# Organic Farming on an Island of Agribusiness: Epekwitk Organic Farmers and Corporate Power

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A Thesis

In

The Department

Of

Sociology and Anthropology

Presented in partial fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Arts (Anthropology) at

Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

April, 2026

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# ABSTRACT

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On Epekwitk or Prince Edward Island, corporations have been appropriating and vertically integrating the agriculture industry for decades. As the island suffers the consequences of this takeover, organic farmers have been at the forefront of the fight for alternative food systems that place sustainability and communal well-being over profit. In this thesis, I examine the relationship between organic farmers and the corporate control of agriculture on Epekwitk. I provide an in-depth historical overview of the conditions of land tenure and agriculture that allowed for the takeover of large companies, and I detail the nuances, contradictions and surprises that arise as organic farmers both lose ground to hegemonic power and continue to assert their unyielding vision of sustainable, ethical, and farmer-led agricultural futures. Drawing on 6 months of work on a diverse range of organic farms, as well as 9 in-depth interviews, I examine the discourses and practices employed by organic farmers in their efforts to navigate a monopolised agriculture industry. As organic farmers have become inundated with structures and logics hostile to their core politics, morals, and ethics, staying in business has necessitated significant concessions to the agribusiness-oriented system in which they are forced to operate. At the same time, organic farmers continue to push back against, adapt to, and resist corporate domination. Farmers turn to the agrarian roots of organic farming, they look to their agricultural ancestors who fought absentee landlords for freehold land tenure, and they lean on the cherished multispecies relationships that their practices facilitate.

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# INTRODUCTION

There are three ways to get to Epekwitk or Prince Edward Island (PEI). The airport, where traffic ebbs and flows with the tourist season. The ferry from Nova Scotia, free to board on your way to the island, but $100 if you want to leave. And then there is the 13-kilometre Confederation Bridge from New Brunswick. The longest bridge in the country and the longest bridge in the world over a frozen body of water. On this particular day, I am taking the bridge. Returning from Montreal to conduct my fieldwork, it is late June, and even though I have been driving for 11 hours, the sun is still up. As I reach the denouement, the salty air has finally slipped through the cracks of my car, the horizon opens up, and I am met with my first good view of what appears to be most of the 224-kilometre-wide island.

Depending on the time of year, this moment looks and feels very different. In the spring, the Island struggles to shake off the drawn-out winters imposed by the cool waters, and the Gulf is dotted with fishing boats. In the summer, fishing boats turn to sailboats, and the land turns into a quilt of farm fields and green hills. In Autumn, the forest lining the shore lights up, and the waters of the Gulf that shorten spring, prolong mild fall temperatures. In winter, there will be no boats at all, the waters freeze, and all you see is a scale of grey cut through the middle by red sandstone cliffs.

As I draw closer to land, I brace for the flood of feelings that wash over me every time I come home. As my tyres touch ground, sometimes it fills me with wistfulness, sometimes with dread, and at the best times, the island feels like it is opening its arms in anticipation of me entering its secure and familiar embrace.

ISLAND OF AGRICULTURE

The sign that greets me upon my arrival reads “Welcome to Prince Edward Island” and is backdropped by a photo featuring a cottage shrouded in a field of canola, overlooking a bay and a sandspit of dunes. For the average newly arrived person to the island, this is but the first of many signs and posters scattered throughout that work to drive home a specific image of a bucolic paradise, where life is slow, the grass is green, and the old ways are alive and well. As Lucy Maud Montgomery said, “You never know what peace is until you walk on the shores or in the fields or along the winding red roads of Prince Edward Island”, and this sign is part of the concerted efforts by the government to imbue people with this idea.

As I look at the image on the sign, I do not see the timeless and beautiful slow-paced life, or the peace described by Montgomery. Rather, I see the violent and destructive forces of extractive capital that have been slowly naturalised into the landscape. And I see a field whose expanse of uniform yellow is signalling futures hostile to life, where humans, animals, and waterways are depleted and poisoned.

Ironically, once I get off the bridge, I am in the heart of potato country. This part of the island is where industrialised agriculture and extractive capital have done their worst. Intensive potato production has ravaged the environment, filling the waterways with chemicals, exhausting the soils whose organic matter is in free fall, and poisoning the farmers struggling

to keep up with the productivity demanded of them. As I continue my drive home, I cannot help but wonder how things have reached the point where the kind of agricultural production killing the island and its people has become so mundane, so integrated into everyday life that it is proudly put up as the first thing people see upon their arrival.

To understand this, I dug into the history of agriculture and land tenure on Epekwitk and sought out the organic farmers working against the consequences of agribusiness, the ones who are trying to change our food systems and create more livable futures. In this thesis, I examine the relationship between these farmers and the corporate takeover of agriculture on Epekwitk. As farmers pick up the tradition of organic farming and throw down the gauntlet against the destruction of industrialised chemical agriculture, they inherit long and complex histories of ecological farming practices, agricultural struggles, and battles against power that lead them into unexpected directions, strange relations, and beautiful connections. In their efforts to farm otherwise in an agricultural environment that punishes those who do not fall in line, organic farmers have had to enter into a sort of dance with agribusiness; a dialectical relationship wherein they dodge, adapt, resist and sometimes accept the pressures of corporate agriculture as it attempts to assimilate, transform, influence and snuff out any challenges to its modus operandi.

## ORGANIC FARMING

Before moving on, it is important to first establish what organic farming is and where it comes from.

Organic farming is a form of ecological agriculture, a set of ideas and protocols with fragmented and disparate origins that generally focuses on the sustainable production of food without the use of chemical fertilisers or sprays such as pesticides and herbicides (Sumner & Llewelyn, 2011). Organic farming, as it has taken shape on Epekwitk, is a culmination of various social movements reaching back to 19th-century agricultural struggles, moving

through 20th-century counterculture and environmentalism, all the way to today's trends in food and concerns over the health effects of pesticides.

More broadly, the origins of the organic movement developed simultaneously in English and German-speaking states at the end of the 19th century, popping up where the promises of industrialised farming began to falter (Lockeretz, 2007).

In the English pantheon of organic agriculture, one man is usually credited as the founder, Albert Howard. Growing up in the Midlands of England, he watched the countryside he loved slowly turn away from the small mixed farms he considered cornerstones of English agriculture (Barton, 2018). Concerned with how agricultural practices were trending in the UK and informed by his time in India, he published the book *An Agricultural Testament,* within which he drove home the ideas that plant and animal disease are Nature's way of reprimanding agricultural practices, and that within the compost pile, lies the solution to the ails of industrialised agriculture (Barton, 2018).

In Germany, what they call biodynamic or biological agriculture got its start after WW1, when crop yields dropped 40% despite a dramatic increase in the use of mineral fertilisers. The German public grew concerned about the noticeable decrease in the quality of their food, and they pointed fingers at the irresponsible use of fertilisers and pesticides (Vogt, 2007). Many turned to organic farming as a solution for keeping high yields while avoiding chemical fertilisers and pesticides.

From England and Germany, organic farming spread to the United States once intensive chemical and industrial agriculture destroyed almost all of the organic matter in the soils of the Great Plains, resulting in the Dust Bowl disaster of the 1930s. As Americans came face to face with the perils of industrialised agriculture, they began seeking alternatives. From the Dust Bowl arose The Friends of The Land, a collective of scientists who nurtured the nascent organic farming movement in the United States (Vogt, 2007).

As the organic movements in Europe and the United States continued to grow, they spread to Canada, and by the 1950s, the first organic farms were established. Here too, as more people became exposed to the destruction of industrialised chemical agriculture, they looked for alternatives. By the 1970s, the movement had spread to Epekwitk as farmers reacted to the abrupt and forced “modernisation” of agriculture through the Comprehensive Development Plan in 1969.

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

Returning to my own work, in the search for understanding the experience of organic farmers pushing back against the destruction of industrialised corporate agriculture, I managed to find a job working on a small flower and vegetable farm owned by farmers Bill and Sarah. Their farm is where I conducted the majority of my participant observation, working with them from June to September, Tuesday to Friday and sometimes Saturdays when they needed someone to cover their stand at the farmer’s market. Most days were structured the same. The first thing I did every day was walk around, check up on the crops, and harvest whatever was ripe. After my morning rounds, I would go help Sarah in the flower field, where we would tend the beds and gather what she needed for her bouquets that day. The field was small but so diverse that every day it seemed like there was a new flower I had not noticed before. I was constantly asking her the names of everything, how they grew, and where they came from. She has a wealth of knowledge, and it made my head spin trying to remember everything she was telling me. After helping in the flower field, it would usually be time for lunch. Most days, we stopped work, and all had lunch together inside the house. Sarah would make something from the vegetables in season, and we would sit, eat, and talk. After lunch, I would help Bill with his work, and then the day would usually conclude with washing, organising and storing the harvest.

During this time on their farm, everything I would come to learn through interviews and other research was made tangible. I watched and learned as Bill and Sarah navigated the financial realities of organic farming, the stresses, the instability, and the difficulties that come with operating in an industry that is hostile towards their ethics and practices. At the same time, I watched and learned as they pushed to continue farming organically, leaning into their love for the kind of life and relationships that organic farming has afforded them. Through observing the environment and watching how they moved through it, I gained insight into the mundane aspects of farmers' lives, into the habits and the small acts of care that to farmers might seem so normal or unremarkable, but to me are crucial for my own understanding of organic farming, organic farmers, and the kinds of relationships they maintain with places, peoples, histories and practices.

