

Financialization and Consolidation of Farmland in Manitoba: Interrogating the “Good Farmer”

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of  
The University of Manitoba

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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Winnipeg

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## ABSTRACT

On the Canadian prairies, farmland is more than just an investment or a resource; access and control over farmland is deeply embedded in the history, culture, and identity of Canadian farmers. Land grabbing, the large-scale purchase of farmland by domestic or foreign investors, is a phenomenon on the rise worldwide and is best understood within the framework of financialization. Despite a lack of quantitative research on the topic, some of the effects of financialization in the agri-food sector are visible in Manitoba, including rising farmland prices and increasing farmland concentration, resulting in fewer and larger farms. My research investigates the dynamics of farmland ownership in four rural municipalities with high valued farmland in Manitoba. Although reliable information about farmland investment in Manitoba is limited, 39 semi-structured interviews with farmers, rural municipal officials and staff, and others involved in the agriculture industry, provide a baseline understanding of the current dimensions of farmland sales, farmer-landlord relationships, and the social and environmental implications of increasing farmland concentration. I draw on participants' perceptions of investors to better understand how these kinds of purchases might impact rural landscapes. Furthermore, I find that farmers themselves have adopted financial logics as they make land purchases that are less rooted in the productive value of the land and increasingly motivated by the speculative value of the land. Thus, my research reveals the ways that the 'good farmer' framework is at work in Manitoba and is pushing farmers to make "non-economically rational" (as cited in Burton et al., 2020, p.2) decisions that are ultimately contributing to the deterioration of rural communities and environments. The thesis concludes by discussing two pathways for the future of agriculture in Manitoba: the first is that these trends will deepen and access to land and control over food production will be further extracted from the hands of local people. The second is a more hopeful possibility that farmers, civil society, and government might co-construct a different future in agriculture by redefining what it means to be a 'good farmer' and prioritizing community, collaboration, and profitable/viable farm businesses.

## **LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I acknowledge this research was carried out on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabe, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, Dene, and Métis peoples. I also recognize the privilege of my safety while I conducted my fieldwork in Manitoba, as I travelled by myself without fear of direct racial discrimination or violence; which allowed me to easily enter onto the property of settler-farmers, and access their stories and perspectives.

This thesis discusses the access and ownership of settler-farmer farmland and I acknowledge this research does not address the displacement and dispossession of Indigenous peoples from the land. There is an ongoing colonial history between Indigenous peoples and settler-farmers that maintains exclusionary systems in all facets of Canadian society including agriculture and subsistence farming.

Further to my acknowledgements, I am actively pursuing reconciliation through educating myself and providing an opportunity to educate others in the hope they will gain a perspective that pushes for fairness and justice in Canada. For information about Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, the Land Back Movement, and the path to reconciliation in Canada, see Appendix M for resources.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank all of the farmers, rural municipal (RM) officials and staff and others who participated in this research for sharing their time and stories with me. Thank you for seeing the value in my research and, in many cases, for opening your homes to me. It was a pleasure getting to know each and every one of you.

Thank you to my co-advisors Dr. Annette Desmarais and Dr. Jonathan Peyton. Annette, thank you for being an absolutely aw-inspiring mentor. You have created a community of women researchers that has been such a joy to be a part of, both in work and play. Thank you for believing in my abilities and giving me opportunities to grow as an academic. Jonathan, thank you for always challenging me to think critically and being a source of support and encouragement throughout both my undergraduate and graduate degrees. I would not be at this point in my education without your mentorship.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my committee members Dr. André Magnan and Dr. Martin Entz. It was an honour to have you review and provide feedback on my work, your input throughout this whole process has been invaluable. Thank you to Dr. Mengistu Wendimu for sharing his time and resources to help narrow down possible RMs for this study.

I am honoured to acknowledge the financial support of the University of Manitoba through the Manitoba Graduate Scholarship, the Masters Award for Indigenous Students, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada, and the SSHRC-funded Insight Grant. I was privileged to receive this funding which allowed me to focus on my studies.

A big thank you to all of my family, friends, and colleagues for being there when I needed to let off steam, and for giving me space when I needed to buckle down and work. Your love and support got me through. A special thank you to my friend, Justine Josephson-Laidlaw; going through the last six years of our education together has made it one of the most rewarding times of my life and I am eternally grateful for your friendship and camaraderie.

Finally, I would like to thank my partner, Jason, for being my companion in life and on the farm. Thank you for humouring me when I said we should grow vegetables to sell. Thank you for all of the times you took on the commute to the farm so that I could work on my thesis from the passenger seat, for all of the times I came to you to talk through an idea or find the right words to describe something I had read or observed, and for encouraging me through every new challenge. Your steadfastness and love for learning never cease to inspire and amaze me.

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my ancestors; the Métis, the Icelanders, the Scots, and the Ukrainians, who farmed, foraged, and tended this land, and lands afar, long before the advent of industrial farming and after. May the wisdom and knowledge you cultivated be revived, shared, and cherished for many generations to come.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

|       |                                                 |
|-------|-------------------------------------------------|
| SSHRC | Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council |
| AAFC  | Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada                |
| RM    | Rural Municipality / Rural Municipal            |
| KAP   | Keystone Agricultural Producers                 |
| NFU   | National Farmers Union                          |
| CFA   | Canadian Federation of Agriculture              |
| TINA  | There is No Alternative                         |

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Given the multitude of roles that land plays in the lives of people and in ecosystems as a whole, it is important to distinguish land from other natural resources (Sipple & Visser, 2020). Despite its many disputed uses or roles, land<sup>1</sup> does indeed have a particular “presence and location”; it is unlike other resources in that it cannot be transported away (Li, 2014, p.589). Land is not inherently a resource, but it is made – or as Li (2014) puts it, “assembled” into a resource by various actors, all with their own set of motivations and understandings of what land is or what it should be. Thus, land is different things to different people; for example, “what land *is* to a farmer is not the same thing as for a tax collector” (Li, 2014, p. 589). Land is at once an essential resource to human life and a place-based component of the subjectivities of rural people (Sipple & Visser, 2020). However, another role of land has emerged in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as it entered into the world of finance where it is also regarded as a commodity for investment thus triggering a global land grab. Land is both “challenging to ‘assemble’ as a resource for global investment” (Li, 2014, p.590) and “an especially contested investment object” (Sipple and Visser, 2020, p.2).

Has ‘land grabbing’ reached the Canadian prairies? The large-scale purchase of farmland by domestic or foreign investors, a phenomenon on the rise worldwide, combined with the existing farmland acquisition legislation raises concerns for the social and economic resilience of Canadian agricultural land and rural communities (Desmarais, Qualman, Magnan, & Wiebe, 2017). Following the post-2008 rise in global food prices, corporations and financial actors began purchasing large tracts of farmland as a form of profitable investment (Desmarais et al., 2017). Land grabbing is best understood within the emerging framework of financialization in the agri-food system. Financialization explains the processes and mechanisms by which financial actors and the financial elite accumulate more capital thus increasing their presence and power within national and global economies (Epstein, 2002). While this is a phenomenon that has been well-documented in many countries in the Global South, there is less research about land grabs in the Global North, including in Canada, despite an abundance of fertile agricultural land. In the

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<sup>1</sup> While I am recognizing here that land has many different meanings and understandings depending on the context within which it is discussed, you may notice throughout the thesis that I use the term ‘land’ somewhat uncritically. Thus, I am letting the context of the text speak for itself and hoping that the reader will keep in mind the many and important ways that we can, and do, conceptualize land.

case of Canadian agriculture, some of the effects of financialization are visible including the concentration of land and capital into fewer hands (Qualman, Desmarais, Magnan, & Wendimu, 2020). The prioritization of the large-scale, industrial model of agriculture pressures farmers to continually expand their operations in pursuit of the mythic “economies of scale”, while also having detrimental effects on the environment (Horrigan, Lawrence, & Walker, 2002; Kremen, Iles, & Bacon, 2012).

This is not the first time that large-scale agriculture emerged in North America. In fact, some of the largest farms in North American history were found in the Red River Valley of North Dakota and Minnesota through the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. “Bonanza farms”, as they became known, were industrial mega-farms, often owned by wealthy stockholders and businessmen from urban centers, without any personal farm knowledge, and run by farm managers (Allen & Lueck, 1998; Prairie Public, 2016). These farms consisted of tens of thousands of acres, and for decades they prioritized a monoculture production method, growing only wheat year after year (Prairie Public, 2016). Eventually depleting the fertility of the soil and seeing an increase in disease and pest pressure, the farms were divided and sold to local family farms (Allen, 1998), giving rise to the model of family-run agriculture that prevailed throughout much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As Entz (2015) writes, “the smaller family farms that replaced the bonanzas were better able to withstand fluctuating commodity prices due to more diversified operations that almost always included both crops and livestock.” However, over the last few decades there has once again been a shift of focus towards more monoculture production. Unlike Bonanza Farms, the large-scale, industrial model of agriculture that is prevalent on the prairies today no longer requires numerous labourers per farm or relies on horse power to work the land. Today, farms of this scale are run by just a few farmers and/or labourers, relying on the heavy use of synthetic chemicals and fertilizers and operating large-scale machinery that extracts the need for local knowledge of ecosystems and food production.

Kremen et al. (2012) state that “industrial systems [of agriculture] simplify ecosystems and utilize highly specialized, technical information with the goal of maximizing the profitability of a commodity crop or livestock on any given farm” (p. 2). Despite the highly specialized technology, and immense capital investment required, this approach to food production does not necessarily result in greater efficiency (Kremen et al., 2012; Qualman, 2011; Qualman et al., 2020). In fact, as competition intensifies in the increasingly large-scale, industrial paradigm of

agriculture in Canada, farmers are facing more farm debt than ever before and despite increasing costs of production, farm gate prices and farmer incomes have not increased at the same rate (Akram-Lodhi, 2013; Qualman, 2011).

A side effect of the financial logics present in the food system is an imbalance of profits and control in food production and farmland markets. As a result, farmers are pressured to either expand their operations or to get out of the industry altogether. There is evidence that farmland is now more concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer farmers (Qualman et al., 2020). The average farm size in Canada is increasing while the number of Canadian farms has been steadily declining for decades and Manitoba has experienced a 70% fall in the number of farmers under 35 since 1991 (as cited in Qualman, Akram-Lodhi, Desmarais, & Srinivasan, 2017). However, there is a lack of research on how the dynamics of farmland concentration impact rural communities and the extent to which farmers in Canada are impacted by the presence of financial actors in the farmland market. Increasing farmland prices, viability of succession plans, access for new entrants to farming, environmental degradation due to industrial agriculture practices, and the impacts on community dynamics due to absentee farmland owners (Magnan & Desmarais, 2017) are potential issues that require consideration in the development of farmland acquisition legislation. Changing farmland ownership patterns may affect not only the livelihoods of farmers, but also the very identity of farmers and farm families, as well as their relations with environments and communities. As lamented by Pretty (2002),

The rapid modernization of landscapes in both developing and industrialized countries has broken many of our natural links with land and food, and so undermined a sense of ownership, an inclination to care, and a desire to take action for the collective good. (p.2)

Yet, on the Canadian prairies, the connection to farmland is more than just an investment or a resource; access and control over farmland is deeply embedded in the history, culture, and identity of Canadian farmers (Desmarais et al., 2017). Since colonial settlement in Canada, beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, settler-farmers have built their lives around their rural and agricultural identities. European settlers came to occupy the Canadian prairies, bringing with them the notions of what it means to be a ‘good farmer’. The first texts that discuss the traits of a ‘good farmer’ are from the 16<sup>th</sup> century in the United Kingdom, where a ‘good farmer’ is referred to as a ‘good husbandman’, one who has a wife and family behind him and makes positive contributions to the community (Burton, Forney, Stock, & Sutherland, 2020). However,

Burton et al., (2020) explain that the notion of a ‘good farmer’ is constantly changing and evolving; at its inception the concept would have been with regard to farmers who were mainly serfs in the rentier state. Thus, the relationships to land would have been much less rooted in ownership models of tenure than they are now. While there is some evidence that a transition back to more rented farmland is currently happening in some parts of the Global North (Ciaian, Kancs, Swinnen, Van Herck, & Vranken, 2012; Varble, Secchi, & Druschke, 2016), ownership of land has become an increasingly important aspect of the ‘good farmer’ identity as the control over land and pride of ownership displayed through visible stewardship of the land is sometimes seen as superior when the land is farmed by the owner (Fraser, 2004; Leonhardt, Penker, & Salhofer, 2019).

Who is considered to be a ‘good farmer’ versus a ‘bad farmer’ is not only dictated by farming peers, there is outside influence by industry and policy makers as well (Burton et al., 2020). Government agricultural policy in Manitoba clearly articulates a desire for growth, innovation, and efficiency in the industry, thus alienating small-scale farmers while working to define ‘good farming’ in the province. Throughout Canada, we hear farm industry, government, farmer organizations, and even farmers themselves employ a discourse of the ‘innovative’, ‘efficient’, ‘adaptable’ farmer and most often these qualifiers are associated with the need to increase the units of production. In turn, this pressures farmers to make non-economically rational decisions (as cited in Burton et al., 2020) when purchasing land, machinery, and inputs so that they can continue to compete within the current large-scale agricultural model. Competition for available land and high land prices are also driving the consolidation of farms throughout the Canadian prairies. Consequently, large-scale acquisitions of farmland could accelerate this process and further limit access to land for small and medium-scale farmers with less buying power, as well as young and new farmers.

## **1.1 Background and Rationale**

In Canada, each province is responsible for the development of land ownership legislation. However, the neoliberal ideology of the state<sup>2</sup> calls into question the effectiveness of this strategy in protecting the interests of farmers and rural people. Canadian citizens and citizen-

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<sup>2</sup> The state here refers to governance institutions, including bureaucratic actors, that help shape governance and regulatory decisions and influence the politically and economically-driven collective consciousness of Canada.

owned corporations can purchase farmland of any size in Manitoba and land purchases by non-foreigners are generally capped at 40 acres; however, there are a number of exceptions that leave this to the discretion of the Manitoba Farm Industry Board (Government of Manitoba, 2019; Heminthavong & Lavoie, 2015). The exceptions as they stand are broad and the legislation explicitly states that these can be made if the purchase of farmland stands to benefit the Manitoba economy. This creates potential vulnerabilities in the regulation and opens up possibilities for farmland investment by financial actors outside of Canada. Furthermore, there are no regulations that prohibit financial actors based in Canada from purchasing large tracts of farmland, and these financial activities have numerous impacts on the social and environmental landscapes of rural communities. In an earlier study, Schnaiberg and Gould (1994) discuss the impact of absentee investors in industrialized production schemes, stating that there are often considerable social and environmental implications as they are disconnected from the local landscape and primarily concerned with generating returns on their investment. Thus, an increase in large-scale investment into agricultural land may equally have these impacts. Furthermore, a lack of policy concerning Canadian agriculture and farmland markets effectively removes barriers for agribusiness, investors, and transnational corporations and allows them to extract much of the resources and wealth from the industry (Qualman & Wiebe, 2002), all the while emphasizing growth in the sector, much of which is geared to external markets.

In some instances, the Manitoba government policy and priorities demonstrate the weight given to continually seeking ‘better’ economies of scale in agriculture to increase yields. For example, The Manitoba Agriculture Industry report by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) (2014) focusses on market contributions, growth, and overall success in the canola, hog, and wheat export industries, without mentioning the other types and smaller scales of farming that exist in the province. As Qualman and Wiebe (2002) argue, exports are not inherently bad, however, by assuming that increasing exports is always beneficial for farmers, as the Manitoba government seems to do, government actors are ignoring the fact that Canadian farmers’ net incomes have been near \$0 since 1985<sup>3</sup>, despite exponential increases in agricultural exports

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<sup>3</sup> This excludes tax-payer funded farm support payments and off-farm work income, which have both contributed significantly to the net incomes of large-scale farms in Canada over the last two decades or more (Qualman, 2011).

(Qualman, 2011). In the large-scale, industrial agricultural model, farmers lose power in the marketplace and are subject to the volatility of the global economy (Qualman, 2011).

In Manitoba, some of the effects of this export expansion policy in the agri-food sector are visible, despite a lack of fine-grained empirical research on the topic. Between 2006 and 2016, the number of farmers in the province fell by 24% (Statistics Canada 2019a; Statistics Canada, 2016) while between 2001 and 2016, the average farm size grew by 25% (Statistics Canada, 2019b). Li (2011) explains that commodity crops such as grains and soy are well suited for large, industrial farms run by only a couple of individuals, making this model attractive for investors looking to profit from intensive production on their farmland. Although she was writing more generally about North American agriculture, this example encapsulates the agricultural landscape in Manitoba.

Furthermore, many methods employed by large-scale conventional, high-input agricultural operations have been shown to have detrimental effects on the environment, including soil, and to contribute to climate change (Smith et al., 2007). However, there is a narrative in Manitoba which indicates that large-scale export agriculture is inherently environmentally sound and sustainable. For example, Manitoba Agriculture's (2012) report on the state of agriculture opens by saying that "Manitoba's agricultural industry is built on the fact that Manitoba has a land base capable of virtually endless sustained farm production" (p.2). The report goes on to explicitly state that the agricultural sector in Manitoba is regarded as an environmental leader. Although Manitoba's total contribution to greenhouse gas emissions in Canada is relatively small, from a provincial standpoint, the agriculture industry accounted for 31% of the total greenhouse gas emissions in 2015 (Manitoba Agriculture, n.d.a). Furthermore, the emissions from the agriculture sector in Manitoba increased 42% between 1990 and 2009 (Manitoba Agriculture n.d.a). Alongside these worrisome trends, many farmers are having trouble accessing enough farmland to remain viable, while young and new farmers often struggle with accessing or purchasing land altogether (Bihun & Desmarais, forthcoming). This begs the question, is Manitoba's land base really limitless? More research is needed to better understand the dynamics of farmland access and ownership in Manitoba, including whether or not land grabs are occurring and what effect they have on farmers' livelihoods and rural communities.

A key challenge to understanding and opposing the financialization of farmland markets in Canada is the need for more research about the extent and effects of land grabbing. White et

al. (2012) explain that “large land deals are typically shrouded in secrecy and no one really knows how much land has been acquired” (p.620). Further to this point, in other countries of the Global North where concerns have been raised about land ownership, there are typically poor records of land ownership making it difficult to operationalize the information in a way that addresses the issues posed by farm consolidation and concentration (Geisler, 2015). This is certainly the case of Manitoba as accessible and detailed information regarding changes in land ownership and land concentration at the provincial level is essentially non-existent, despite a booming agricultural economy that depends on farmland. In Manitoba, the management of farmland ownership data has been privatized, creating barriers to access, and there has been no public research that addresses changes in farmland ownership patterns and trends in the province as a whole. As a result, little is known about the presence of financial actors in the farmland market in Manitoba, however, the agricultural industry in the province is highly industrialized and the presence of ever-larger and ever-fewer farms in the province indicates that there have been significant changes in the landscape of farmland ownership in the province. Due to the large-scale paradigm of agriculture in Manitoba, the situation may not be as simple as asking “who is an investor and who is not”, as some farmers may simultaneously farm the land and invest in farmland (Andreucci et al., 2017). Therefore, empirical research is needed that focusses on these land relations and documents the importance of access to farmland and farmland ownership in rural communities. The potential social impacts and environmental implications of the large-scale acquisition of Manitoba farmland by financial actors are too great to leave unchecked.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

My research investigates changing farmland ownership in four rural municipalities (RMs) with high valued farmland in Manitoba. It examines the extent to which investors are already purchasing farmland, if at all, and how changing dynamics of farmland ownership patterns impact rural communities and environments. Whether financial investment in farmland is currently happening in Manitoba rural communities or not, this research provides a baseline understanding of the current dimensions of farmland sales, farmer-landlord relationships, and the implications of increasing farmland concentration through 39 in-depth interviews with farmers, RM officials, and other people involved in the agriculture industry. I also analyze farmers’

experiences in accessing farmland, the ways that farmers value land, perceptions of environmental changes, and the ways that changing dynamics are affecting rural communities and livelihoods. The key questions guiding my research are as follows:

1. Are land grabs occurring in Manitoba?
2. What have been the most important changes in land ownership in the province over the last decade?
3. What impacts do changing farmland ownership patterns have on the social and environmental landscapes of rural communities?

### **1.3 Methods**

This thesis is part of a larger SSHRC-funded research project about farmland ownership on the Canadian prairies that is investigating how farmland ownership patterns are changing and what impacts changes have on the social and environmental landscapes of rural communities. The research group includes the three principal investigators (Drs. Annette Desmarais, André Magnan, and Mengistu Wendimu) as well as two other graduate students, Melissa Davidson and Katherine Aske, who conducted the research in Saskatchewan and Alberta, respectively. The research team developed the methods collectively to allow us to compare and contrast land tenure patterns in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. However, the research approach was also adapted to suit the particular context and logistical barriers in each province. Leading up to conducting the fieldwork in each province, we met periodically as a group to discuss the logistics of the research as well as any changes to the specific methods to be used. We agreed that this qualitative research would be conducted using semi-structured interviews with farmers, RM officials and staff, as well as several context interviews with people who are knowledgeable about or involved with the agriculture industry. The following is a summary of the quantitative and qualitative methods I used to conduct the research, with brief discussions of the limitations or deviations I had to make where applicable.

#### **1.3.1 RM Selection**

At the outset of the research, I had hoped that I would be able to access the land titling data from the provincial land registry, which would have enabled me to see exactly how farmland ownership has changed in Manitoba and more readily identify any non-farming,

investor land owners with significant land holdings. Thus, this quantitative research method would have allowed me to more easily select the four RMs with the most investor activity and with the most land changing hands. However, with the privatization of land titling data in Manitoba, combined with a reluctant government office, there are significant barriers to access for researchers (see Funk, 2020). After more than five years of negotiations between the principal investigators on this project and the office of the Registrar General, we were unable to reach an agreement that would have let us access and use the data in the way required for this project. Therefore, I had to identify other methods to select the appropriate RMs for my study.

As an alternative to the land titling data, with the help of the principle investigators on this project, I was able to secure access to two data sets that helped me narrow down the possible RMs for the study. The first was farmland transaction data through the Manitoba Assessment office. Drs. Annette Desmarais and Mengistu Wendimu, reached out to the Department of Municipal Relations to request access to the land transaction database. Their request was approved and I was also granted access through this process. Having access to the database, I was able to isolate all of the land sales between January 1, 2005 and January 1, 2019<sup>4</sup> for all of the RMs in Manitoba, and transferred the data into an excel spreadsheet with one tab for each RM. Next, I analyzed the transaction data and created summary statistics for each RM, which showed the total number of transactions, the total value of all land sales, the average value of land sales, the number of transactions in each price range<sup>5</sup>, and the value of the highest land sales in the RMs. Specifying the number of high valued land sale transactions was important because one of the criteria for the RM selection was to conduct research in RMs where land prices were high and where a lot of land has been changing hands. The rationale being that in those RMs participants could most readily speak from experience about what land ownership changes are occurring and how those changes impact their farms and communities. One major limitation with this method is that the land transaction data does not indicate how many acres are included in a sale or who bought or sold the land. Consequently, while I could see the date and price of the farmland sale, I had no way of knowing how much land or what kind of infrastructure might be included in the price or easily identify any non-farming investors.

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<sup>4</sup> I chose these dates to ensure that I would capture any potential land investments that occurred leading up to, during, and since the 2008 financial crisis, when farmland grabbing is thought to have started to occur more significantly.

<sup>5</sup> The ranges that I used were \$250,000 to \$1,000,000, \$1,000,001 to \$5,000,000, and \$5,000,001 and over.

The second data set that I used was a summary excel file of Statistics Canada (2016) that was supplied by a research team member. The document displayed the breakdown of the total number of farms and total cultivated acres of hay and field crops, broken down by crop, in each agricultural region and each RM in Manitoba. This data allowed me to identify which RMs had the most acres in grain and oilseed production which was also a key component of the selection criteria for our prairie region study. We were also interested in including a mix of medium and large-scale farms<sup>6</sup> in this research. Our assumption was that medium sized farms are struggling to stay afloat and keep their farms profitable; they are also likely to be trying to expand and therefore are in competition with larger farms.

To summarize, RM selection was guided by four main criteria, I was looking to identify RMs that have the following: 1) a lot of land changing hands in recent years, 2) a mix of medium and large-scale farms<sup>7</sup>, 3) a lot of grain and oilseed farms<sup>8</sup>, and 4) high valued land. With this in mind, I cross referenced the summary statistics from the land transaction data with the number of grain acres in those RMs from the hay and field crop data. Through this process, I identified eight RMs that fit into the criteria, so that I could continue to narrow down my search by analyzing more closely, a smaller sample of the 98 RMs in Manitoba.

Once I selected the eight RMs, I ordered an ownership map for each of them from Repromap, a company based in Dauphin, Manitoba, that produces property ownership maps of Manitoba RMs. The maps were from various different years, ranging from December 2016 to January 2019, therefore, some of the maps were more current than others. Once I received the maps, I began the tedious process of linking up the land sales data with the owners listed on the maps. I went through each of the eight RMs and for any land sales that were \$250,000 or more<sup>9</sup>,

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<sup>6</sup> For the purpose of this study, I am generally thinking of small, medium, and large farms as the following: small farms are less than 1,000 acres, medium farms are between 1,001 and 3,000 acres and large farmers are 3,001 acres and more. Since this study is comprised of mainly grain and mixed grain and livestock farms, the land base of a “small farm” in the conventional grain and mixed farm industry would be quite a bit more than other kinds of small farms, such as vegetable farms producing for local markets, for example. I also based these ranges on the ways that farmers in this study characterized their own farms and those of their neighbours, as well as the fact that the average farm size in Manitoba was 1,193 acres in 2016 (Manitoba Agriculture, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> Although this was a criterion that we decided upon ahead of the recruitment process, there was not a reliable way to contact participants based on their farm size. In the end, I did manage to get a good diversity of farm sizes, but it was not through any particular method that I achieved this.

<sup>8</sup> From here on out grain and oilseed farms will be referred to interchangeably as either grain and oilseed farms or just ‘grain farms.’

<sup>9</sup> I only looked at land packages that sold for \$250,000 or more simply because I did not have the time to go through every single land transaction and because high valued farmland was one of our criteria for RM selection. Therefore,

I used the section/township/range code provided on both the maps and the land transaction data to identify who owns that piece of land as of the date on the map. This does not necessarily mean that it is the same person who bought the land as outlined on the transaction data sheet. However, it gave me a sense of, as documented on the Repromap, the most current recorded owners of the larger or more valuable land parcels that have changed hands in the last 15 years. The owner's names were added to the data in the excel sheets so that I could then go through and see who owns the land, where names of owners were found elsewhere in the RM, and investigate any owners that could be non-farming investors, such as numbered companies, for example.

Finally, I ran these choices past my committee member Dr. Martin Entz, who has a good sense of the agriculture landscape in Manitoba, and cross referenced it with the results of a survey conducted and analyzed by Drs. André Magnan and Mengistu Wendimu, respectively. In the end, I felt that any of the eight RMs identified through this process met the four criteria listed above and that they would yield appropriate participants. It was important for me to identify more than the required number of RMs because research success in each RM would hinge on the following two issues: 1) the availability and willingness of RM officials and staff to provide information on the current landscape and dynamic of ownership in their RM and 2) my success recruiting farmers in those RMs.

### ***1.3.2 Participant Recruitment***

For the sake of consistency across all three of the prairie provinces, my goal was to interview a total of 32 farmers and eight RM officials and staff. Furthermore, to gain a deeper understanding, I interviewed an additional three people who have knowledge or experience working in the agriculture industry. Upon receiving ethics approval (see Appendix A), I began by conducting the context interviews. I recruited these participants through e-mails and cold calls. The goal of these interviews was to get a general sense of what has been happening with farmland ownership across Manitoba as a whole, providing me with a good idea of some of the broad changes and challenges farmers are facing with regards to farmland ownership. The hope was to also identify some areas where there might be investor activity, however I was not really able to do that through these interviews.

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I set a minimum land transaction price. I do recognize, however, that land prices vary between RMs, and even within a single RM, and that land transactions below \$250,000 could be part of larger land sale packages.

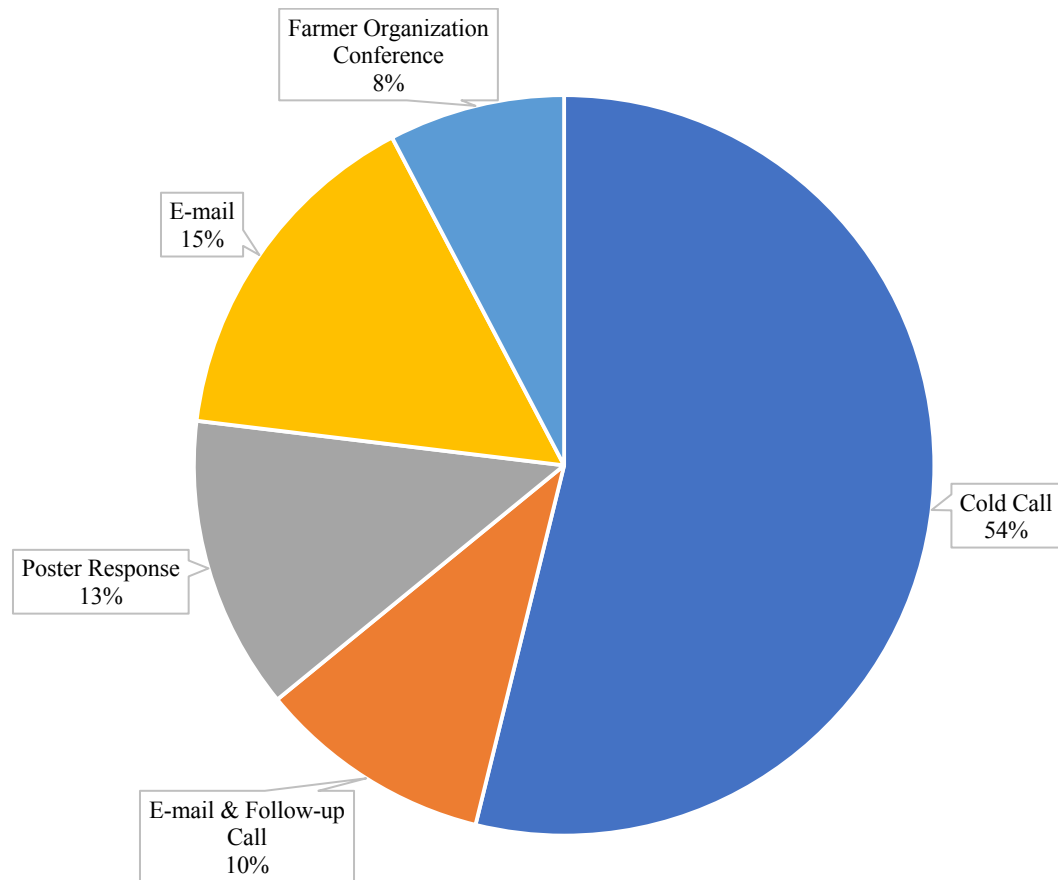
Next, I sampled both the RM officials and staff and the farmers using a non-probability, convenience sampling model. This is described by Montello and Sutton (2013) as a sampling design whereby, once the sampling frame is set<sup>10</sup>, “the researcher simply accepts every case he or she [or they] can conveniently get hold of to be in the sample” (p. 169-170). I employed a number of strategies to recruit participants, including cold calls, e-mails, e-mails paired with follow up phone calls, meeting people in person at the conferences of the Keystone Agricultural Producers (KAP) and the National Farmers Union (NFU), and putting up posters calling for participants throughout the research area, as well as circulating the research poster through the University of Manitoba Agriculture Department e-mail lists. Figure 1 shows the distribution of participants obtained through each strategy.

