>2</sup>) of the block of 15 items can be determined.<sup>8</sup> In the case of FAMFARM, the mpR is 0.423 and mpR<sup>2</sup> is 0.179. Thus, about 17.9 percent

<sup>6</sup> In any analysis with a large number of independent variables, collinearity may present problems. We examined this possibility using methods suggested by Belsley et al. (1980). They note that a near dependency exists when a coefficient has a high condition index (i.e., greater than 30) and has at least two variance-decomposition proportions greater than 0.5 associated with it. Nine of the 22 coefficients had condition indexes greater than 30 (ranging from 30.4 to 74.7). However, while four of these nine coefficients had variance proportions greater than 0.5 (ranging from 0.50650 to 0.91972), none of the four had more than one variance proportion greater than 0.5. We conclude that no near dependencies exist and that collinearity is not a problem in this analysis.

<sup>7</sup> The percentage increase in predictive power by adding the values is  $[(0.273 - 0.157) / 0.157] \times 100 = 74$  percent.

<sup>8</sup> It is possible to use the block of independent value variables for calculating a multiple partial correlation (Cohen and Cohen 1983:143), which is then interpretable in much the same manner as an ordinary partial r. However, the multiple partial R (and mpR<sup>2</sup>) indicates the effectiveness of the block of variables in explaining variation in the dependent variable. As with multiple R, the positive sign of the coefficient has no meaning.

Table 2. Regression of FAMFARM, AGBASIC, and YEOMANSHIP on Values and Controls

| Variable                        | FAMFARM |          | AGBASIC |          | YEOMANSHIP |          |
|---------------------------------|---------|----------|---------|----------|------------|----------|
|                                 | Beta    | Partial  | Beta    | Partial  | Beta       | Partial  |
| Values                          |         |          |         |          |            |          |
| Achievement                     | 0.110   | 0.092**  | -0.142  | -0.116** | 0.071      | 0.058**  |
| Personal freedom                | 0.002   | 0.002    | -0.204  | -0.165** | -0.077     | -0.063** |
| National progress               | 0.004   | 0.003    | 0.268   | 0.200**  | 0.172      | 0.130**  |
| Sexual equality                 | 0.055   | 0.042    | -0.095  | -0.071** | 0.037      | 0.028    |
| Individualism                   | -0.171  | -0.143** | 0.124   | 0.101**  | 0.351      | 0.279**  |
| Racial equality                 | -0.217  | -0.180** | -0.039  | -0.032   | -0.030     | -0.025   |
| Work                            | -0.105  | -0.098** | -0.062  | -0.057*  | -0.119     | -0.109** |
| Material comfort                | 0.017   | 0.015    | 0.091   | 0.078**  | -0.098     | -0.083** |
| Leisure                         | -0.203  | -0.197** | -0.084  | -0.081** | 0.128      | 0.123**  |
| Patriotism                      | -0.044  | -0.039   | -0.001  | -0.001   | -0.099     | -0.085** |
| Moral integrity                 | 0.072   | 0.068**  | 0.109   | 0.101**  | 0.106      | 0.098**  |
| Standing with God               | 0.189   | 0.178**  | 0.027   | 0.025    | -0.053     | -0.050*  |
| Democracy                       | 0.136   | 0.115**  | 0.156   | 0.128**  | -0.072     | -0.060** |
| Practical/efficient             | 0.102   | 0.087**  | 0.177   | 0.145**  | -0.005     | -0.004   |
| Helping others                  | 0.275   | 0.237**  | -0.035  | -0.031   | -0.121     | -0.104** |
| Controls                        |         |          |         |          |            |          |
| Age                             | 0.013   | 0.012    | -0.134  | -0.115** | -0.059     | -0.051*  |
| Sex                             | 0.079   | 0.083**  | 0.006   | 0.006    | -0.014     | -0.014   |
| Income                          | 0.058   | 0.052*   | -0.139  | -0.121** | -0.118     | -0.103** |
| Education                       | -0.267  | -0.232** | -0.096  | -0.083** | -0.053     | -0.047*  |
| Grew up rural                   | -0.091  | -0.079** | 0.068   | 0.057*   | -0.119     | -0.101** |
| Live now rural                  | 0.005   | 0.004    | 0.074   | 0.063**  | 0.263      | 0.221**  |
| R-Square                        | 0.281   |          | 0.244   |          | 0.248      |          |
| Adjusted R-Square               | 0.273   |          | 0.236   |          | 0.240      |          |
| R-Square change dropping values | 0.157   |          | 0.182   |          | 0.178      |          |

\* indicates  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* indicates  $p < 0.01$ .

of the variance in the FAMFARM scale scores, which was not accounted for by the controls, is explainable by the 15 values.