My stint working on organic farms opened up invaluable windows of observation, and it left me with a bank of knowledge I could have only acquired through prolonged interaction with the farm. In the act of doing farming, of learning to sprout seeds, to plant them, to help them grow, to harvest and even sell them, I was imbued with a specific kind of agricultural knowledge. In other words, as I immersed myself in the habitus of farmers, into their habitual structures of action, it opened up specific pathways of living and knowing (Bourdieu, 1977). Every day as I worked in the fields, I gathered information about organic farming centered on my bodily experiences. I watched how things grow and listened to the life in the fields, and as I learned the rhythms of planting, harvesting, and weeding, I learned about organic farming through my skin that darkened in the sun, through my hands that callused in the dirt, and in my muscles that grew and shrank to accommodate the labour requirements of farming. Through my work on the farm over time, I collected data with my body and gained a visceral understanding of what it feels like to be an organic farmer.

As the seasons changed on the farm, this also opened up new avenues for experiencing and learning about organic farming. To understand this relationship between seasons and the rhythms of organic farming, I borrow the concept of seasonality from Mark Harris (1998). He approaches seasonality through Ingold's (1993) notion of dwelling to conceptualise seasons as "embodied periodicity, produced in attendance of people to their environment" (p.66). Seasonality understands social life as inextricably intertwined with the environment, its beings, and their rhythms. As the seasons change, the rhythms of farming and sociality change as well. During the planting season, I experienced the chaos of trying to get everything sprouted and in the ground. Things are very volatile this time of year, as it sets the tone for the entire season. It includes lots of trips to the store, lots of stress over seedlings, helping hands where needed, and an obsession with the weather. This is also the time of year when pests emerge, birds return, and the blackflies and mosquitoes come back with a vengeance. Mid-season, once the crops are in the ground and everything is growing, things settle into a more stable rhythm. Daily tasks are laid out, and a broader image of the year begins to materialise. It is a busy time, but it is padded by the assurance of a completed planting season along with long lunch breaks, trips to the beach, visiting guests, and all the other delights that summer brings. In late summer and autumn, when single harvest crops like potatoes or blueberries have ripened, it is all-hands-on-deck to make sure everything is brought in on time. Friends and neighbours lend a hand, and the fruits of our labour are on full display before the coming darkness of winter. Finally, there is winter. A time for repair, tending to neglected tasks and preparing for next season. This is also when many farmers return to their other jobs to get them through the off-season.

INTERVIEWS

Beyond my time working on farms, I conducted interviews with 9 different farmers. Initially, when I was reaching out to organic farmers, I was met with a significant amount of suspicion.

One reason for this is that I included farmers who adhere to organic practices but have done away with trying to receive certification. These farmers were especially wary of me, as if I were some sort of regulator coming to see if they were claiming to be organic without the certification. Eventually, I started to make headway with a specific subsection of organic farmers. On Epekwitk, the majority of organic farms are small household production farms with a few larger, more mechanised organic farms, as well as a handful of mixed farms that are mostly conventional with small sections of organic production. I reached out to these farms, and all but one refused to do an interview. The one who did agree eventually stopped answering my calls. Therefore, all of the farmers I interviewed and worked with for this research practised organic farming on comparatively small, mixed, household production farms.

I secured my first interview with the farmer, whom I will call Geoff. Geoff has the largest organic greenhouse in the Maritimes, mostly growing tomatoes and cucumbers with small amounts of other vegetables and greens. We spoke while he was making a 2-hour drive to Moncton, and he generously gave me the entire car ride to go through all of my questions. He then recommended that I talk to Michelle, whose family runs a mixed organic grain, egg and beef production in the same part of the island as Geoff's farm.

My real breakthrough came after I interviewed farmers Bill and Sarah about their mixed vegetable and flower farm. They live in the eastern part of the island on the 10-acre farm where I conducted most of my participant observation. On this farm, Bill was responsible for the vegetable side of the production while Sarah grew flowers and ran a florist business out of the farm. Bill was in many ways the connective tissue between me and almost all the farmers I worked with and interviewed for this thesis. He brought me around and introduced me to farmers, and he asked me to present my work at a local National Farmers Union (NFU) meeting, where I was also able to recruit 3 other participants, Albert, James and

his father. Albert is a semi-retired organic farmer who was part of the first wave of organic farmers in the mid to late 20th century. James is a 4th-generation mixed farmer who raises hogs, beef, and poultry using what he calls "traditional" animal husbandry methods that are currently not organic. He and his father were the only non-organic farmers I explicitly interviewed for this thesis. To be fully transparent, I went into the interviews under the impression that their farms were organic. While not organic, they use many of the same methods, and some of their products would qualify as organic if they were to seek out certification. Regardless, the father's experience with The Development Plan and the various other hardships he faced over the years gave me a lot of insight into the struggles of conventional farmers. Furthermore, they had spent a lot of time considering a transition to organic farming, and their reasoning for not doing so was enlightening.

Returning to Bill, he was also responsible for putting me in touch with Reg Phelan who along with his wife Stella, were some of the first people to start farming under the banner of organic back in the 1970s. Parallel to his organic farming practices, Reg has had a long career of academic writing and has become a mainstay participant in the work of scholars coming to study organic farming on the island. In this thesis, most farmers have been given pseudonyms in order to protect their identities and ward off any potential unwanted attention. However, with Reg's permission, I have chosen not to give him a pseudonym. The primary reason for this is that his Master's thesis on the tenant struggle and the through lines to The Development Plan, the takeover of agribusiness and what he calls ecological farming practices has been an invaluable tool in my own research. Since I cite him heavily throughout my thesis and since I am forever indebted to him for the knowledge he shared with me, as well as the farmers he put me in contact with, it felt bizarre and inappropriate to give him a pseudonym. In other words, Reg's own research, his knowledge and access to the community

were so helpful for my own research that it places him in a position different to the other farmers who so graciously gave me their time.

Between the 9 interviews I conducted as well as the presentation I gave at the NFU meeting, I gathered enough information to adequately analyse the broader conditions of organic farming on Epekwitk, the challenges organic farmers are collectively facing, and the practices and discourses they deploy when facing these challenges.

EPEKWITK

Meaning “cradled on the waves”, the story goes that after creating Glooscap (A large human-like being with great powers), the Great Spirit shot an arrow into a sacred birch tree, causing splinters of wood and chunks of bark to fall to the ground. From these chunks of wood and bark, the Great Spirit created the Mi’kmaq people. After creating the Mi’kmaq people, he created them a home, taking a piece of red clay and stating, “I will shape this clay into a crescent form, and it will become a beautiful home for my Mi’kmaq people.” (Sark, 2021). The Great Spirit made this island and named it Epekwitk. He instructed Glooscap to carry the island down from the heavens to Mother Earth and called upon whale and eagle to guide him.

In her book, *Canada’s Place Names and How to Change Them* (2022), Beck notes how place names “like everything else in our ecumene, they live, decay, and perish; they offend, please, and honour; they describe, hide, and destroy; and they empower, disempower, and disrupt”(p.5-6). The names used to describe place will always uplift some people's ways of knowing place while silencing others. By and large, settler place names in Canada, like Prince Edward Island, honour histories of settler colonialism and obscure the violence and oppression within them. Choosing not to use settler place names is a small way to confront and disempower their inherent violence, and an opportunity to accentuate other people’s histories and ways of knowing the land. As Wysote and Morton (2021) note, settler place

names are one of many ways that settler colonialism forces the land to lie on behalf of settlers, erasing histories of Mi'kmaq presence while narrating settler histories and asserting settler permanence. Prince Edward was the commander-in-chief of British forces in the Maritime Provinces of North America in the 18th century and was directly responsible for the Mi'kmaq people's suffering. In this thesis, I feel it would be irresponsible to continue honouring his legacy by using the place name Prince Edward Island. Especially as I also work to interrogate other forms of settler colonial violence on the island. Therefore, in consideration of the power within the names given to and used for places, I almost exclusively refer to the island as Epekwitk. Throughout this thesis, any instance where I do use PEI or Prince Edward Island, it is in reference to the settler colonial institution of Prince Edward Island and its government.

## POSITIONALITY

Within anthropology, there has long been a tendency to look down on conducting research in one's own community. Written off as an exercise in Navel Gazing where proximity inhibits ethnographic inquiry, there is still emphasis on the primacy of the anthropological "Other" (Docot, 2025). Yet, as the field continues to grapple with its violent histories as an accessory to colonialism and imperialism, as well as its tendency towards extractive research, more and more anthropologists are returning to their own communities to conduct their research. As someone wary of my blind spots as a straight white settler man, I view my research at home as a means to flesh out the politics, morals, and ethics of fieldwork in a familiar place where I am more equipped to confront and ameliorate any overreaches or mistakes I may make. Additionally, my positionality has granted me a specific kind of access to my field site. There is no doubt that farmers were more willing to speak to me because I am from Epekwitk, and in my conversations and interviews with them, there was a candidness and willingness to speak on certain topics as a conversation between two insiders.