## **Figure 1**

### ***Participant Recruitment Strategies***

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<sup>10</sup> A sampling frame is “the subset of the population from which cases are actually drawn to become part of the sample” (Montello & Sutton, 2013, p. 168). In this case, the sampling frame was any RM officials or staff and retired or active farmers in the RMs selected.



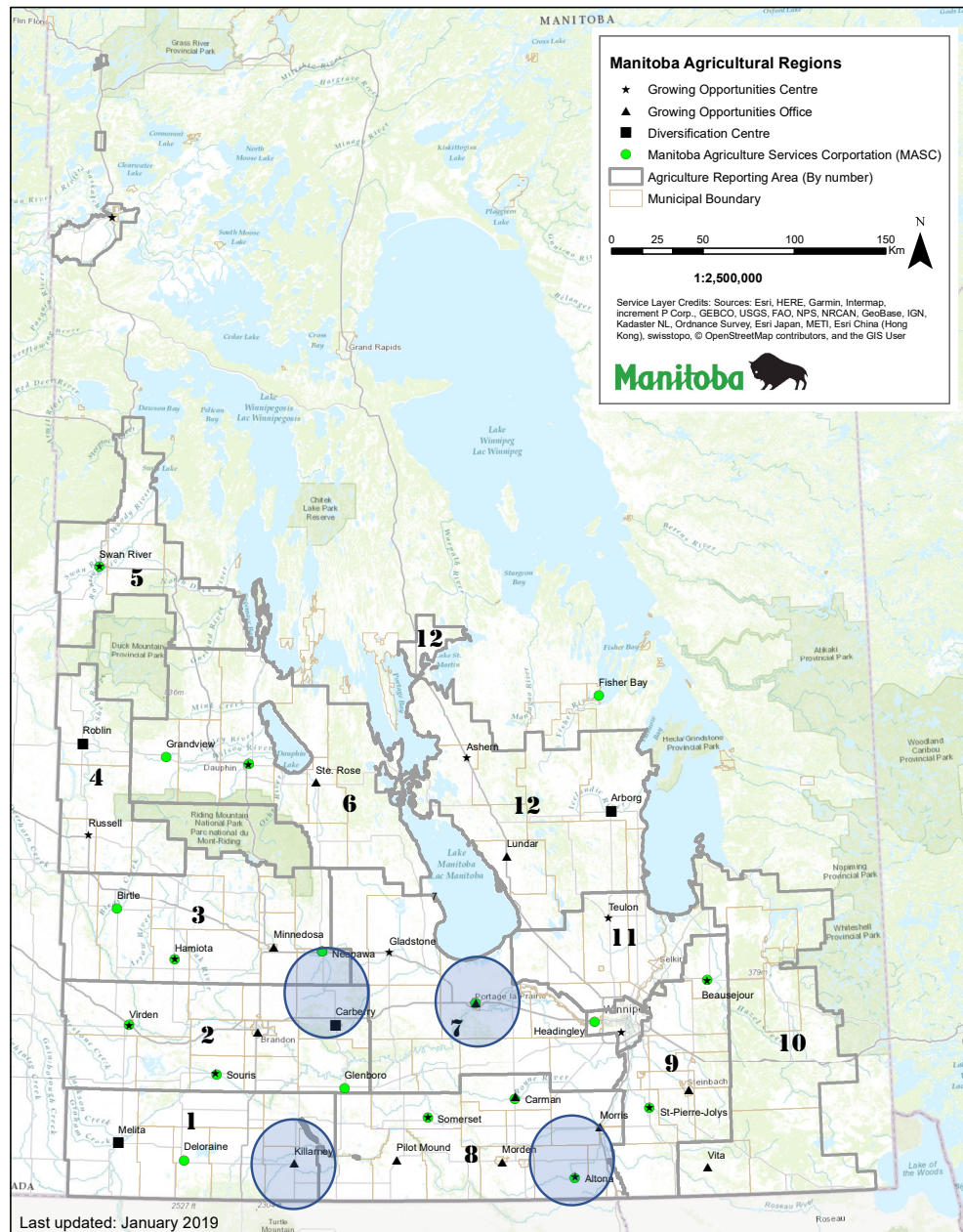
I reached out to RM officials and staff from each of the eight RMs that I identified as suitable for the study. RM officials and staff were all recruited through e-mail communication or e-mails followed up with a phone call to the RM office. Upon receiving responses from two RM officials and/or staff from four different RMs, I began conducting interviews to get a better sense of the agricultural landscape of the RM and obtain a broad understanding of the types of changes that have occurred with land ownership. Another focus of these initial interviews was to get an idea of what specific areas of the RMs have a lot of grain farming being conducted by both medium and large-scale farms. The willingness of the RM officials and staff to share their knowledge with me was an important first step to understanding the layout of the RM and helped inform my recruitment of farmers<sup>11</sup>. Thus, I interviewed two RM officials and/or staff in each of the following RMs: Rhineland, North Cypress-Langford, Portage la Prairie, and Killarney-Turtle

<sup>11</sup> However, due to the restrictions set by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, in terms of snowball sampling, I did not ask them to identify names or provide phone numbers for any farmers.

Mountain. As is apparent from the Manitoba agricultural regions map (Figure 2), although there is not a significant geographical spread between the RMs included in the study, they are all located within different agricultural regions in Manitoba.

**Figure 2**

***Rural Municipal Study Areas on the Manitoba Agricultural Regions Map***



*Note.* This map shows the boundaries of the agricultural regions in Manitoba. I added the blue circles to show where the four RMs included in this study are located. From top left to right are, the RMs of North Cypress-Langford, Portage la Prairie, Killarney-Turtle Mountain, and Rhineland.

*Source.* Government of Manitoba (2019a)

The final step in the fieldwork was to recruit farmers from each of the four RMs for interviews. Cold calls were by far the most common way that I recruited participants (Figure 1), in particular for farmers. Due to the restrictions set by our ethics board, we were not allowed to recruit participants using snowball sampling. Consequently, the only means that I had for recruiting participants was to use the Repromap ownership maps for each RM. I went through each of the four maps, identifying key areas where there were a mix of medium and large-scale farms<sup>12</sup>, and/or evident investor landowners, and made lists of the names that appeared on farmland parcels in the surrounding area. I then looked up the names on the Canada 411 website, and if the person was listed, I called them.

There are some important limitations to note here since this method did not give everyone farming in the RM an equal chance of participation. More specifically, this method did not account for those farmers who only rent land and therefore do not show up on the ownership map, nor did it account for those who are not listed in the phone book. I conducted hundreds of cold calls across the four RMs; many people did not answer, many people declined participation, and some were not farmers themselves but just rented out their land. The inability to use snowball sampling was a significant barrier to the research. Within a rural context, especially when looking at something as under-documented and under-researched as land ownership changes, it is important to be able to take farmer suggestions about who to speak with in their community. It would have been a lot more efficient and may have produced different results had I been able to get suggestions from farmers about who in their community has knowledge about recent changes in land ownership and/or investor ownership. It is also important to note that this kind of referral is a part of rural culture and that farmers are quite mindful of which neighbours

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<sup>12</sup> I made assumptions about where the large and medium scale farms were based on information provided in the context and RM official and staff interviews, as well as based on how many times the same name appeared on different parcels of land throughout the RM. Of course, this is not a perfect method as it does not account for rented land. I also called people from outside these identified areas as needed.

would be willing to talk and which would rather remain anonymous. Thus, giving them the chance to do that would have been beneficial for this research. In the end, I did succeed in recruiting eight participants in the RMs<sup>13</sup> of Killarney-Turtle Mountain, Portage la Prairie, and North Cypress-Langford. However, I ran into additional challenges in the RM of Rhineland where I was only able to secure four farmer participants (see section 1.4.4 for details).

### ***1.3.3 Data Collection and Analysis***

In total, I conducted 39 semi-structured interviews with 41 participants. I spoke with farmers (n=30) of a variety of farm sizes and farming types, RM officials and staff (n=8), and others involved in the agriculture industry (n=3). The latter included the following: Fred Tait, a mixed grain and cattle farmer and former vice president of the NFU; Laura Rance, an agricultural reporter with the Manitoba Cooperator and more recently with the Winnipeg Free Press; and a policy analyst from a Manitoba farm organization. Interviews were conducted either over the phone or in person. The majority of the interviews with farmers were conducted in person on their farms, with only ten done over the phone. The RM officials and staff interviews all were conducted either at the municipal office or in their homes. Many of the RM officials and staff were also farmers themselves, however, I will not specify this throughout the thesis in the interest of maintaining anonymity. Two of the context interviews were conducted over the phone and one was done by e-mail. Farmer participants were a mix of active (87%), semi-retired (6.5%), and retired farmers (6.5%). Overall, the average farm size in this study is 2,660 acres<sup>14</sup>. The smallest farm in the study is a mixed grain and cattle farm that farms only 100 acres, while the largest farm is a grain farm that farms 16,500 acres. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the distribution of farm types in the study and summary statistics of the farmed acres for each category.

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<sup>13</sup> There were three participants who farmed just outside of the RM boundaries (two for Portage la Prairie and one for Rhineland). Since they were within a few miles of the RM boundary, I included them as they still had a good sense of the land ownership changes in the area.

<sup>14</sup> Due to the focus on land access and ownership in this study, I did not include herd size in the analysis of farm size, but instead focused only on acres farmed, including crop land and grazing land.

**Table 1*****Distribution of Farm Types and Sizes***

|                                                   | Grain and oilseed         | Mixed Grain and Cattle   | Cattle                   | Mixed Grain and Potato |
|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| Number of participants (out of 28 <sup>15</sup> ) | 16 (57%)                  | 9 (32%)                  | 2 (7%)                   | 1 (4%)                 |
| Mean farm size                                    | 3,751 acres               | 1,168 acres              | 975 acres                | 2,000 acres            |
| Median farm size                                  | 2,400 acres               | 1,100 acres              | 975 acres                | 2,000 acres            |
| Minimum and maximum farm size                     | 320 acres<br>16,500 acres | 100 acres<br>3,000 acres | 950 acres<br>1,000 acres | N/A                    |

Two of the interviews with farmers were conducted with farming couples, where both parties contributed to the conversation. While these were counted as one interview, for analysis sake they were two separate participants. It is important to note, however, that at times it was difficult to ensure that both parties were providing a response for each question. One participant (usually the man) would often dominate the interview, therefore, both participant's responses are not always included in the summary statistics.

The interviews with all participants were conducted with 31 men (76%) and 10 women (24%). The farmer interviews were with 25 men (83%) and five women (17%), ranging from 27 years old to 87 years old at the time of the research. The average age of farmers in the study is 54 years old; this is exactly in line with the Manitoba average which Statistics Canada (2017) reported as 53.8 years old in 2016. At times throughout the thesis I will specify that somebody is a "young farmer"; for the purpose of this study I am considering anyone between the ages of 18 and 40 years old to be a young farmer<sup>16</sup>. Table 2 shows the distribution of men and women

<sup>15</sup> The interviews conducted with farming couples were only counted once here as they are from the same farm.

<sup>16</sup> This age range is based off of the parameters set by the federal government of Canada in terms of who is eligible for young farmer programs and services.

**Table 2*****Gender Distribution by RM and Interviewee Type***

|                              | Rhineland    | North Cypress<br>Langford        | Portage la Prairie               | Killarney-Turtle<br>Mountain               |
|------------------------------|--------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Farmers                      | 4 men (100%) | 1 woman (12.5%)<br>7 men (87.5%) | 1 woman (12.5%)<br>7 men (87.5%) | 3 women (30%) <sup>17</sup><br>7 men (70%) |
| RM<br>officials<br>and staff | 2 men (100%) | 1 woman (50%)<br>1 man (50%)     | 1 woman (50%)<br>1 man (50%)     | 1 woman (50%)<br>1 man (50%)               |

across two of the participant categories and all four of the RMs. This is important to note because the lack of equal representation in some areas means that I am not able to make any distinctions or generalizations based on gendered experiences. In general, I had a lot of difficulty finding women farmers to interview. This is not surprising as research by Bihun and Desmarais (forthcoming), that looked at young farmer experiences in Manitoba, indicated that there remains a significant gender divide in the industry with a higher percentage of conventional farmers<sup>18</sup> in the province being men. When I did reach women over the phone, often times they would direct me to their husbands. In these cases, I would do my best to try and find out if they contributed to farm labour as well and see if they would be willing to talk to me instead of their husbands. However, most of the time when that happened, they would tell me that their husband knew more about land ownership in the area or that it would be best to speak with him.

Analyzing the qualitative data happened through a number of different steps. After transcribing all of the interviews, I began by reading through the transcripts and making notes of recurring themes and important observations. From there, I developed codes and sub-codes that I used to help capture different aspects of those themes. Next, I went through the interviews and inserted the codes throughout the word document while also creating new word documents for

<sup>17</sup> It's important to note that two of these women were interviewed along with their husbands and often did not respond to some of the interview questions themselves. Furthermore, the presence of their partner may have impacted how they responded to questions.

<sup>18</sup> Bihun and Desmarais (forthcoming) define conventional farms as selling through conventional markets and as, "grain, livestock, and mixed farm[s]... includ[ing] those farming grains, legumes, forage seed, hay, cattle, hogs, sheep, and any mixture of those using conventional methods of production, on a larger-scale. This includes intensive livestock operations and/or the use of chemical or synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, genetically modified organisms and/or other industrially produced inputs."

each code to more easily isolate the relevant text. I then went on to create summary statistics and tables to capture the similarities, differences, and outliers within each theme, pulling out interesting and relevant quotes as I went along.

## **1.4 Situating the Research**

This research was conducted in four RMs across southern Manitoba (Figure 2). The following is a brief description of the geography of each RM including the population, geographical spread, and any interesting agricultural or historical context. I also provide an overview of the summary statistics of the land sales transaction data discussed above for each RM to demonstrate the kinds of information that I considered as I chose the RMs.

### ***1.4.1 RM of Portage la Prairie***

The RM of Portage la Prairie is about a one hour drive west of Winnipeg, Manitoba in agricultural region seven (Figure 2) and covers a total of 1,961.97 square kilometres with a population density of 3.6 people per square kilometre (Statistics Canada, 2016a). Agricultural region seven has the second highest number of grain and oilseed farms in the province (as cited in Government of Manitoba, n.d.). Furthermore, according to Statistics Canada data, the RM of Portage la Prairie is amongst the top RMs in the region in terms of the total number of acres that are in grain and oilseed production. Between 2011 and 2016, the population in the RM of Portage la Prairie grew by 6.9%, with a total population of 6,975 in 2016. This rate of growth exceeds both the provincial and national averages of 5.8% and 5%, respectively (Statistics Canada, 2016a). The fifth largest city in Manitoba, Portage la Prairie, is located in the middle of the RM, with a population of approximately 13,000 people.

The RM of Portage la Prairie website describes the RM as “one of the best agricultural areas in Manitoba” and goes on to state that “the area is renowned for its diverse crop and livestock production and capabilities” (RM of Portage la Prairie, n.d.). The fertile soil of the region accommodates a number of crops including grain, oilseed, potato, and other vegetable production. In addition to diverse types of farming, there is also increasing investment in agricultural processing plants in the RM, including the Simplot Canada potato plant and the “world’s largest pea processing plant” that was set to open by the end of 2020 by a French

company called Roquette<sup>19</sup> (Roquette, 2020). The presence of the processing industry, along with the more diverse economic opportunities in the city of Portage la Prairie and the proximity to the city of Winnipeg make this an attractive RM for corporate investment and city dwellers seeking a rural lifestyle, and likely also contributes to high land prices. Table 3 is a summary of the farmland sale transaction data for the RM.

**Table 3**

***Summary Statistics of the RM of Portage la Prairie Farmland Transaction Data***

|                                                            |              |
|------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Total number of sales                                      | 914          |
| Average sale price <sup>20</sup>                           | \$488,829.69 |
| Highest sale price                                         | \$7,073,400  |
| Number of transactions between \$250,000 and \$1,000,000   | 279          |
| Number of Transactions between \$1,000,001 and \$5,000,000 | 64           |
| Number of transactions \$5,000,001 and up                  | 4            |
| Number of succession transactions                          | 268          |

*Note.* This table contains summary statistics from farmland sale transactions of \$250,000 or more between January 1, 2005 and January 1, 2019.

#### ***1.4.2 RM of Killarney-Turtle Mountain***

The RM of Killarney-Turtle Mountain is a two and a half hour drive southwest of Winnipeg, Manitoba. With a population of 3,429 people; the land area of the RM is 926 square kilometres with a population density of 3.7 people per square kilometre (Statistics Canada, 2016b). Killarney-Turtle Mountain is situated in agricultural region one, which has the fifth highest number of grain and oilseed farms in the province (as cited in Government of Manitoba, n.d.). Although there are RMs within agricultural region one with more and larger grain farms, I

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<sup>19</sup> The pea plant has been under construction throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and may have faced some delays in opening due to a COVID-19 outbreak reported as of November 9, 2020 (Manitoba Cooperator, 2020). No updates have been issued since.

<sup>20</sup> The average sale price here is calculated without the succession transactions which are represented by a \$1 sale price, since these skew the average sale price significantly.

was unable to contact any RM officials or staff from other RMs. Thus, I went with Killarney-Turtle Mountain which does have the third highest number of both wheat and canola farms in the region. Table 4 is a summary of the farmland sale transaction data for the RM.

**Table 4**

***Summary Statistics of the RM of Killarney-Turtle Mountain Farmland Transaction Data***

|                                                            |              |
|------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Total number of sales                                      | 528          |
| Average sale price <sup>21</sup>                           | \$396,341.63 |
| Highest sale price                                         | \$4,140,000  |
| Number of transactions between \$250,000 and \$1,000,000   | 142          |
| Number of Transactions between \$1,000,001 and \$5,000,000 | 29           |
| Number of transactions \$5,000,001 and up                  | 0            |
| Number of succession transactions                          | 162          |

*Note.* This table contains summary statistics from farmland sale transactions of \$250,000 or more between January 1, 2005 and January 1, 2019.

The RM of Killarney-Turtle Mountain (n.d.) website states that the RM is “deeply rooted in agriculture” and goes on to state that the agriculture industry is the “economic and cultural cornerstone” of the community. Large seed and seed cleaning operations also contribute significantly to the local economy (Killarney-Turtle Mountain, n.d.). Additionally, the hog industry is present in the RM of Killarney-Turtle Mountain. HyLife Ltd. operates a number of hog barns throughout the RM. Once a Manitoba owned company, in 2019, HyLife sold 50.1% of its shares to Charoen Pokphand Foods Public Company Limited, a transnational agri-food corporation based in Thailand (Arnason, 2019). The other 49.9% is owned by the Japanese firm, Itochu (Arnason, 2019).

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<sup>21</sup> The average sale price here is calculated without the succession transactions which are represented by a \$1 sale price, since these skew the average sale price significantly. .

### ***1.4.3 RM of North Cypress-Langford***

The RM of North Cypress-Langford has a diverse agriculture economy including livestock, grain, and potato production. The town of Neepawa, located at the northern edge of the RM, has many economic opportunities including several agricultural industry businesses such as seed dealers and the HyLife Ltd. hog processing plant. North-Cypress Langford is situated just over two hours west of Winnipeg, Manitoba. The RM has a geographical spread of 1,761.89 square kilometres with a population density of 1.6 people per square kilometre and a total population of 2,745 people (Statistics Canada, 2016c). North Cypress-Langford is located in agricultural region two, which has the third highest number of grain and oilseed farms in Manitoba (as cited in Government of Manitoba, n.d.). Within agricultural region two, the RM of North Cypress-Langford has the highest number and largest average acres of wheat, oat, corn, and canola farms of any other RM. Table 5 is a summary of the farmland sale transaction data for the RM.

**Table 5**

***Summary Statistics of the RM of North Cypress-Langford Farmland Transaction Data***

|                                                            |              |
|------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Total number of sales                                      | 794          |
| Average sale price <sup>22</sup>                           | \$380,031.83 |
| Highest sale price                                         | \$4,299,999  |
| Number of transactions between \$250,000 and \$1,000,000   | 235          |
| Number of Transactions between \$1,000,001 and \$5,000,000 | 31           |
| Number of transactions \$5,000,001 and up                  | 0            |
| Number of succession transactions                          | 261          |

*Note.* This table contains summary statistics from farmland sale transactions of \$250,000 or more between January 1, 2005 and January 1, 2019.

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<sup>22</sup> The average sale price here is calculated without the succession transactions which are represented by a \$1 sale price, since these skew the average sale price significantly.

#### **1.4.4 RM of Rhineland**

The RM of Rhineland is about one and a half hours southwest of Winnipeg, Manitoba. According to Statistics Canada (2016d), the population in the RM was 5,945 people as of 2016. The RM spans 960.40 square kilometres and the population density is 6.2 people per square kilometre (Statistics Canada, 2016d). Rhineland is located within agricultural region eight, which is the region that has by far the most grain and oilseed farms reporting in the 2016 census of agriculture (as cited in Government of Manitoba, n.d.). Within region eight, the RM of Rhineland is host to the highest number of wheat, soybean, and corn acres (Statistics Canada, 2016e). The RM of Rhineland (n.d) website states that “the fertile soil combined with unusually high temperatures and a long growing season make Rhineland the perfect place to grow many conventional and specialty crops.” Table 6 is a summary of the farmland sale transaction data for the RM.

**Table 6**

***Summary Statistics of the RM of Rhineland Farmland Transaction Data***

|                                                            |             |
|------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Total number of sales                                      | 1012        |
| Average sale price <sup>23</sup>                           | \$357,861   |
| Highest sale price                                         | \$4,114,432 |
| Number of transactions between \$250,000 and \$1,000,000   | 307         |
| Number of Transactions between \$1,000,001 and \$5,000,000 | 43          |
| Number of transactions \$5,000,001 and up                  | 0           |
| Number of succession transactions                          | 272         |

*Note.* This table contains summary statistics from farmland sale transactions of \$250,000 or more between January 1, 2005 and January 1, 2019.

The ownership map for the RM of Rhineland looks quite different than the other three RMS in that, more often than not, there are many subdivisions within each section of land. An

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<sup>23</sup> The average sale price here is calculated without the succession transactions which are represented by a \$1 sale price, since these skew the average sale price significantly.

RM staff member explained to me that this is due to the settlement history of the area. In the late 1800s, Mennonites immigrated to Canada and settled in the RM of Rhineland. According to this RM staff member, the succeeding generations of the original settlers had large families and it became a tradition to put land under the names of each of their children. Thus, succeeding generations continued to subdivide their parcels of land to accommodate that tradition. This means that when you look at the ownership map, it looks like there are several different people farming smaller parcels of land in each section. However, the RM staff member explained that most of that land is still consolidated amongst fewer farmers through rental and lease arrangements. This created barriers to the research in Rhineland as it was very difficult to contact the actual farmer because my main method of recruitment was cold calling from names collected on the RM ownership map, where farmers who rent are not represented. Thus, I conducted dozens of cold calls in the RM but only successfully recruited two participants with this method. The other two were recruited at the annual meetings of the KAP and the NFU. Despite my best efforts, I had to settle for four farmers instead of eight in the RM of Rhineland, as I was limited by time and the methods that I had for recruiting participants. This is also the only RM where I was unable to find any women farmers to speak with. This is an RM where snowball sampling would have been particularly useful.

### **1.3 Outline of Thesis Chapters**

The following is a summary of how the thesis will proceed. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature that informed the research analysis. This includes a discussion of the financialization of the agri-food sector and a consequent process of land grabbing. I also summarize how these financial logics are driving the concentration of land and capital in the hands of fewer people. Finally, I discuss the framework of the ‘good farmer’ that helps shape farmer identities, farming practices, and relationships amongst farmers within rural communities. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 present my research findings. In Chapter 3, I give an overview of the dynamics of farmland ownership and farmland transactions, including farmer-landlord relationships, challenges farmers face accessing farmland and a discussion of the significance of who owns farmland in the community. Chapter 4 summarizes what participants shared about their knowledge of investor ownership in their RM and discusses the consolidation of land and capital amongst farmers. Chapter 5 looks at the ways that farmers value the rural landscape, with a focus on the various

roles that farmland plays. I also present participants' perspectives on the changing social and environmental landscapes in their communities. Lastly, in Chapter 6, I summarize the research findings and discuss the ways that my findings relate to the literature. Specifically, I discuss the competing views of the 'good farmer' in rural Manitoba, the increasing presence of financial logics in the agriculture industry here, and the ways that they impact the decision making of farmers. I conclude with a discussion of possible strategies or opportunities for moving forward in a way that benefits farmers and rural communities and provide recommendations for future research.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **2.1 Financialization and the Consolidation of Land and Capital in the Agri-food Sector**

Global food systems have become increasingly intertwined with financial markets since the 1980s, when neoliberal ideologies began to dominate state thinking and created more and diverse opportunities for finance capital to infiltrate the agri-food sector. This gave way to the financialization of global economies, defined as the “increasing importance of financial markets, financial motives, financial institutions, and financial elites in the operation of the economy and its governing institutions, both at national and international levels” (Epstein, 2002, p.3). Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, following a period of over-production and under consumption, many dominant multinational corporations began to recognize a condition of oversupply resulting in stagnating profits (Lawrence & Smith, 2018). Driven by the need for continued capital accumulation, Burch and Lawrence (2009) explain that financialization is not a “corporate strategy itself” but it does create opportunities for accumulation by capitalists as they embed themselves in global economies (p.277). A striking example of this phenomenon is visible in the agri-food sector. Following the 2007-08 financial crisis, financialization started to appear more significantly in the agri-food sector in many countries as investors turned to the agri-food system as an opportunity for profitable investment. As Desmarais et al. (2017) summarize, “financialization is both a continuation of and deepening of the neoliberal restructuring of agriculture” (p.151).

There are two general explanations for financialization in the agri-food sector. The first, a Marxist approach, points to the neoliberal, capitalist drive for ever-increasing accumulation (Clapp & Isakson, 2018). This theory suggests that stagnating profits and oversupply necessitated a shift of focus to financial activities, as capitalists reached the limits of capital accumulation through productive activities (Clapp & Isakson, 2018; Lawrence & Smith, 2018). The second explanation frames financialization within a Malthusian point of view which instead looks to population growth, resource scarcity, and the promise of economic efficiency and increased production through financial investment in the agri-food sector (Clapp & Isakson, 2018). Perhaps financialization emerged out of some combination of these two explanations, whereby the social perceptions of the risk involved with population growth and resource scarcity sparked a discourse about a need for increased economies of scale, and this, paired with the

establishment of a sweeping neoliberal landscape, facilitated the opportunities for financial investment into the agri-food sector. The neoliberal ideologies that allowed for financialization in the food system are still at work today and continue to legitimize the process. Lawrence and Smith (2018) indicate that neoliberalism does this by “encouraging new actors, creating new mechanisms/techniques for profit making and producing new outcomes” (p.9). Investors are the aforementioned new actors, their investment strategies are the techniques for profit making and the new outcomes include the bottom line financial goals of the investors and shareholders as well as the associated changes to labour, production, and the environment to facilitate those goals.

While financial actors choose to invest in land for a variety of reasons, including speculative investment, White et al. (2012) explain that many investors see farmland as an opportunity to also facilitate and profit from large-scale agricultural production. Although more research is still needed overall, much of the research about land grabbing to date has focussed on the Global South, yet there is some evidence that suggests it is occurring in the Global North as well (Desmarais et al., 2017; Geisler, 2015; van der Ploeg, Franco, & Borras, 2015). As a result, academics and investment entities are starting to pay attention to farmland in the Global North as it becomes more attractive as an investment. For example, Desmarais et al. (2017) found that in 2014 the amount of farmland owned by investors in Saskatchewan, Canada was 16 times the amount owned by investors in 2002. From a broader perspective, investors only own about 1.4% of all the farmland in Saskatchewan. Although this may seem like a small amount of farmland, Desmarais et al. (2017) urge us to consider not only the amount of farmland owned by investors, but how much of the available farmland they are capturing. For example, Magnan and Desmarais (2017) explain that at the peak of farmland investment in Saskatchewan in 2012, “investors accounted for nearly 10% of all arm’s length transactions” (p.8). Furthermore, in the RMs where investor activity was most concentrated their “purchases accounted for more than one fifth of all arm’s length transactions” (Magnan & Desmarais, 2017, p.9). The authors go on to explain that these purchases may be contributing to rising farmland prices since investors were paying significantly more per acre than other arm’s length buyers.

Land grabs by financial investors could result in ownership of farmland and power in the agri-food sector being increasingly concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer people. While this is certainly a concern, farmland is also concentrating in the hands of fewer farmers

themselves as large industrial farms consolidate smaller farms that are not able to compete in the current agricultural paradigm. Van der Ploeg et al. (2015) suggest that land concentration, in the hands of investors or farmers, is equally as important as land grabbing. The authors explain that, “agricultural land is becoming concentrated into ever fewer, large holdings under the control of a few corporate entities. This is undermining the capacity of many farming households to construct and defend their livelihoods and maintain their autonomy” (van der Ploeg et al., 2015, p. 149). Although they are speaking about Europe specifically, the message seems relevant when looking at the situation of declining farm numbers in Canada. Many large farms are incorporated and looking to grow, and in some cases, the acquisition of the neighbour’s farm may be the easiest method of expansion. Whether farmland is concentrating in the hands of investors or farmers, there is an increased risk that the consolidation of land holdings breaks down the structure, solidarity, and voice of rural communities and ultimately compromises their ability to resist further consolidation of farmland and thus the further industrialization of agricultural operations (Desmarais et al., 2017). Nonetheless, land concentration is often tolerated within rural communities due to the common narrative that it is necessary to achieve the “proper” economies of scale (as cited in Geisler, 2015).

The use of crisis narratives around population growth and economies of scale help to create the normative assumption that only larger, industrially run farms are capable of meeting the task of “efficiently” producing enough food, through intensification of production (Li, 2014). Meanwhile, small farmers are depicted as inefficient. In Canada, for example, the AAFC (2010) report, “2009 Dialogue Tour on Young Farmers and Farm Transfers: What we Heard”, suggests that inefficient farmers who are not effectively participating in the sector by joining the large-scale paradigm of agriculture should exit agriculture altogether. One of the proposed objectives of the AAFC is to examine whether or not government programs are working to enable these farmers to continue when they “should have exited the sector” (AAFC, 2010, p.7). This perpetuates the narrative that only large-scale farms can achieve the ‘right’ economies of scale. However, recent research by Qualman et al. (2020) calls into question the efficiency and productivity of increasing economies of scale. Preliminary data in Saskatchewan demonstrated that in fact, the largest farms were spending more per acre on inputs and fuel, rendering their operations no more efficient than those of the smallest farms (Qualman et al., 2020).

The assumption that large-scale agriculture is more productive and efficient, and thus better for the economy, the environment, and the people within it, works to justify corporate land deals that aim to facilitate large-scale agriculture (White et al., 2012). This was clearly demonstrated in Saskatchewan, where the Canadian investment firm Sprott Resource Group sought to create the largest conventional farm on the Canadian prairies using First Nations' reserve lands (Sommerville, 2018). To justify their strategy for essentially 'grabbing' reserve land, they employed a combination of the narratives outlined above: they drew on the image of the "inefficient land holder" (in this case the Indigenous peoples occupying that land); the crisis narrative of population growth that calls for increased productivity on the land; and the narrative that purports new land investment will result in a more environmentally friendly method of caring for the land. Embedded in each of these strategies are the colonial underpinnings of the Canadian settlement history that works to disenfranchise Indigenous peoples by dispossessing them of their lands and culture (Carter, 1990). Yet, One Earth Farm was established in 2009 by Sprott Resource Group in collaboration with representatives from a number of First Nations across Saskatchewan (Sommerville, 2018). Ultimately, One Earth Farm failed to meet its target profits, actually lost money, and by 2014 they dismantled the farm and cut ties with the First Nations communities, never realizing the profits or benefits promised to the communities at the outset (Sommerville, 2018). This example demonstrates the ways that financial actors manipulate financial logics and social contexts to achieve their objectives of purchasing farmland as a profitable investment.