The underlying values with which belief in the importance of the family farm (FAMFARM) is associated are indicated by the significant betas and partial correlations in Table 2. Affirmation of the family farm is positively associated with the personal importance of helping other people, one's standing with God, and democracy. Of lesser significance are personal achievement, practicality, and moral integrity. Of equal importance in understanding the values embedded in belief in the family farm are the negative associations of the FAMFARM index with individualism, racial equality, work, and leisure, and also with the respondent's education. Belief in the family farm thus is associated with a traditional moral and sociopolitical ethic, one that is at variance with more recent individualistic and egalitarian social values. These findings are consistent with Molnar and Wu (1989), who found less support for the family farm among blacks than whites and among political liberals than conservatives.

*Agrarian fundamentalism.* In Table 2, 23.6 percent of the variance in AGBASIC is explained by the set of American values and the control variables. Dropping the 15 values reduces the explained variance to 18.2 percent. The values thus increase the explained variation of agrarian fundamentalism by 30 percent. Moreover, the mpR for AGBASIC is 0.440, and mpR<sup>2</sup> is 0.194. About 19.4 percent of the variation in the agricultural fundamentalism scores, which is not accounted for by the control variables, is explained by the 15 values.

Belief in agrarian fundamentalism derives meaning by the underlying values to which it is both positively and negatively related. It is positively associated with the personal importance of national progress, individualism, moral integrity, democracy, and being practical and efficient. It is negatively related to the importance of personal achievement and personal freedom. Agrarian fundamentalism thus is primarily associated with values that undergird American society as a whole, rather than those of the aggregate of individual Americans. This change in focus, as well as the particular configuration of values, differentiates agrarian fundamentalism from the family farm attitudinal orientation. Younger persons and those with lower incomes most often utilize the imagery of agrarian fundamentalism to give expression to these core values.

*Yeomanship (economic independence).* The 15 values and the control variables explain 24.0 percent of the variance in YEOMANSHIP. When the values items are dropped, R<sup>2</sup> is 0.178, indicating that the 15 values increase explanation of YEOMANSHIP by 35 percent. Moreover, the mpR for YEOMANSHIP is 0.437, and mpR<sup>2</sup> is 0.191. In other words, about 19.1 percent of the variation in YEOMANSHIP not accounted for by the control variables is explained by the 15 values.

The values that are most positively linked with YEOMANSHIP are individualism, national progress, leisure, and moral integrity. But YEOMANSHIP also acquires a significant set of meanings from the values with which it is negatively associated—work, helping others, patriotism, and material comfort. One may note too that YEOMANSHIP has a weak negative relationship to personal freedom, a value commonly attributed to the yeoman historically. The tenet of the independent yeoman farmer nowadays thus gives expression to values of independent self-reliance, an ethic of doing one's own thing at one's own pace. This ethic is especially prevalent among those who grew up in rural America, many of whom continue to live in rural areas.

### *Discussion*

Evidence of the prevalence of agrarian imagery in American society is diverse. Beyond the fact that substantial majorities adhere to systems of beliefs endorsing the family farm, agrarian fundamentalism, and yeomanism, the issues are whether such support exists among significant sub-groups and whether it is stronger or weaker than might be expected. This and other research (e.g., Molnar and Wu 1989) indicates that socioeconomic groups differ in the extensiveness of support for these tenets of agrarianism; despite such differences, majorities of the various residential and occupational groups subscribe to these tenets. At the national level, moreover, support among farmers for the agrarian fundamentalism and yeomanism items in 1986 was as strong as was that of Wisconsin farmers in the mid-1960s and of Washington and Idaho farmers in the mid-1970s (Coughenour 1987). The data for a direct comparison of farmer support of the family farm items or the public's support of the tenets of agrarianism generally do not exist for different time periods. Although that data would enable us to determine whether public adherence to these beliefs is stable or declining, the extent of support of agrarian beliefs is widely distributed and relatively strong.