CHAPTER ORGANISATION

In chapter 1, I provide an in-depth overview of agriculture and land tenure on Epekwitk, from the establishment of farms by early European settlers to the seizure of Mi'kmaq lands, to the takeover of agriculture by corporations in the 21st century. Through the lens of political economy, I trace how historical and economic changes to land tenure and agriculture have led to the current conditions in which organic farmers find themselves. Predominantly, the chapter is focused on two key events: The absentee landlord system put in place by the British after they gained control of the island in the 18th century, and the implementation of the Comprehensive Development Plan in 1969 by the government of Prince Edward Island, which ushered in neoliberal policies and created the conditions for corporate takeover of agriculture.

After the Treaty of Paris in 1763, Epekwitk was divided into 67 lots and lotteried off to high-ranking British military officials, politicians, and businessmen. For over 100 years, the people living on the land were at the whim of their absentee landlords until, through a determined fight, they eventually gained freehold tenure. In the aftermath of the tenant struggle, the island saw an agricultural golden age wherein small mixed household production farms flourished, and farmers fiercely defended their newly gained land. However, by the late 60s, conditions began to change after the implementation of the Comprehensive Development Plan, which, through policies and incentives, forced farmers to grow, mechanise, consolidate or get out. "The Plan", as farmers call it, quickly turned the post-tenant struggle agricultural conditions on their head, prying open the industry to allow corporations to enter, take over, and put in motion processes of industrialisation and consolidation that continue to dictate agriculture on Epekwitk to this day. In the chapter, I detail the evolution of these processes and discuss how things have reached a point where the conditions farmers find themselves working under have become eerily similar to those of

their agricultural ancestors during the tenant struggle. One corporation, Irving, has monopolised and vertically integrated every step of production and farmers, whose margins grow ever thinner, are forced to play by their restrictive rules. As farmers scamper along the agribusiness treadmill, they have had to drastically increase fertiliser and pesticide use, overexhausting their fields to squeeze out as much production and profit as possible. The environmental destruction arising from this is untold. Topsoils are lifeless, crop diseases proliferate, cancer and asthma rates continue to soar, and fish kills are an annual occurrence as our soils, air, and water have been poisoned by unsustainable intensive agricultural practices.

In Chapter 2, I begin with an explanation of how it is organic farmers who are at the forefront of the fight against the destructive and exploitative agricultural industry dominated by corporations. However, given the total control corporations have over the industry, organic farmers are increasingly having to adapt to its constraints in order to remain in business. At the same time, industry pressure mounts as agribusiness shifts its gaze towards organic farming and the potential profits to be made. Under these social, political, and economic pressures created in the process, organic farming subjectivities are altered as farmers are having to pay more attention to profit in places where they were once able to prioritise the health of their communities and a vision of organic farming that is sustainable and ethical. In this chapter, I contrast the differences in how the organic farmers I worked with conceptualise and envision the future of organic farming compared to corporations. Next, I discuss the ways in which a corporate vision of organic farming is being asserted through the everyday discourses and practices organic farmers employ. Primarily, this is done through the 3 elements of capitalist innovation in agriculture laid out by Julie Guthman (2004). These are intensification, appropriation, and valorisation. First, intensification is “broadly characterized by efforts to speed up, enhance, or reduce the risks of biological processes.” (p.65). Within

organic farming on Epekwitk, intensification is carried out through soil science, crop experimentation, and by working towards a closed-loop system.

Second, appropriation in agriculture is the process through which the industry creates value to be extracted from agriculture beyond what is produced in the fields (Guthman, 2004). In organic farming on Epekwitk, organic certification dominated as a form of appropriation affecting farmers. The burden of certification has significantly affected how farmers are able to operate within the industry. When the government created the Canadian Organic Standards, it did so in ways that heavily favour large-scale, monocultural, organic farming. More crop variety means more paperwork, and for small farms that cannot afford to hire someone to help with certification, it has become a time-consuming and expensive bureaucratic mess. For many of the farmers I spoke with, the cost and extra work required to obtain certification is making certification increasingly untenable, and they feel like they are at a fork in the road where they either need to bend to the will of agribusiness and intensify, industrialise and homogenise or abandon certification altogether.

Finally, valorisation is the creation of profit avenues through consumption (Guthman, 2004). Organic farmers on Epekwitk are valorising their farms by changing what they grow, how they grow it, and who they sell to in an effort to adapt to market demands and stay ahead of trends. Organic farmers have little hope of trying to compete head-to-head with their agribusiness counterparts. As such, they have had to embrace their position on the periphery, looking for niches and openings where they can make their money and stay afloat.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the discourses and practices employed by farmers to push back against the infiltrations of capitalist innovation and its subjectivities. Despite the difficulties of surviving in an industry controlled by agribusiness, organic farmers continue to assert localised and farmer-led organic farming futures that are incompatible with agribusiness and its logics. In the face of an industry that wants farmers and farms to behave and look a certain

way, organic farmers are resisting in ways that draw upon a diverse range of discourses and practices. First, organic farmers look to the 19th-century land struggle in their resistance to the takeover of agriculture on Epekwitk by corporations. In my research, I observed how farmers used the 19th-century tenant struggle as a framework for understanding the relationship between farmers and corporations today. The tenant struggle has imparted farmers with a deep-seated suspicion of state and corporate intervention in farming, and it has provided them with a strong example of what is possible through grassroots collective organisation. Next, farmers are pushing back against corporations through their insistence on the agrarian farm. Through their public advocacy for the agrarian farm and their determination to live by its tenets, organic farmers are pushing back against industry pressures to mechanise, grow, homogenise and turn their farms into corporate hierarchies with employees. Finally, in their struggle against the encroachment of agribusiness, organic farmers are mobilising their multispecies relationships. Within the rhythms and everyday practices of organic farming, farmers foster meaningful and sustainable relationships with their environment that would not be possible on large corporate farms. As they face the pressures of agribusiness, farmers lean on these relationships for strength and motivation to pursue their vision of farming in an industry inhospitable to their politics, morals, and ethics.

In Chapter 4, I give a brief examination of organic farmers' resistance to agribusiness and how, as they work towards sustainable and ethical food systems, there are blind spots to be wary of. Specifically, within the practices and discourses that organic farmers deploy in their pushback to agribusiness, there is a tendency to neglect complacency in structures of settler colonialism. For instance, as farmers use the tenant struggle to understand their relationships with power and the land, they often do so in a way that obscures Mi'kmaq histories and presence while also fashioning forms of settler nativism. In their adherence to the agrarian family farm, farmers feed into a long legacy of farming as a tool for the seizure

and occupation of Indigenous land. Additionally, since agrarianism and its defence of private property has been a bulwark against the advancement of agribusiness onto organic farms, it is difficult for farmers to imagine their world without it. Finally, within settler colonial societies, there is a tendency amongst settlers trying to cultivate harmonious and close relationships with the environment to do so in problematic ways that work to erase Indigenous presence and reinscribe settler belonging. Strong bonds form between farmers and the land since organic farmers work so closely with the land and have to find ways to care for and cooperate with their environment. Following this, organic farmers are uniquely positioned to slip into the kinds of human-environment relationships that perpetuate damaging forms of settler belonging and should therefore work to ensure they do not arise.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

In the first chapter of my thesis, I discuss the history of land tenure on Epekwitk and the events that have led up to the current conditions within the agriculture industry. Epekwitk is a place that is very much on the periphery of the state, and it is a place that many people have never heard of. Because of this, I begin with a general historical overview of the island to ensure that the lack of geographical knowledge on the part of my readers does not detract from my overall arguments. For this, I used books like Edward MacDonald's (2000) If You're Stronghearted, along with J.M Bumsted's (1987) Land, Settlement, and Politics on 18th Century Prince Edward Island as resources for general histories of Epekwitk.

After establishing a general overview of the history of Epekwitk, the majority of Chapter 1 focuses on the establishment of British control over the island, the lot and absentee landlord system they put in place, and the subsequent backlash from tenants. For this, I rely heavily on the book by Errol Sharpe (1976), *A People's History of Prince Edward Island*, which presents a history of Prince Edward Island with special attention to the plight of the common settler folk. Sharpe discusses formative events from the land seizure by absentee landlords, to the worker co-operatives that formed in the middle of the 20th century, leading all the way up to the fight against corporations taking control of the farming industry in the latter half of the last century. His attention to the working class and poor, albeit the white settler working class and poor, is very valuable as I attempt to trace the historical lines of agricultural experience on Epekwitk.

In the latter half of Chapter 1, I focus on the history of agriculture and the lead-up to the current state of conventional and organic farming on Epekwitk. The 2016 book *An Environmental History of Prince Edward Island,* edited by Edward MacDonald, Joshua MacFadyen, and Irene Novaczek, is an incredible resource when discussing this topic. Specifically, Part III of the book, Harvesting Land and Sea: Development and the Environment on Prince Edward Island, gives a thorough overview of the history of agriculture and land use on PEI, starting from early colonial settlement to today.

Perhaps the most important piece of literature I work with when discussing agriculture and land use on PEI is the master's thesis of Reg Phelan (1996), titled Islanders and the Land: A Multi-disciplinary Approach to the Culture of the Land Struggle in Prince Edward Island. In this thesis, he draws upon the oral tradition he grew up around and offers an alternative history of agriculture and the settler struggle for land on Epekwitk. He presents the history as told by the farmers who opposed the British colonial administration in the 18th and 19th centuries. His work is critical for this thesis as it intricately and skillfully articulates the relationships to the land that the struggles of the 18th and 19th centuries have begotten and how these relationships persist and inform the current struggles faced by farmers on the Island. In his thesis, he emphasises how in the 18th and 19th centuries, farmers organised and were eventually successful in pushing out their tyrannical landlords. Phelan goes on to exclaim that 21st-century farmers should learn from this struggle and use it in their own struggle against agribusiness.