The state plays an important role in facilitating land grabs. There is evidence suggesting that in many countries of the Global North, including Canada, large-scale farms and large-scale landholders are prioritized in the distribution of government subsidies and supports (van der Ploeg, 2015; Maxey, 2006). These incentives contribute to the transformation of farmland into what Andreucci et al. (2017) call a "pseudo-commodity" (p.30). Facilitated by the reigning private property regime, farmland is monetized as investor landholders become rentiers and treat the land itself as a commodity, therefore investors are able to produce profits without having to produce anything (Andreucci et al., 2017). Once again, the state is implicated as it is charged with facilitating rent relations and regulating private property rights, including who can purchase farmland and how much they can purchase (Andreucci et al., 2017). As financial actors solidify

their place in farmland markets and the agri-food sector, state intervention is abstracted from the workings of financialization which can then result in more deregulation of financial markets.

Arguments that support land grabs typically emphasize the opportunities of financial investment in farmland to allow for easier succession to the next generation of farmers and the potential benefits of increasing production to feed growing populations of hungry people, which would in turn benefit national economies without having to increase arable land bases (Magnan & Sunley, 2017; Li, 2011). However, these holistic intentions are rarely driving financial actors' pursuit of farmland acquisition, which are instead motivated solely by profits (Li, 2011).

Entering the land market in countries or industries that are experiencing social or economic unrest works in the favour of investors as citizens are more readily accepting of land investment in their country/industry, especially when presented as a means of repairing the crisis. In this way, land grabbing and financialization in the agricultural sector are presented as a “spatial fix”, prepared to address the growing demand for food and to create new efficiencies in agricultural production (Andreucci et al., 2017; Desmarais et al., 2017). Desmarais et al. (2017) state that financializing farmland through corporate investment negatively affects small-scale, young, and new farmers as they are put in competition for land with large-scale farms and the buying power of investors. The small and medium-scale farmers are marginalized in this process as they are once again painted as inefficient. Meanwhile, the smallholders that do manage to remain on the farm are now in competition with investor run mega-farms that are more readily able to meet retailer expectations and global export demands (van der Ploeg et al., 2015). The fear is that these investor-backed mega farms will become “too big to fail”, much the same way that monopolies such as Wal-Mart now dominate the retailer industry and have grown to the point of no return, thus making it more difficult to regulate their growth, tax them, and control their activities (Geisler, 2015, p.244).

Clapp and Isakson (2018) outline the ways that financialization has affected farmers, and agriculture more generally. With industrialized agriculture, farmers rely on the finance sector to supply loans for agricultural inputs. In many countries, including Canada, the state initially provided support for agricultural credit programs. With the neoliberal restructuring of the agricultural sector, however, the state has increasingly retreated from this process, creating the opportunity for private finance to fill the role of holding farmers' debt for inputs, land, and machinery. As farmers are pressured to increase production to be competitive, the cost of inputs

increases, which puts pressure on farmers to achieve more efficient economies of scale thus necessitating even more land in production and more inputs, and the cycle continues (Clapp & Isakson, 2018; Weis, 2012). The increase in production results in lower farm gate prices which means lower revenues for farmers who now have increased expenditures. Meanwhile, financial actors are benefitting from this process as they continue to invest in the agricultural input sector, both in production of inputs and in supplying the credit to buy them (Clapp & Isakson, 2018). These processes have contributed to continuously rising levels of farmer debt as well as growing levels of agrarian distress. This creates the perfect opportunity for financial investment in the sector as many farmers, now under immense stress and attempting to manage debt, make the decision to sell their land to an investor who might pay more for it than a new or young farmer could, thus transferring control of farmland from farmers to investors while contributing to the overall concentration of farmland (Clapp & Isakson, 2018).

Given the immense debt that many farmers are facing, some farmers are selling their land to investors to free up capital for the purchase of inputs and machinery, or to rent land (Sommerville & Magnan, 2015). Thus, farmers get out of crippling debt by selling their assets, while investors get their secure investment in farmland. Clapp and Isakson (2018) suggest that, in fact, renting farmland compromises the autonomy of farmers. Furthermore, although most farmers claim to treat all land the same regardless of the tenure model, some evidence suggests that farmers treat rented and owned land differently (Leonhardt et al. 2019). Especially where there are short, insecure rental arrangements, farmers are less likely to invest in long term soil management practices since farmers may not see the benefit of those investments (Fraser, 2004; Leonhardt et al., 2019). Even where there are long-term rental arrangements, Fraser (2004) found that these did not “provide the same incentives as land ownership” (p.78). Thus, farmland grabbing that results in increased land rentals for local farmers not only affects the autonomy of farmers and rural communities over land in their community, but may also have implications for soil conservation and the environment.

Whether farmland is concentrating into the hands of fewer farmers or into the hands of non-farming investors, farmland ownership has implications for land access, both through renting or purchasing. Ribot and Peluso (2003) introduce an important distinction between property and access that is perhaps useful to consider in the discussion of the consolidation of land ownership and tenure models. According to Ribot and Peluso (2003), property implies a

right to claim something as your own while access implies the ability to benefit from a space or thing without necessarily being able to declare any claim over it. Different levels of access and control of land and resources are interrelated, creating what Ribot and Peluso (2003) call “webs of access”, whereby “some people and institutions control resource access while others must maintain their access through those who have control” (p.154). In developing a private property regime that grants the right to control land to some people over others, a kind of self-regulating process emerges whereby citizens who own and control land also control the access of those who are not granted the same rights. Consequently, those without the right to own land must seek access from those with that right. This, in some sense, grants those with rights and power over land, rights and power over people as well— since “power resides in the property which they own” (as cited in Blomley, 2003). This dynamic works to maintain the private property regime, as those with the right to property have a tangible interest in maintaining the regime in order to maintain their power and control of land and people (Blomley, 2003).

This is an important consideration in the discussion of farmland ownership in the Canadian prairies, as it demonstrates the importance of who owns farmland. The owners of farmland are those that decide who will get access to that land and who will not. Farmland concentration represents a redistribution of power that calls into question the autonomy of not only farmers themselves but also of rural, food producing communities in being able to dictate what and how food is produced and who has access to the means of production. As farmland consolidation and concentration continue to increase, there are important implications for the dynamics of rural relationships.

Financialization reinforces the inequalities present in the food system, drives environmental and socio-economic changes that heighten food system fragility, and impedes collective action by isolating individuals in their interactions with finance capital (Clapp & Isakson, 2018). Although farmland investments appear to have slowed in the past 5 years, the precedent has been set for financial investment and financial influence in individual lives and collective systems (Clapp & Isakson, 2018). Civil society and social movements are marginalized in the increasingly complex and technical language and instruments of financial investment. This impedes their ability to participate in policy debates and ultimately stifles social movements against the financialization of food and farmland (Clapp & Isakson, 2018). For civil society to better resist the increasing financialization of food systems, Clapp and Isakson (2018)

suggest the following three lines of action: facilitate public conversations that de-mystify the language of financialization and allow for collective understandings of the framework and its impacts; develop strategies for meaningful and productive engagement between civil society and the state to collaborate on appropriate regulation; and nurture an alternative food movement that empowers small-scale, alternative producers and encourages them to scale out and take up meaningful space in the agri-food sector. While these are important steps in creating more just and sustainable food systems, perhaps a more radical restructuring of social and economic relations is needed if we are to tackle the power of finance in our increasingly neoliberal, globalized, and financialized food systems. As state and market actors in Canada continue to prioritize a paradigm of agriculture that consolidates farmland into fewer owners and uses production practices that are detrimental to our environment, the future of agriculture is uncertain as the dominating agribusiness corporations and financial actors outcompete small-scale, new, and young farmers for power, land, and profit. Furthermore, the narratives of efficiency and growth utilized by state and market actors begin to infiltrate the identities and decision-making of farmers themselves, thus solidifying the power of those narratives over communities and people.

## **2.2 The 'Good Farmer': Perceptions of land, community, and the environment**

Burton et al. (2020) explain that “the term ‘good farmer’ ...refers to both the production roles and wider social and moral roles” of farmers (p.8).<sup>24</sup> It is both a real-life category and an analytical framework; and as Burton et al. (2020) demonstrate, there are three general uses of the framework of a good farmer. The first is farmer-based uses, where it is a common-sense category that distinguishes competent farmers from incompetent farmers, as well as an emic category used

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<sup>24</sup> Burton, Forney, Stock, and Sutherland are leading scholars in the theoretical and practical understandings of the ‘good farmer’. I recognize that I reference their most recent book, *the Good Farmer: Culture and Identity in Food and Agriculture*, as well as their other works, quite often throughout this thesis. This is because research and theorization on the ‘good farmer’ is a relatively new body of work and these are four of the main scholars contributing to the conversation about what it means to be a ‘good farmer’ in different countries and contexts, how the idea emerged, and why it is a useful framework for understanding agricultural landscapes and farmer identities and behaviours. The above mentioned book also provides a more overarching view of the ‘good farmer’ as an analytical framework, that draws on historical, contemporary, and new research and literature to provide a more in-depth and wide-reaching relevance to their work. Conversely, I found that other work on the ‘good farmer’ often takes a more specific or place-based approach that was less useful for the context of my research, since for my purposes the ‘good farmer’ framework was used to interrogate the paradigm of ‘good farming’ that is present in Manitoba.

by farmers to denote the symbolic significance of certain farming behaviours. Next, are the agriculture industry and policy-based uses which employ the good farmer framework to assess “productivity and/or environmental impact”, linking the observed practices with scientific knowledge to evaluate which practices are ‘best’ (p.7). Finally, there are social science based uses of the ‘good farmer’ framework, which can take many shapes depending on the goal, but are generally employed to develop an understanding of the social norms and conflicting ideas of who a ‘good farmer’ is in a given community.

The analytical framing of a ‘good farmer’ is a useful tool for developing an understanding of the perceptions that farmers have about land, community, the environment, and each other. It is important to note, however, that who is considered a good farmer changes over time and space. There is not one single definition but instead many culturally constructed ideas of who is a ‘good farmer’ and what ‘good farming’ looks like at a given time and place (Burton et al., 2020). These authors go on to note that,

In reality, a ‘good farmer’ is not a literary being, but emerges organically from the interaction between farmers, society, and in particular, the knowledge, implements, and machines that are used to work the land... One becomes a ‘good farmer’ by reaching a level of competence in a set of culturally significant behaviours (p. 37).

Within any given farming community there are often competing views of what it means to be a ‘good farmer’, with different rules and symbols. This is the case where the small-scale, direct market focussed model of production exists alongside the large-scale export-oriented model. Each of these models will have different common understandings of who is a ‘good farmer’ and there are characteristics and symbolic queues associated with each. Despite the existence of both of these models on the Canadian prairies, the dominant model is that of large-scale, industrialized agriculture producing commodities for export, which effectively informs a dominant notion of the ‘good farmer’ throughout much of the prairies.

Symbols of a ‘good farmer’ can be both visible measures, such as the physical appearance of the land itself, as well as conceptual measures, such as the role of farmers in the community. The symbolic values present within each of these measures converge to create the ‘good farmer’ identity. Past versions of the ‘good farmer’ focussed more on the farmer’s family, their relationship to the community, and their morality (Burton et al., 2020). More recently, however, as these authors point out, those foci have taken a back seat to the productivist,

business-focussed farmer, as the narrative of the “efficient” farmer takes hold and emphasizes economies of scale as the ultimate goal. As outlined by Cusworth (2020), following World War II, farmers’ main priority was “to produce as much food as possible, and the rules of the game accordingly legitimised land management styles that pertained to achieving that goal” (p. 167). Furthermore, as technology advances and farm practices change, so too do the symbols of a ‘good farmer’. The arrival of the combustion engine was perhaps one of the most important of these changes as it transformed the visual representation of a ‘good farmer’; thus, imperfect fields with any weeds were no longer acceptable as ‘tidy’ and ‘neat’ fields became the norm (Burton et al., 2020). This gave rise to new symbolic indicators; farmers with weeds in their fields are now widely interpreted as lazy or ‘bad farmers’, while those with clean and weed-free fields are regarded as hard-working, ‘good farmers’. Often referred to as ‘roadside’ farming, the visual aspects of farmland are an important tool used by the farm community to establish competency and solidify the ‘good farmer’ reputation (Sutherland & Burton, 2011).

These new norms have implications for those using organic or alternative methods of production as their fields may look quite different than those of their conventional counterparts. Furthermore, studies have shown farmer resistance to the adoption of agri-environmental schemes, as any change in farming practices may result in losing your status and identity as a ‘good farmer’ (Burton, Kuczera, & Schwarz, 2008). This resistance may also be rooted in the fact that many farmers already see themselves as conservationists. As Silvasti (2003) indicated in her study of Finland, “farmers tend to underestimate or deny negative environmental impacts of their farming practice. Although farmers have adopted modern, effective, and industrial ways of farming, they still consider their work as a harmonious and respectful cooperation with nature” (p.143). Furthermore, farmers often regard uncultivated areas as bad practice because they may harbour vermin, thus leaving any land in a natural state is seen as undesirable (Burton et al., 2008). This view is further demonstrated in the practice of removing all trees and other habitat from the farm, a practice that Silvasti (2003) attributes to many farmers’ perception that uncultivated land is wasteful or not valuable.

Due to the lack of symbolic value associated with environmentally sound agricultural practices, Burton et al. (2008) call for “agri-environmental policies that provide farmers with a sense of value of their environmental work” (p. 32). Thus, establishing new symbolic values of ‘good farming’ rooted in more environmentally focussed practices could result in new iterations

of a ‘good farmer’ that are more environmentally conscious. However, in addition to a perceived loss of identity, resistance to the adoption of agri-environmental schemes may be rooted in the perception that associated practices are counter-productive or that there will be a loss of autonomy associated with these types of changes (Burton et al., 2008)

Burton et al. (2020) explain that the title of a ‘good farmer’ is not something given lightly and that “the act of calling someone a ‘good farmer’ is an acknowledgement of appreciation and status within the community” (p.1). Just as somebody can be labelled a ‘good farmer’, they can also be labelled a ‘bad farmer’. This designation within a rural, farming community may have implications for access to social, cultural, and material capital. Much of the literature on the ‘good farmer’ builds on Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of social and cultural capital with an emphasis on the symbolic values that help distribute this capital amongst farmers (see Riley, 2016, for example). Social capital in agricultural communities is most often characterized by an exchange of both knowledge and equipment resources (Sutherland & Burton, 2011). Sutherland and Burton (2011) explain that if a farmer is perceived to be a ‘bad farmer’, their peers will be less likely to want to share their knowledge and machinery, for fear they might damage it. However, the authors also note that given the interconnected world we live in, knowledge and information is often shared outside of the local community. Therefore, even if you lack the social capital to access knowledge in your own community, you may seek it elsewhere.

The ‘good farmer’ framework is a useful starting point to understand the path that has led the agriculture industry towards increasing farmland concentration and the infiltration of financial logics in the agri-food sector. The shift from a focus on family and community to increased production and efficiency coincides with a troubling trend of increasing production costs and stagnating profits for farmers (Qualman, 2011). Importantly, it is not only farmers that employ the ‘good farmer’ framework; it is also used by industry and policy makers as a rhetoric that assigns a particular agricultural approach as the ‘right’ one (Burton et al., 2020). Although “the term ‘good farmer’ has arguably been replaced with other terms such as ‘entrepreneurial’, ‘innovative’ or ‘sustainable’,” these are just the latest prioritized characteristics assigned to farmers (Burton et al., 2020, p.7). The agri-business industry has a profound influence over the model of a ‘good farmer’ as the size, scale, and type of machinery available dictates what size, scale, and type of agricultural production will occur. Thus, the increasing focus on larger models of agriculture and the perceived economies of scale that they represent is not necessarily

reflective of the primary goal of farmers, but as Burton et al. (2020) put it, “increasing production was important from the perspective of those in power” (p.65). This pushes farmers to continue expanding their operations by acquiring more land, adopting the latest technologies and purchasing the latest inputs and machinery. Farmers make decisions about their farm based on more than just economic sense, they also account for social and cultural considerations, such as their reputation in the farm community (as cited in Burton et al., 2020). Consequently, the normative assumption that ‘good farmers’ must continually seek economies of scale to increase production and be efficient may be a driving force in the non-economically rational decision making in which some farmers appear to be engaged.

## **2.3 Research Design**

The empirical research and theoretical frameworks of the ‘good farmer’ and financialization in the agri-food system outlined above inform my analysis of the social impacts and environmental implications of changing patterns of farmland ownership in Manitoba. Speaking with farmers, RM officials and staff and others with knowledge of the agriculture industry in the province, I investigate if financial investors are purchasing farmland in Manitoba and the impacts these actors are having on rural communities. Financial investors in the agri-food sector may be individuals or financial institutions that seek profitable investment in different levels of the food system; these include “hedge funds, private equity firms, wealthy individuals, and pension funds”, for example (Magnan & Sunley, 2017). Put simply, for this project, an investor is anyone who owns farmland without being a farmer or farming the land themselves. Although this research is interested in the role that investors play in effecting these changes, it also explores the dynamic of other farmland sales, so as not to over-estimate the role of investors. That is, I also explore the causes and effects of the increasing concentration of farmland amongst farmers in the province, referring back to the literature on financialization in the agri-food sector and the role of the ‘good farmer’ narrative to make sense of my data and observations.

As part of a larger project that asks the same questions in Manitoba, Alberta and Saskatchewan, this research provides crucial analysis of land markets, farmer livelihoods, and the driving ideologies and forces of increasing concentration of land and capital on the prairies. This will allow for a comparison with the other provinces in Western Canada. Employing the

‘good farmer’ and financialization frameworks will help uncover the ways that financial logics have entered farmland markets and in particular how they affect farmer livelihoods and influence farmers’ decision making. Finally, developing an understanding of the dynamics of land transfers and the possibility of land grabs in Manitoba will help to reveal how these processes affect the social, economic, and environmental landscapes of rural communities.

### **3. WHY LAND OWNERSHIP MATTERS: A LOOK AT FARMER EXPERIENCES RENTING, BUYING, AND OWNING FARMLAND**

For farmers, access to farmland is necessary, no matter the size or type of farm. However, accessing farmland, whether through renting or ownership, is one of the biggest challenges that farmers face, both at the beginning and throughout their careers. Increasing competition for available land paired with rising land prices have resulted in unequal access to land for some people. Smaller farms, as well as new and young farmers, are those more impacted by this dynamic; these farmers are continuously outcompeted for available land, allowing large farms to get larger and solidifying the inequalities already present.

At the same time that farm size is increasing, farmer identities are shifting as well. Agricultural reporter, Laura Rance, summarized some of the current changes, in terms of how farmers are approaching land,

The land ownership matrix is changing as well as the attitudes towards farmland ownership. Whereas it was standard for farmers to own all or most of the land they farm, many farmers now secure additional land access through rental. This is due in large part to the reluctance of many retired farmers to sell their land, but also because it is financially less risky for the operator. It is becoming more common for new operators to rent most of the land they operate.

This apparent shift from predominantly an ownership tenure model to more farmers renting farmland may have implications not only for the farm business, but also for farmers themselves. As Rance put it, “land ownership has been considered a fundamental component of a farmer's identity”. However, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, farmer identities and in particular farmers’ statuses as ‘good farmers’ are increasingly rooted in their ability to grow their farms and increase production through whatever means necessary. Therefore, as land prices rise and competition intensifies, perhaps land access through renting is indeed becoming more common amongst farmers despite the traditional preference for ownership.

This chapter uses the interviews that I conducted in Manitoba to shed light on farmers’ perceptions and experiences of the benefits and drawbacks of renting and/or owning land, the challenges in accessing land, and why it matters who owns farmland. I focus on the empirical data to allow the responses from participants in this study to direct the content and flow of this chapter.

### **3.1 Owning Versus Renting Farmland: The good, the bad, and the necessary?**

Land ownership is indeed important to farmers; 70% of the farmers in this study own 50% or more of their land base, while only 23% own their entire land base. Therefore, most farmers have both land that they rent and own. When asked if they would prefer to own more farmland or continue renting, 79% said that they would like to own more farmland, 5% said they would like to own and rent more land, and 16% said they would like to continue renting<sup>25</sup>. The three farmers who said they would like to continue renting indicated that they would like to do so because they are nearing retirement and do not want to take on anymore land purchases at this stage of their career. The farmer who said that he would like to both rent and own more farmland explained that this is because he wants to expand the land base as much as possible to make room for his son who is joining the operation. An overwhelming majority of farmers in this study want to own more land rather than continue renting. This preference for land ownership suggests that farmers in Manitoba are pushing back against the trend towards predominantly rented farms.

Farmers are keenly aware that with current land prices, owning their entire land base is an unlikely reality. As one young grain farmer in Portage la Prairie, who currently rents his entire land base, put it, “I’d prefer to own some but to be honest I just don’t think it’s in the cards. At \$5,000 an acre, I just don’t see how that can happen.” Farmers gave myriad reasons why they prefer ownership over renting, including: the equity you gain with owned land, the speculative increases in land values, the ability to make decisions about what to do on that land, the freedom to improve the land, and security of tenure. These reasons relate to an overarching theme that became apparent as farmers compared rented and owned land; in short, owning land gives you autonomy and renting land compromises that autonomy.

Van Gelgern and Jansen (2006) lay out three aspects of autonomy that typically come into play for business owners, “emphasis on independence (“others do not determine what I will do”), self-congruence (“I want to do my own things”), and power to decide (“I want to be the one that sets the rules”)” (p.26). These same elements are apparent in the ways that farmers are thinking about their land tenure models. For example, one grain farmer from Portage la Prairie, when talking about the importance of having control over land said,

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<sup>25</sup> These numbers were calculated out of 19 total farmers, rather than all 30 farmers. This is because one of the farmers farms with his father-in-law and does not own or rent any land personally, seven of the farmers own their entire land base, and three of the farmers are retired and were not asked this question.

Two big reasons: one is security of tenure, when I own land I'm controlling it and if I'm doing improvements on it, I'm doing that for myself. The only problem is, it takes a lot more cashflow to do that. And the other is, I suppose we're hoping for some appreciation... [in] the value of land.

A grain farmer from Rhineland points to the threat of having your land taken away,

With owning, the advantage would be security. We have lost rented acres because [the landlord has] sold it to the highest bidder; or they've switched, they all the sudden would switch renters if someone offers them more. So, [it is] the security of just having that land.

Aside from losing productive acres, in many cases, farmers are using rented land to spread out the cost of other land purchases which means that losing rented land could potentially have serious consequences for the farm. A grain farmer from Killarney-Turtle Mountain said that the insecurity he feels with short term rental agreements gives him pause when thinking about expanding his operation,

Land lease terms are typically three, some are five, the odd one I've heard of is ten [years]. Currently, I have a two-year lease, so, you don't know whether to expand your operation based on whether those acres are going to be available next time the lease is up.

In addition to ensuring that you will have the land in the future, and have the benefit of profiting off of the value of that land, renting can sometimes result in a lack of independence for farmers. For example, if a landlord dictates what can and cannot be done on the land.

Only four farmers said that their landlords impose conditions on their farming practices, such as demanding specific rotations and limiting the application of certain synthetic chemicals, which, for the most part, did not seem to be viewed as a big inconvenience. However, an example given by a mixed grain and cattle farmer from Killarney-Turtle Mountain demonstrates how, in some instances, such demands can be detrimental,

If you're renting, you can't control the stipulations by the owner...about half of the land we farm is owned by someone who, this year, told us he wants us to keep it all in alfalfa. And so, we're organic farmers and our rotation is very important for weed control [and] for fertilization...not being able to implement a rotation, in the long term, it could be quite damaging to us.

She went on to say that the reason for these stipulations, is that the owners are thinking of selling the land and they want to be able to produce hay so that prior to a land sale they can show that they are actually farming it themselves which will affect their tax status. She and her husband

will have first option to buy the land if it comes up for sale, but there was some uncertainty about whether they would do so. She explained that, “you have to be able to pay for it with what you produce off it”, something that they might be compromising now by following the stipulations set in place by the landlord.

Over the last several decades, landlord and tenant relationships have shifted from being primarily based on relationships, to becoming more of a legal transaction. The days when land tenure agreements were done by a handshake are becoming a thing of the past. Some participants lamented the time when rural neighbours had that kind of implicit trust in one another. However, a RM official from North Cypress-Langford explained that this is positive as it protects both the farmer and the landlord,

That's a good thing in my mind. There's a lot of younger kids that are inheriting land, it's better for the farmers to have a contract now in any way, shape or form. And it's twofold. It works great for the renters because then they know when . . . and how they're getting their money. It's easier for the farmers because they know what they're paying and it's set out and it's a given, they've got this land for a certain time frame, that allows them to plan farther out. But it used to be handshakes.

Despite the formality of a contract, there are still plenty of farmer and landlord relationships that are rooted in community and trust. A grain farmer from Portage la Prairie compares dealings he had with a landlord he did not know, versus one who he has known in the community for over 20 years,

We'd farmed it for ten years, and because...another wheeler dealer comes in and offers about \$15 more an acre, [the landlord] took it. Now, in that case, he really had no loyalty to us... he was all about the money. We've been renting a piece of land here from a couple people for 25 years, and I'm sure they've had other offers, and higher ones than us, but they don't take it, they leave it with us. So, it depends an awful lot on your landlord as to how secure you are in these rental agreements.

A young grain farmer from Rhineland reiterated the importance of a contract for the farmer-landlord relationship,

The relationship's important, an open relationship where they communicate what their intentions are for the future of the land. A good lease agreement is important, I started out with a good one and then over time we kind of just did verbal consent for a while but then once I got these new landlords involved we got something in writing again, which I think is good, it helped the communication process I would

say. So, that's very important. Our confidentiality is important, and yeah, just mutual respect I would say.

Increasingly, farmers are seeing landlords who are focussed primarily on money and will leverage their power to raise rents. A young grain farmer from Portage la Prairie pointed to the barriers that this kind of dynamic has for him,

If you can cultivate a good relationship with the land owner you can potentially rent that land for a very long time. But you know, usually the thing is they'll only sign up to a 5-year contract with you and that's doing pretty good... Then after that it just takes one high roller to come in and say, 'well I'll bid this up and if this goes beyond what you can afford as a young farmer, well, you don't have much standing room there'.

A grain farmer from Killarney-Turtle Mountain explained his perspective on these kinds of landlords,

I know there's some landlords that, when the lease is up they're always talking to people saying, 'you know, this lease is coming up, I'm entertaining bids,' and stuff like that. And for ourselves, we're not interested in doing business with people like that. We prefer to do business with people that, I guess, your relationship is valued and, you know, you spent so many years farming [their land] and they kind of give you first chance to continue that.

Maintaining good relationships with your neighbours and landlords, even if you have a contract, can help combat the insecurity of renting farmland. A retired farmer who is now in his late 80s explained that when he and his wife decided to rent out their land, they chose a person who was a "great, great, great neighbour", and although they "aren't renting it [out] for anything like they could", he plows their driveway in the winter and just generally looks out for them, so they are happy with the arrangement all the same. A good relationship with your landlord is important, but it is also inevitable that as the price of land increases, so too does the price of rent. A young mixed grain and cattle farmer from North Cypress-Langford shared his perspective on rent increases in his area,

I think most landlords understand that there's money to be made, so maybe they are asking for more rent than they did 20 years ago, but they deserve it. I mean, it's their land, they should make a dollar on it too. In the past, it was maybe more that, 'who's your neighbor' and 'I'll just rent it to them, and they tell me what they're gonna pay', but now I think it's more competitive.

Despite the challenges that renting farmland can bring, most farmers are still incorporating rented land into their farms. In some cases, this is because of the financial freedom rented land provides, as one young grain farmer from Rhineland put it,

Renting would be good because there's no commitment, really, you pay rent one year and you don't have massive interest in principal requirements every year, you just make the rent and you're less invested and have a little bit less return.

For others, rented land has become a necessity for their business. As another young grain farmer from Rhineland put it,

If you're basing your farm and your purchases and your equipment that you own on a certain landmass, then all of a sudden you think, 'wow, there's a risk of a thousand acres being taken off', that's a big chunk. So, then the purchase of land, even though there's a risk, has a silver lining.

Often times, farmers are seeking out rented land in order to increase their acres so that they can spread the cost of new land purchases or equipment across those acres. Thus, losing any number of acres can mean big financial trouble for those farmers. A young grain farmer from Portage la Prairie explained how he needs rented land to make his finances work, but how the insecurity of rented land makes that dependence stressful,

As much as farming is a very long-term game and you need to think long term, when you're only renting the land, you don't know if you're going to have that land next year, or in 2 years, you know? So, you're trying to plan financially; trying to plan for, if you bought a tractor and you've got to make payments in the next 5 years. Well, okay, I've got the land up till 3 years but what about these other two? You know? What if I can't get more.

A young farmer from Rhineland emphasized the preference for owning land but explained how rented land fits into the finances of his farm business,

Absolutely, if I could own 5,000 acres tomorrow I would, you just can't. I don't have, whatever, ten million dollars sitting in the bank. So, I can't. So, yeah owning, absolutely, hands-down, just in an idealistic sense. But realistically, a little of both, we need some rented land to generate some cash flow to make our loan payments on our recently bought land and then the land that we have totally paid for, that also helps to pay for the new land purchase.

Rented land comes with its benefits and setbacks, and although most farmers agree that ownership is always preferred, there is a time and place for renting land. A grain farmer from Killarney-Turtle Mountain explained that because he is an established farmer in a good position to buy land, he prefers to do that, but, "for someone just starting out there's benefits to keeping

working capital in a good position and renting the land”. Further to this point, another grain farmer from the same RM said that rented land is “a good way to increase your acreage quickly”. This type of rapid acreage increase is something that is becoming increasingly difficult to do, especially for smaller farms and young farmers.

### **3.2 Fighting for the Farm: Challenges farmers face accessing land**

Manitoba farmers are facing a number of challenges in finding land to rent or purchase. Land prices have been steadily increasing for decades, Statistics Canada data shows that the average price per acre in Manitoba rose by 77% between 1996 and 2016 (Manitoba Agriculture, n.d.). Unsurprisingly, land prices and competition for land are the two most commonly cited challenges that farmers in this study face as they work to keep their farms viable by expanding their land base (Table 7).

**Table 7. Main Challenges Farmers Identified in Accessing Farmland**

| <b>Challenge</b>               | <b># of farmers out of 30 that mentioned this challenge at least once</b> |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Price of land               | 25 (83%)                                                                  |
| 2. Competition                 | 20 (67%)                                                                  |
| 3. Availability of land        | 9 (30%)                                                                   |
| 4. Access to capital/financing | 9 (30%)                                                                   |

One of the only two farmers who answered ‘no’ when asked if they had ever faced any challenges finding land to purchase or rent, said that was the case because of relationships he had in the community. The grain farmer from Killarney-Turtle Mountain said that the availability of land has never been it an issue for him, land just always “seemed to have come up for whatever reason.” In fact, he has been approached on three different occasions by neighbours offering to rent him their land. He explained how one of these interactions played out,

We were never close friends but we always got along, and he just texted us and he says, ‘I’m thinking of renting my farm, are you interested?’ Then we went and talked to him and he says, ‘you’re first on my list’.