The principal hypothesis that agrarian ideals gain credence and salience because they express hegemonic American values is strongly supported by the analysis. Clearly, there is a significant portion of variance in the four agrarianism indexes that is associated with the broad spectrum of American values. This linkage of agrarian beliefs with American values is statistically independent of its linkage to structural sources (i.e., socioeconomic groups); and for each dimension of agrarianism, values are more important than the structural sources.

Although this is gratifying, there is much variation in the agrarianism indexes that is not explained by either American values or by the control variables included in this study (or that can be accounted

for by the lack of reliability in the measures). One possibility is that values might relate more strongly to agrarianism if the agrarianism items themselves were not embedded in additive indexes. Perhaps aggregation diminishes the efficacy of values in explaining the phenomena. To examine this possibility, we ran each of the 11 high loading agrarianism items identified in the factor analysis as the dependent variable in a regression with the same set of 15 values and the control variables. The R-squares obtained in trying to predict each of the individual agrarianism items ranged from 0.179 to 0.315; multiple partial R-squares varied from 0.102 to 0.257. The highest  $mpR^2$  occurred with “agriculture is the most basic occupation” as the dependent variable. No other  $mpR^2$  exceeded 0.189. These results lead to the same conclusions as that reached from the analyses reported using the four agrarianism indexes—agrarian ideals are significantly, but not completely, an expression of general societal values as reflected in the items adapted from Williams’ dominant value orientations of American society. A different set of values or measurement methodology, of course, may yield somewhat different results.

### **Conclusions**

The presence and significance of agrarian beliefs in American society has interested historians, sociologists, and other scholars for many decades. Due primarily to the lack of a national data base, however, several issues have been matters of conjecture rather than proof. This study indicates that public opinion among Americans generally is structured in accordance with at least four of the five tenets identified by Flinn and Johnson (1974)—family farm, agrarian fundamentalism, yeomanship, and the naturalism of a farm life style. The complexity of agrarian beliefs suggests that relationships with issues in the public domain also may be quite complex.

Support for these agrarian themes and images is quite widespread. Although anchored in certain socioeconomic groups—farmers, farm-related groups, lower income and educational groups—that have been historically associated with agrarian movements, the system of beliefs is widespread throughout American society. Some may claim that this has never been questioned, yet the empirical evidence to support the extent to which this is so has not been available until now. The importance of the agrarian phenomenon is significant since it means that agrarian beliefs are not related merely to current farm policy initiatives as Molnar and Wu (1989) have shown, but also that policy makers, organizational leaders, and activists alike who choose to utilize agrarian images in support of particular causes tap a broad public base of potential supporters.

Both the pervasiveness and persistence of agrarian imagery constitutes evidence for linkages with hegemonic values of American

society. This theoretical expectation is clearly supported for the three dimensions of agrarianism—family farm, agrarian fundamentalism, and yeomanship—for which reliable indexes could be constructed from our questionnaire data.

Of greater interest, perhaps, are the particular themes in American society to which the various dimensions of agrarianism are associated. The normative belief in importance of the family farm taps values in which the social mores of God, family, and human welfare find expression. This value orientation contrasts with the liberal values expressed in radical individualism, racial equality, and leisure associated with an affluent life style. Agrarian fundamentalism gives expression to a different configuration of dominant values. It symbolizes beliefs in the existence of a democratic America that is continually making progress, while upholding the rights and importance of practical-minded individuals. It expresses values especially close to the hearts of people with less education and income, linking them to core societal values that counterbalance their rejection of the values of personal freedom and achievement. The yeomanship theme in agrarianism expresses a third configuration of values with self-reliant individualism as the cornerstone. Like the storied man with a hoe, the modern yeoman symbolizes moral integrity and commitment to societal (national) progress while maintaining detachment from the state. But today's yeoman symbolizes leisure rather than hard work (i.e., a kind of carefree, self-reliant individualist who contrasts with the image of the family farmer described previously).

The distinctive configurations of values found embedded in the various dimensions help explain agrarianism's multivariate structure. Agrarian beliefs lack univocal structure precisely because the values Americans share, when made manifest, are complex and contradictory. The construction of agrarian symbols in everyday life reflects this complex reality. The historic persistence of agrarianism as part of American culture and society derives from the dialectical linkage of value and belief. Agrarian symbols on the one hand are embedded in "webs of significance" to use Geertz's (1973:5) phrase while at the same time constituting symbolic forms that are continually commanded to serve ideological ends (see Laitin 1986; Buttel 1980; Buttel and Flinn 1975).

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