AGRIBUSINESS AND ORGANIC FARMING

Although I do not spend much time talking about the history of organic farming or the specifics of the movement, I have read a lot on the topic, which informs how I understand organic farming and how I discuss the practice throughout my thesis. To broaden my understanding of organic farming on Prince Edward Island, I examined its origins and its

emergence as a modern concept. Evidently, the vast majority of agriculture throughout history can be considered organic. However, it would be anachronistic to label it such since until the 19th century, there was nothing that lay in opposition to what would become known as organic farming. It was not until the Green Revolution and the perpetuation of its practices that the dichotomy between organic and conventional agriculture could be established. While farming without the use of synthetic fertilisers and pesticides is as universal as agriculture itself, organic farming as a concept is thoroughly a Western creation, and this is important to understand moving forward. In examining the history of organic farming, Books like Barton's (2018) *The Global History of Organic Farming,* or Lockeretz's (2007) *Organic Farming: An International History,* have lent me a broad overview of the history of organic farming and how it has morphed into the movement we know today.

With regards to agribusiness, most of my knowledge comes from what farmers explained to me during interviews and in conversation. I understand agribusiness as agricultural production guided by market principles and dictated by corporate entities. The aim of agribusiness is profit extraction, and its means of profit extraction is the appropriation and transformation of the agricultural means of production. Another key characteristic of agribusiness is that it offloads the risks of cultivation and labour relations onto farms while controlling the means of production and the channels of distribution (Kearney, 1980). Beyond what I learned about agribusiness in the field, the main source of my knowledge on the topic is the book *Frontline farmers: How the National Farmers Union resists agribusiness and creates our new food future*, edited by Annette Desmarais (2019). This book gives a diverse overview of the struggle between farmers and corporations within Canadian contexts, and it helped me understand how corporate-controlled agriculture in Canada functions and how it has affected farmers over time. Additionally, articles like The Rise of Flex Crops and Commodities by Borras et al. (2016) as well as the key terms section

in the Journal of Peasant Studies,  particularly the section on monocrops and agro-extractivism, have helped to understand what agribusiness is, how it functions, and how it relates to organic farming (Leon Araya, 2023; Veltmeyer & Ezquerro-Canete,  2023).

CORPORATE CONTROL

In the last section of Chapter 1, I discuss the current state of agriculture on the island. Mostly, the corporate takeover and vertical integration of agriculture on Epekwitk. On this topic, there is little to go off of; however, there were two articles I found very informative. The first is an article by Naomi Beingessner (2020) called, Owning the Land: The Question of Land in Prince  Edward Island. In her article, Beingessner underlines how it is essentially one corporation that controls the entire conventional farming industry on Epekwitk and their vertical integration is pushing farmers out of the industry, and concentrating agriculture into the hands of corporations. Another useful article that discusses the corporate control of agriculture on Epekwitk is the article by Kolinjivadi et al. (2020), Would you like some fries with your ecosystem services? This article discusses the futility of Prince Edward Island's response to soil erosion and loss of biodiversity, given the rapid social and ecological homogenisation of agriculture. The article focuses on the payments for ecosystem services program on PEI that incentivises farmers to make changes that purport to help biodiversity and decrease soil erosion. The authors discuss how this program seems positive on the surface but ultimately serves to perpetuate the intensification of industrialised agriculture as it fails to address the underlying orientation towards development and growth (Kolinjivadi et al., 2020).

POLITICAL ECONOMY

Fundamentally, this thesis is based in a political economic examination of organic farming on Epekwitk. Through tracing the historical trends in ownership of the agricultural means of production, I am able to discuss the specific process of corporate takeover of agriculture on

Epekwitk. The starting point for the rest of my analysis in this thesis comes first from an understanding of the economic relations of organic farming. When I broach other theoretical perspectives in this thesis, whether they be those of subjectivity, resistance, multispecies anthropology, or settler colonialism, it is undergirded by the economic relations that structure the contexts through which subjectivities are formed, resistance is carried out, multispecies relationships are formed, and settler colonial violence is enacted. My fondness for political economy in anthropology comes from major works in the field, like Eric Wolf's *Europe and the People Without History* (1982), and more contemporary works like David Graeber's (2014) *Debt.* As for my use of political economy within agricultural contexts, I have heavily relied on work from Philip McMichael and Harriet Friedmann, both together and respectively. Their concept of food regimes was crucial for helping me understand the economic trends and developments within agriculture through time and how global trends in agriculture affected the changes in land tenure and agriculture on Epekwitk (Friedmann & McMichael, 1989). Another key source I used for my examination of organic farming on Epekwitk through the lens of political economy was Julie Guthman's *Agrarian Dreams* (2004), in which she details the developments, trends and paradoxes of the organic farming movement in California. In the book, she outlines 3 key areas of capitalist innovation in agriculture: intensification, appropriation, and valorisation, and discusses how they have shaped organic farming through time. I borrow this framework for my own analysis as a way to understand how the corporate control of agriculture is changing the discourses and practices of organic farming on Epekwitk. Using these areas of capitalist innovation has allowed me to pinpoint subtle changes in organic farming symptomatic of an ever corporatised and neoliberalised agriculture industry.

Concerning potential drawbacks of my use of political economy, the oft-waged criticism towards this approach to anthropology is that it is too concerned with

macroeconomic processes and, in turn, is guilty of a sort of economic essentialism that pays too little attention to the diversity of individuals, their experiences and the ways they exercise their agency within economic constraints. Understanding these criticisms is why I emphasise the sensory experience of organic farming and pay particular attention to how historical and economic relations influence the subjectivities of farmers.

SUBJECTIVITY

As Sherry B. Ortner puts it, subjectivity is "the ensemble of modes of perception, affect, thought, desire, and fear that animate acting subjects… as well the cultural and social formations that shape, organize, and provoke those modes of affect, thought, and so on"(p.108). Essentially, the theorisation of subjectivities works to parse out the material discursive relationship between subjects and social formations. In other words, how "social phenomena are simultaneously phenomena of the person and vice versa." (Holland & Leander, 2004, p.137). My reliance on the concept of subjectivity arose from a recurring theme in my conversations with farmers that I had difficulty making sense of. In many of the interviews I conducted, I had trouble getting farmers to stay on track with the interview questions, as time and time again, they would switch to talking about the business side of organic farming. With every interview and conversation, the business of organic farming was at the forefront of farmers' minds, and I had to figure out why this may have been. Some farmers clearly enjoyed navigating this aspect of organic farming, but it eventually became clear to me that, whether or not they enjoy it, making a living from small organic family farms is so difficult in the current agricultural climate that farmers are all but forced to make business and profit their primary preoccupation. As a result, farmers' attention is directed away from the other aspects of organic farming and, as I argue, causes a rift and a shift in their subjectivities.

To understand how something like the dominance of corporate agriculture on

Epekwitk could change the subjectivities of organic farmers, there were 3 key sources I turned to. The first was Sherry B. Ortner's *Anthropology and Social Culture,* and more particularly Chapter 5, Subjectivity and Cultural Critique. In this chapter, she explores how late capitalism, as a historic regime of power, shapes subjectivities. More specifically, Ortner is interested in the subtle forms of power within late capitalism that "saturate everyday life, through experiences of time, space, and work" (p.128). Her book was critical in my analysis and understanding of how agribusiness and its subtle forms of power are manifesting in the everyday lives of organic farmers and shifting their subjectivities.

Alongside Ortner's book, the article, Uncertain Subjects of Anglo-American Financialization by Paul Langley (2007) helped me grasp how power shapes the tools at the disposal of individuals in the pursuit of their desires. These tools, or what Foucault (1988) called "technologies of the self", in turn shape subjectivities. In his article, Langley discusses how financial markets have become technologies of the self through which individuals pursue success and autonomy. In my own work, Langley's article helped me understand how agribusiness, as a technology of the self, was shaping the subjectivities of farmers and becoming a tool through which successful farming was pursued and quantified.

Finally, my understanding of organic farmer subjectivities and their relation to agribusiness is informed by Stuart Hall's (1988) The Toad in the Garden. In this article, he outlines the volatility of ideology and demonstrates how subjectivities are always subject to change. They can be made and remade, and the example he uses to prove this is Thatcherism and how it changed the subjectivities of citizens through successfully reorienting what it meant to be a good citizen. Importantly, Hall stresses that the changes brought on by Thatcherism were not externally enforced but rather incorporated and enacted in processes of negotiation, mediation, and resistance. In a similar sense, I observed this messy process of subject formation on organic farms as farmers navigated the pressures from agribusiness.