In this example, the person offering land was a neighbour who was described as a friendly acquaintance, knew the farmer and his sons, and “liked what they did”. Thus, this could be an example of those ‘good farming’ symbolic values at work in the community, since he identified that he liked the work they did based on what he had observed and not a close personal relationship. Despite the encouraging picture of community solidarity this example presents, this kind of luck was not commonplace amongst farmers in my study. In fact, 92%<sup>26</sup> of farmers identified challenges that they have faced when trying to find land to purchase or rent.

### ***3.2.1 The Price of Land and Balancing Finances on the Farm***

Land values in several agricultural regions of Manitoba have sky-rocketed in recent years. The high price of land as a challenge was mentioned by 89% of the farmers in this study (Table 7). A grain farmer from Rhineland explained how he has observed land prices change and how this affects his decision-making process for the farm,

So, because there was a big shift: all of a sudden it was over \$1,000 an acre and all of the sudden it was \$1,500, all of a sudden it was \$3,000, then [it] moved to four, now to five, now it's about \$5,000 an acre in our area. So, that price jump and then trying to do your math on how is this affordable anymore? And just even exploring the concept of purchasing land and the purpose of purchasing has dramatically shifted from, ‘oh great, because we can afford it and the land will pay for itself’, to now, we have to bring in our whole farm and say, ‘oh, I now need other land to support the purchase of that land’. So, there's stress, stress is a huge part of that.

Farmers in all four RMs in this study talked about the dramatic rise in land prices. While it makes it difficult for farmers to expand and make a profit off of the land, because most farmers are also land owners, they are at once frustrated with the price but happy that the land they already own is so valuable. However, this increase in value is only good for farmers if they plan to sell their land. More and more landowners are holding onto that land as a way to continue profiting from the land by renting it out, but for those just starting out or in the middle of their career, the increase in value does not provide any immediate benefits. As a young grain farmer from Killarney-Turtle Mountain put it,

There's also been the rapid appreciation of land that has kind of made landlords less willing to sell, they want to just rent because, well, it's been more like 13

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<sup>26</sup> This was calculated out of 26 farmers, rather than 30, because three farmers are retired and one is not involved with the buying or renting of the farmland for the farm, these four farmers were not asked this question.

years now where land has tripled in value. So, landlords are less willing to let go of that asset because they maybe feel like there's more room for growth.

He went on to explain that since he has no plans to sell his land, the increase in value does not do anything positive for him at this time, and actually impacts his business costs,

Land sales are public knowledge, right? So, as soon as a land sale becomes public knowledge then the next person selling typically wants that price or more, so, it increases the value. Which on one hand is good because it increases the value of my current land, but on the other hand I'm not planning on selling my land. All it does is increases my operating costs in terms of taxes and it lowers my return on investment as a farm because now I have more equity in land, so it decreases my return that I am getting off the land.

Increasing land values are impacting the cost of both purchasing and renting land, making it increasingly difficult to justify expansion through either avenue. As one grain farmer from Portage la Prairie put it,

Generally speaking, the advantage of renting is that it should come at a lesser annual cost. And the advantage of ownership is that it is equity building. The unfortunate reality is that in recent years the rental rates and ownership costs have gotten very close together, so that rental has become very difficult.

If renting is no longer cheaper than owning farmland, then the benefits of renting farmland, as outlined above, start to diminish. Given this reality, a grain farmer from Killarney-Turtle Mountain explained some of the challenges that young farmers face,

There's not much for rent, so, they've just got to buy. I mean the price of land is so high out here and they're just forced to buy or else they won't get it and there's people standing in line to buy it too.

The price of land is so prohibitive now that farmers continue to expand their land base in pursuit of 'better' economies of scale. As a young grain farmer from Rhineland put it,

I could make it work to buy a little bit here or there, but to buy another piece of land, like 160 acres, I would need to subsidize that purchase by renting more land or coming up with some other income source which usually would be renting three— let's say renting another 300 acres to pay for these 100 acres.

Increasing your economies of scale may work in theory, but actually finding available land at a reasonable price and securing that land is not always as straight forward. Overall, there appears to be less available land and more competition for that land.

### 3.2.2 *Competition and Land Availability*

Not only are farmers paying more for land than ever before, farmers in this study also identified land access and availability as key challenges. As a mixed grain and livestock farmer from Killarney-Turtle Mountain said, “there is land available if you want, it’s just how much you’re willing to pay and how far you want to travel.” Competition for land was identified as a challenge by 67% of farmers interviewed, and a closely related challenge, the availability of land, was mentioned by 30% of farmers in this study. Many farmers are having difficulties finding land to rent or purchase, and in some cases, farmers are having to travel further from their home base to find available land. Once they do find land that is available, it often seems that everyone else in the area is vying for the same piece of land thus helping to create an imbalance of power and access to land in the community while contributing to rising land prices. As a cattle farmer from North Cypress-Langford put it,

If there's any land that ever comes up for sale, now it's just more or less a bidding war. The big guys want it and the little guy hasn't got a chance. Like, my son, he would never be able to buy land here now for the price it's going for, to make it pay, no, no.

Not every farmer will be able to access the land that they need to farm, regardless of how determined they might be. A grain farmer from Portage la Prairie explained how he has seen these challenges play out over the last few decades,

Most farmers would say that there isn't very much land that changes hands, relatively[-speaking]. And . . . from my view, in the last 30 years, most people don't get a chance to expand; and the more productive your area, the tougher it is because you've got more competition for small parcels of land.

The competition for land, paired with escalating land prices, has created unequal market opportunities for farmers. The largest farms, including Hutterite colonies<sup>27</sup>, seem to hold most of the buying power throughout these productive agricultural regions. As one potato and grain farmer from North Cypress-Langford put it,

It's not a fair playing field anymore, eh? You've got Hutterite colonies, they'll pay \$2,000 more an acre just because they wanted it. They don't need the payback...because they've got a rafter shop, a pen of pigs or something... That's the only part that's really tough around here.

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<sup>27</sup> It is important to note that to group Hutterite Colonies in with large farms is misleading since any given colony consists of many families. Although the perceived threat to accessing land posed by the presence of Hutterite Colonies came up often in the interviews, it is beyond the scope of this research to analyze this issue.

In Portage la Prairie, where there are at least 13 Hutterite colonies as well as several very large farms, medium-scale farmers are finding it extremely difficult to compete. As one grain farmer from the area put it,

It's always difficult to watch the big get bigger. And generally, the colonies are the bigger ones. There are a few family farms that are in their size, there's the odd one that's bigger, but they're difficult to compete with. They're efficient, they're smart, and they've got lots of equity to work with and lots of borrowing power. So, it's always a little disheartening to know that before you ever start [bidding on land], your number that you could live with is already smaller than the number they can live with. It's a little daunting. The only time we're able to do much is if we have a specific connection to an individual who would rather not have a colony or a large farm [buy up their land] and they would rather see it going to a young farmer, and there isn't many of those anymore.

As the price of land rises, some farmers are seeing it as an opportunity to get out of the industry and secure their retirement fund, so selling to their neighbour or the young farmer nearby is not always the most practical, much less the lucrative, option. In some instances, participants pointed out that there are a couple of very large farmers that are willing to pay more for good land and who are better equipped to travel to secure that land. This creates barriers for those in the area who are looking to grow modestly, purchasing small pieces of land slowly, over time, to ensure that they are able to keep their books balanced and their debt load manageable.

As one grain farmer from Portage la Prairie put it,

The opportunities to go out and buy a quarter section here, or a quarter section there, are getting fewer and further between. Basically, now if you're gonna buy some farmland you're gonna have to be able to buy four, eight quarters type thing. In the past I think it was a lot easier to buy a quarter here and there, but it seems like the farmers that are retiring now are either just gonna rent things out or, if they're gonna sell it, they're gonna sell everything, buildings, yard, all their land, equipment, lock, stock and barrel.

A grain farmer from North Cypress-Langford echoed this statement,

They want to sell it all to one person, they don't really want to break it up amongst neighbours, or, the odd time, yeah, they do that, but for the most part, if they've got a buyer, they want to...[sell] everything.

As seen above, farm size appears to play a significant role in the ability of farmers to expand their land base, particularly through buying more land. Perhaps this is because the more land you have, the better chance you have to secure financing. Or, perhaps the more acres you

operate, the easier it is to justify new land purchases by spreading out the cost of land across the rest of your land base. As a cattle farmer from North Cypress-Langford said, “it’s like a big wheel, it just keeps on rolling and the little guy like me doesn’t have much of a say.” A RM official elaborated on that statement,

I've noticed that small [farmers] don't have a chance. Usually they don't even get asked. That's the unfortunate truth. I know several young guys that wish they could expand their farms, I'm one of them, and I have a heck of a time. There are a couple other guys in the area who I talk to and we pay through the nose if we even get a chance at it, pardon the French, it's balls to the wall. You take it and you give them the best price you can off the hop, otherwise you don't even get looked at.

The competition for any available land that comes up is so intense that many small and medium sized farmers recognize that they do not have a chance at securing land, as there always seems to be a bigger farmer competing for the same land, and they typically have the upper hand.

Despite all of these challenges, many farmers are working to expand their land base in efforts to remain competitive in the agriculture industry and to ensure that they are able to build profitable farms for future generations. Although, with each land purchase given the current price, they may be setting themselves up for more financial risk than security. Renting land is a strategy many farmers use to be able to compete in the land market, but with the price of rent rising too, that strategy may not be as viable in the future. As big farms get bigger and continue to compete for available land while also pushing up the land price, there are fewer and fewer opportunities for small-scale farmers, as well as those who are young and new to agriculture. One grain farmer from Portage la Prairie explained his conflicting view of the rising farmland prices in the area,

Land prices have increased more in the last 20 years, or even probably 10 years, than they have in [a] lifetime [and] history...in Western Canada. So that makes it good for somebody like me because I’m close to retirement, but it makes it difficult for my children and almost impossible for my grandchildren to continue to expand the business and purchase farmland.

Many farmers in his position, those who own a lot of their land base and are nearing retirement, are at once happy about the prospect of a retirement fund through the sale of their high valued land, but also concerned for what these rising prices mean for the next generation

### 3.3 Why Does it Matter Who Owns Farmland?

Farmers in this study have acquired land in a number of ways, including inheriting land, renting land, buying out neighbouring farmers, sharing with family, or even travelling further and further from the farm to find available land. Acquiring land, although a crucial aspect of any farm business, can put a strain not only on the financial side of the business but also on farmers and farm communities. The dynamics of who owns the land has the potential to impact community characteristics, landlord-tenant relationships, and the accessibility of land for the next generation of farmers. There were a couple of farmers who thought that it did not make a difference who owns the farmland, like this grain farmer from North Cypress-Langford who said, “if it's on the open market, I truly believe it doesn't matter who buys it, if they're getting the dollars, who cares.” However, for the most part, research participants did believe that who owns the farmland matters. As a young farmer from Portage la Prairie put it,

If it's land leaving the community, that's land lost forever. It's land that no locals will ever be able to rent, there will be no— it's just gone. That's how I see it, as a piece of my community gone somewhere else.

There is growing concern that people who purchase land, but do not live in the community, will not contribute to the local economy. A policy analyst from a Manitoba farmer organization said she has heard farmers worry about land leaving the hands of community members,

We actually had a farmer talking the other day . . . he was upset because it was a farmer from somewhere else who was buying up land close to him and his feeling was, you know, that person is going to own that land and farm that land but they're not going to shop at the dealerships there, they're not going to buy coffee from that local coffee shop. They actually wanted to see land owned by people in the community.

Going one step further, some farmers argued that land should only be owned by somebody who is actually going to work the land themselves, as they are most likely to care for the land and community. As one young grain farmer from Rhineland put it,

I think whoever is more invested in the wellbeing of the land, they'll have the best impact in terms of owning the land. Just because someone, who just buys it to rent it [out], owns the land and they aren't in the area, then as long as they're getting their rent that they agreed upon, I don't think they care. And like, I can't really blame them for that because they see it as an investment. They're putting money in, they're getting money out. That's what it is. And with larger farm corporations who farm thousands of acres, it's the same thing, you have people who are on the

fields working who are there to get a paycheck. And I'm sure the majority of them care about doing a good job, but they personally are not invested either. Maybe even less so than the landowner. So, yeah, I think the best person to own the land is someone who is actually farming it.

A RM official from Rhineland had a similar take on the benefits of having local ownership, "I think a local farmer, as far as taking care of the land, best management practices, etc., I think that there is more responsibility that way."

Since the average age of farmers in Manitoba is 54 years old, there will be more and more farmers retiring in the next decade or so (Statistics Canada, 2017). As this happens, there will be more land owners who are not farming the land anymore, but who have done so in the past. Having farmed at some point in one's life was identified as an important aspect of who should own land. A retired farmer from Portage la Prairie, who rents out his land to local farmers, talked about the significance of having landlords with experience farming,

I don't think the corporation that owns it understands what needs to be done. I think I do, having had dirt under my finger nails. I worry about giant corporations owning all the land and the renter becoming the serf, but it's happening... [Corporations] are not playing an active role in farming, they know nothing about it. It's a trade or a profession that you have to see the bad years and the good years, you have to lay awake at night, after a hail storm. I remember we had a hail storm one time in the evening, there were wild ducks killed in the field, there were chickens killed in the yard, and when I harvested that field of wheat, which had been swathed, half of it had been shelled with the hail. So, unless you go through those dramas and the trauma of it, I don't know that you'll ever really appreciate farming.

Many farmers agreed that retired farmers make better landlords than those who have never farmed. Not only because they understand farming, but also because they are a part of the community. When farmland is owned locally, there is more opportunity for farmers to cultivate those relationships that have been so beneficial for some farmers in accessing land. One young grain farmer from Rhineland explained that as landlords become more removed from the farm and community, it is harder to maintain the relationship. At least when it is a retired farmer who owns the land, he can go visit or call and keep the lines of communication and camaraderie open. He put it like this,

You can go and visit the retiring farmer, the relationship is more than transactional, there's some personal connection. So, if you want, you can hone that, you know? Help lock in that relationship with them understanding what you're doing with the land and they would care a little bit more about what

happens...with that land and if you're working on it. Versus someone further away who just sees it as investment money, and they don't really care as much about the work you've done to make that land more sustainable, you know, for farming and for longevity.

Some farmers also expressed concern over the possibility of investor ownership. A mixed grain and cattle farmer from Killarney-Turtle Mountain claimed,

I don't know so much in our area, but there's a lot of big investment groups that are buying land, I think that should be outlawed. They're here for the short term and they'll move somewhere else. So yeah, those type of farmers, they're extracting the wealth and they don't reinvest in the community.

Additionally, a young mixed grain and cattle farmer from Portage la Prairie opened up about some of the questions that come to mind when she hears of investors purchasing land,

There...[are] two senses, I can sell my land for more money later, but also you kind of think, who is going to be farming this now? Are they going to be treating it good? Are they going to run drains and drain it onto my field? What is going to happen?

Aside from having non-farmers and people from out of area purchase land, some farmers also indicated that when a large farmer buys land, whether from within or outside the community, this can also affect the community wellbeing. A mixed grain and cattle farmer from North Cypress-Langford explained that,

In a lot of cases when a great big farm comes in, you lose the neighbourly touch. They're maybe not willing to help you out if you help them out kind of thing, the neighbourly stuff just doesn't happen like that anymore with the larger guys.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

Overall, farmers prefer when somebody who lives in the community owns the land, and it is better still when land owners are also farmers. From the participants' perspectives, having local ownership means that landowners are involved in the community, they support local business, and contribute to community cohesion through relationships with neighbours and farmers. These preferences are not surprising given that having good relations with your neighbours has meant access to land rentals or even land purchases for some farmers. The concern here is that if large farms continue to acquire extensive parcels of land in the community or if there are more absentee land owners, then there will be even fewer options to access land

for smaller farms and younger farmers who rely on incremental growth and connections in the community to grow.

The consolidation of land and capital in rural communities has impacts for agricultural futures in Manitoba as it creates barriers to access for those with less power in the farmland market. Despite the focus on small and young farmers in their struggles to access land, farmers of all sizes are certainly facing challenges as they attempt to grow their farms to try and keep their operations profitable. However, farms with larger land bases typically have more buying power in the marketplace as they are able to leverage the land that they already own or spread out the cost of new land across more of their acres that they rent or own. Meanwhile, smaller farms, new and young farmers are facing both rising rental costs and rising land prices while also trying to compete with established farms. As a result, it is becoming increasingly difficult to expand, even by renting more farmland. This is an issue because for many farmers just starting out, continuing to grow your operation is a necessity to make a living and pay for the costs of production, especially given seemingly ever-lower crop prices for conventional farmers. Furthermore, within the current industrial, export-oriented model of agriculture, the normative assumption and narrative is that you must continue to grow to remain competitive in the agriculture industry in Manitoba.

#### **4. SCALING UP THE FARM: INVESTOR OWNERSHIP, FARMLAND CONCENTRATION AND FARM DEBT**

Farm size is growing across the prairies, and Manitoba is no exception; however, while farmland prices continue to rise, farmer incomes have not increased at the same rate (Qualman, 2011). Fred Tait, a mixed grain and cattle farmer and former Vice President of the NFU, explained that “the marketplace is driving this. As the margins in agriculture production are reduced, then of course you have to expand your operation.” A main focus of my study was to investigate how land ownership patterns have changed in the last ten or more years, and the effects of those changes on farmers and rural communities. Many farmers are looking to expand through both rented and purchased farmland as they work to achieve what a successful farm ‘should’ be and look like in Manitoba. Generally, this idea includes adopting the latest technologies and continuing to increase production through expansion; both of these strategies are contributing to farmland concentration and rising farm debt.

An additional goal of the research was to investigate to what extent land grabbing is occurring in Manitoba and how the presence of investors impacts rural communities and farmer livelihoods. Since I was unable to access land titling data that would have allowed me to more easily identify outside investor ownership in the province, I relied on the perceptions and knowledge of participants to explore this question.

This chapter summarizes what participants shared about investor activity in their area. I then go on to discuss the consolidation of land and capital in rural communities, including the ways in which this process limits access to farmland for some farmers. I end with a discussion of farm debt including the driving forces that are pushing farmers to take on more debt.

##### **4.1 Land Grabs in Manitoba?**

In some cases, farmers’ knowledge about who owns the land in their RM is limited, some of the reasons for this include: private land sales, not having a relationship with the previous owner who sold the land, a numbered company purchased the land, or simply never having had the chance to meet the current landowner. Some participants expressed that they were not sure who purchased parcels of land in their community or even who their neighbour was. When asked

if they knew of any land purchased by non-farming investors in their RM, 61%<sup>28</sup> of farmers and RM officials and staff in this study said either ‘no’, ‘I don’t know’, or ‘they did in the past, but not recently.’ The other 39% pointed to some instances where they either knew for sure that there was a non-farming investor owner, or that they had heard of investors in the area, without having any first-hand knowledge of it. Since participants in each of the four RMs had different experiences with investors to share, the following sub-sections outline some of the responses that I received when I asked participants about investor activity in their specific area.

#### ***4.1.1 RM of Portage la Prairie***

In Portage la Prairie, half of the participants said they knew of, or had heard about, non-farming investors purchasing land in the community. A young mixed grain and cattle farmer shared what she knew about investors in the RM,

There [are] a couple [parcels of land that] have been bought by the Ontario Teacher’s Association, which for me, I struggle with. I’m glad that they’ve decided to invest in Canadian land, but it also makes it very difficult sometimes, we can’t compete with that kind of pricing.

A RM official explained how these land purchases by investors often fly under the radar and the impact they have on the farmland market,

Those [transactions] are a little more on the quiet side, we usually don’t know what’s happening, it’s pretty secretive, there’s a broker that acts on their behalf on some of them... Speaking frankly, I’m not as in favour of some of those investments, such as the [Ontario] teacher’s society using their pension fund...to come over and invest in the land. They are raising the land price up a little bit and they’re vacant owners. I’d rather see that go to a local ownership group, personally.

Having financial actors, such as pension funds, purchasing land in their community was generally seen as undesirable because it increases competition for farmers already struggling to pay the high land prices and compete for the sparsely available farmland.

The other half of the participants from Portage la Prairie said that they had no knowledge of investors recently purchasing land in the area. One grain farmer explained that this was something that happened in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but not recently,

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<sup>28</sup> The answers to this question were calculated out of 36 farmers and RM officials and staff rather than 38 since with both of the farming couples that were interviewed together, only one answered this question.

[Investors] did [buy farmland] back in [the] 1980s, they came over here and bought a bunch of land and then they've rented it out. But, the guys that did that are now passing on and their families don't want it so it's coming up for sale... We bought a half section this spring that had been purchased in 1980 by investors, and now they're selling it off.

Due to the farmland ownership regulations in Manitoba, as long as you are a Canadian or Canadian owned corporation, there are no limits to the amount of farmland that you can own. This means that Canadian pension plans, like the one mentioned above, as well as other financial actors, do not face any regulatory barriers to buying land as an investment in Manitoba. However, potential investors from outside of Canada can only own up to 40 acres of land. Despite these regulations, one grain farmer said that foreign investors have been known to find ways to acquire Manitoba farmland,

Some of them... must have gotten residency or somehow were able to escape the rules. But hey, if they moved here I suppose everything was fine... In the early 70s, there was an Italian guy that was buying farmland, he bought farmland up until two years ago. He amassed a huge chunk of land in Manitoba and southern Ontario. He just passed away two years ago, he was still buying land, and all of it came for sale.

Coincidentally, most of the farmers from Portage la Prairie who participated in my study farmed in the area where this one particular Italian investor had owned a lot of land. In the past, this was a challenge for them as the added competition contributed to the uneven access to land; however, his children have been selling off pieces of his land holding since his death. A grain farmer, who owns land adjacent to where that investor owned land, explained how that played out,

It was wide open, they could come and buy whatever they wanted... At that time [the outside investors] drove the price up far more than what anybody else was paying... That's how they acquired it, and they acquired quite a bit in this area. But, it's now starting to be sold off in the last-- well actually, probably in the last ten years there's been a bit, but now in the last couple years there's been quite a bit [more] of it for sale here.

#### **4.1.2 *RM of Killarney-Turtle Mountain***

In Killarney-Turtle Mountain, 70% of participants said they did not know of any non-farming investors buying land while 30% said they had heard of it happening at least once in the area. Those who said they knew of some non-farming investment admitted that it was mainly based in rumours and hearsay. While there did not appear to be any clear evidence of land grabs

happening in the area, some expressed apprehension about the possibility of it happening in the future, which would have serious consequences for the wellbeing of the community. As one mixed grain and livestock farmer put it,

I'm not aware of any investor land here as of yet... The [Ontario] teacher's union they own a pile of land out by the Langruth area...they're looking at return on investment, that's all they're after, long-term investment...None of that has happened here. I'd rather see it stay local, it's local control and...the profit stays within the community, you know? The odds are the producer...that lives there, he's gonna farm, he's gonna have kids, he's gonna buy his groceries in town, he's gonna go out for supper once in a while.

A young grain farmer gave his theory about why there are not more investor land owners in the RM,

Well, there's an old saying in agriculture that one of the ways to ruin a farm is to have an absentee owner...not that it can't work, but, it's not a general recipe for success. The reasons why multinational food companies don't own the land [is]... they see it as a very conservative investment... still a good investment, but they've realized for a long time that to manage it well and profitably, they need to have people on the ground... The five major food companies [are unable] to do that... That's why land is still owned at a local level...and I see that as a good thing, the land is something that we all-- well, we're all connected to our environment, right? It's an important thing that it is managed locally and sustainably.

#### ***4.1.3 RM of North Cypress-Langford***

In North Cypress-Langford, all participants said that they did not know of any investors purchasing land in their RM. However, there is some uncertainty about who exactly is involved with land purchases. For example, when asked about investor land ownership in the community, one grain farmer from North Cypress-Langford said,

Within a farm's ownership structure [there could be] investors in it but I don't specifically know of any. I think most of the land around here has just been bought up by farmers... We haven't seen any foreign investment, to my knowledge, around here. I just think that where we are, we won't see that because there's a lot more attractive investments with cheaper land out west, so, I think that's where they're gonna continue to invest in, but then maybe there will be a day when they do start pulling in.

As a follow up question, I asked if he thought that having high land prices was actually protecting the land from foreign investment, and he said, “for sure it does”. A mixed grain and cattle farmer from the area echoed this sentiment,

I don't think it's feasible here. Cause, you'd have to pay so much to get the land and then pay someone to farm it or rent it out again, I can't see it ever being feasible to do that... it's a good investment, but you've got to make payments on that every year. So, if you're investing a few million, your payments are obviously pretty healthy and to turn around and rent that out, I doubt the rent would cover your payments.

Participants pointed to the high valued potato land that covers a good portion of the RM of North Cypress-Langford as a main driver of the rising land prices across the municipality, despite the variability of the land quality. Thus, potentially acting as a deterrent to non-farming investors. A RM official explained how this has played out in their area,

There was a major...land rush for about five years where the potato farmers moved from the Wellwood area into this area...That caused the prices in this area to go [up]. I purchased this quarter [section] we're on now in 1996. I paid \$350 an acre. Today, it's worth well over \$3,000.

This jump in land prices could be contributing to the lack of interest from outside investors. Another grain farmer, with access to land ownership data through her off-farm job, said that although she does not know of any investment in her RM, she has heard of it happening not too far away and would not discount it altogether,

I know other RMs where I'm seeing it, because of my job. [In the] Glenella-Landsdowne, Alonsa area, there is a big investment company that has been buying land up there, a significant [amount of] land. They've been buying pretty crap land, clearing it and trying to farm it again but...from the information I know, and it's kind of common information in this area... it's a retired teacher [pension] fund out of Ontario that's buying land. I've also heard closer to the Saskatchewan border there's some more of the investors buying out there but not particularly in this area. But maybe... I'm not quite sure on the potato side of it, if you go... [down to] the old North Cypress, there's a potato area so I'm not quite sure if there's any investors in that situation because...a lot of times you don't know who actually owns the land because it's a lot of company names or company numbers.

#### **4.1.4 RM of Rhineland**

In Rhineland, all of the participants said that they either knew of an investor landowner directly or had heard about non-farmer investments in the municipality. A RM official shared

what he knew about investors in the community: “I think there was some Chinese [investors]. I think they were Canadian citizens though, but they were investing because the appreciation of land was significant and they were looking to invest in assets that were stable.” Another grain farmer explained the connection his farm has to a foreign investor,

We rent a piece of land from [a man who] lives in Germany... Apparently...he has three thousand acres here, in this area, in Manitoba. But it's becoming more difficult, I know he wants to sell his land because tax laws in Germany and everything is making it tough to get the money out eventually.

This is not the first time that this farmer has rented from foreign owners; he rented from a different landowner who lived in Germany many years ago. He explained that the relationship with that investor landlord was a good one; and that it only ended because the owner sold the land when “farming got really tough” because he wasn’t making any money on his investment with the price of rent as it was.

One young grain farmer gave examples of two kinds of investors currently present in the RM of Rhineland, and how he thinks the community perceives each one,

I think farmers are getting a decent amount of the purchased land, which is good. [There are] some foreign investments... [but that’s happening] a bit less now in our RM... Actually, one of my landlords, who is a local, friend relationship, he’s bought the odd piece of land. So, that's just a local person who is not farming but sees the investment return. Those [type of investors] typically, farmers would be okay with. The foreign investors would be more of an issue because that land may never get bought again or may never be seen again...then it's gone forever potentially, or for a long time... Farmers wouldn’t like that's as much...I don't know if I’ve seen that a ton...but there is a decent amount of foreign ownership in Rhineland, I would say.

There is talk of both foreign investors who have found ways to purchase land in the area as well as locals who are not farmers themselves but who purchase land as an investment. Another young grain farmer spoke about a local entrepreneur that invests in farmland,

There's a guy who owns greenhouses in Carmen...He's bought land from neighbours but they've been able to strike a deal: ‘I'll buy your land but then you still get to farm it for as long as you're farming’. So, the farmer is going, ‘oh, I get my money and I still get to farm.’

This arrangement may be beneficial for farmers since they can continue to farm without having to take on more debt and the risk associated with loans. While farmers I interviewed often

and strongly said that land is better off owned by local farmers, investor activity can come with some benefits. As one grain farmer put it,

Having an investor come in here... and buying [land], they'll probably rent it to somebody that will add to the community. So, I don't know how bad that is. It's just, if it drives the ability for other people to own it. I think it's always better for people that live here if they can own their own land that would be better, more sustainable.

Thus, even where participants could see the value of having investors purchase farmland and make it available for others to farm, there was often the recognition that if an investor is buying land, it means that there will be another absentee landowner, which was viewed by some as contributing to the deterioration of rural communities. However, even local investors were, at times, seen as having negative impacts, specifically on the dynamics of farmland sales. A grain farmer put it like this,

What we have seen is people with lots of money in other businesses have bought farmland as an investment and they don't farm it, they rent it out...I know there's a piece of land, right beside ours...[and] a guy who owns a machinery dealership bought a bunch of land for just over two thousand dollars and now that land is probably worth six [thousand dollars]...[He] never has farmed it...They pay top dollar, so...a lot of times it's those guys that are setting the prices. And they're buying small pieces of land for large amounts of money and then everybody wants that price.

The presence of any buyer with lots of financial backing puts upward pressure on land values as they add to the already competitive farmland market.

#### ***4.1.5 General Reflections Regarding Investors***

The existence or prospect of a non-farming or foreign investor brought up strong feelings for some farmers in the study. However, there were indeed a variety of perspectives about investor land ownership in all four RMs, with many farmers feeling conflicted about their presence. For example, a grain farmer from Portage la Prairie said,

Farmers have varying views. I like to see it when [land stays in the hands of] local farmers, but, I don't know at the bottom line whether it makes that much difference, whether Canada Pension Plan owns some farmland or whether it's the Hutterite colony down the road or my neighbour.

Others felt very strongly that land should not be bought by outside investors, when asked what difference it would make if an investor owned farmland in her community, one mixed grain and cattle farmer from Killarney-Turtle Mountain replied,

I think it's huge...I don't know so much in our area, but there's a lot of big investment groups [that are] buying land, I think that should be outlawed. They're here for the short term and they'll move somewhere else... Those type of [land owners], they're extracting the wealth and they don't reinvest in the community.

Further to that point, a young farmer from Portage la Prairie explained his concerns around investor ownership,

I think that a more extensive look into 'okay why do you want to buy all this land and how does this help Manitoba?' I don't think this is helping Manitoba, we live here, we want to farm this land. I don't see what some multimillionaire in Austria owning up half the countryside is doing for this countryside, or for this community. It hurts it, it doesn't help it. If they were bringing in jobs, infrastructure, if they were bringing in some type of advantage, well sure! I couldn't really argue with that. But...they're just paying the regular amount of taxes like any other resident would, I don't see what it does.

Overall, land grabbing does not appear, at least on the surface, to be occurring in Manitoba in a significant way. However, as a grain farmer from Rhineland put it, "you don't always know the owner of the land beside you." In many instances a lot of what is known about who owns the land is based in rumours and stories, rather than actual firsthand knowledge. Conversely to the theory that high land prices protect farmland from investment, an alternative outcome could be that as land prices continue to rise there could be more opportunities for outside buyers to purchase land that farmers simply cannot afford. As a grain farmer from Portage la Prairie put it,

Now the average age of farmers is in their 60s...and most of them I think would want as many buyers as possible... They want to see the higher price, and who is going to be able to buy the land? When I'm gone I will leave my farmland to my children, but when my neighbour dies and my children can't raise the capital to buy it or can't borrow the money, who is going to buy the farmland? Where is it going to go? [Young farmers] won't be able to buy...there's going to be a limited number of people that can buy land at today's price. It's going to be more restrictive than it ever has [been], since 1977 when I started farming. There's never been a more difficult time to cashflow the purchase of land.

However, as pointed out by farmers in the RM of North Cypress-Langford, the high price of land could act as a deterrent for investors, who may hesitate to spend that amount on land when it

may affect their return on investment, at least in the short term. On the other hand, if there are only a handful of farmers left farming in the area, the pool of possible buyers will be smaller and may create opportunities for investors to enter and purchase land at a lower price.

Despite a lack of quantitative data that would point to where and to what extent investors are currently purchasing farmland in Manitoba, the perspectives shared above shed some light on the perceptions of investor presence in the community as well as the potential benefits and harm that investor ownership might have for rural communities. Even though my research cannot point to investors as a driving force, the financial landscapes of rural communities are indeed changing. Land prices are sky-rocketing, farm sizes are increasing, farm debt is growing, and the disparities of access to farmland for small to large farms continue to grow.

#### **4.2 Farmland Concentration: The consolidation of land and capital**

One of the most significant changes occurring in rural landscapes in Manitoba is that farms are getting bigger and there are fewer farms overall. This creates a snowball effect as the bigger farms get, the more buying power they have, the more available farmland they are able to capture, and the harder it becomes for small and medium sized farms to compete in the farmland market. 85% of all participants in this study agree that farmland concentration is among the most important of changes occurring in the countryside. A farmer from Portage la Prairie, who farms 700 acres of grain, explained,

Like everywhere else in Western Canada, there's been a very significant consolidation of ownership in the last 40, 50 years. Even...in the last 25 years, there's been a pretty significant consolidation... You're seeing very few farms in our size survive and the ones that started expanding 10, 15 years ago...have the economies of scale that they continue to expand. But there's no new farms in our size. They're either very small or very large, with the middle size farm having...nowhere to go.

The pressure and perceived necessity to expand farm operations is putting farmers in a position where they are purchasing farmland at prices that impact the viability of their farms and contribute to rising farm debt. Fred Tait summed up how this plays out,

Well, it's either you grow or go home. I mean, there's no options anymore. The older people that are still occupying some land base here, they have 100% equity on their operation...And so, they can make a living out of that because they don't have the interest payments and...principle on loans... Some of these more medium sized farms, they can probably get by quite successfully without the

high-tech, very, very expensive farm implements. Once you get to a certain size of operation, then you have to use the high-technology equipment and all this stuff to cover the acreages that are required, it becomes a catch 22 actually... [As for land], it's not difficult to obtain if you want to purchase it at a price above its productive capacity...the purchase price exceeds its capacity to produce a profit.

Fewer small and medium-scale farmers are able to remain in the business due to the costs of running the operation. A mixed grain and cattle farmer in Portage la Prairie explained how the limited options for available machinery push him to consider expanding his farm,

We need to be at 3,000 acres to make a living with the price of machinery. I need an \$80,000 combine and an \$80,000 air seeder, [but] the [cost of the] combine is fixed at \$650,000 and the air seeder is \$450,000. So that's forcing me to go to larger acres. I can't buy that other machine [the less expensive one], it doesn't exist, they don't make it. So, you can't pay for that combine on 2,000 acres.

The size and scale of machinery shapes what agricultural practices are used, a strategy used by industry to influence the model of 'good farming' that will be perpetuated in a given farm community (Burton et al., 2020).

An exception to the growth imperative is older farmers who own most of their land base, are nearing retirement, and do not have any children looking to take over the farm operations. Rather than looking to expand, many of these farmers are planning to continue farming at its current scale and pass their land onto the next generation (who will likely either rent it out or sell it themselves), or sell it as their retirement fund. However, those who are planning for the future generations that would like to farm, in some cases, leverage their farms to make land purchases to help their children access enough land to keep the farm going. As a grain farmer from Portage la Prairie explained,

I know another neighbour said...he's got three boys, possibly one for sure, maybe all three will farm. He bought land a couple of years ago, and I don't know how much he paid, but that was his attitude... 'well, someday the boys will thank me'. So...they're basically using the rest of the farm to pay that. They're a bigger farm, they've got big equipment. So...it's a long term— it's 25 years of payments and not making any money...and hoping that maybe in 20 years from now, maybe it's worth two million, maybe! Nobody knows that.

As farms continue to grow, the size of land parcels that come up for sale also increase. This can limit access to land for young, new, and smaller-scale farmers as a lot more capital to purchase land is required. As a large grain farmer from Portage la Prairie explained,

The biggest change has been the dollar value and probably the size of the parcels...20 or 30 years ago farms were 500 acres, 1,000 acres, and then usually when someone retired he sold half to one neighbour, half to the other neighbour, to try and keep everybody happy. And the dollar values were a lot lower, but in the last five to ten years, one of my neighbours sold the farm, it was 25 million dollars. Another [neighbour], sold one that was five million. We bought a neighbour out for seven and a half million dollars. So, it's larger land parcels and significantly larger dollar values. We increased our farm size here five years ago, by a 10% increase in land, which increased the debt load by 50%.

This was a common story amongst farmers in this study, taking on massive debt for moderate increases in their landbase. However, a young grain farmer from North Cypress-Langford is not letting the mythic economies of scale drive his decision making,

Do I feel pressure [to grow]? No. Do I think that I will expand? Probably yes in the future but...I'm not going to double in size in the next five years or anything, but just strategic growth will be kind of the way we go about it.

Slow growth is a smart strategy, if you are able to find smaller parcels of land to access at a reasonable price; something that many farmers have said has not been an option for them.

Small- and medium-sized grain, cattle, and mixed farms are at a disadvantage not only because they do not often have the economies of scale to be competitive in the farmland market, but they also have less leveraging power in agricultural machinery and input dealers. A cattle farmer from North Cypress-Langford explained,

It always seemed to be the little guys were paying big bucks keeping the big guys going...[the big farmers] would get a better deal because they were bigger. The little guy was just buying one tractor where they were buying four...so, they could always get a better deal. Same with the Hutterites when they came in, they would buy five or six combines at once, whereas the little guy, he only bought one, so he had to pay, same with fuel and fertilizer. It's always the little guy has to pay for the big guy.

At the same time that small to medium-scale farmers have less leveraging power within a farm machinery shop, they also have fewer overall options of where to purchase farm implements and inputs. Having fewer farmers on the landscape inevitably means that agricultural input, machinery, and seed dealers are consolidating as well. As a grain farmer from Portage la Prairie put it,

In Portage la Prairie we lost our Case [equipment] dealership, which to me is shocking but services are going further and further and that's inevitable. Unless we are going to

pay to have a farmer at every quarter section, and it's not going to happen, it's just evolution.

Farmers are also subject to the volatile commodity prices that influence input prices. A RM official from Portage la Prairie explained how this affects the profitability of farms and contributes to the pressure to grow the operation,

Input costs always seem to rise up anytime that you see the commodity prices jump up a little bit, input costs jump incredibly fast. [However] then the commodity values drop in a heartbeat and the input costs stay up there forever and a day... They don't react the same way, it's basic economics in that sense. So that makes it very difficult for a smaller farmer to compete. And just all the costs... the equipment costs are going through the roof, so it's a little bit more challenging, you honestly need the larger land base to justify the bigger equipment and the inputs you're putting in to make it more efficient.

As a result of high costs of production, farm debt is growing and adding risk to an already risky business. Agriculture reporter, Laura Rance explained what she believes to be the biggest challenges farmers face today, "maintaining economic viability in the face of two uncontrollable variables: a changing climate and [a] deteriorating global trade environment. Weather and markets have always been unpredictable but the variance has become more extreme." The unpredictability of farming, due to changing weather and commodity markets, paired with the debt load farmers are taking on, creates a level of risk for farmers that may be unsustainable. As a young grain farmer from Portage la Prairie put it, "with current land prices and... [the] crippling land payments... one bad year can be enough to sink your entire operation." A small-scale mixed grain and livestock farmer from North Cypress-Langford spoke about the risk involved with trying to expand the farm,

If I had a son that wanted to farm, they'd have to mortgage our little farm right to the hilt to buy one more little chunk of land, if you could find a chunk of land that somebody is willing to sell to you. You would probably never live long enough to pay it off, grain farming like we are... If you spent a million dollars on the quarter section beside you, I know what a quarter section is going to give you growing grain, you're going to end up losing your entire farm probably.

In Manitoba, farm debt has been steadily increasing for years and is fast approaching 10 billion dollars; between 2016 and 2017 alone, farm debt rose by 4.8% (Minogue, 2018). Although the province's total agricultural debt is low when compared to Alberta and Saskatchewan, Manitoba has the highest debt-to-asset ratio of the three prairie provinces

(Minogue, 2018). This demonstrates the financial struggle farmers are facing as they attempt to scale up to fit into the industrial paradigm of agriculture. In spite of the risk involved, a mixed grain and cattle farmer from Killarney-Turtle Mountain spoke about the debt she still sees farmers taking on,

People are doing it as an investment, they feel that land will always go up. I'm not so sure about that, I think they're setting us up to pull the rug out....The farm debt load is just unbelievable... If you look at a graph of farm debt...it's...almost straight up.

A young grain farmer from Rhineland outlined the risk he sees in continuing to grow the farm despite the high land prices and costs of production,

Farmers are getting more leveraged; they've been spending up to a point where they're kind of now needing, or assuming, that they're gonna be having bumper crops and really good prices... Everyone is more leverage than they used to be...they've gotten used to having good years and then...if all of the sudden there's some poor years then farmers are gonna have a tough time making the payments... If all of the sudden prices go down then they still have the same payments to make on that high price land, that's definitely a risk.

However, one grain farmer from Portage la Prairie suggested that some land might actually become more available as a way to combat the risk of having high debt loads,

[Farmers] recognize the financial stress on their farms, so there is a possibility that some of this recently acquired land may come back on the market as a defensive strategy. So, if you bought 1,000 acres, maybe you sell 300 [acres] back to reduce your debt load. In 1980s, nobody would do that.

Most farmers look at their farm the same as any other business operating in a capitalist economy, and that means ensuring that you have good profit margins and economies of scale. One grain farmer from Killarney-Turtle Mountain spoke more about farmland concentration as it relates to the business mentality that many farmers have,

There's always a general trend in Manitoba, well, across the prairies, for farms to get bigger, that's just the nature of most businesses. But, in Manitoba, it's a little bit insulated, you don't see the mega farms like you do in Saskatchewan and Alberta. It's a little bit slower down in Manitoba because, I would say profitability in farming has generally been good so that keeps smaller operators in business. The tighter the profitability, the more likelihood of larger farms.

While this may be the case, participants outlined the various ways that the high price of land, competition for land, and increasing buying power of large farms are starting to strain the profitability of small and medium scale farms.

A grain farmer from Portage la Prairie, who farms 16,500 acres and has multiple children involved in the operation, shared that he thinks the process of expanding the farm means that “we’re playing monopoly on a bigger scale with adjacent farmers to put together productive tracts of land and parcels to farm efficiently to...make profit for the business.” This highlights a key consideration when thinking about land concentration: it is not that large farmers necessarily want to see the disappearance of small and medium scale farmers as they buy out their neighbours; in fact, some expressed that this was against their best interest since having fewer farmers means having fewer neighbours with whom to create a sense of community. However, many also feel they have to continue to expand their land bases in order to keep their operations profitable. Consequently, in many cases, medium to large farmers felt they had no option but to try to expand at all costs, while smaller farms have no option but to exit the sector. As a small cattle farmer from North Cypress-Langford put it, “there’s no free choice anymore, you’re either big or you’re not. And the “not” means, get out of [farming].”

### **4.3 Conclusion**

The lack of access to detailed land titling data for the province of Manitoba means that we are left with many questions about who owns farmland, and in some cases, it has left even those farming and living in rural communities uncertain about who is purchasing land in the community. Where there are confirmed instances of investor ownership, such as in Rhineland, the concern is that these types of land purchases will even further limit access to farmland for those young, new, and smaller farmers who are already experiencing barriers. As long as there are local farmers who are ready, willing, and wanting to farm the land in the province, is it fair to let investment companies purchase land that could have contributed to successful local farm businesses? Furthermore, how can communities unite to combat these investor purchases, what many call land grabbing, if they do not know for sure that they are happening?

Although my investigation of farmland grabbing in Manitoba is largely inconclusive due to the need for more transparent land ownership documentation, one thing is certain – the consolidation of land and capital is resulting in farmland concentration amongst farmers

themselves in Manitoba. Many small to medium sized farmers are struggling to expand their operations due to the high price of land and cost of production, paired with the intense competition for the sparsely available land. The idea that farmers must strive for economies of scale to be more “efficient” seems to be infiltrating the decision making of some farmers. As a result, many farmers seek to grow their farms at all costs, even when they may not see any profit off of land purchases for decades. This expansion narrative is perhaps a driving force in the farm debt crisis. Farmers stretch their finances to purchase that new combine, that extra piece of land, and all of the inputs needed to operate in the current model of ‘good farming’ in Manitoba. However, as Qualman et al. (2020) suggest, because of the high costs of production associated with large-scale agriculture, scaling up the farm may not produce higher yields or higher income per acre, compared to the so-called “inefficient” smaller farms. A more thorough evaluation of the efficiency, profitability and productivity of economies of scale in agriculture is needed (Qualman et al. 2020), especially given the potential social and environmental implications posed by the further consolidation of farmland.

## **5. RURAL LANDSCAPE VALUES: THE IMPACTS OF OWNERSHIP CHANGES ON THE COMMUNITY AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

The Institute for Environmental Studies (n/d) at the University of Amsterdam, defines landscapes as having “both material and immaterial dimensions: they provide us with a range of goods and services, but also form an important part of our identity, contributing to our natural and cultural heritage.” My research reveals that rural landscapes in Manitoba are changing in a number of ways. The consolidation of land and capital into the hands of fewer people not only affects farmer livelihoods, it also has implications for the social and environmental landscapes of rural communities. The shift to fewer and larger farms means fewer people are living in rural areas. This trend also impacts perceptions of farming practices that have become the norm with the scaling up of the industry as a whole. Changes in farming practices and land use within a rural landscape may influence the ways that people value the landscape itself; in fact, “the way we see and value landscapes is in large part a function of what we do in them” (as cited in Zube, 1987, p. 39). Therefore, as the scale and type of farming changes, so too does the way that rural landscapes are perceived and valued.

Fred Tait explained changes in landscape values in Manitoba:

Well you see...[when] farming was more diversified, we needed the diversified landscape because we had some hogs, we had some cattle, we had some grain, we had maybe some off-farm employment to a limited extent. But these farms today, they're not diversified farms, they're specialized in oilseed and cereal grain production, that's it... These woodlands that we used for shelter for our cattle, those wetlands that we use to capture wild hay crops, they're of no value to them; and so, they immediately remove them, and the tree covers that we used to shelter our farmsteads... They remove the farmsteads too if it's not occupied. So, none of this is of any value to them, the only thing they can get value out of is cultivated acres, and...any part of nature they can convert to that, they [will].

This chapter outlines some of the physical and social restructuring that has taken place in rural communities over the last decade or more. I provide an overview of the various environmental perspectives and observations that participants shared. Drawing on the interview data, I discuss the changing social landscape within communities, including the impacts on rural life and relationships. Finally, I end with a discussion of the changing landscape values that became apparent throughout conversations with farmers.

The physical landscape and environmental wellbeing of agricultural spaces are, at times, a controversial topic to discuss with farmers since farmers are often criticized in the media and

by the general public for contributing to climate change and environmental degradation (Burton et al., 2020). However, many farmers themselves are concerned about farming practices that are increasingly becoming the norm, including the clearing of trees and draining of wetlands that ultimately push habitat off of farmland. Fred Tait pointed to a main driver in this process,

That's the other thing that is happening, with this consolidation of ownership...the new owners they remove every bit of natural diversity off the landscape, almost immediately. They bulldoze, they drain, they do whatever they can, there can be no barriers, eh? And...that is having quite an impact actually; the consolidation, and the destruction of the natural environments that it brings with it.

Aside from the changes to the physical landscape, farmers also spoke about the changing social landscape and the diminishing quality of rural relationships. Many people lamented the old days when your neighbours were close, both physically and relationally. As agricultural reporter, Laura Rance, explained,

The concentration of farms and farmland in order to support increasing scale in agriculture has negatively affected rural communities in several ways. The population has declined and the farm population has become more transient as landholders are replaced by employees. Competition for land has made farmers less supportive of each other in difficult times. The only way for one farm to grow is for another to fail, freeing up land for others to acquire.

The increased competition for land is putting strain on rural relationships. Meanwhile, the perceived success of farms hinges on their ability to access more land; thus, the regard or concern for their neighbours' wellbeing falls on the list of priorities. As a result, those who outcompete their neighbours in the farmland market, in many cases eventually see their neighbour retire or quit, which allows them to swallow up the very neighbour with whom they once competed, and perhaps more importantly, created community. A policy analyst working for a farm organization pointed to some of the specific impacts she has noticed with this process,

Your neighbours are going to be farther away, you have less people to talk to and work with within your community. Schools are going to be farther away, hospitals, everything is kind of being decentralized from these smaller communities. So, there is definitely an impact on communities in that way.

## **5.1 Transforming the Physical Landscape**

Sometimes what is absent on the landscape is as significant as something that is visible, and “speaks to what is no longer there” (as cited in Beilin, 2005, p. 63). The physical changes

documented in this research are largely a story of what is now missing from the landscape: trees, wetlands, animals, insects, yard sites, and neighbours. A RM official from North Cypress-Langford put it like this; “it's not uncommon for a piece of dirt in the RM, once it changes hands, to be completely leveled and the face of the earth changed.” A farmer from Portage la Prairie talked about this same phenomenon,

Some of the larger farms will, if they acquire a block of land...[and] it has a yard site on it, most commonly the colonies do this but some of the large farms do it [too], they'll bulldoze it level... In the 30s, the story was there was a family on every quarter section, so there would be four families in a square mile... You don't have any of that anymore. And some of the long-standing yard sites...[they] just bulldoze [them], they're bare field now, you'd never know they [had] existed.

When asked if they have noticed any impacts on the environment or physical landscape over the last decade in their area, 88%<sup>29</sup> of farmers replied affirmatively. However, not everyone agreed whether these changes are positive or negative, or even on the extent to which they are happening.

Similar to Burton et al.'s (2020) findings, farmers in Manitoba often view themselves as environmentalists or conservationists. For example, some participants commented that the idea that more technologically advanced farming practices are detrimental to the environment is a misconception since they viewed these as contributing to new efficiencies while at the same time leading to environmental sustainability. One large scale grain farmer from Killarney-Turtle Mountain put it like this,

Efficiency is the big thing...we're very intense on clearing land, like, no trees, every slough we can drain, we drain. And some people look down on that, but it's to be more efficient and productive and it actually doesn't hurt the environment because you concentrate your farm on so many acres. You don't need to worry about if your neighbor has a half section of bush, well that's fine, he can leave it that way, that's his choice. It's our choice to farm like this, they can farm like that.

Also focussing on the perceived efficiency that landscape changes can bring, a mixed grain and livestock farmer from North Cypress-Langford explained that,

Mainly because of the change in the size of the equipment, to be more efficient on all aspects of inputs [and] time, land [has] been cleared up or at least cleaned up... When the land was first broke out our way, we have rocks the size of this table, so, they only pulled the rocks to wherever the horses could at that time, when they

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<sup>29</sup> This percentage was calculated out of 26 of the farmer participants because four participants were not directly asked this question and did not discuss the physical environment in their interview.

were clearing the land. So, we've gotten rid of potholes by burying those rock piles...But, for the most part, where our farm is situated, there's been improvements to the land...mainly with just the slightest bit of drainage and getting rid of rocks... [We are] making the land more efficient.

Meanwhile, a RM official from Killarney Turtle-Mountain praised farmers' role in environmental conservation by stressing that,

[If] you talk to anybody in the city they'll probably disagree with us, but farmers are probably the biggest conservationists that we have in our country. I always giggle when you see these people talking about climate change and they're blaming cow farts or agriculture or GMO products and everything like that. Our farmers are preserving the land a lot more than a concrete jungle ever does and I think that if more people would get out of the city and actually see what happens out here. You know, they're there in the city fertilizing their lawns, no permits, no nothing, not regulated, not checking to see what the nitrogen value is and everything like that. Farmers have become extreme conservationist. Part of it is because they care about it, part of it is also because of cost, it's expensive to do it. They need to...have it down to an exact science... farmers are absolutely the best stewards of the land that we could ever have.

This points to the misconceptions and biases that arise from the lack of involvement in the food system typical of many urban dwellers. However, while farmers may indeed try to farm more efficiently to preserve the environment or to reduce costs, as demonstrated in Chapter 2, farmers are often resistant to agri-environmental schemes. Meanwhile, large-scale farms in particular are often associated with the heavy use of synthetic chemicals, fertilizers and other inputs that ultimately compromise the sustainability that these so-called 'efficient' models purport to offer (Qualman et al., 2020).

Others participants voiced various concerns about the negative environmental impacts of agricultural practices. For example, some participants expressed concern over the use and conservation of the fresh water supply. A cattle farmer from North Cypress-Langford spoke about the practices of nearby potato farms,

What I don't like is, the whole countryside has changed because of it, there's no trees anymore, hardly. It's all about the mighty irrigation. And they don't seem to care about anything...it's all about the irrigation... That's partially the trouble why they don't get the crops off, is because they irrigate and irrigate and irrigate, and if it does rain, the potatoes are already growing in mud... It's ruined the countryside in some sort of ways... If we're so environmentally aware now, why are they allowing this to happen?

This farmer is referring to the wet falls experienced in Manitoba in 2018 and 2019 that resulted in thousands of acres of potatoes that rotted or went unharvested both years (Dawson, 2019; Laychuk, 2019). According to Manitoba Agriculture (n.d.c), the RMs of Portage la Prairie, North Cypress-Langford, and Rhineland are all amongst the most suitable RMs in Manitoba for irrigated potato production. Certain large-scale potato contracts in Manitoba require that you invest in pivot irrigation, thus, as potato farming has become more and more lucrative in these agricultural regions, much more of the RMs are covered in irrigation.

However, the use of water in potato production was not the only concern raised about water management in Manitoba RMs. A young grain farmer from Killarney-Turtle Mountain identified some issues concerning water that he feared might intensify in the future,

Water will become an increasingly important issue, whether it's drinking water or, it seems as though the urban population has a very keen interest in what we do with surface water on our land as well, so, how we negotiate that will be an ever-increasing issue.

Focussing more on the present situation, a grain farmer from Rhineland worried about the water management that some farmers are undertaking,

There's more tile drainage, not exactly where we are, but just to the west of us. So, there's more tile drainage because they're saying, 'well, now all of the sudden drainage might become more affordable if I compare it to buying land' they'll say, 'I'd rather just make this land [better and] add tile drainage.' And...I don't think the impacts of tile drainage have been fully discovered and understood... In certain areas there's some clarity that actually the tile drainage has been bad because, yes, it takes water away from sloughs but then that water has to go somewhere so it goes into the drainage system increasing the heights of rivers... If I have drainage on my land, we just do ditches and stuff, [but] then it might be harder to get that water off in a flood scenario. So, the water issue is probably the biggest in our area.

Although many farmers spoke about tile drainage as a positive water management technique, some farmers like the one above were more skeptical about the impacts it might have on the surrounding area. This speaks to the competing views of what 'good farming' practices look like in Manitoba. Additionally, a retired grain farmer from Portage la Prairie raised concerns about the potential for more acute impacts from water contamination,

The last two years, the Assiniboine river has been very low, so we should be building a dam, northwest of Brandon, to save that water. And I'm getting very concerned about the water that I drink. I'm not buying bottled water yet, I still have faith in what's coming out of my tap, but a couple of dry summers and water

is becoming important... I think we have maybe...drained some land that we shouldn't have, [we] should have left some marshes there.

These examples demonstrate the complexity of water management and the many roles that water plays in our lives and throughout the rural landscape.

A RM staff member from Rhineland pointed to other physical changes to the rural landscape that have had negative effects on the environment,

I guess the one big environmental impact is shelterbelts are going away and that's been something we've noticed across the whole municipality is the demise of shelterbelts. So, when I was a kid growing up here we had shelter belts...everywhere. Now, they're getting to be few and far in between for a variety of reasons. But yeah, that's been a huge environmental impact I think. The other thing that we have seen is probably more dirt blowing as we've moved toward more high value crops, edible beans, those kinds of things that leave...a very fine top layer... There's more blowing dirt.

The removal of trees and subsequent soil erosion was a concern raised by participants in all four RMs. A RM official from North Cypress-Langford talked about the lack of trees in the area,

If it wasn't for the government pasture just north of here, we wouldn't have a tree from here to Neepawa, which is quite a ways... The government pasture is the tree line, and that's the only tree line. I mean, there's no trees, marginal land has been broken up, it blows when it gets windy, and...there's less birds, less wildlife, because there's no habitat... [And] once you take those trees out, that have been there for how many years, the land is going to blow because it was in pasture for a reason.

Shelter belts are often cited as good tools for protecting against soil erosion (Kort, Collins, & Ditsch, 1998; Prinsley, 1992), creating more habitat for animals and insect populations (Manning, Gibbons, & Lindenmayer, 2009), and contributing to the natural aesthetic of rural areas. However, one young grain farmer from Rhineland has an alternative suggestion,

I kind of personally wonder about the value of trying to plant trees in an area where there were never trees. Like in this area, there were not trees...this is grassland, it's tall grass prairie. And so, I would sooner think about planting perennial grass strips instead... It wouldn't work the same way, but some of the ideas and benefits could be the same.

Many farmers themselves are concerned about the transformation of the physical landscape in their communities. Aside from soil erosion, some studies also suggest that the removal of trees and habitat may have negative impacts on the bird and insect population

(Hodson, 1976; Medan, Torretta, Hodara, de la Fuente, & Montaldo, 2011). One mixed grain and cattle farmer from Killarney-Turtle Mountain has observed such changes,

This year, we had no bees. No bees. If you go and walk in the grass and you're out in the yard, you notice the silence of the lack of insects and the lack of birds, like the raptors, the hawks, there's just so many less birds.

Some research participants linked increased farm size to environmental concerns. A grain farmer from Portage la Prairie indicated that,

I'm very environmentally conscious here...we don't leave spray jugs out and all this kind of stuff. And certainly, I find that, the bigger the farms get, the environmental [awareness] kind of goes out the window. You know, like, we got the guy here burning his spray jugs in a tub on the edge of the dugout... So, I think it probably has more of an impact on the environment than anything else. Myself, I see it because I'm in it, a lot of people don't see that...they don't know. I am concerned about the environment as far as how some of these guys are operating.

A retired farmer from Portage la Prairie pointed to one of the largest farms in the RM and the impacts of their practices; he said; “[that farmer] eliminates the shelter belts out of the old farm yards...creating a desert as far as I'm concerned.” He went on to explain how these impacts are visible in the RM,

You can drive out in the winter time when the soil is exposed and it's drifting onto the road. See, a lot of people don't understand, but in the Red River Valley, we have heavy land, a lot of it. And people say, 'well, that doesn't blow', but in the winter time when the frost breaks it down into small particles, it does. It blows, you can see. Sometimes you'll see ditches filled with drifting topsoil in the wintertime. Cause the frost is powerful.

Aside from the impacts on the capacity of the land to support biodiversity, retain topsoil and protect the water supply, the changes to the landscape, and in particular the bulldozing of yard sites, are creating more distance between rural neighbours.

## **5.2 Transforming the Social Landscape**

Farmers are grasping onto the last semblances of a farm community, as for decades they have watched their neighbours become fewer and live farther away. Often, they are torn between the business mentality that they've adopted, through years of specialized training and tough business decisions, and their rural roots of community and comradery. As farms continue to grow, farmers are feeling the effects on their communities through the deteriorating

infrastructure and services available, as discussed in the previous chapter. However, they are also seeing fewer opportunities to cultivate meaningful relationships and a sense of community. When asked if they have noticed any impacts on the community wellbeing, 89%<sup>30</sup> of farmers said yes, and the majority agreed that the changes they are seeing are not positive.

As farms expand and take over neighbouring farms, there is a noticeable shift in the structure and solidarity of the rural community. A large-scale grain farmer from Portage la Prairie talked about this process from his point of view as an expanding farmer; “from the farm side of it, as we swallow up the neighbour’s farms and get bigger blocks of land, we’re able to farm square sections and that part is more efficient. But, all our neighbours are disappearing.” Farmers are now faced with fewer neighbours to lean on for support and to cultivate community. As a young grain farmer from Rhineland put it,

I think there is just less...interaction between neighbours and in the community generally...There are less [sic] people around and we rely on our neighbours less than we have in the past in terms of things like sharing equipment or working together. It used to be common place in this area for people to be harvesting together and now that’s relatively rare.

As mentioned previously by Laura Rance, there was also a sense that there is less consideration for your neighbours and the wellbeing of their operation than there has been in the past. For example, a grain farmer from Rhineland explained,

For a time, my dad used to look at land and say, ‘there’s a neighbor that wants to buy it’ and he [my dad] actually dropped off of buying it because that neighbor really wanted it... Now that seems to be pretty much gone and you feel like ‘well, the other neighbor didn’t care about me, why should I care?’. You know? Like, if it’s just a business transaction...who cares?

Some people talked about the declining quality of relationships between farmers of different scales and models. As a mixed grain and cattle farmer from North Cypress-Langford put it,

I think, in a lot of cases when a great big farm comes in, you lose the neighbourly touch. They’re maybe not willing to help you out if you help them out kind of thing, the neighbourly stuff just doesn’t happen like that anymore with the larger guys.

One grain farmer from Portage la Prairie discussed the attitudes that underpin these differences,

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<sup>30</sup> This percentage was calculated out of 27 of the farmer participants because three participants were not directly asked this question and did not discuss the community wellbeing in their interview.

I really don't know whether there is anything you can do, because in my opinion, the biggest problem with these types of people is arrogance. And you know, they have the idea that they are bigger and better than you, and most of them are very arrogant, so I mean, I don't know what you do to change that really, because basically it's their mindset, that is the problem. You know, it's not so much their farming or anything else, it's just their attitude towards everything.

These types of interactions contribute to the tensions between small and medium-scale farmers and large-scale farmers and ultimately result in a lack of solidarity amongst farmers of varying sizes and models.

Some farmers lamented the loss of significant relationships amongst farmers. One grain farmer from Rhineland put it like this,

You can't assume the relationship is as meaningful, which is too bad. It makes it harder. That trust in each other has kind of gone away or...there's a respect...like those unwritten rules that people used to have, that [are] kind of...tied to country lifestyle... You can [not] assume that is gonna be there, which is too bad.

This is perhaps a symptom of the changing definition of the 'good farmer' in Manitoba being less rooted in the social reputation and community-mindedness of farmers, as it has been in the past, and more rooted in the farmer's ability to produce ever-higher yields by sizing up the farm. For example, a young grain farmer from Rhineland shared a story about when his father-in-law, who he farms with, got into a bidding war with a neighbouring farmer who they considered a friend. They were bidding on a piece of land that was adjacent to their farm's yard site. Therefore, his father-in-law assumed that the unwritten rules amongst farmers would give him an upper hand in the land sale since it was a piece of land that would have completed their home section, but he told me that in the end,

The land went to the highest bidder... [And] even though I think now...[my father-in-law is] kind of over it and he understands that, even neighbours and other farmers who live less than a mile away, they see farming as a business; so, it's like, 'well, no hard feelings but we're just trying to farm more'. Whereas, in this situation at least, [my father-in-law] was kind of like, 'well, this is kind of personal, this is on our home section and you're pushing the price up'... And so, land has the potential to create these divisions between farmers in communities and it can kind of be awkward.