RESISTANCE

In Chapter 3 of this thesis, I use resistance to examine how farmers push back against the encroachment of corporations. Resistance as a concept is quite nebulous, but as Vinthagen and Johansson (2013) discuss, at its core, it is an oppositional act “situated in certain time, space and relations, and engages with different (types of) actors, techniques and discourses” (p.1). In my analysis of resistance amongst organic farmers on Epekwitk, I primarily relied on James Scott’s (1985) *Weapons of the Weak.* In this book, he shows how seemingly benign and common behaviours amongst subaltern groups are, in actuality, subtle tactics employed by people to survive and undermine domination, especially in situations when open rebellion is not possible. Therefore, he distinguishes between everyday resistance and public resistance, which is open, publicly declared, and aims for de jure results. Evidently, the organic farmers I worked with can in no sense of the term be considered part of the subaltern. Almost all of the farmers were of white settler origins with distinctly privileged positionalities. Therefore, unlike the subaltern, they have the full range of legal and political means to express their political positions and visions of farming. And as I detail in Chapter 3, farmers are exercising these means. At the same time, Scott’s idea of everyday forms of resistance is explicitly fleshed out through the examination of the “constant struggle between the peasantry and those who seek to extract labor, food, taxes, rents, and interest from them” (p.xvi). Therefore, in my examination of the struggle between organic farmers and those who extract from them, the concept of everyday resistance has been useful for understanding the ways in which farmers are undermining corporate power beyond their public acts of resistance. During my research, I observed the efficacy of organic farmers’ resistance to corporate takeover through their everyday rhythms and ways of living, and Scott’s work has helped me understand the mechanisms behind this kind of resistance. Additionally, his conceptualisation of everyday resistance outlines how “Agents of resistance often

simultaneously promote power-loaded discourses, being the bearers of hierarchies and stereotypes as well as of change" (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013, p.13). Understanding this helped me reckon with how organic farmers can simultaneously be perpetuating the spread of agribusiness and other problematic structures while at the same time actively resisting them.

SETTLER COLONIALISM

Settler colonialism is a form of colonialism where settlers come to set up permanent homes, with explicit goals of replacing Indigenous populations. Due to its aim for permanence, its logics and structures differ from those of franchise colonialism or imperialism (Konishi, 2019). In my interviews and discussions with farmers, I noticed how, despite their work towards sustainable and ethical food systems, there seemed to be a blind spot in farmers' awareness of how their claims to land and relationships with the land are entangled with Mi'kmaq sovereignty and persisting structures of settler colonialism. When asked about this in interviews, many farmers told me they had not given it much thought, while farmers who said they had engaged with these ideas found it difficult to confront them in ways that moved past narratives of inclusion. In the fight for sustainable and equitable food systems, I believe that farmers must reckon with the historical and present role of agriculture in the ongoing appropriation of Indigenous land and elimination of Indigenous life. Therefore, I devoted a small chapter to the subject.

The foundation of my understanding of settler colonialism, its structures, and their relationship to agriculture comes from Patrick Wolfe's (2006) Settler Colonialism and The Elimination of the Native, within which he details how "settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event" (p.388). In the article, Wolfe discusses how the main concern of settler colonialism is territory and the elimination of Indigenous peoples and how as a technology for seizing territory and eliminating Indigenous peoples, agriculture is highly effective. Agriculture, as he explains, is "geared to vouchsafing its own reproduction,

generating capital that projects into a future where it repeats itself" (p. 395), and this permanence and perpetual generation of capital support other spheres of settler colonial expansion. Additionally, it connects settlers to the land and forms new settler colonial identities, and it enables settler population expansion at the expense of Indigenous land, acting as a form of primitive accumulation that undermines Indigenous modes of production.

Delving deeper into the relationship between settler colonialism and agriculture, the article by Travis Wysote and Erin Morton (2019), 'The depth of the plough': white settler tautologies and Pioneer Lies, is key to my understanding of settler ecologies and the stories that settlers tell themselves about settlement in order to paint their claims to land as non-problematic. Wysote and Morton detail how the narratives propagated by settlers about the land, as well as the changes they make to the land itself, work to erase historical and present settler colonial violence. The example they use to illustrate this is agriculture, particularly the Acadian Dyke system and the ox and plough.

Other key sources that have directed my inquiry into settler colonialism and farming are Sarah Rotz's (2019) "They took our beads, it was a fair trade, get over it": Settler colonial logics, racial hierarchies and material dominance in Canadian agriculture, as well as Lauren Kepkiewicz's (2020) Whose Land? Complicating Settler Understandings of Land in Canada. Both of these articles informed my understanding of the relationship between settler colonialism, the "family farm", and the connections farmers establish with the land. They helped me examine how elements of organic farming that have an everyday givenness, an assumption of their presence, can in fact be the result of entrenched relations of settlement that work to undermine Mi'kmaq sovereignty. For instance, for the farmers I worked with, the structures of the agrarian family farm were taken as a given. Yet as I demonstrate in the chapter, the agrarian family farm is in many ways a product of settler colonialism and a highly effective technology of expansion.

## STS AND MULTISPECIES ANTHROPOLOGY

Finally, works in science and technology studies (STS) as well as multispecies anthropology provide the backdrop for much of the analysis within this thesis. My engagement with both fields is more implicit than explicit, but it is important that I lay out how they have influenced my work.

Both STS and multispecies anthropology helped me ground my use of political economy in the field, providing me with a framework for the analysis of more micro phenomena on organic farms, like farmers' placemaking practices, relationships to more-than-human beings, and the different ways they can be discussed and mobilised. Books like Haraway's *When Species Meet* (2008) or *Staying With the Trouble* (2016) gave me the tools to grasp the entangled politics, morals, and ethics involved in multispecies relationships and what configurations they might take on organic farms. Other works, such as Puig de la Bellacasa's Matters of Care in technoscience (2011) as well as Despret's (2004) The Body We Care For, provided me with a framework for understanding the relationships of care on farms and the networks of affect that form between farmers and more-than-human actors like the land, cows, barn swallows, blueberries, tomatoes and so on.

Additionally, these works, alongside others like Latour's (2018) *Back Down to Earth* or Natasha Myers' (2018) How to Grow Livable Worlds helped me flesh out what I mean when I say sustainable food systems, which I understand to be systems that: (1) promote the flourishing of both human and more-than-human communities. (2) Stay with the trouble, beholden to our responsibilities to the myriad of beings whose well-being is necessary for our collective survival, and (3) stay committed to unsettling settler colonialism.

Chapter 1

# A History of Agriculture and Land Tenure

I find it hard to describe how beautiful early summer is on Epekwitk without resorting to platitudes. As the warming waters of the Gulf of Saint Lawrence embrace the cradle-shaped island, it erupts with green rolling hills accentuated by the red soil and deep blue of the ocean.

The trees, the grass, the birds, the sea, all let out a deep sigh of relief, charging the air with life and the excitement of summer.

It is still my favourite time of year, but there is one moment that permanently puts a damper on my early summer sensory experience. I was with my friend, and we were driving past fields of green as the sun set, the sky lit up with colour, and the dew in the air had a peppery smell to it that I always associate with the time of year. I remarked upon this, and my friend gave me a puzzled look. I asked her what was wrong, and she questioned me, asking if I truly did not know what the smell was. I confirmed that I did not, and she explained that I was smelling pesticides coming from the farmland we had been driving past.

I grew up in what is the closest thing to a suburb on the island, and while I was only a short walk from farmland, for some reason or another, I was never able to draw the connection between the peppery smell in the air and farmers spraying their fields. My friend, on the other hand, grew up in a house surrounded on all sides by an intensively farmed potato field, and she can recall having to go inside and shut all the windows while the farmer

sprayed near her house. I felt betrayed that a smell I associated with my favourite time of the year turned out to be harmful chemicals used for exploitative industrial agriculture. The more I thought about this new understanding, the more I realised how frequently I was coming across pesticides in the air, and when I spoke to those around me, I grew to understand that this was a common experience.

## INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I ask what historical and economic conditions led to my experience in the car that day. How has intensive industrialised agriculture become so ubiquitous that I grew up associating the smell of pesticides with summer? In this chapter, I suggest that the current agricultural environment on the island is the result of the intersection between two factors–the major reorganisation of global food systems during the 19th and 20th centuries and the unique history of land-centred struggles on Epekwitk. The entanglement of these histories is what makes Epekwitk an interesting case study for understanding not only the current obstacles faced by farming but also the imaginary of agricultural pasts, presents, and futures.

In the first section of this chapter, I discuss the history of land tenure and agriculture on Epekwitk. Making sense of the present agricultural structures and discourses on Epekwitk is not possible without an understanding of the unique history of land-centred struggles. On Prince Edward Island, land has always been of central concern. On top of the fact that the island is small and land is finite, islanders have been in a constant struggle to stop those with money and power from seizing land and squeezing them off of it (Sharpe, 1976; Kolinjivadi et al., 2020).