In addition to the loss of solidarity and trust, many communities are feeling the impacts of having fewer people around when it comes to organizing and carrying out community events. A young mixed grain and cattle farmer from Portage la Prairie talked about this,

Community wise, I've seen in a couple of different things where, I'm a volunteer . . . [and] for the farmer's appreciation dinner, we used to always get the potatoes [and] the carrots [donated] from growers. So, we had a potato farmer, and it would rotate, and they would donate the potatoes for the supper, and then the carrot farmer he always just donated the carrots, so it was fine. Now, that there is less and less farmers...it ends up being tougher to get donations and support for events like that. Sometimes you can still get good support for an event...lots of these guys are still really willing and really community involved, but sometimes it's just really tough because...you're going to the same person year after year after year asking, 'can you donate, can you donate, can you donate?', and you're not spreading it out over the populous that used to be there.

Although the rural communities in this study all have access to other employment and economic opportunities in nearby towns, nonetheless, people are experiencing a loss of the farmer community and collaboration that has traditionally been very important for the success of farms. The ability to relate to other farmers, who experience the same kinds of struggles and who have knowledge and resources to share, has been a fundamental aspect of rural life. A young grain farmer from North Cypress-Langford says she has found that kind of community in her area but it comes with a catch,

It's great having so many young farmers in this area because we've become very good friends, we have a good network of friends and support and like a lot of our friends, our really close friends, they're all farming. So, that's kind of nice having that support, like, as a farm wife, it's nice to have other farm wives that we can complain to and we are exhausted in the middle of harvest and, you know... my husband, [if] something breaks down on his tractor, his friends are the first ones he phones and sees if they [have] had this situation happen to them, and so, it's nice having that support system but it is driving up the price of land.

While this paints a promising picture, this was not a common narrative. More often, people recounted stories of competition rather than community and isolation instead of neighbours.

### **5.3 Changing Landscape Values in the Rural Manitoba Context**

The values assigned to rural landscapes in Manitoba are changing as the purpose and scale of agriculture within communities transforms. Here, value can be thought of as “a property of things and that receiving the thing that is valued should make a difference in one's life...the greater the desire or need for the thing, the greater the value to the individual” (as cited in Zube, 1987, p. 39). In the Manitoba farming context, land is the thing that is valued, not only in terms

of the monetary value of land, but also in terms of its role within the rural landscape in terms of local ecosystems and farmer identities and histories.

One of the questions that I asked farmers in this study is whether or not they have noticed any changes in the ways that people think about or value land in their community. While this is somewhat of an abstract question, it elicited responses that pointed to a shift away from the past when there appeared to be a stronger attachment or care for the land. Participants' responses uncovered some of the ways that farmers think about land itself, but also about how they see land as part of the larger rural landscape. Often, farmers cited the nostalgia of centuries of family connection to certain pieces of land, as well as the memories or stories of the past as they sentimentalized the landscape. However, many indicated that despite these values they have attached to the landscape, they do have a business to run and farmland is the most important resource they have for the success of their business. Thus, the social values attributed to the landscape become less important as they focus on the productive value, the farmland.

Farmland has taken on many meanings in the lives of those living in the countryside and there are notable dualities in the ways that farmers value land in their community. It is at once a business asset and a part of the farmer identity. It is both a way of life and a means to a life. It both presents a beautiful landscape for farmers and community members to admire and plays an important role in the economy and in the survival of communities. Despite these dualities expressed by participants, my study revealed that the ways that farmers value the agricultural landscape is changing in important ways due to the pressure to produce and profit as much as possible off of the land within that landscape. As a grain farmer from Portage la Prairie put it,

Now that we're into these...huge farms...every quotation you read, you know, 'it's a business, it's a business, it's a business.' So, I think in a lot of ways...land has taken on that role. It's part of the business and it's kind of there to get the most out of it that you can. Whereas, years ago when I first started, there was more interest in...looking after the land. You know? Like, a lot of people had livestock so they spread their manure on the land and they did that kind of stuff; a lot of people had a rotation, so they intermixed the cereals and the pulses, and so on. Where[as] now...I don't see that anymore. There's a field here, close by here, that's had beans on it for seven years in a row. But that's where the money is, right?

The mistreatment of land that this farmer mentioned was brought up by many other participants and seemed in some cases to be tied to a kind of protective feeling over preserving both the productive capacity and aesthetic of the land. For example, a young grain farmer from

Rhineland talked about the visual value of a well-maintained yard site within the rural community,

I think people really appreciate a yard site like this...so many people come up to the yard and go, 'oh, such a beautiful yard, so nice there's lots of trees', and I agree too, so I think...people in the community, even if they just drive by a yard, for example, they value that because it looks nice and it makes them feel good.

In conversation, farmers indicated that you can see when a farmer truly cares about their land, when someone is a "good farmer", a concept that I analyze further in Chapter 6. However, it is interesting to note here that the idea of a good farmer in a farm business is not always the same as a good farmer for the community and for the environment. A retired grain farmer from Portage la Prairie, who also worked as a municipal assessor and who now rents out his land base, spoke about how he identifies a "good farmer",

Let's go have a look at his yard first. For 35 years I drove into farmers' yards. Now, if you have to open a bunch of gates to get in, and the gates are all wired together and real messy, and you get there at 10 o'clock in the morning and he's just coming out of the house, rubbing his eyes...[but], if you phoned a farmer up to make an appointment and you said, 'I'd like to come out and talk to you tomorrow morning', and he says, 'well, you be here at 7 o'clock', that guy is up, he's doing things. The other guy just woke up, so you generally look at the yard, you know?

Additionally, the relationship, and almost a sense of intimacy, that farmers have with their land was also seen as an important aspect of being a good farmer to some people. However, as farmers expand their land base, it gets more difficult for them to be aware and connected to every single acre. A young mixed grain and cattle farmer from Portage la Prairie spoke about an analogy passed down to her by her father, one that resonates with her as she observes the large farms expanding all around her,

The more acres you're trying to manage, the harder it is just to manage well... I guess an easier way to say it is based on cows, cause that's how I learned it... The more cows you try to manage, the less well managed an individual cow is in your herd. Right? So, if you have 15,000 acres, how are you managing to be very good on every acre? Compared to if you have 600 acres, and you can be [good] at every acre.

Corroborating this analogy, a mixed grain and cattle farmer from Killarney-Turtle Mountain, who has a smaller land base, spoke about how intimately she knows every acre of her farm. She put it like this,

I walk the fields. I'm very connected to the land and the wildlife and the life that thrives on the land... We're a small farm, not a big farm, and we know our acreage intimately and we can be flexible about targeting areas that need work... If you see an area that you're worried about erosion or whatever the concern is, drainage or whatever it is . . . We have a small enough farm that we target areas and try to improve our land.

## 5.4 Conclusion

The value of land extends beyond what it can produce for a farm business; it is but one of the 'things' that make up the rural landscape. Other aspects of this landscape that were traditionally valued include the historical significance of certain yard sites or parcels of land, the opportunities for social life and community building that a more populated and connected landscape would bring, and the ecological and aesthetic benefit of leaving trees and wetlands on the landscape. As the dominant agricultural model has pushed farmers to adopt more advanced technology, bigger machinery, and take on more acres in attempt to pay for the high costs of production, there has been an inevitable impact on physical and social landscapes.

Farmers are looking to get as much out of their land as possible by farming every square metre. This has resulted in a physical restructuring of agricultural communities, one that has allowed farmers to grow their operations, but often times at the expense of the environmental and social resiliency of their communities. A young farmer from Rhineland expressed his concerns for the future of Manitoba rural communities,

Ownership change is slowly turning into less hands owning farmland. So, if that is the case... then that means that communities will have less—well, rural communities and rural yards will be more empty [*sic*] and they'll be one big yard. And that's kind of how it is in Saskatchewan, I think [in] some areas, community is very hard...there's not much community and there's more isolation.

These changes are connected to the ways in which the landscape as a whole is valued. Is it a place where agriculture commodities are produced? Is it habitat for wildlife? Is it home to your neighbours and family? Is it a visual reminder of the past? It can of course be all of these things; however, the widespread and somewhat rapid changes in the physical structure, and consequently the social structure, of the landscape in rural communities is contributing to a shift in what can be valued about the land. Where there is no longer habitat, wildlife, or neighbours to

value, then there is an inevitable shift to valuing what is there, acres and acres of unimpeded mono-cultivated land.

Indeed, the way in which society views and values landscapes is not a constant or unchanging thing. As Eaton (1990) suggests, there are a number of preconditions required for a society to “be ready to perceive certain kinds of landscapes as beautiful” (p. 24). The first, is that there must be a “homogeneity within the society”; meaning there must be enough people who use and understand the same language and vocabulary; second, they must also have some control over the intrinsic properties of the landscape itself (Eaton, 1990, p.24), for example, the ability to manipulate the landscape for the desired results. In rural Manitoba, it is possible that these mechanisms have been at work over the last several decades as farmers have adopted similar narratives of efficiency, growth, business-minded management of the land and have worked to create an image of what the ideal landscape looks like in agricultural regions. This process works to justify the ‘good farmer’ narrative in rural Manitoba, as farmers have a sense of what it is to have a good-looking plot of farmland and conversely, a bad-looking plot of farmland. As Eaton (1990) argues, “if it is a fact that aesthetic values are always culturally determined, then it cannot be wrong to make aesthetic judgments according to them” (p.23).

Farmers in Manitoba are collectively shifting to a point where the aesthetic value of the rural landscape is less related to a natural or historical significance and instead it is tied up in its financial and productive opportunities. This is in line with Primdahl, Kristensen, and Busck’s (2013) discussion of landscape management as “determined by the motives and practices of the farmers who are operating in the landscape in question, individually and collectively” (p.301). As the concepts and indicators of ‘good farming’ change, so too do the ways that rural landscapes are managed by farmers. Those who have been farming for a long time are worried about some of the new norms that they are seeing on the landscape; a grain farmer from North Cypress-Langford put it like this:

You see people not really worried about rotation as much as they used to, because, it doesn’t matter, in our area, you could just farm the land to death... no rotation, no anything, and it will sell for the same money as the guy that actually...took care of it. So, I’ve seen that change, because they know they’re guaranteed to sell it... It’s more of a business now...compared to the old days, you see some pretty ugly fields [out] there, get carried away with weeds... In the old days the guys showed a lot of pride; he’d go back after it... Now, they just shrug it off for this year and clean it up the next year kind of deal. Just an attitude [and] the way it’s farmed.

## 6. DISCUSSION

The goal of this research was to investigate changes in farmland ownership patterns and their impacts on the social and environmental landscapes of rural communities amidst the overarching changes to the agri-food sector, including the increasing presence of financial actors and financial logics. In the process, I also sought to uncover whether or not land grabs are occurring in Manitoba. However, without access to farmland ownership data that would have allowed for a fine-grained analysis, I cannot say for certain if significant land grabbing is occurring in Manitoba. Even so, the findings of this research point to increasing competition amongst farmers, driven by the imperative to expand farming operations, which is resulting in the further consolidation of land, capital, and control in rural communities. I argue that these phenomena have significant implications for the social and environmental welfare of rural landscapes, including how those landscapes are valued, and that the narrative of the ‘good farmer’ employed by industry, government, and farmers themselves in Manitoba works to justify the ongoing pursuit of a particular model of agriculture. The modern idea of ‘good farming’ that dominates in Manitoba is characterized by large-scale farms that are adopting the latest inputs, technologies and machinery to scale up their operations to better fit into the model of the ‘efficient’ farmer.

This chapter expands on the evidence of the ‘good farmer’ narrative at work in Manitoba, including a discussion of the impact it has on farmer identities and decision-making within the neoliberal economy. I also discuss the relevance of these findings in relation to the literature of financialization and the ‘good farmer’. Finally, I end with a discussion of the future of farming in Manitoba, including potential strategies to help mitigate barriers for farmers as well as future research needed to further the conversation. My approach throughout this thesis has been to highlight farmers’ voices. As is evident in my empirical chapters, I relied heavily on the stories and perspectives of farmers to guide the structure of the chapters and the analysis. This chapter follows the same approach of allowing the knowledge, experience, and stories of farmers to speak for themselves while pointing to relevant literature and my own analysis where appropriate.

## 6.1 Financial Logics and the ‘Good Farmer’ in Manitoba

Clapp and Isakson (2018) state that “the growing prominence of financial motives, logics, and markets has infiltrated and fundamentally reshaped the underlying non-financial economy and the democratic societies in which it resides” (p. 5). While research about the financialization of the agri-food sector, including land tenure and land use, typically takes a national or global focus, my research demonstrates some of the ways that those financial motives and logics are manifesting on a local scale and the impacts that they have on particular rural communities and environments.

Some of the questions that came up for me as I conducted this research are: how is the good farmer narrative at work in Manitoba? How is financialization appearing in local, food producing communities? How are these processes related and what does it mean for the future of agriculture? And the answers are complex; many farmers are actively trying to grow their farms and more often than not, the methods for doing so include outcompeting and eventually consolidating their neighbours’ farms all while employing production methods that have been shown to have negative effects on the environment, including contributing to climate change (Smith et al., 2007). However, those same farmers are often also including the next generation in their farm and working with their families to build something that might be able to last within the new and unapologetic ‘agri-culture’ that has emerged alongside the neoliberal, financial and productivist agendas: a culture that continuously undervalues the work of farmers and undermines their ability to create sustainable farms – both in an environmental sense but also in terms of the feasibility of passing on a viable farm to the next generation.

For thousands of years, ‘agri-cultures’ were rooted in what you could do for your neighbour, your community, your family, but today the narrative of the ‘good farmer’ has been co-opted so extensively by government and industry actors that farmers themselves are adopting the mantras of the free market, even when they do not serve them or their communities. This is leading to a change in farm culture and the roles that farmers take on within their community and on the farm. As Pretty (2002) writes,

It is revealing that Roman agricultural writers such as Cato, Varro and Columella spoke of agriculture as two things: *agri* and *cultura* (the fields and the culture). It is only very recently that we have filleted out the culture and replaced it with commodity. (p.7)

Alongside these changes, agri-business corporations are looking to profit on the backs of farmers while the government seeks to increase production on farms for the export economies they supply that continue to demand more products for less money from farmers. It is perhaps unsurprising then that farmers themselves are also starting to adopt the financial logics present throughout the economy, and the food system. Farmers in Manitoba tend to be well-educated, business-savvy individuals who see farmland as a means of production as well as an investment opportunity.

At times, farmers adopt financial logics to justify land purchases that are increasingly rooted in speculation on the potential financial value of land, rather than its productive value. In line with the literature that identifies the investor/farmer hybrid that has emerged with increased financialization within the agri-food sector (Andreucci et al., 2017; Clapp & Isakson, 2018), some farmers in Manitoba are taking on both of these roles as well. The largest farmer in this study, a grain farmer from Portage la Prairie, who together with his children farms 16,500 acres, clearly demonstrated this kind of thinking when he told me,

My job now is probably mergers and acquisitions for the last ten...or 20 years...I'm in the land speculation business now, my son who is running the farm is in the farming business, and renting land is far more profitable than buying land at the moment, if you just look at the returns from harvesting the crop and not the speculation on the land.

This farmer owns 85% of his 16,500-acre farm. Thus, despite admitting that renting is more profitable in the short-term, he has prioritized ownership and adopted a more long-term, investor-minded approach by factoring in the potential future value of the land<sup>31</sup>. As Fairbairn (2014) explains, investors see land as a “store of value” first, and as a means of production second (p.786). Thus, as farmers continue to make land purchases that are rooted in the future potential value of land, they too are ‘storing value’ in their own land. Several farmers in the study were purchasing land primarily with the speculative value in mind, while fully knowing that at the current price it would be years (or perhaps even decades) before that piece of land provided any productive value.

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<sup>31</sup> It is worth noting that the motivations for this farmer’s land investments are rooted in acquiring land for the next generation since he has four children currently farming with him. However, he did tell me that his son, who is now managing the farm, has voiced concern over continuing to invest in land as he recognizes that although it may produce value in the future, it is not profitable now.

Unsurprisingly, many farmers expressed disappointment that they had not expanded their land base more when land prices were lower. Thus, the decision to leverage the farm to make purchases now is often driven by the hope or optimism that prices will continue to rise and their children will have the equity needed in the future to maintain their farm business. One grain farmer from Rhineland put it like this,

I do things a little different than my father did. He backed me on the first piece of land I bought but after that he was like, I'm [sic] on my own. Whereas here, I'm kind of backing him [my son] to be able to buy land. So, I'm using my collateral to help him get loans and stuff like that... not everybody would do that. But had my dad done that, I probably would have three times the land that I have now.

Many older farmers believe that in order to survive in the current agricultural paradigm, their children will need to continue to expand the farm to be profitable. Some, like the farmer above, have taken it upon themselves to make this happen, while others are more accepting that this may be the last generation for their family farm. For the former, by speculating on the future value of land they are hoping that in 10, 20, 30 years their children will have a fighting chance at keeping the farm going. However, this does not account for the fact that the deteriorating rural landscapes, that result from the consolidation of land, capital, and control in rural communities, may well push young farmers further from the farm. Bihun and Desmarais (forthcoming) found that the primary factors motivating young farmers are the allure of the rural lifestyle and a desire to farm with their families. As farming cultures change and rural landscapes and lifestyles are transformed, young people may have less motivation to continue farming.

Of course, by speculating on the future value of land and outbidding their neighbours for land, these farmers may well be contributing to these trends, including the increasing land prices. Thus, it is a vicious cycle that pits farmers against each other, and in some ways even themselves as rising land prices affect their ability to continue expanding. The conflicting goals, values, and priorities of farmers as individuals versus farmers as business-people was a common theme in the research findings. Many farmers at once see the benefit of owning land that is worth so much, but are also struggling to continue to expand given the high prices of land and/or are worried about what this all means for the next generation of farmers. As one grain farmer from Portage la Prairie put it,

I'm in kind of disbelief of some of this. But, it is what it is. There's nothing I can do about it and part of me is like, 'hey, this is great, my land is worth a lot', it's good. But I sure feel for anybody that ever thinks they are going to expand.

Here, we see a glimpse of the ‘There is No Alternative’ (TINA) discourse, first presented by Margaret Thatcher to bolster the free market economy in Britain; this kind of narrative has played an integral part in the larger neoliberal restructuring of global and national economies (Bateman, 2002; Wyile, 2013). However, as I will demonstrate further in the next section, farmers in Manitoba are also exhibiting elements of the TINA syndrome as they struggle to imagine any alternative outcomes than continuously rising land prices and the consequent consolidation of land and capital. Many small and medium scale farmers are at once frustrated that they are being outcompeted at every turn by larger farms with more buying power and adamant that it is still not desirable to limit market access for those larger farmers since the free market mentality prevails. Thus, they are helping to maintain the status quo that is indeed not serving them or their farms.

Similar to Burton et al.’s (2020) hypothesis that having social capital helps to secure more social capital, land ownership begets more land ownership. While in the past, relationships amongst farmers and neighbours were an important aspect of land access in rural communities, this is becoming less the case – as demonstrated in Chapter 5. Today, the ability to purchase land is increasingly linked to the land and capital you already have. Those with large amounts of land are able to leverage their land and other assets to secure more financing to purchase land. Considering the high level of competition for any land that comes up for sale in these productive agricultural regions, it is mainly only large landowners who are able to leverage their current assets to secure large loans and thus outcompete the other farmers in the area. This leaves small and medium scale farmers at a disadvantage and pushes them to exit the sector, fulfilling the goals and objectives of the ‘good farmer’ narrative that the provincial and federal government have conveyed to farmers in Manitoba time and again.

Meanwhile, farm debt and financial risk are prevalent amongst those farmers who remain, as they are, at times, making decisions against their best interests. This relates directly to Burton et al.’s (2020) discussion of non-economically rational decision making, whereby farmers are motivated to make purchases for reasons beyond economic sense. A young mixed grain and cattle farmer from North Cypress-Langford, speaking of the high risks associated with these kinds of decisions, put it like this: “we do have a couple of young neighbours that are farming and [with] the debt they’ve taken on the last couple of years, they need everything to go 100%.”

Of course, farming is not a sure thing in the best of times as there is always inherent risk for farmers in terms of weather and the volatility of commodity markets, for example. But as farmers take on these immense debt loads, they may end up compromising their profitability while creating vulnerabilities for the future of their farm. In these instances, the financial logics that drive this kind of decision making do not account for the fact that farmers are also reliant on the productive capacity of that farmland to generate the income to make the payments that sustain their investments. Given that farmers do not have any control over the prices they receive for their products, there is significant risk involved in adopting these financial strategies. On the other hand, financial actors who invest in farmland are able to charge rents according to the value of the farmland, and thus are less reliant on the actual productive value of the land.

It is important to note that the farmers in this study who were most critical of these kinds of risky decisions were often in a more advantageous position. For example, those who inherited land or were in the process of taking over a well-established farm from their parents, or those who had purchased a large amount of land before land prices spiked, did not face the same pressure to expand their operations to make a profit since they already had enough land to make a comfortable living or could use that land as collateral for bank loans to more easily acquire land. However, even farmers who had recently purchased land at a price above its productive capacity understood that this was not an ideal method to accumulate land— but what other choice do they have? As demonstrated in the research, many retired farmers or those looking to get out of agriculture are selling their entire farm, or large portions of it, all at once. Thus, the opportunities to grow modestly by purchasing small parcels of land are few and far between for some farmers.

Driven by the narrative that only the large-scale, ‘efficient’ model of farms will survive, Clapp and Isakson (2018) explain that, “farmland investments have encouraged production at all costs, typically employing industrial farming methods that have been associated with climate change and biodiversity loss” (p.18). However, the competing ideas of ‘proper’ land stewardship and who is a ‘good farmer’ in Manitoba really became apparent when discussing the environmental changes observed on the landscape. As I explored in Chapter 5, there are those operating in the large-scale paradigm which, given the price and scale of machinery, requires that you farm as much of your land as possible and engage in ‘good farming’ strategies such as clearing trees and sloughs, draining wetlands, and keeping tidy fields free of weeds. Although

most farmers seemed to agree that a field riddled with weeds was a sign of a ‘bad farmer’, an alternative narrative emerged amongst many small and medium-scale farmers in this study as they condemned farmers who sacrificed the aesthetic aspects of the landscape by removing trees and habitat from their land. These small to medium-scale farmers looked for symbols on the landscape that represented more of a balance between conventional symbols of ‘good farming’, in terms of clean fields and high yields, and the natural aesthetic of the landscape, in terms of tidy yard sites, biodiversity, and strategic planting of trees to prevent soil erosion<sup>32</sup>. The latter set of symbols represented a level of care and respect for the environment and the community that was seen as valuable. Nonetheless, participants agreed the physical landscape of rural communities is being transformed and many pointed to the loss of biodiversity as monoculture crops dominate the landscape.

In the past, many rural communities in Manitoba offered meaningful opportunities to build rich social, cultural, and economically prosperous lives while also offering a lifestyle connected to nature. However, as landscapes are transformed through the clearing of trees and habitat, and those are replaced with ‘tidy’ fields of monoculture crops, the values assigned to the rural landscape inevitably change too. The productivist values that dominate farmer identities are visible on the landscape and begin to normalize the lack of trees, habitat, insects, animals, and even neighbours. As a result, the cultural and historical values that the rural landscape used to represent may be starting to fade. For example, a large-scale grain farmer from Portage la Prairie, when talking about how he thinks about his land, said that “it’s just a high valued commodity...I don’t know whether anybody else— they might have this memory of grandpa on the farm, this sentimental thing, but it’s a high valued commodity no different than my uncle’s stock portfolio.” As financial motives infiltrate the decision making of farmers, they begin to see land more as a profit producing aspect of the landscape, rather than emphasizing its historical, cultural, and ecological significance. Thus, the sentimental ideas of the landscape are becoming less important than the visual and material symbols of productive value on the land itself. This coincides with an overall shift in the ways that ‘good farmers’ are portrayed and valued as well: from being regarded primarily as family and community-oriented people who contribute to the

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<sup>32</sup> It is important to note here that these observations are based on a sample that is largely skewed towards more small and medium scale farmers, thus more research is needed that would include a more representative sample of large-scale farms to better understand where different sizes and scales of farms agree and disagree on the characteristics of a ‘good farmer’.

solidarity of farm communities, to being seen as business-minded people with the value of their roles instead tied to their contribution to the agriculture economy. This is not to say that farmers are not still community and family-oriented as individuals. Instead, it signals that what is most valued about farmers, from a socio-economic perspective, is no longer their place in the family unit or community, but their ability to continue adapting to the ever-changing agriculture industry, including scaling up their land base, machinery, and yields, even if it is at the cost of their environment and community.

The social landscapes of rural communities are inevitably changing as the scale and model of agriculture changes. While participants strongly expressed a preference for local ownership of land, as farms increase in size and decrease in number, many farmers are travelling further to find available land. Thus, people within a given community are starting to see farmers from other parts of the province incorporating nearby land into their operations. Although this was certainly preferential when compared to the possibility of domestic or foreign investors owning land, participants worried about impacts on their local economy and the community wellbeing since that farmer (from away) would most likely not be shopping in town or attending community events. Similar concerns were expressed over investor ownership as well.

Interestingly, some farmers gave a kind of mobility to land in these conversations, stating that if investors buy the land, it will be ‘gone’. A quote from Chapter 3 demonstrates this, as a young grain farmer from Portage la Prairie said,

If it’s land leaving the community, that’s land lost forever. It’s land that no locals will ever be able to rent, there will be no— it’s just gone. That’s how I see it as a piece of my community gone somewhere else.

A young grain farmer from Rhineland had a similar take when comparing local investors to foreign investors. He said, “the foreign investors would be more of an issue because that land may never get bought again or may never be seen again, you know, then it’s gone forever potentially or for a long time.” The idea that land is something that can be taken ‘away’ is indicative of the unique relationship between farmers and land. Of course, land cannot be physically removed from a given community, however, this points to the attachment that community members have to the land within their rural landscape and to the fact that, for some, ownership by unknown entities or individuals represents a fracture between the community and the culture, history, or other value that the piece of farmland represents for them.

Similar to the way that investors prioritize large-scale agricultural operations, there was some indication that when it comes to rental arrangements, even local landlords give preferential access to the larger farmers who they perceive as being able to pay more and farm more reliably.

A grain farmer from Rhineland explained,

The farmers are...retiring...and some are renting out, but I mean the bad part is that farmers around here tend to...[rent] to those bigger corporate farms... Even if we would say, 'okay, well we'll pay more'...they don't rent it to the smaller people... I think they feel some kind of security in that these big farms are gonna pay them, or maybe if things get tough they feel we can't pay it or something, I don't know. I think that's part of it. They sort of feel they're gonna get top dollar from these corporate farms and they're gonna be most likely to pay through any adverse...weather, [because weather] can change...I mean last year we had so much rain here in the fall like a lot of these edible beans...were all worthless, so, if you're bigger I guess they figure that you'll survive when it's tough.

Thus, local landlords too have certain perceptions of who is a 'good farmer' and who is not, which helps dictate who they will rent their land to. Although this kind of local land ownership was generally seen as having more positive outcomes than if the land were owned by domestic or foreign investors – it may still contribute to the unequal access to land that many small-scale, new, and young farmers are experiencing in Manitoba (Bihun & Demarais, forthcoming).

Whether or not domestic or foreign investors are present in Manitoba, the neoliberal, financial, and capitalist agendas are prevailing within farm communities and the impacts of this are visible on the landscape. Some farmers are getting involved in speculative farmland investments and most active farmers are looking to expand their operations and increase production. Meanwhile, these farmers are pointing to the 'good farmer' narrative which acts as a catalyst for the change that is happening in rural landscapes and in the food system more broadly. To be a 'good farmer' you must grow and become more efficient – to do this you must adopt the latest technologies, inputs, and machineries, and perhaps most importantly you must outcompete your 'inefficient' neighbours, contributing to the depopulation of the countryside and solidifying the transformation of agricultural landscapes. The "good farmer" in Manitoba reproduces the very conditions of their own demise. As farmers continue to grow their farms, there will be even fewer farmers on the landscape and fewer people controlling the management of our farmland and food production.

## 6.2 The Uncertain Future of Farming in Manitoba

Farmers of all sizes are worried about the future of farming for the young people in their communities. A mixed grain and livestock farmer from Killarney-Turtle Mountain told me, “farms are getting bigger, right or wrong...they’re all getting larger whether you want to or not.” The growth imperative that many farmers are adhering to in Manitoba is creating vulnerabilities in rural communities in terms of the economic viability of farms. An organic mixed grain and livestock farmer from Killarney-Turtle Mountain pointed to the government’s role in this process,

The fact that they [the government] dismantled all of our tools to work together and market together, that’s a huge issue. We’re set up to take the fall. There’s no risk to the people that are extracting the wealth from the land. There’s no risk to them. We take all the risks.

As discussed in the previous section, the normative assumption of achieving the ‘right economies of scale’ has led farmers down a path that has created financial uncertainty and risk which may compromise their ability to farm, or see their children farm, in the future. A small-scale grain farmer from Portage la Prairie stated that, “there’s a fine line between being able to borrow money and being able to pay it back.” Since farming in Manitoba has been ‘good’ over the last decade, participants told me that many young farmers have not experienced anything like the bad years that the preceding generation experienced. A grain farmer from Killarney-Turtle Mountain put it like this,

I’m scared someday there might be a bit of a disaster because there’s a lot of money being shelled out here for some of this land and equipment and a lot of younger farmers, they haven’t seen the tough times, so they might get caught in this. I don’t know, we’ll see, time will tell.

The fall leading up to conducting my field work in 2019 was a very challenging year for farmers in Manitoba as it was a wet fall and many did not get all of their crops harvested. An article in the Manitoba Cooperator indicated that as of April 24, 2020, thousands of acres of crops were still laying in the fields; thus, “for many farmers seeding will start with harvesting the last of last year’s crop” (Dawson, 2020). A cattle farmer from North Cypress-Langford indicated that the challenges some farmers faced were linked to farm size,

[Maybe] they didn’t get their crop off because there was too many acres, they couldn’t get off, like, they’re too big, I’m damn sure the little guy probably got all his crops off. You know? Cause he’s only got a certain amount of acres, but they

have so many spread all over, that maybe that's why they didn't get their potatoes off and they didn't get their other crops off.

A grain farmer from Portage la Prairie saw some opportunity in these misfortunes,

Now, from here to the mountains, there's a whole whack of really difficult crop to get off, expensive to dry, and the quality is down so you sell it for a lower price. There's a lot of compounding factors. So! I'm moderately hopeful that there may be – ...[maybe not] here, but there may be places in the prairies where some of the recent expansion is actually going to contract back down with people recognizing that they're in financial difficulty, that they need to offload some debt.

Perhaps some farmers will begin to redistribute land amongst their neighbours as a strategy to combat debt. However, whether this happens or not, the farm population is aging and there is going to be a significant turnover of land at some point in the near future.

While some farmers have successors, who will continue the farm business, others will either rent out their land to other farmers, sell it to the highest bidder, or pass on their land to children who will become absentee landlords. As one grain farmer from Portage la Prairie explained,

Just about everybody out here farming is [in their] 50s [and] 60s... There's a lot of farms here without...[young farmers] coming up the takeover [and] there's a lot of land out here. You fast forward ten years from now, 10 to 15 [years], there's going to be BIG changes, bigger changes than the last 15, the next 15 is going to be a big, big change.

A mixed grain and cattle farmer from Killarney-Turtle Mountain shared what he thinks about the generational transition,

When you're done farming, it don't [sic] matter anymore. then sell it to the highest bidder. It doesn't matter what happens to it after that. Which is part of the lifestyle, in my opinion. It's a part of the lifestyle.

This kind of 'who cares' attitude was not common; most farmers do indeed care about what happens to their farms and communities in the future as it is more than just a job to them, it is their life's work.

Many farmers who are nearing retirement understand that their land is their retirement fund, and consequently, they may have to sell to the highest bidder, which likely will not be the young farmer or the neighbour who is just starting out farming. Many farmers are approaching a moral crisis whereby they must choose between seeing their rural communities thrive into the

future, or cashing out on their life's work to ensure they have money for their own retirement. While this is worrisome for the future of farming in Manitoba, many farmers understand why retiring farmers will do this. As a young grain farmer from Portage la Prairie put it,

Well, I would say that...my parents' generation, they've suffered a long time with low crop crisis and bad weather, and now they have something that's actually worth something. It's their land. And that can't be ignored, I don't think that the baby boomer generation is being selfish here, like a lot of these people have worked tirelessly to keep their farms afloat through the 90's to the early 2000's and now they're seeing a bit of reward for their risk. It's a real catch 22, you know.

The catch being that in order to see the full extent of that reward, they will likely need to sell to somebody, or some entity, that is not a young or smaller farmer. As another grain farmer from Portage la Prairie stated,

The average age of farmers is in their 60s...and most of them I think would want as many buyers as possible. Cause they want to see the higher price, and who is going to be able to buy the land? So, when I'm gone I will leave my farmland to my children, but when my neighbour dies and my children can't raise the capital to buy it or can't borrow the money, who is going to buy the farmland? Where is it going to go?

This is an important question – if we continue on the path we are currently on, who will be left to buy farmland in the future?

My research points to two general paths that the agriculture industry might take. The first suggests that farmland prices will continue to rise, thus facilitating the further concentration of land and capital amongst fewer people and corporate entities. As a result, rural communities will continue to contract, and control over rural agricultural landscapes will consolidate under fewer large, corporate, investor-backed farms (whether these are non-farming investors or investor/farmer hybrids) who will farm extensive tracts of land. Given the high production costs of agriculture and in the interest of seeking 'efficiencies,' farmers are likely to clear even more yard sites, trees, and wetlands— all the while espousing a narrative that this is necessary to feed the world and the practices are environmentally sound. Thus, the current idea of who is a 'good farmer' in Manitoba will continue to influence the rural landscape and smaller grain, cattle, and mixed farms may no longer have a place in the agriculture industry in the province.

Another point of view was that the high price of land is actually protecting Manitoba farmland from investors; thus, if land prices eventually come down, and there are no local

farmers left to purchase that land, perhaps it will create the conditions amenable to large-scale acquisitions of land by domestic or foreign financial actors. Although the research could not track substantive instances of land grabbing, the uncertain futures in farming in Manitoba may open up the market for farmland investment. As a RM official from Portage la Prairie suggested,

You're going to see a swelling in the value, or the increase in the farmland values for a little while, I think, I'm not saying it's going to go down but it's going to slow down and you're also going to see people more reluctant with pulling the trigger and purchasing land. So, some of the locals might just take a step back... There's some farmers that are getting to the age that it's going to be time to sell shortly, so I think there could be a fair bit of land coming on the market. So that concerns me a little bit because not everyone locally is going to be able to do [those purchases of land] and I think there's going to be some outside investment coming in, it's gonna gobble it up.

Furthermore, it is unclear to what extent these investments might already be happening and contributing to the rising land prices and increased consolidation of rural assets.

In this scenario, the next generation of farmers will be labourers who work for a farm manager and the knowledge of local ecosystems and food production will be extracted from communities and increasingly lost with every generation. As Fred Tait explained,

This generation of farmers now, they amaze me actually...they are quite well educated and often have university degrees in agriculture. But at the same time, they're not farmers in the sense that if you took their high input technology away from them, they could not farm. In the process of this change, we now rent all our knowledge, and we don't have the community knowledge to cope anymore. And that's a sad thing because when you destroy that community-based knowledge—and that community-based knowledge is largely extinct now, there's just a few remnants of it around that people of my generation have— but... that intergenerational transfer of knowledge that took place for generations in agriculture all of the sudden came to an end. And it makes the system that's left so vulnerable.

Knowledge about food production is one of the most important aspects of human life which traditionally required an understanding of the interconnectedness of plant, animal, and insect life in a given ecosystem and of the specific needs of different plants based on the soil they grow in, their angle to the sun, the nutrients they require, and the pests that might feed on them. This is all still important in the modern, industrial farming era, however, this knowledge is increasingly produced and monitored by machines and the knowledge of the specific, place-based needs of crops on any given acre is replaced with a sweeping formula that, if applied across enough acres,

will produce “efficiencies”. The extraction of farmer-led knowledge of food production is a very real threat to our food security and our food sovereignty, and as Fred Tait so aptly explains above, without that knowledge we are leaving our food systems, and ourselves, vulnerable.

When I asked what participants thought could or should be done to help mitigate some of the challenges they identified around accessing farmland and building viable farm businesses, 45%<sup>33</sup> of farmers quickly responded that there was nothing to be done or that they did not see any possible solutions. Inundated by the narrative that small farms are ‘inefficient’ and should not be supported to stay in business, one small grain farmer from Portage la Prairie had started to adopt this narrative himself,

I think the marketplace will sort itself out. Maybe small inefficient farms just need to go the way of the dodo bird. I don’t know. In our world, at my size, I really should be in the organic industry... The economic model there, for my size, is actually probably better. I haven’t transitioned that way just cause I’m at the end of my career.

Speaking about the competition for land and resources amongst farmers, one mixed grain and cattle farmer from Killarney-Turtle Mountain is also out of ideas,

There’s no help, we do it to each other. Nobody’s going to help us. One farmer says, ‘I’ll buy your dirt for X amount of dollars,’ and this other guy says, ‘well, I’ll do it for more.’ The young farmer, he can’t start up because it costs money and the big guy just wants to get bigger, so there’s no help, farmers have been doing it to themselves and to each other for forever. That’s what we do.

Here again, we see clear evidence of the TINA syndrome. Farmers are so entrenched in the neoliberal model that they are unable to conceptualize any possible alternative that might actually make their businesses, communities, and environments more sustainable.

As a probing question I sometimes asked if they thought that any government supports would be beneficial; however, some farmers were skeptical of government involvement. A large-scale grain farmer from Portage la Prairie provided his stance on government intervention,

My personal opinion is we don’t want government involved in the farm, in what’s going on. The support I need from government is in trade, in trade with the world... Trade is what we were founded on and Western Canada relies on it. We have to export 80, 90 percent of what we produce. So, we need trade relationships, agreements, so that we can have a buyer for our production, our commodities, whatever we are producing.

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<sup>33</sup> This question was only answered by 22/30 farmers as I did not ask six people this question directly and two other farmers participated in an interview with their spouse who answered this question.

Meanwhile, a retired farmer from Portage la Prairie who was critical of some of the larger farms in his area was also at a loss for how to mitigate some of the impacts that large-scale farming is having on the local environment and community. He said,

Probably not much you can do, you hope that if they don't use good practices they're going to go out of business. That may be the biggest pressure is to hit them in the wallet. But it's hard to legislate practices. You know, and what would be my opinion of poor farming, might not be agreeable to other people. And maybe the large farmer here north of Portage, maybe he is doing the right thing, I just don't think it is. I'm quite proud of my [tenant's] crops, I can go out there and look at them, and show them off and generally, they are cleaner and healthy looking.

As others have argued, there is typically a lot of resistance to change amongst farmers who are operating within the 'good farmer' framework, even when the current system is not serving them as best as it could (Burton et al., 2020). Thus, those farmers who expressed so few ideas about what could be done to better ensure the current and future viability and vitality of farmers' livelihoods, rural communities and the environment may well be struggling to imagine change since their identities and businesses are so rooted in the ideas and symbols of the 'good farmer'. The neoliberal and financial goals that have constructed this idea of the 'good farmer' have worked to make farmers feel powerless. Farmers are no longer able to market their products collectively, they are heading deeper into debt, and within their own communities they are witnessing significant changes to their way of life. However, instead of resisting, many farmers are actually helping to further these agendas since 'that's just the way it has to be'. Let us imagine for a moment what it could look like to have more farmers say *no* to the neoliberal restructuring of their lives. And to instead demand the support to build a different model of agriculture that both allows them to construct thriving farm businesses without having to adhere to the financial logics and pressures that are driving them out of their own industry.

The second possible path is perhaps more rooted in a dream or an imagining of what our agricultural and economic futures could look like. This future asks farmers to come together to create viable farms and strong rural communities rooted in collaboration and solidarity. It has the next generation of Manitoba farmers who are determined, well-educated, and dedicated to a life in farming (Bihun and Desmarais, forthcoming), successfully resisting the current trends and fighting for more stable and secure agricultural futures that support and value a diversity of

models and scales of farms. In this reimagining, retired farmers would be supported and incentivized to provide access to land for new and young farmers in their area by working with them to create land transfer arrangements that simultaneously benefit the incoming farmer while paying for their retirement. Farm communities will perhaps once again assign symbolic value to keeping trees, wetlands, and beneficial insects, birds and bees on the land. Government and farmer organizations could collaborate more effectively, and with a more holistic scope, to develop policies and programs that address the current inequalities, especially in terms of stagnating returns for farmers as well as access to land and capital for young farmers and smaller farms. However, given the barriers discussed throughout this thesis, the necessary precursor to all of this is that there needs to be an overall reimagining of what farm futures ‘should’ look like in Manitoba.

Burton et al. (2020) suggest that the ‘good farmer’ framework, although typically regarded as a negative force, in the future, could in fact work as a “basis for dialogue and co-construction of futures in food and farming” (p.153). The authors suggest that there is opportunity to use the ‘good farmer’ framework not as a critique of farmers, as is often the case, but instead as a form of resistance whereby farmers assert their own definitions of what it means to be a ‘good farmer’, thus empowering farmers to re-define themselves within socio-economic contexts. This approach is grounded in the idea that ‘good farmers’ are “likely to adapt and change as they have needed to in order to remain farmers” (Burton et al., 2020, p.157). Hence, as the current model continues to limit and jeopardize agricultural futures for many, there are opportunities for farmers to resist and remain on the land.

In many ways, this kind of resistance is already happening; for example, an organic mixed grain and cattle farmer from Killarney-Turtle Mountain spoke about her financial position as a form of resistance against the consolidation of power in the food system,

I don’t know what they’ll do with rogues and renegades like us who, we just sold our dairy [farm] and we paid off all our debt, we own all our infrastructure and our land, our homes, and we can probably survive in one corner back here for quite a long time. I don’t know what they’ll do with people like us.

Another promising perspective expressed by some of the young farmers centered on resisting expansion by concentrating more on increasing productivity on their current land holdings. For example, a young grain farmer from Rhineland put it like this,

Personally...I would question that mentality of like ‘okay, we need to make more money, we have to get bigger’, and I would sooner look at ways of maybe making more money off of our acres, per acre, rather than trying to farm more acres.

Perhaps, as more young farmers work to adopt a different mindset, this would have implications for the kinds of ‘good farming’ narratives that emerge with the next generation.

There are other examples of beyond the farmgate resistance already happening in Manitoba as well, including the work conducted by farmer organizations such as the NFU and KAP. For example, KAP has developed a Manitoba Young Farmers Committee that seeks to unite and support farmers throughout the province through policy work that focusses on “farmland ownership, financial lending and taxation” (KAP, n.d.). By getting input from the next generation of farmers, and creating opportunities for them to work together and develop their collective vision of the future, KAP youth are setting the groundwork for farming futures rooted in community, advocacy, and resiliency.

It is important to note here, however, that while KAP represents a variety of farm sizes, the majority of their focus as an organization is on issues and innovations in support of the conventional, large-scale model of agriculture. For instance, if you attend the KAP annual meeting, their keynote speakers are most often not farmers questioning the profitability and viability of the current model or discussing the social and environmental hardships that, as demonstrated in my research, so many are witnessing. Instead, they are agents of the bank telling farmers how to leverage themselves more, agents of the fertilizer company telling them which chemical they absolutely need to incorporate into their budget next, agents of the machinery dealership showing them the latest technology in combines, with a price tag that immediately directs that ‘good farmer’ to the need for more land to justify the cost of the machine, the chemical, the mortgage.<sup>34</sup> However, what organizations like KAP do well is provide a platform for farmers to meet, collaborate, and listen to one another. Therefore, this is an important organizing structure for farmers and will continue to have an important role to play as an avenue for solidarity, advocacy, and change.

This is already happening as the next generation takes the lead; for example, one young grain farmer from Portage la Prairie who is a KAP member talked about his work advocating for change,

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<sup>34</sup> These observations are based on two KAP annual meetings that I attended, in 2018 and 2019.

Currently I have a resolution going through KAP but it'll be brought to the floor at AGM, where I'm trying to get a young farmer land rental tax incentive through to CFA [Canadian Federation of Agriculture] and if it goes through to CFA I'll have to go and fight for this in Ottawa in 2020... The idea behind it is a land owner would receive a tax exemption or tax credit of up to 100% of all monies earned if they rent to a young farmer and within 35 km of their home base of operations. So, they have to rent to a local young farmer.

If successful, this kind of policy could open up access to farmland for those currently struggling to access enough land to make a living or those looking to start out in the agriculture industry.

Additionally, the NFU has worked on many policy issues concerning farmer livelihoods and wellbeing, and have spearheaded research on the role of agriculture in climate change, farm debt, farmland ownership and the corporate control of farmland (see, for example, Holtslander, 2015; Qualman & the NFU, 2019, among many others). These studies demonstrate that the NFU has made a number of policy recommendations that would address the issues and uncertainties presented in this chapter. These recommendations include: 1) creating restrictions that keep land ownership in the hands of farmers and local people; 2) maintaining records of land ownership and consider capping the land holding size of any given entity; 3) applying differential tax rates to give an advantage to local, family farms; 4) offering incentives for more ecologically sound land management practices; 5) tasking the Government of Canada with easing intergenerational land transfers, including providing better access to young and new farmers; and 6) restricting the non-agricultural use of land (NFU, n.d.). The work that farmers do under the umbrella of these farmer organizations are key examples of the ways that farmers are already organizing to resist the further financialization of food systems and farmland, and finding ways to work together despite a prevailing narrative that tells them to compete against one another.

Despite all of the barriers and challenges that farmers identified in their interviews, the majority still expressed hope for the future. When asked what solutions are needed to resolve problems in the agricultural industry, 55%<sup>35</sup> of farmers offered ideas to help mitigate against barriers such as the increased competition for land, rising costs of production, and deteriorating rural relationships and communities. Some examples included making capital more accessible to young farmers and giving young farmers tax breaks, educating consumers about their role in dictating the direction of the food system, more engagement between farmers and government to

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<sup>35</sup> This question was only answered by 22/30 farmers as I did not ask six people this question directly and two other farmers participated in an interview with their spouse who answered this question.

help develop policies and programs grounded on the needs of farmers, farmers collaborating and working in solidarity with one another, and caps on non-farming land ownership. All but one of the young farmers who were asked this question offered potential solutions, demonstrating the hopefulness that the next generation of farmers has for the future. For example, a young farmer from Rhineland called for action, and he said that, “to say that there's nothing to be done about it, I think is wrong, I think...it's important that we are looking at who's buying this land.” This is evidence of resistance against the TINA narrative that tells people not to bother looking for alternatives, and points to the important role the state could play if it chose to effectively move beyond a market-led distribution of land.

Current farmland legislation in Manitoba does not prohibit all non-farming investment; as long as investors are Canadian citizens or investment funds that have partial or full Canadian ownership, they are free to purchase as much farmland as they want in Manitoba. Although this research sheds light on the ways that farmland concentration amongst farmers is impacting farmer identities, rural communities, and the environment, there is an underlying threat that further extraction of farmland from the hands of local people could deepen these trends. While research participants often could not say whether or not investors were buying up farmland in their areas, they did acknowledge hearing about investor purchases of farmland in Western Canada and many are wary of the potential impacts on their livelihoods and the viability of their rural communities were investors to purchase land in their area. Furthermore, as farmers themselves take on the financial motives and logics of investors, the impacts on rural communities and the environment may well be quite similar to those in places where land grabs are occurring, in terms of the further consolidation of land and capital and the prioritization of industrial agricultural practices. However, as Fred Tait put it, “any business that increases in production and increases in debt at the same time is not a successful business.” Thus, a significant part of the solution involves re-defining what it means to be a ‘good farmer’ in Manitoba and through that process, society can help co-construct sustainable futures in agriculture for the next generation—futures that are rooted in community collaboration and support rather than competition and debt.

### **6.3 Limitations and Future Research**

A significant limitation of this research was the lack of representation of women farmers' voices. Burton et al. (2020) acknowledge that women are typically excluded or omitted from the literature on the 'good farmer', and even within agriculture communities. The fact that farming is still male dominated is in line with the historical undervaluing of women in agricultural landscapes and reflected in the difficulty that I had in tracking down women who are farming conventionally in Manitoba. At times, these limitations were apparent even within a farming household. When couples were interviewed together in this research, it was common that the man would dominate the conversation, making it difficult to gain an understanding of the woman's perspective on these issues. This points to the need for more research that captures not only the voice of male farmers, but equally reflects the interests and positions of women.

Given that even farmers, at times, do not know who owns land in their community, it is imperative that a more comprehensive analysis of land titling data be facilitated. This will require access to farmland ownership data through the Office of the Registrar General that would allow researchers to quantify the extent of farmland concentration and investor ownership in Manitoba, in much the same way that Desmarais et al. (2017) did in Saskatchewan. This kind of inquiry would be an important step in understanding the scope of the challenges that farmers face now and into the future and could help to inform policy development aimed at protecting farmland for future generations of farmers. A young farmer from Portage la Prairie summarized the need for this research well by indicating that we need, "a more extensive look into, 'okay, why do you want to buy all this land and how does this help Manitoba?' I don't think this is helping Manitoba, we live here, we want to farm this land".

Finally, as acknowledged at the outset of this thesis, this research does not address the historical and ongoing displacement and dispossession of Indigenous peoples from the land. Further Indigenous-led research is needed to understand the perspectives of Indigenous peoples with regards to the access to and ownership of farmland and the self-determination of Indigenous communities over treaty land. Additionally, it is imperative that all levels of government and policy makers seek meaningful consultation with Indigenous communities that would inform an inclusive farmland policy in Manitoba.

## 6.4 Conclusion

The neoliberal and financialization agenda has infiltrated what it means to be a “good farmer” in Canada, deeming ‘economies of scale’ as the ultimate goal while rural communities and environments deteriorate. As Clapp & Isakson (2018) explain, “contemporary capitalism is being transformed by the growing role of finance in the economy, and each is important in considering the role of financialization as it reshapes the food and agriculture sector” (p.5). The financial logics present across the agri-food sector have permeated the identities of many farmers in Manitoba and led them into a treadmill of production in which they need more land to achieve the scale of farm deemed necessary, but the cost of that expansion requires even more land (whether rented or owned) so that they can produce higher yields to help pay for new land purchases, and the cycle continues. Why is it that farmers are so willing to take on such high debt loads and risk while also accepting that it is their responsibility to do so in the name of engaging in good farming and establishing a good business? Why is it that farmers so clearly see the disadvantages they have in terms of being able to create profitable and viable farm businesses and resilient farm communities, yet, when asked what they think could be done to mitigate the impacts of farm consolidation and farmland concentration, many farmers immediately (and almost defensively) answer “there is nothing to be done”, or “government should not get involved”? Perhaps they are correct in their distrust of the government to intervene considering that it is the very government that has helped to facilitate the ‘good farmer’ narrative of ‘growth’ and ‘efficiency’ and created the current economically, environmentally, and socially unsustainable model of agriculture.

Given conventional agriculture’s significant contribution to climate change (Smith et al., 2007), it is imperative that as a society we work to assign value to and provide incentives for farmers that are maintaining habitat, supporting biodiversity and adopting more environmentally sound practices. Civil society has a meaningful role to play in this process, as a retired farmer from North Cypress-Langford put it, “when you city slickers inside the perimeter wake up and smell the roses, everything will change, until then...” Realizing resilient and viable agriculture futures requires citizen action and sound government policy that no longer recognizes agriculture as just any other business and land as just any other resource. It requires educated consumers who care about where their food comes from and who advocate for the wellbeing of farmers and the environment. Rather than working to empower farmers to maintain the family farm and to

ensure that we continue to have educated and dedicated farmers on the landscape, we are allowing the market to direct the future of agriculture in Manitoba, and in Canada as a whole. This path is risking a future that no longer has farmers living and working on the landscape with knowledge of food production, but instead has farm managers who hire labourers to operate the high-tech machinery and who do not have a vested interest in the sustainability of the practices employed on the land or how they might impact the rural landscapes around them. The question of who produces our food and how it is produced has implications for the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of both rural and urban landscapes and people. While farms are certainly businesses, they are in the business of producing food and thus, we all have a vested interest in ensuring that farmers are supported to make economically, socially, and environmentally sound decisions. In doing so, Manitobans would be working to alter rural landscapes and farmers' identities in ways that better fit the vision of the global food sovereignty movement. Through this process, farmers and rural people would be empowered to direct the future of their communities towards rich social lives, thriving economies, and a flourishing environment.

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## APPENDIX A: Ethics Approval and Amendments



Research Ethics  
and Compliance

**Human Ethics**  
208-194 Dafoe Road  
Winnipeg, MB  
Canada R3T 2N2  
Phone +204-474-7122  
Email: humanethics@umanitoba.ca

### PROTOCOL APPROVAL

**TO:** Annette Desmarais  
Principal Investigator

**FROM:** Jonathan Marotta, Chair  
Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board (PSREB)

**Re:** Protocol #P2019:050 (HS22790)  
Changing Farmland Ownership in the Canadian Prairies



**Effective:** April 16, 2019

**Expiry:** April 16, 2020

**Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board (PSREB)** has reviewed and approved the above research. PSREB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*.

This approval is subject to the following conditions:

1. Approval is granted for the research and purposes described in the application only.
2. Any modification to the research or research materials must be submitted to PSREB for approval before implementation.
3. Any deviations to the research or adverse events must be submitted to PSREB as soon as possible.
4. This approval is valid for one year only and a Renewal Request must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date.
5. A Study Closure form must be submitted to PSREB when the research is complete or terminated.
6. The University of Manitoba may request to review research documentation from this project to demonstrate compliance with this approved protocol and the University of Manitoba *Ethics of Research Involving Humans*.

#### Funded Protocols:

- Please mail/e-mail a copy of this Approval, identifying the related UM Project Number, to the Research Grants Officer in ORS.



## Research Ethics and Compliance

**Human Ethics**  
208-194 Dafoe Road  
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Email: [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca)

### AMENDMENT APPROVAL

August 13, 2019

**TO:** Annette Desmarais  
Principal Investigator

**FROM:** Jonathan Marotta, Chair  
Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board (PSREB)

**Re:** Protocol #P2019:050 (HS22790)  
Changing Farmland Ownership in the Canadian Prairies



**Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board (PSREB)** has reviewed and approved your Amendment Request received on **August 7, 2019** to the above-noted protocol. PSREB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*.

This approval is subject to the following conditions:

1. Approval is given for this amendment only. Any further changes to the protocol must be reported to the Human Ethics Coordinator in advance of implementation.
2. Any deviations to the research or adverse events must be submitted to PSREB as soon as possible.
3. Amendment Approvals do not change the protocol expiry date. Please refer to the original Protocol Approval or subsequent Renewal Approvals for the protocol expiry date.

Research Ethics and Compliance is a part of the Office of the Vice-President (Research and International)  
[umanitoba.ca/research](http://umanitoba.ca/research)



UNIVERSITY  
OF MANITOBA

Research Ethics  
and Compliance

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## AMENDMENT APPROVAL

October 22, 2019

**TO:** Annette Desmarais  
Principal Investigator

**FROM:** Jonathan Marotta, Chair  
Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board (PSREB)

**Re:** Protocol #P2019:050 (HS22790)  
Changing Farmland Ownership in the Canadian Prairies



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**Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board (PSREB)** has reviewed and approved your Amendment Request received on **October 21, 2019** to the above-noted protocol. PSREB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*.

This approval is subject to the following conditions:

1. Approval is given for this amendment only. Any further changes to the protocol must be reported to the Human Ethics Coordinator in advance of implementation.
2. Any deviations to the research or adverse events must be submitted to PSREB as soon as possible.
3. Amendment Approvals do not change the protocol expiry date. Please refer to the original Protocol Approval or subsequent Renewal Approvals for the protocol expiry date.

Research Ethics and Compliance is a part of the Office of the Vice-President (Research and International)  
[umanitoba.ca/research](http://umanitoba.ca/research)

## APPENDIX B: Recruitment Poster



University  
of Manitoba



University  
of Regina

*Changing Farmland Ownership in the Canadian Prairies*

### **PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH ON FARMLAND OWNERSHIP**

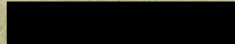
A lot of farmland is changing hands in the Canadian prairies. We are interested in how this is affecting rural communities and farmers. If you are currently farming, we would like to hear from you. We invite you to participate in an interview that would take about 60 to 90 minutes.

### **PLEASE JOIN US!**

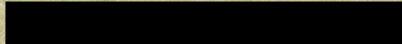
**To participate in this study, please contact:**

Hannah Bihun, Masters Student, University of Manitoba

Tel:

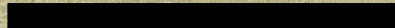


E-mail:

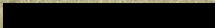


**For more information about this study, please contact:**

**Dr. Annette Desmarais, Department of Sociology and Criminology, University of Manitoba**

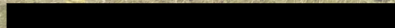


Tel:



or

**Dr. André Magnan, Department of Sociology and Social Studies, University of Regina**



Tel:



This study has been approved by the Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba and the Ethics Board at the University of Regina.

## **APPENDIX C: Phone Recruitment Template (Context Interviews)**

### **For short interview with rural municipal officials and staff, farm leaders and farm organization staff, and journalists:**

Hello, my name is Hannah Bihun. I am a MA student at the University of Manitoba working on a research project called “Changing farmland ownership in the Canadian Prairies”. I am working with Dr. Annette Desmarais (University of Manitoba), Dr. André Magnan (University of Regina), and Dr. Mengistu Wendimu (an independent researcher and agricultural economist) on this research. The purpose of the research is to better understand what changes in land ownership are taking place and the impact that these are having on rural communities.

I am contacting you because of your role (as an elected rural municipal official or staff, farm leader or staff person working for a farm organization, or a journalist) and someone who might have some knowledge of changing farmland ownership in the area where you live and/or in the province as a whole. I got your name by consulting public sources (Here we would explain the appropriate source depending on who is being approached. For example, for the rural officials and staff we consulted the provincial government’s electronic municipal directory; for farm leaders and farm organization staff, I consulted the website of the farm organization; and for journalists, I obtained your contact information through the website of the media outlet where your media story appeared).

As part of our research, we are very interested in hearing what you might know about the kinds of changes in land ownership that are happening, and what kinds of impact these are having rural communities. Given your role, we feel that the information you can give us will be an important contribution to the research. I would like to conduct a short 30 minute interview with you. We could do the interview over the phone. Could we set up a date and time for the interview?

(If the person agrees to an interview, then the script would continue as follows:)

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this research. I will e-mail you the consent form which gives you more detailed information about the research. It is important that you read

this consent form and that I obtain your verbal consent before we can proceed with the interview.

## **APPENDIX D: Phone Recruitment Template (RM Officials and Staff)**

### **For longer interviews with rural municipal elected officials and staff:**

Hello, my name is Hannah Bihun. I am a Masters student on a research project called “Changing farmland ownership in the Canadian Prairies”. Your municipality was one of four rural municipalities selected for this study because it has among some of the highest rates of land changing hands in recent years. We want to better understand what changes are taking place and the impact that these are having on the rural community. I am working with Dr. Annette Desmarais (University of Manitoba), Dr. André Magnan (University of Regina), and Dr. Mengistu Wendimu (an independent researcher and agricultural economist) on this research.

We got your name by consulting the provincial government’s Municipal Directory system and I sent you an email (state date) to ask if you would contribute to our research by participating in an interview. Do you remember receiving that e-mail? If not, I could certainly send it to you by e-mail today and I could call you back to discuss this further.

(If the person says he received the e-mail, then the conversation would continue as follows):

As part of our research, we are very interested in hearing from rural municipal officials and staff about what kinds of changes are happening as far as farmland ownership is concerned, and what kinds of impact these are having in the municipality. Given your position in the community, we feel that the information you can give us will be an important contribution to the research. We expect that the interview would take between 60 to 90 minutes. Could we set up a time and date?

(If the person agrees to an interview, then the script would continue as follows:)

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this research. I will e-mail you the consent form which gives you more detailed information about the research. It is important that you read this consent form and that I obtain your verbal consent before we begin the interview on (date and time).

## **APPENDIX E: Phone Recruitment Template (Farmers)**

### **For longer interviews farmers:**

Hello, my name is Hannah Bihun. I am masters student at the University of Manitoba working on a research project called “Changing farmland ownership in the Canadian Prairies.” The purpose of the study is to better understand what farmland ownership changes are taking place and the impact that these are having on rural communities. (I am working with Dr. Annette Desmarais (University of Manitoba), Dr. André Magnan (University of Regina), and Dr. Mengistu Wendimu (an independent researcher and agricultural economist) on this research. )

Portage la Prairie was one of the four rural municipalities selected for this study because it has among some of the highest rates of land changing hands in recent years. We got your name by consulting the rural municipal land map and see that you have land adjacent to some large landowners and/or investors who have purchased farmland.

As part of our research, we are very interested in hearing from farmers about what kinds of changes are happening as far as farmland ownership is concerned, and what kinds of impact these are having for you as a farmer, your farm, and the impact it is having in rural communities. It is important for us to hear from farmers so we would greatly appreciate your participation in this research. Can we count on you to participate by being interviewed? We expect that the interview would take between 60 to 90 minutes. Could we set up a time and date?

(If the person agrees to an interview, then the script would continue as follows:)

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this research. I can e-mail you the consent form which gives you more detailed information about the research, or I will bring this form with me. It is important that you read this consent form and that I obtain your verbal consent before we begin the interview on (date and time).

## **APPENDIX F: E-mail Recruitment Template (RM Officials and Staff / Context Interviews)**

Hi \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Hannah Bihun and I am a Masters student at the University of Manitoba, working on a research project called “Changing farmland ownership in the Canadian Prairies”.

The rural municipality of \_\_\_\_\_ is one of a few rural municipalities selected as potential study areas for this research in Manitoba because it has among some of the highest rates of land changing hands in recent years. We want to better understand what changes are taking place and the impact that these are having on the rural community. I am working with Dr. Annette Desmarais (University of Manitoba), Dr. André Magnan (University of Regina), and Dr. Mengistu Wendimu (an independent researcher and agricultural economist) on this research.

We got your name and contact information by consulting \_\_\_\_\_. As part of our research, we are very interested in hearing from rural municipal officials and staff (or other designation for context interviews) about what kinds of changes have happened and/or are currently happening as far as farmland ownership is concerned, and what kinds of impact these are having in the municipality (or in Manitoba as a whole for context interviews). Given your position in the community (or given your experience working in \_\_\_\_\_ for context interviews), we feel that the information you can give us will be an important contribution to the research.

I am reaching out to you to see if you would be willing to participate in the research through an approximately 1 hour interview. We can conduct the interview in person or over the phone.