The second section traces the history of agribusiness–a term used to describe the alliance between corporations and agriculture–it attempts to transpose market rationale onto the land, streamlining food production in order to make it as predictable and as profitable as

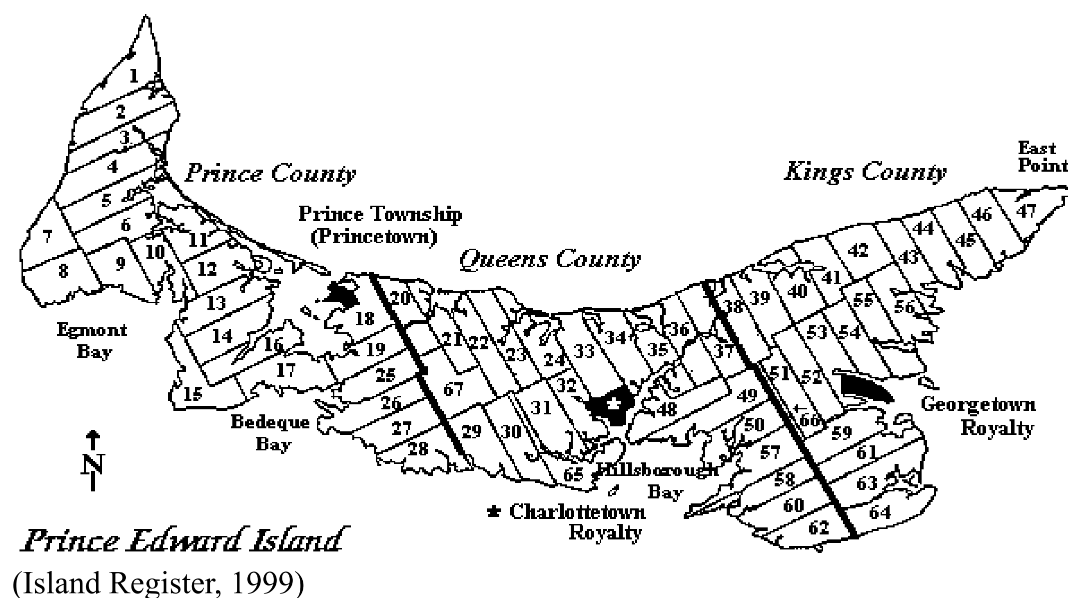
possible (Desmarais, 2019). By and large, agribusiness is the dominant mode of agriculture on Epekwitk, and I trace how this came to be.

In the third section, I focus on the period from the 1970s to the present, during which agribusiness went from gaining its footing on Epekwitk to having the island in a stranglehold. The abrupt introduction of the agribusiness model created unrest in the beginning, yet backed by the state and the neoliberal order, its purveyors successfully embedded the model within island agriculture. The propagation of agribusiness and the ways it interacted with the complex histories of agriculture and land tenure on the island is what created the current landscape, providing a grammar for how farmers on Epekwitk perceive and interpret agriculture.

## EARLY SETTLEMENT, LAND STRUGGLES, AND FARMING

Beginning in the early part of the 16th century, the French and English began frequenting the Island's shores, coming to fish and sometimes trade with the Mi'kmaq. In 1534, Jacques Cartier produced the first written European record of the island, describing the abundance of berries and grains, stating that Epekwitk is "the best-tempered region…Nothing is wanting but harbours." (Sharpe, 1976:9). Despite the abundance described by Cartier, there was little to no incentive to settle. Settling was expensive, and the French were quite content with their profits from the waters of what they were now calling Isle Saint-Jean. It was not until the 17th and 18th centuries that pressure to settle began to mount. Endless war spilt over into the colonies, and the English and French began competing for places like Epekwitk that were once considered unimportant in the settler colonial project. In 1720, the French established the first permanent European settlement on the island, but not long after, it was captured by the British (MacDonald et al., 2016). For the first half of the 18th century, the island would continue to be captured and recaptured, and the tumult it created meant that there were never more than a couple thousand settlers on Epekwitk and sometimes as few as 300 (Sharpe,

1976). In the second half of the 18th century, the dust had settled, and the British finally gained permanent control. Once their power was secure enough, they began to implement land reforms and encourage further settlement. On July 23, 1767, the island was split into 67 lots of 20000 acres each and lotteried off to British military officers and others whom the government owed favours. The newly established lots came with three conditions that all of the landlords supposedly had to follow. First, each lot was to be settled with one person per 100 acres within 10 years. Second, the land was to be settled by protestants from the 13 colonies or other European territories. And three, each landlord owed a yearly rent to the colonial administration (Sharpe, 1976). As Bumstead (1981) remarks, “the land-holding and administrative arrangements on the Island represented an experiment on the part of the mother country never replicated in other British colonies founded after 1750” (p.45). The leasehold tenure system on Prince Edward Island and the way it prevented settlers from gaining clear title to the land was unique and atypical for British settler colonies (Jarvis, 2022).



(Island Register, 1999)

Under the new feudal land system that settlers found themselves thrust into, they would be charged 1 shilling per year, with a gradual increase as they worked to clear the land and make it more “productive” (Sharpe, 1976). However, clearing the land and forcing their European

ways of subsistence onto it proved extremely difficult, and the lot system meant that most of the population had no hope of owning the land they cleared, lived on, and farmed (MacDonald, 2000). As they dug deeper roots, the land became more valuable, creating more and more profit for the landlords, most of whom had never set foot on Epekwitk (Sharpe, 1976).

Landlords collected rent to do nothing while seldom paying what they owed to the colonial administration, which willingly turned a blind eye. They hired land agents as their thugs to collect rent and kick tenants off the land if they were not paying. Unsurprisingly, the tenants who rented from the absentee landlords lived with a high amount of precarity. Most operated subsistence farms, and they would spend years clearing the land, building houses, farming, but if they could not pay rent or if the landlord simply wanted them gone, they would be kicked out and have all of their possessions seized (Sharpe, 1976).

From very early on, the landlords and land agents were met with distrust and disdain, and it did not take long for tenants to start pushing back. In the 19th century, tenants did everything in their power to avoid paying their absentee landlords, leading to the establishment of an autonomous zone in the northeastern part of the Island (Phelan, 1996). No land agents or law enforcement were allowed to enter the autonomous zone, and they even created an economy completely independent from the rest of the island, going so far as building ships to trade with the rest of North America. Through tricks, humiliation, and harassment, tenants in the autonomous zone successfully warded off the authorities. When land agents or police did venture into the zone, a chorus of conch shells would erupt, alerting of their presence and mobilising resistance. There were even instances of land agents being killed by tenants (Sharpe, 1976).

Eventually, the tenants organised to form a tenant league with the aim of creating an escheat court, enabling the seizure of land from landlords who failed to meet the original

conditions of the land lottery. Since almost all of the landlords did not meet these original conditions, most of the land would go directly to the tenantry if their efforts proved successful. The leader of the league was a former land agent turned tenant advocate named William Cooper (Sharpe, 1976). Cooper and the tenant league took the position that the landlords were not concerned with the land itself, as they did not live on it or use it. Rather, they wanted a claim to the labour taking place on the land. The league argued that this was wrong for two key reasons. The first deployed the concept of Lockean land rights, and Cooper argued that the tenants had natural rights over the land that they farmed because they were the ones who cleared it and thus made it productive and valuable. The other major point posited by the league was that the conditions of the landlord system on PEI were, for all intents and purposes, a form of enslavement, and it was illegal under British law to enslave British subjects (Sharpe, 1976).

Cooper and the tenant league were making slow progress towards an escheat court, but things came to a screeching halt when, in 1860, the Land Commission put out a report rejecting escheat. This action by the colonial administration would spark what was essentially a guerrilla war campaign. The tenant league organised to withhold the payment of all rent, island-wide and in the winter of 1865, marched on the government building while the legislature was in session. The authorities only managed to arrest one of the protesters, Samuel Fletcher, but he was not in custody for long. The rest of the protestors marched to the sheriff's office, tore it down, rescued Samuel, and fled back to the autonomous zone in the eastern part of the island (Sharpe, 1976).

Humiliated and angry, the colonial administration reacted swiftly and harshly. They gathered some 200 men, composed of both infantry and cavalry, to go into the autonomous zone and arrest Samuel Fletcher. The infantry was made up of regular citizens, most of whom were tenant sympathisers. The cavalry, on the other hand, was composed of land agents and

other thugs hired to do the dirty work of the landlords. As they marched towards Fletcher's farm, the infantry was falling behind and eventually stopped for tea while the cavalry continued onward. As the cavalry approached the farm, they encountered what they thought was a fort. Advancing under the flag of truce, they came to realise the fort was nothing but wooden boards and pipes with hats on them. Embarrassed but unperturbed, they continued onward to Fletcher's farm only to find it empty. The 200 men, unable to arrest 1, went home to Charlottetown and were received by a mob jeering and taunting them (Sharpe, 1976).

After the Fletcher episode, the government realised it needed to do something to soothe the tension. Their solution was the Freehold Purchase Act, which allowed tenants to take out a loan that was half of the cost of what it would take to purchase the land they occupied. The Act was simply not enough, and the tenants moved forward with their guerilla campaign, continuing to act collectively with enviable levels of solidarity (Sharpe, 1976).

In May of 1865, one landlord successfully served his tenants writs, but a few days later, his barns went up in flames. A reward of 500 pounds was put out, but nothing came of it. In July of the same year, a group of tenants attacked the sheriff on his way to deliver writs. They took the writs and tore them up, but the sheriff managed to arrest one of them. On the day of the arrested man's trial, 1000 people came to protest at the courthouse. It did not matter anyway because a jury of peers could not be found, and the trial was unable to proceed. By this point, when a tenant was brought to court for land disputes with landlords or the colonial administration, juries were almost impossible to assemble (Sharpe, 1976).

Through collective action and solidarity, the tenants were successfully undermining the power of the authorities to do anything about withheld rent and more and more land was slowly entering into the control of the tenants. This enraged the authorities, and they decided to combine forces with the Island's bourgeoisie (whose assets were under threat by the highly organised tenantry) to plead with the Pope and the colonial homeland for military aid.