This study has been approved by the Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba and the Ethics Board at the University of Regina. I have attached the consent form for this project for you to review.

I will follow up with a phone call soon so that I can answer any questions you may have and see what your availability is like, but please feel free to call or e-mail in the meantime with any questions.

Thank you for your time and for considering this request.

I look forward to hearing from you soon,

Hannah Bihun

MA Geography Student

University of Manitoba

Insert contact info here

## APPENDIX G: Informed Consent Form (Context Interviews)



Department of Sociology  
and Criminology

Winnipeg, Manitoba

Telephone:

Fax:

November 22, 2019

### **Informed Consent Form for Short Interviews (Farm leaders and staff of farm organizations, Rural Municipal officials/staff, journalists)**

**Research Project Title:** Changing Farmland Ownership in the Canadian Prairies

**Researcher:** Dr. Annette Aurélie Desmarais, Associate Professor, Canada Research Chair in Human Rights, Social Justice and Food Sovereignty, Department of Sociology and Criminology, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba. Tel: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]

#### **Co-Researchers:**

Dr. André Magnan, Department of Sociology, University of Regina, [REDACTED] Regina, Saskatchewan, S4S 0A2 Tel: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]

Dr. Mengistu Wendimu, Independent Researcher and Research Team Member, [REDACTED] Winnipeg, Manitoba, R2N 0K4. Tel: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]

The project also includes the following three graduate students as co-researchers who are completing their Masters in the Department of Environment and Geography at the University of Manitoba.

1. Hannah Bihun is responsible for the research fieldwork in Manitoba. Her contact information is as follows: [REDACTED], University of Manitoba, R3T 2M6, Tel: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]
2. Melissa Davidson is responsible for the research fieldwork in Saskatchewan. Her contact information is: c/o Department of Environment and Geography, [REDACTED] University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3T 2M6. Tel: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]
3. Katherine Aske is responsible for research fieldwork in Alberta. Her contact information is as follows: c/o Department of Environment and Geography, [REDACTED] University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3T 2M6. Tel: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]

**Sponsors:** Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Insight Grant and Canada Research Chair Program.

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask the Masters student responsible for research fieldwork in your province. The student's contact information is provided above. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information. The consent form begins by providing a brief description of the research project and requests your consent to participate in the research project entitled "Changing land tenure in the Canadian Prairies."

The goal of this research is to explore the social and environmental implications of changing patterns of farmland ownership in the Canadian prairies. You have been contacted to participate in the research

project because your work as a public servant (either as an elected official or staff person) working at the rural municipal level, your position as a farm leader/member or member of a farm organization, or your work as a journalist.

Your experience and knowledge are of great interest to this project as we seek to understand the positive and/or negative effects of changes in farmland ownership in the prairies. We are investigating the changes in farmland ownership (including increased land concentration among farmers and the presence of investors) in the farmland market across the prairies and how these changes are affecting rural communities. In all three prairie provinces, the research will highlight the voices of rural people to better understand how their lives and communities are changing as a result of shifting patterns of land ownership in rural municipalities.

You are being asked to participate by answering some questions that will be sent to you by e-mail or posed to you over the telephone or face to face. We expect that your participation in this research will not take more than 30 minutes of your time. We will begin by asking you some specific questions: the first questions are geared to getting some basic information (your name, position and contact information), and next you will be asked some more general questions regarding your knowledge land ownership transactions, and changes in land tenure and land use in your rural municipality and/or the province in which you reside. With your permission, the interview will be voice recorded, and MA student conducting fieldwork in your province will also be taking notes as she conducts the interview. Only this student, her graduate supervisor (Dr. Annette Desmarais) and possibly a transcriptionist, who will have signed a confidentiality form, will have access to the audio-recording. The transcription of your interview may be shared among the research team members (all listed on page 1 of this form) for comparative purposes with interviews conducted in all three prairie provinces. However, in this process, your confidentiality will be protected as explained further in the section below entitled "Confidentiality and Anonymity". You may choose not to answer any question that you are not comfortable answering and you may withdraw from the interview at any point.

**Risks and Benefits:** The potential risks associated with this research are minimal. You may be asked questions related to: what changes in land ownership you have seen happening; what kind of responses have you seen in your rural municipality as a result to changes in land ownership; and what are the farming business structures, strategies and practices you are seeing as a result of changes in land ownership. Although there is no direct benefit to you as a participant, this research will shed light on the implications of new patterns of farmland ownership and structure for the farming community and for society at large.

**Confidentiality and anonymity:** Your right to confidentiality and privacy is important. The information you provide may be used in reports, journal/magazine articles, blogs, books, media interviews, or public and academic presentations; the information may be presented as summaries of interview material, some summary statistics, and may also include direct quotations. Given your public role as elected official, staff person, farm leader/member or staff of a farm organization, the information you provide will be most useful if your name and organization can be attributed to your comments. If you are not comfortable with this, you may choose a different option as outlined below.

There are several options for you to consider if you decide to take part in this research. If you prefer not to identify yourself or your organization, a generic reference will be used instead in the dissemination of the results of this research. That is, all attempts will be made to disguise your identity. There is a chance, even in cases where your confidentiality is to be maintained, that your comments could be attributed to you by someone reading the research results based on the context of your remarks and the information you provide.

Please put a check mark on the corresponding line(s) that grants us your permission to: (Note that the researcher will note your verbal consent as to which of a, b and/or c you choose)

- a/ Use your name in relation to information you provide to us: Yes: ☐ No: ☐  
b/ Use your position in relation to information you provide to us: Yes: ☐ No: ☐  
c/ Quote your words in relation to information you provide to us: Yes: ☐ No: ☐

Please note that if you have selected no to the above, all attempts will be made to disguise your identity by supplying only generic references and using a pseudonym when referring to anything that you communicated to us. We will remove all direct identifiers in the notes of the interview.

The answers you provide to our interview questions, that is, the audio recording and the transcription of your interview, will be kept in password protected folders on password protected computers of the Principal Investigator and the MA student doing work in your home province. The MA students and the PI will also keep a backup of the material that will be stored in password protected hard-drives and placed in secure locations. A research assistant may also have access to these materials, but only on condition that they uphold the same commitment to your confidentiality outlined above. The data will be kept for at least three years post publication of the results, after which time all of the data will either be deleted/shredded.

**Results:** A summary of the results of the study will be made available to participants once we have analysed the data and written the results of the research. We expect that for the research in Saskatchewan and Manitoba this will be in April 2020 while the summary for research in Alberta is expected by July 2020. The MA student researchers will note down the information you provide to her over the phone so that we have a record of where to send the summary of research results.

**Your Name:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Your Address:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Your Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Consent:**

Your participation is voluntary and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. By consenting verbally to this research you are indicating that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities.

For research participants residing in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time (before we begin analysing the data on January 15, 2020), and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. After January 15, 2020, you will no longer be able to withdraw from the research. If you live in Manitoba and would like to withdraw your consent please contact Hannah Bihun (\_\_\_\_\_\_). If you live in Saskatchewan and would like to withdraw your consent please contact Melissa Davidson (\_\_\_\_\_\_).

For research participants residing in Alberta, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time (before we begin analysing the data on February 1, 2020), and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. After February 1, 2020, you will no longer be able to withdraw from the research. If you would like to withdraw your consent please contact Katherine Aske (\_\_\_\_\_\_). Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba may look at the research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way. This research has been approved by the Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named person or the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at 204 474-7122 or e-mail [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca).

Please note that your verbal consent will be noted by the MA student researcher.

## APPENDIX H: Informed Consent Form (RM Officials and Staff)



### Department of Sociology and Criminology

Winnipeg, Manitoba

Telephone:

Fax:

November 22, 2019

#### Informed Consent Form for Long Interviews (Rural Municipal Officials and staff)

**Research Project Title:** Changing Farmland Ownership in the Canadian Prairies

**Researcher:** Dr. Annette Aurélie Desmarais, Associate Professor, Canada Research Chair in Human Rights, Social Justice and Food Sovereignty, Department of Sociology and Criminology, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba. Tel: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]

**Co-Researchers:**

Dr. André Magnan, Department of Sociology, University of Regina, [REDACTED]  
Saskatchewan, S4S 0A2 Tel: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]

Dr. Mengistu Wendimu, Independent Researcher and Research Team Member, [REDACTED]  
Winnipeg, Manitoba, R2N 0K4. Tel: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]

The project also includes the following three graduate students as co-researchers who are completing their Masters in the Department of Environment and Geography at the University of Manitoba.

1. Hannah Bihun is responsible for the research fieldwork in Manitoba. Her contact information is as follows: [REDACTED], University of Manitoba, R3T 2M6, Tel: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]
2. Melissa Davidson is responsible for the research fieldwork in Saskatchewan. Her contact information is: c/o Department of Environment and Geography, [REDACTED] University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3T 2M6. Tel: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]
3. Katherine Aske is responsible for research fieldwork in Alberta. Her contact information is as follows: c/o Department of Environment and Geography, [REDACTED] University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3T 2M6. Tel: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]

**Sponsors:** Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Insight Grant and Canada Research Chair Program.

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask the Masters student responsible for research fieldwork in your province. The student's contact information is provided above. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information. The consent form begins by providing a brief description of the research project and requests your consent to participate in the research project entitled "Changing land tenure in the Canadian Prairies."

The goal of this research is to explore the social and environmental implications of changing patterns of farmland ownership in the Canadian prairies. You have been contacted to participate in the research

project because your work as a public servant, either as an elected official or staff person, working at the rural municipal level.

Your experience and knowledge are of great interest to this project as we seek to understand the positive and/or negative effects of changes in farmland ownership in the prairies. We are investigating the changes in farmland ownership (including increased land concentration among farmers and the presence of investors) in the farmland market across the prairies and how these changes are affecting rural communities. In all three prairie provinces, the research will highlight the voices of rural people to better understand how their lives and communities are changing as a result of shifting patterns of land ownership in rural municipalities.

You are being asked to participate by participating in a face to face interview. If this is not possible, we will interview you by phone or skype. We expect that your participation in this research will not take more than 60 to 90 minutes of your time. We will begin by asking you some specific questions: the first questions are geared to getting some basic information (your name, position and contact information). Next, with a rural municipal map containing land-titling data in hand, you will be asked some more general questions regarding your knowledge of land ownership transactions, and changes in land tenure and land use in your rural municipality. You may choose not to answer any question that you are not comfortable answering and you may withdraw from the interview at any point.

With your permission, the interview will be voice recorded, and MA student conducting fieldwork in your province will also be taking notes as she conducts the interview. Only this student, her graduate supervisor (Dr. Annette Desmarais) and possibly a transcriptionist, who will have signed a confidentiality form, will have access to the audio-recording. The transcription of your interview may be shared among the research team members (all listed on page 1 of this form) for comparative purposes with interviews conducted in all three prairie provinces. However, in this process, your confidentiality will be protected as explained further in the section below entitled "Confidentiality and Anonymity".

**Risks and Benefits:** The potential risks associated with this research are minimal. You may be asked questions related to: what changes in land ownership you have seen happening; what kind of responses have you seen in your rural municipality as a result to changes in land ownership; and what are the farming business structures, strategies and practices you are seeing as a result of changes in land ownership. Although there is no direct benefit to you as a participant, this research will shed light on the implications of new patterns of farmland ownership and structure for the farming community and for society at large.

**Confidentiality and anonymity:** Your right to confidentiality and privacy is important. The information you provide may be used in reports, journal/magazine articles, blogs, books, media interviews, or public and academic presentations; the information may be presented as summaries of interview material, some summary statistics, and may also include direct quotations. Given your public role as elected official or staffperson for the rural municipality, the information you provide will be most useful if your name and organization can be attributed to your comments. If you are not comfortable with this, you may choose a different option as in the following paragraph.

There are several options for you to consider if you decide to take part in this research. If you prefer not to identify yourself or your organization, a generic reference will be used instead in the dissemination of the results of this research. That is, all attempts will be made to disguise your identity. There is a chance, even in cases where your confidentiality is to be maintained, that your comments could be attributed to you by someone reading the research results based on the context of your remarks and the information you provide.

Please put a check mark on the corresponding line(s) that grants us your permission to: (Please note that since we are obtaining verbal consent, the MA student researcher will note which of these options you select)

- a/ Use your name in relation to information you provide to us: Yes: ☐ No: ☐
- b/ Use your position in relation to information you provide to us: Yes: ☐ No: ☐
- c/ Quote your words in relation to information you provide to us: Yes: ☐ No: ☐

Please note that if you have selected no to the above, all attempts will be made to disguise your identity by supplying only generic references and using a pseudonym when referring to anything that you communicated to us. We will remove all direct identifiers in the notes of the interview. All of the data (notes and analysis of the notes) will be stored in a password protected folder in password protected computers and password protected hard drives belonging to the MA student doing research in your home province and the PI. The data will be kept for at least three years post publication of the results, after which time all of the data will either be deleted/shredded.

The answers you provide to our interview questions, that is, the audio recording and the transcription of your interview, will be kept in password protected folders on password protected computers of the Principal Investigator and the MA student doing work in your home province. The MA students and the PI will also keep a backup of the material that will be stored in password protected hard-drives and placed in secure locations. A research assistant may also have access to these materials, but only on condition that they uphold the same commitment to your confidentiality outlined above.

**Results:** A summary of the results of the study will be made available to participants once we have analysed the data and written the results of the research. We expect that for the research in Saskatchewan and Manitoba this will be in April 2020 while the summary for research in Alberta is expected by July 2020. Please print your name here if you would like to receive a copy of the summary and include an address or e-mail address where it can be sent: (Please note that the MA student researcher will note down your contact information so that we can send you the summary of results once they are ready).

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Consent:**

Your participation is voluntary and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. By consenting verbally to this study, you are indicating that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities.

For research participants residing in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time (before we begin analysing the data on January 15, 2020), and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. After January 15, 2020, you will no longer be able to withdraw from the research. If you live in Manitoba and would like to withdraw your consent please contact Hannah Bihun ([REDACTED]). If you live in Saskatchewan and would like to withdraw your consent please contact Melissa Davidson ([REDACTED]).

For research participants residing in Alberta, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time (before we begin analysing the data on February 1, 2020), and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. After February 1, 2020, you will no longer be able to withdraw from the research. If you would like to withdraw your consent please contact Katherine Aske ([REDACTED]). Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba may look at the research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way. This research has been approved by the Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named person or the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at 204 474-7122 or e-mail [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca).

Please note that the MA student researcher will audio recording your verbal consent.

## APPENDIX I: Informed Consent Form (Farmers)



Department of Sociology  
and Criminology

Winnipeg, Manitoba

Telephone:

Fax:

March 1, 2020

### Interview Informed Consent Form (Farmers in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta)

**Research Project Title:** Changing Farmland Ownership in the Canadian Prairies

**Researcher:** Dr. Annette Aurélie Desmarais, Associate Professor, Canada Research Chair in Human Rights, Social Justice and Food Sovereignty, Department of Sociology and Criminology, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba. Tel: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]

**Co-Researchers:**

Dr. André Magnan, Department of Sociology, University of Regina, [REDACTED], Regina, Saskatchewan, S4S 0A2 Tel: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]

Dr. Mengistu Wendimu, Independent Researcher and Research Team Member, [REDACTED]  
Winnipeg, Manitoba, R2N 0K4. Tel: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]

The project also includes the following three graduate students as co-researchers who are completing their Masters in the Department of Environment and Geography at the University of Manitoba.

1. Hannah Bihun is responsible for the research fieldwork in Manitoba. Her contact information is as follows: [REDACTED], University of Manitoba, R3T 2M6, Tel: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]
2. Melissa Davidson is responsible for the research fieldwork in Saskatchewan. Her contact information is: c/o Department of Environment and Geography, [REDACTED] University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3T 2M6. Tel: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]
3. Katherine Aske is responsible for research fieldwork in Alberta. Her contact information is as follows: c/o Department of Environment and Geography, [REDACTED] University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3T 2M6. Tel: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]

**Sponsors:** Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Insight Grant and Canada Research Chair Program.

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask the Masters student responsible for research fieldwork in your province. The student's contact information is provided above. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information. The consent form begins by providing a brief description of the research project and requests your consent to participate in the research project entitled "Changing land tenure in the Canadian Prairies."

The goal of this research is to explore the social and environmental implications of changing patterns of farmland ownership in the Canadian prairies. Your experience as a farmer, living and working in a rural community, is of great interest to this project as we seek to understand the positive and/or negative effects of

changes in farmland ownership in the prairies. This research is part of a larger project that is investigating the changes in farmland ownership patterns including increased land concentration among farmers and the presence of investors (that is, non-farmer land owners) in the farmland market across the prairies and to understand how these changes are affecting rural communities. In all three prairie provinces, the research will highlight the voices of rural people to better understand how their lives and communities are changing as a result of shifting patterns of land ownership in four rural municipalities.

Your participation in this research is welcomed. You have been contacted to participate in the research because you are a farmer who either rents, owns and/or farms land in at least one of the rural municipalities under study. You are being asked to participate in an individual interview that will likely last about 60 to 90 minutes. We will begin by asking you some specific questions to get some basic information (your name, some contact information, and several questions about the land you farm). Next, you will be asked some more open ended questions related to your experience as a farmer, land ownership and rental changes in your area, and your observations of the impact of changing land ownership in your community. You may choose not to answer any question that you are not comfortable answering and you may withdraw from the interview at any point.

With your permission, the interview will be voice recorded, and MA student conducting fieldwork in your province will also be taking notes as she conducts the interview. Only this student, her graduate supervisor (Dr. Annette Desmarais) and possibly a transcriptionist, who will have signed a confidentiality form, will have access to the audio-recording. The transcription of your interview may be shared among the research team members (all listed on page 1 of this form) for comparative purposes with interviews conducted in all three prairie provinces. However, in this process, your confidentiality will be protected as explained further in the section below entitled "Confidentiality and Anonymity".

**Risks and Benefits:** The potential risks associated with this research are minimal. You may be asked questions related to: what changes in land ownership you have seen happening; what kind of responses have you seen in your rural municipality as a result to changes in land ownership; and what are the farming business structures, strategies and practices you are seeing as a result of changes in land ownership. Although there is no direct benefit to you as a participant, this research will shed light on the implications of new patterns of farmland ownership and structure for the farming community and for society at large.

**Confidentiality and anonymity:** Your right to confidentiality and privacy is important. The information you provide may be used in reports, journal/magazine articles, blogs, books, media interviews or public and academic presentations; the information may be presented as summaries of interview material, some summary statistics, and may also include direct quotations. We will not use your real name in any of the information resulting from this research. Following the interview, we will transcribe the recording and remove all direct identifiers. All of the information will be kept confidential and will be stored on password protected computers and password protected hard drives belonging to the MA students and the PI. All data (voice recordings, transcripts, and notes) will be kept for at least three years post publication of the results, after which time all of the data will either be deleted/shredded.

We will supply only a generic reference, use a pseudonym, and all attempts will be made to disguise your identity. However, even in cases where your confidentiality is to be maintained, there is a possibility that your comments could be attributed to you by someone reading the research results based on the context of your remarks and the information you provide.

The answers you provide to our interview questions, that is, the audio recording and the transcription of your interview, will be kept in password protected folders on password protected computers of the Principal Investigator and the MA student doing work in your home province. The MA students and the PI will also keep a backup of the material that will be stored in password protected hard-drives and placed in secure locations. A research assistant may also have access to these materials, but only on condition that they uphold the same commitment to your confidentiality outlined above.

**Results:** A summary of the results of the study will be made available to participants once we have analysed the data and written the results of the research. We expect that for the research in Saskatchewan and Manitoba this will be in April 2020 while the summary for research in Alberta is expected by July 2020.

Please print your name here if you would like to receive a copy of the summary and include an address or e-mail address where it can be sent: (Please note that the MA student researcher will note down your contact information so that the summary of results can be sent to you).

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Consent:**

Your participation is voluntary and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. By consenting verbally to participate in this research, you are indicating that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities.

For research participants residing in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time (before we begin analysing the data on March 1, 2020), and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. After March 1, 2020, you will no longer be able to withdraw from the research. If you live in Manitoba and would like to withdraw your consent please contact Hannah Bihun [REDACTED]. If you live in Alberta and would like to withdraw your consent please contact Melissa Davidson [REDACTED].

For research participants residing in Alberta, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time (before we begin analysing the data on February 1, 2020), and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. After February 1, 2020, you will no longer be able to withdraw from the research. If you would like to withdraw your consent please contact Katherine Aske [REDACTED]. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba may look at the research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way. This research has been approved by the Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named person or the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at 204 474-7122 or e-mail [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca).

Please note that your verbal consent will be audio recorded by the MA student research.

## APPENDIX J: Interview Guide (Context Interviews)

### SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE: Farm Organization Leaders & Media

General information:

- What is your current position?
- How long have you worked in your position and/or been elected in your position?
- Do you currently live or work/farm in a specific rural municipality? If so, which one?
- How long have you been living or working in that rural municipality?

A/ Interview theme: Changes in land ownership

1. What kinds of changes in farmland ownership have you seen in your rural municipality over the past decade? What about the province as a whole? (**Probe:** What exactly are some of the most significant changes that you have seen? To what extent are investors or other absentee landowners affecting land ownership patterns? To what extent are large farmers affecting land ownership patterns? Are you seeing a lot more land concentration in your area?)
2. Do you think that some RMs are more affected than others? If so, which RMs do you know of where there has been significant change?
3. Do you know who is buying up farmland? In the last decade, do you know if investor and absentee purchases of farmland have increased, decreased, or stayed about the same in your RM? What about the province as a whole? Do you know of some RMs where investors have been particularly active?
4. When looking at the farm size statistics, we can see that farms are certainly getting bigger, which means that there is an increased concentration of land among farmers. Is this happening in your RM? And, are there some RMs where this is more of an issue than in others? Which RMs?
5. When farmland comes up for sale, what difference does it make if the land is bought up by an investor, and absentee owner, or a local farmer?
6. How is the involvement of outside buyers affecting the local farmland market? What effects, if any, is this having on local farmland buyers?
7. How is the involvement of larger farmers affecting the local farmland market? What effects, if any, is this having on local farmland buyers? (**Probe:** What is your perception

of how farmland concentration, that is, farms getting bigger and bigger, is leading to changes in the community?)

B/ Theme: Social and environmental impact of the changes in land ownership

What impacts do you think farmland ownership changes are having in your community? (**Probe:**

For example, what impact, if any, have these changes had on:

- the rural municipal office and the work that it does?
- infrastructure (i.e. if farms are bigger then heavier and larger equipment is needed, how does this affect the infrastructure and finances of the municipality)?
- services in the municipality?
- community spirit / well-being?
- the kind of farming that is practiced?
- Environment?

Media:

1. In your experience, what are the most important issues that farmers face today? How have those issues changed over the last decade or so?
2. Given your knowledge of what is going on in the countryside, how important do you think the issue of access to farmland is in rural communities?
3. How have land ownership patterns changed over the last decade or so?
4. Have you heard stories or do you know of any investors and/or absentee landowners purchasing farmland in Manitoba? Where? What impact does this have on the farmland market, on rural communities, and on the environment?

5. What kind of difference does it make, if any, if farmland is owned by farmers versus investors or absentee landowners?
6. Have you heard stories/examples or do you know about other large-scale acquisitions of farmland by farmers themselves? Where? What kind of stories are told about these kinds of purchases?
7. How is land concentration amongst farmers affecting rural communities? What kind of environmental impacts do you think farmland concentration is having?
8. What is your sense of people's perception of land in rural areas? Is it just a commodity? Is it more than that?
9. What do you hear people (farmers, consumers, rural dwellers or rural staff, etc.) saying about the shift to increasingly larger farms? How does this shift change rural communities? What are the real or potential impacts of these changes?

## **APPENDIX K: Interview Guide (RM Officials and Staff)**

### **SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE: RM Officials and Staff**

#### General information:

- How long have you lived in this RM?
- How long have been an elected RM official? Or, how long have been employed by the RM?
- Do you also farm?
- What do you grow? How many acres? How long have you been a farmer?

#### 1/ Interview theme: Changes in land ownership

8. When looking at this map of your rural municipality, how have land ownership patterns in your RM changed over the last 10 years? (**Probe:** What are some of the most significant changes that you have seen? To what extent are investors or other absentee landowners affecting land ownership patterns? To what extent are large farmers affecting land ownership patterns?)
9. Do you know who is buying up land? In the last 10 years, have investor and absentee purchases of farmland increased, decreased, or stayed about the same?
10. How is increased concentration among farmers impacting the community? (Probe: What is your perception of how farmland concentration, that is, farms getting bigger and bigger, is leading to changes in the community?)
11. When farmland comes up for sale in your community, what difference does it make if the land is bought up by an investor, and absentee owner, or a local farmer?
12. How is the involvement of outside buyers affecting the local farmland market? What effects, if any, is this having on local farmland buyers?
13. How is the involvement of larger farmers affecting the local farmland market? What effects, if any, is this having on local farmland buyers?

2/ Theme: Social and environmental impact of the changes in land ownership

a) What impacts do you think farmland ownership changes are having in your community?

(Probe: For example, what impact, if any, have these changes had on:

- the rural municipal office and the work that it does?
- infrastructure (i.e. if farms are bigger then heavier and larger equipment is needed, how does this affect the infrastructure and finances of the municipality)?
- services in the municipality?
- community spirit / well-being?
- the kind of farming that is practiced?
- Environment?

3/ Theme: Identifying the different impact of investor and farmer ownership of farmland

- What differences, if any, are there between investor owners, absentee owners, and local farmers when it comes to the relationships they establish with their renters? **Probe:** In what way does the type of landowner (i.e. local or absentee) influence rental agreements? How the land is farmed? Who is hired to work on the farm?
- a) What kinds of relationships are investors and absentee landowners developing with those living in the rural municipality?
- b) What kinds of relationships are local landowners and local farmers developing with those living in the rural municipality?

## APPENDIX L: Interview Guide (Farmers)

### SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE: Farmers

#### 1/ Interview theme: Experience in farming and farmland ownership

- a) Which of the following best describes your situation today?
  - Actively farming
  - Semi-retired or retired farmer (**skip to question e**)
  
- b) How many years have you been farming? (Less than 10 years = early-career farmer; 11 years or more = established farmer).
  
- c) If you are comfortable sharing, for the purpose of our demographics, how old are you?
  
- d) How much land do you currently farm?
  - Of this, how much land do you own? Is the land you own under your name, a spouse/family member's name, or both?
  - How much of your land is rented?
  - How much of your land is shared under some other arrangement?
  - What do you grow?
  
- e) Acquiring farmland:
  - How did you acquire the land that you own? (Probe: Did your family own the land? Did you buy it from a neighbouring farmer?)
  - **Established farmers:** In the last 10 years, have you increased the amount of land that you farm? If yes, when did you expand? By how much did you expand? Did you expand by purchasing land, renting land, or both?
  - **Early-career farmers:** Since you began farming, have you increased the amount of land that you farm? If yes, when did you expand? By how much did you expand? Did you expand by purchasing land, renting land, or both?
  - Have you faced any difficulties in purchasing or renting land for your farming operation? If so, what kinds of difficulties? (**skip to question f**)

**f) Semi-retired or retired farmers only:**

- How many years did you farm? Why did you choose to retire (or partially retire) when you did?
- In the last 10 years, have you sold farmland? If so, when and why did you sell your land? Did you sell all of it, or do you now rent some out? **Probe:** If not all land was sold, why did you not sell it all?
- Once you stopped farming, did you stay in the community or move away? If you moved, do you still have ties to the community? If so, what kinds of ties?
- Can you tell us about the process of selling your land? Was there a lot of interest in purchasing your land? (Probe: did you get a lot of offers from other farmers? from investors?) Were there any challenges in selling your land?
- Who did you sell the land to? (Probe: young farmer from the community? Investor? Older, well-established farmer in the community?) Did it matter to you who bought your land? (Probe: If yes, why does it matter?)

g) In your view, what are the advantages and disadvantages of owning versus renting farmland? (Please elaborate)

h) There has been quite a bit of land changing hands over the past years. What effect have these changes had on your livelihood/farming operation?

i) Has any of the land in your municipality been purchased by investors? If YES: Do they live the community? What effect do you think investors are having on the local farmland market? What is the community's perception of investors buying up land in your RM?

**2/ Interview theme: Landlord/tenant relationships resulting from changes in land rental arrangements**

a) **Semi-retired or retired farmers who are renting land to others:** To whom are you

renting your land? Does it matter to you who is renting your land? (Probe: If yes, why does it matter?)

- How do you choose your tenants? What are you looking for in a tenant? Probe: What is most important to you (whether the farmer stays in the community? Whether they are what you consider to be a good farmer? Etc.)?
- How do you decide on how much to charge? When you rent out the land do you place any conditions on the farming practices? Probe: What conditions? Why do you do this?
- What do you think about the shift towards farmers increasing the amount of land then rent?

b) **Active farmers who are renting land from others:** You mentioned that you are renting XX acres of farmland.

- Who owns that land? **Probe:** Is it a neighbouring farmer? An absentee or local landlord? An investor? A combination of different landlords?
- How would you describe the relationship you have with your landlord(s) (investor, absentee, or local landlords)? Probe: Do your landlords impose conditions on your farming practices? If yes, what conditions?
- What do you look for in a landowner?
- When you're looking for land to rent what is most important to you? Probe: Land quality? Renting from a farmer as opposed to an investor? Trust in the landowner? Cost? Location? The person's relationship to the community? Why is this particularly important to you?
- Does renting land change the way you farm?
- Would you prefer to own more farmland or continue renting? Why?

c) In the last 10 years, how have landowner/tenant relationships changed in your community?

### **3/ Theme: Identifying differences in impact between investor and farmer ownership of**

## farmland

- a) In the last 10 years, what have been the most important changes of land ownership in the community? Probe: (try to get impact of each change) Absentee investors? Big sales? Significant changes in land values? Concentration?
- b) What impacts are farmland ownership changes having on your community? **Probe:** For example, what impact, if any, have these changes had on:
  - the rural municipal office and the work that it does?
  - infrastructure (i.e. if farms are bigger then heavier and larger equipment is needed, how does this affect the infrastructure and finances of the municipality)?
  - services in the municipality?
  - community spirit / well-being?
  - the kind of farming that is practiced?
  - the impact on the environment?
- c) Do changing weather patterns affect the way you farm your land or the kind of land purchases/tenure options you consider? Probe: the amount the land? the location of the land?
- d) Given the barriers you mentioned above, what do you think can or should be done to help mitigate these challenges? (Government action? Farmer organization support? Structural changes to the food system? Consumer expectations?)
- e) Have you noticed any changes in the ways that people think about and/or value land?
- f) Aside from the economic value of land, how do you think about your land? What do you value about your land? Probe: Having grown up in the area (or being in the area for X number of yours) do you feel like you have a connection to certain land over other land?
- g) When land comes up for sale in your community, what difference does it make if the land is bought by an investor, an absentee landlord, or a local farmer? **Probe:** Depending on the type of landlord, are there differences in rental agreements, how the land is farmed, or who is hired to work on the farm?
- h) Do you have connections with First Nations in your RM?
- i) Where do you see the farmland market going in the next ten years?

## **APPENDIX M: Truth and Reconciliation Resource List**

- 1) Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action  
[http://nctr.ca/assets/reports/Calls\\_to\\_Action\\_English2.pdf](http://nctr.ca/assets/reports/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf)
- 2) National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls  
<https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/>
- 3) Land Back Movement in Canada  
<https://redpaper.yellowheadinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/red-paper-report-final.pdf>  
<https://briarpatchmagazine.com/articles/view/what-is-land-back-a-settler-faq>
- 4) Government of Canada Position and Resources  
<https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1400782178444/1529183710887>