Their requests fell on sympathetic ears, and British troops were quickly sent in to quell the movement. The troops managed to put a halt to guerrilla activities, but by this point, peace was always going to be on a knife-edge until the land was in the hands of the tenantry. Meanwhile, as capitalist industry continued to gain its footing in the colonies, the burgeoning merchant class on Epekwitk felt stifled by the landlords who were now starting to lose their grasp on the Island (Sharpe, 1976). This came to a head when PEI was coerced into joining Canada. The merchants had convinced the Island's government to build a railway system, which, for the first time, put the island into a significant amount of debt. Canada, in exchange for PEI joining the state, offered to not only absorb this debt but also give a loan to buy out all remaining landlords. The offer was accepted, and in 1875, the Land Purchase Act required that all remaining landlords sell their land to the government at the price dictated by the Act's commission (Bolger, 1973). This would mark the end of the feudal land system of PEI, but by no means would it be the end of the struggles of the proletariat. After the government purchased the land from the landlords, tenants were given the first chance to buy the property they lived on. Many did, and this change was reflected in the island's economy. Yet, many tenants could not buy the land, and this too was reflected. Those who could not or did not buy the land they rented were lucky enough to have had other opportunities. The last couple of decades of the 19th century were considered to be the Golden Age of the island, and not only could people find work on the new farmer-owned farms, but the fishing and manufacturing industries were booming as well (Sharpe, 1976).

This brings me to a point that quietly goes unmentioned when the story of the tenant land struggle is told. Hierarchies of power, whether they be racial, settler colonial, or economic, gave tenants access to networks of support and avenues to other plots of land and other ways of accessing capital that were simply inaccessible for other groups of people

(Phelan, 1996). For example, while settler farmers waged their battle with the landlords and colonial administration, the Mi'kmaq had no such privilege.

Up until this establishment of British control and the implementation of the lot system, European claims to the land had been fickle and volatile. This, along with the sparse and transient population of settlers, benefited the Mi'kmaq, who still had access to their lands and were mostly able to continue their way of life. Even though the Mi'kmaq had never ceded their territory and had signed treaties guaranteeing access to their land, when the new lot system was implemented, no mention of them was made, and all of their land was placed in the hands of random British aristocrats (Phelan, 1996). All of the agreements and treaties were ignored, and they were left landless, set adrift and now living illegally on the land that they had been caring for and living with for thousands of years. For a short time, they were able to carry on moving seasonally between their traditional sites, but once more and more settlers came, they were gradually kicked off the land (Bittermann, 2006).

With the loss of their land came the loss of their lives. Unable to procure basic necessities in the ways they had been doing so since time immemorial and with little immunity to the illnesses brought over by the settlers, by the end of the 1830s, the Mi'kmaq were growing ever more desperate. They pleaded with local officials and eventually gave a petition to the crown for help (Bittermann, 2006). In the 1838 petition, Chief Oliver Thomas LeBone wrote that ever since the signing of the Treaty of Paris, when the Mi'kmaq were formally made British subjects,

> Our tribe has been deprived of their hunting grounds without receiving any remuneration for the loss they sustained – by which privation and want has reduced our once numerous Tribe in this island to a skeleton of five hundred individuals… Our people are still compelled to wander the forests as an unprotected neglected race of the human species unworthy to enjoy the patronage or favour of those vested with authority (LeBone, 1838).

In the letter, LeBone makes the plea for a tract of land upon which the Mi'kmaq could permanently settle, stating that "our people duly value the benefits resulting from a steady application to farming pursuits and a settled mode of life" (LeBone, 1838). At the time, the Mi'kmaq were continuing to heavily oppose the seizure and subdivision of their land, but it was clear that the pragmatic request for land to farm and live on was necessary, given the sickness and starvation that had befallen their people.

The person who delivered LeBone's letter to the crown was none other than William Cooper, the leader of the Escheat movement, who was on his way to submit documents and petitions on behalf of the tenants (Bittermann, 2006). The difference was that Cooper and the tenants had the luxury of settler colonial, racial, and epistemological privilege on their side. They could make appeals to the crown based on ideas of Lockean land rights and labour theory of value (appeals that directly undermined Mi'kmaq sovereignty), yet the Mi'kmaq had no such luxury, and even their attempts to pragmatically adhere to settler living patterns were ultimately denied. Now they were not only shut out from living as they had done so for thousands of years but also from the privileges afforded to even the lowest realms of the settler colonial citizenry. It was not until 1865 that the Mi'kmaq had a permanent place to settle when an island that was forgotten in the land lottery, Lennox Island, was sold to the Aborigines Protection Society and held in trust for the Mi'kmaq people until 1912, when it became a reserve under the Indian Act (Bittermann, 2006).

In understanding what the Mi'kmaq were going through during the tenant struggles of the 19th century, it becomes clear that although the settlers toiled and suffered under the absentee landlords, the dominant material and cultural conditions present in the nascent settler colonial state remained entirely in their favour. The conditions and events of the 19th century on Prince Edward Island created a society where the Mi'kmaq were denied any

means to land tenure, as tenants fought and eventually gained freehold tenure of their own.[1] Subsequently, this struggle between absentee landlords and settlers cemented a society where settlers were and continue to be fiercely possessive of the land they managed to pull from the hands of their landlords. This, along with the struggles and stories of clearing the forest to make it "productive", fostered deep relationships to the environment and with it, a foundational settler myth that remains strong to this day (Desmarais, 2019).

FROM FAMILY FARMS TO AGRIBUSINESS

Once the fight to fully secure freehold tenure was won, the tenant's attachment to the land cemented with it certain ways of living and farming. As Phelan (1996) put it, "relations constructed during the 19th Century land struggle were sufficiently mature to sustain rural peasant community values for many years to come."(p. 76). The values obtained from the 19th-century land struggles created specific epistemological idiosyncrasies, making island farmers apprehensive and suspicious of any encroachment from outsiders. Such a foundational event, the land struggles were, that they became deeply embedded in the structure through which farmers act on and interpret their socio-material conditions. Equipped with a healthy distrust of authority and loyalty to their fellow peasants, farmers on Epekwitk throughout the first half of the twentieth century were well organised. They established grain banks, started cooperatives for dairy, potatoes, eggs, and even created their own credit union (Sharpe, 1976). The perception of an existential threat by outside forces—created by the 19th-century land struggle—motivated the organising efforts of the former tenantry of Epekwitk, and it allowed for the maintenance of the mixed and small-scale family farm life that they had grown accustomed to.

Meanwhile, much of the agriculture in the rest of the world was undergoing an aggressive upheaval and transition towards industrialised, globalised and capitalist ways of

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[1] The experience of Black Islanders who faced difficulties securing stable land tenure for agriculture speaks to this white privilege as well (Hornby, 1991).

farming and the walls put up by the settler peasantry on Epekwitk could only hold for so long. The robust organisation of farmers on the island helped stave off agribusiness, but by the 1970s, the post-land-struggle ways of farming would fall. The fall would be messy, and in its throes, clashes between agribusiness and the post-land-struggle values would reorganise the material-discursive landscapes of the Island in ways that make Epekwitk a unique case study in agriculture.

Before I discuss the meeting of agribusiness and Island farming, it is important to understand what agribusiness is, what it does, and how it came to dominate global food systems.

Agribusiness is the term I will be using to describe the novel amalgamation of science, capitalism, and agriculture, which began in Northern Europe in the 19th century and has spread ever since (Desmarais, 2019). It is an agricultural model that gained traction through promises of fertility, productivity, predictability and savings on labour. It was and is still seen as a way to feed the world as the population expands. It is also a model where profit is prioritised, land is concentrated in the hands of a few, corporations dominate ownership, crop yields grow higher and less diverse, and the entire process is buttressed by science and technology. When people think about agribusiness, it is often associated with the mid-20th century and the Green Revolution, when Western governments, science, and capital came together to introduce policies and programs bringing fertiliser, pesticides, and many other scientific and technological farming methods to the Global South. Agribusiness indeed reached its current form during that period, but it began rearing its head far earlier during Green Revolution, beginning in the 19th century (Van Zanden 1991).

In the 18th century, capitalism had been cutting its teeth in European agriculture as it began replacing feudal forms of land tenure. By the 19th century, the commons were enclosed, and the Industrial Revolution was in full swing. In this foundational event of

primitive accumulation, small farmers were displaced, and land was consolidated into the hands of the few, creating a new class of workers able to sell their labour to the burgeoning large agricultural operations (Araghi, 1995).

The establishment of capitalist agriculture coincided with the abolition of slavery, and without slaves, colonial powers were forced to look for other options to meet the cheap labour requirements, turning to wage labour or indentured labour. It was these changes in labour, aggravated by the closing of the commons and the abolition of slavery that created the necessary labour conditions for the Green Revolution and modern agribusiness (Melillo, 2012).

Once the original sin of capitalist agriculture was committed, the existential threat of constant growth could not be put back in the bottle. Getting in the way of growth is the fact that land is finite, people can only eat so much, and, unlike the factory environment, it is impossible to even pretend to be able to control the enormous environmental, social and political webs involved in growing food. Squirming under the weight of this predicament, scientific and technological balms of innovation are needed to maintain the doctrine of growth, increasing productivity, and keeping farms relatively financially sustainable (Barton, 2018).

One essential technology that has proliferated during this time is monocropping. Monocropping is the practice of growing entire fields of a single crop. Once agriculture turned capitalist and the Green Revolution got on its feet, monocropping was useful for fixing specific relations to land and labour. As Araya (2023) explains, monocropping is "the violent imposition of a pattern of power predicated upon the concentration of control over nature, labor, inputs, production, profits and knowledge…" (p.789). It is a powerful technology for controlling and imbuing the land with supposed simplicity and predictability, and it is the model that most closely resembles the production factories that had taken the era by storm.

Powerful and controlling as it might be, monocropping was only one technology in a slurry of scientific and technological changes necessary to bring about the Green Revolution and eventually, modern agribusiness. Until the Second Industrial Revolution in th 19th century, with its advancements in fields like chemistry, physics, and biology, the people who were given the responsibility to innovate agriculture were the farmers themselves. Incentivised to improve their methods for propping up the new regime, they invented ways to plant, harvest, fertilise, and keep pests away from their vulnerable monocrops (Barton, 2018).

Once science's new bag of tricks became available, the onus to innovate shifted from the farmers to the scientists. Chemists like Sir Humphry Davy or Justus von Liebig would kick off the scientific revolution in agriculture with an intense focus on soil and its chemical composition. In their drive to discover what chemical compositions make fertile soil, they concluded that it requires the perfect balance of elements like iron, phosphorus, nitrogen, calcium, and potassium. All the farmers had to do to make their soil fertile was mimic nature by playing with this balance (Barton, 2018). However, making the most desirable soil under this paradigm requires access to the right fertilisers with the proper elements. Such a thing was not easy, and agricultural suppliers began importing guano (nitrogen-rich bird poop) and sodium nitrate from places as far as Peru (Melillo, 2012).

Eventually, the invention of chemical fertilisers like superphosphates changed everything. They did not need to be imported as they were easily manufactured at home from cheap materials, and they were said to be just as effective as fertilisers like guano, ashes, or manure. Fertiliser companies began to peddle superphosphates, and the farmers who were already hooked on off-farm fertiliser enthusiastically embraced them.

The advent of chemical fertilisers was the missing piece, setting the stage for the Green Revolution. The changes in labour relations with the appropriation of agriculture by capital was the first step towards the Green Revolution. Next, the structure of capital enforced

on the farm took mixed farming, where labour and inputs like fertiliser were sourced biologically and internally, and replaced it with vast monocrops that required input and labour from outside scientific and technological industries. The combination of agriculture, capital, science and technology culminated in the First Green Revolution. This is when agribusiness hit its infancy, establishing all of the necessary relationships for it to begin its takeover of global food systems.

FOOD REGIMES

Harriet Friedmann and Philip McMichael (1989) describe the emergence and takeover of agribusiness in what they call food regimes. Through the lens of political economy, they organise agricultural epochs using a "rule-governed structure of production and consumption of food on a world scale" (Friedmann,1993:30). Each food regime is defined by a period of stable relationships of power between the state, capital, and the classes of farmers, workers, and peasants.

The first food regime was from 1870 to the 1930s. It was defined by the export of wheat and meat from the settler colonial states to the colonial centre in a nation-state-to-nation-state style of trade. Instead of the colonial form of trade where colonies under direct rule had specialised production that fed into the colonial centre, new forms of nation-state to nation-state trading, sparked by settler colonial state independence, created new wage-labour relations geared towards industrialised capitalism (Friedmann & McMichael, 1989). The result was the restructuring of production, including farms which adapted to fit the new strictures of industrial production. Stuck in their old ways, European metropoles were continuing to conduct business through mercantilist and proto-industrial means while settler colonial states came into existence with industrial capitalism baked in. The new form of specialised agriculture created in the process fused factory and farm and was custom-made for the post-industrial revolution international economy. The first food

regime (or the First Green Revolution) facilitated the changes from mixed farming to industrialised monocultures.

The second food regime, from the 1950s to the 1970s, was US-centred. It was defined by the maturation and strategic propagation of the American model of modern agro-industrialisation, fueled by cycles of technology-based growth. The drive to spread American-style industrialised farming is also what created the 20th-century Green Revolution. International organisations incentivised American industrial farming models, and surplus food was channelled via aid programs and used as a geopolitical weapon in the Cold War. The second food regime is characterised by the complete dissolution of the lines between agriculture, science, and industry, and by agribusiness reaching its current form (McMichael, 2013). Spurred on by state policies and regulations, agro-food corporations rose to the top of the second food regime, integrating family farms that were incentivised to cosy up to big business. The result was that farms became dependent on giant agro-food corporations for both the production of their crops and the distribution of their harvest. Under this regime, farmers buy their technologies, seeds, chemicals, and feed from corporations to grow their crops. And once harvested, farmers turn around and sell their products to the same corporations. In addition to vertically integrating activities on the farm, Agro-food corporations infiltrated universities, dumping funds into the research of chemicals and technologies to increase the productivity, efficiency and thus profitability of agriculture. Farmers continued to buy up what the agro-food corporations were selling, and farms grew larger, more productive, and more specialised as they became trapped in the “technical treadmill” of agribusiness (Friedmann, 1993). By the end of the Second Food Regime, the agribusiness model it championed grew so influential that it has come to be referred to as “conventional agriculture” and, in its wake, left a graveyard filled with methods and rhythms

of farming that up until this point had persisted for centuries if not millennia (McMichael, 2013).

Along with the first and second food regimes, there is debate over whether or not a third exists. Though Friedmann believes it has not yet come to pass, McMichael has proposed that the new neoliberal world order has brought forth a third food regime, which he refers to as the corporate food regime (McMichael, 2005). This food regime, in which we find ourselves today, began in the 1980s and is defined by corporate control of food systems. Corporations consolidated the supply chains and fashioned a supermarket revolution where fresh vegetables, fruit, and fish became available throughout the year. On the farm side of things, corporations gained more control than ever, intensifying their vertical integration of the entire food production process. During the third food regime, agro-corporations further expanded their influence in the universities, which, in turn, churned out research on genetic engineering, agrochemicals, and other biotechnologies which would all come to be widely adopted by farmers (McMichael, 2005).

Whether or not there is a third food regime, there is no denying how deeply corporations have dug their nails into agriculture. So much so that its version of capitalist agribusiness inches closer and closer to feudal relations of the past. Corporate control is so extensive that the system farmers find themselves in goes beyond capitalist modes of production and relationships to the means of production. When one company owns the land you farm, the seeds you plant, the equipment you use, the chemicals you spray, and when that company is also the one buying your product, then your conditions are much more similar to a feudal farmer than a capitalist farmer competing in a market. As farmer Bill said to me, referencing this phenomenon on Epekwitk,

> In almost every segment of the industry, I can tell you who's making the money. It's one family, and they own the oil company. They own the tractor dealership, they own the

> fertiliser, and they own a processing plant. They have decimated the seed industry to the point where basically the only place where you can buy seed from is them, and they're also the ones suppressing prices.

Today, farmers on Epekwitk are suffocating under the hold of but a few corporations. Finding themselves at the bottom of a corporate hierarchy, they are poked, prodded and stripped of agency in the name of producing the cheapest and most profitable raw materials possible (Kolinjivadi et al., 2020).

AGRIBUSINESS COMES TO EPEKWITK

At the outset of the last section, I discussed how once farmers on PEI gained freehold tenure of the land, they were determined to defend their family farms from the aggressions of agribusiness. They did indeed manage to fend off corporate takeover for longer than most, but by the end of the second food regime, their avenues of resistance had been entirely debased. The beginning of the end started when Canada created the 1969 Federal Task Force on Agriculture to "fix" the perceived problems of the industry. Reacting to the policies put in place by the task force, the provincial government of PEI released what they were calling The Comprehensive Development Plan. Holding similar objectives to the task force, "the plan," as many refer to it, set out to modernise what it dubbed the backward agriculture industry on Epekwitk (Kolinjivadi et al., 2020). To quote the development plan, "The historical pattern of land ownership is badly adapted to the needs of modern technology for agriculture, forestry, and tourist development... In this environment, the first step required to permit full development of the Islands' resources, is a province-wide land management program... The objectives of the measures to be implemented for agriculture is to double net value by 1976." (Phelan, 1996). The Development Plan set out to align the Island's farms to meet the parameters of modern corporate agriculture. They promised prosperity and fertility but in the process, they planned to remove two-thirds of the island's farmers from the land through

consolidation in order to create what they thought would be an economically effective industry. Farmers who were not willing to or not able to expand and invest in new and more efficient technologies were forced to retire, foreclosed upon, or bought out by the government (Sharpe, 1976). In essence, agribusiness was coming to Epekwitk whether the farmers liked it or not. Incensed by the prospect of the plan, farmers held large protests at government buildings and in the summer of 1971, hundreds took to the highways in their tractors, shutting down traffic until their demands were met.

The tractor demonstration dragged on for 10 days. Unfortunately, unlike their 19th-century comrades whom they drew inspiration from, the farmers in 1971 did not win. In fact, the trends and regulations they were fighting against would take hold and spread (Sharpe, 1976). The post-land-struggle ways of life would eventually succumb to market and state pressures, and the “modernisation” it ushered in would create the largest shift in land tenure and agricultural practices since colonisation.

Farmers were forced to expand their farms and their profit, or get out. On an island with only so much land, expanding your farm almost always comes at the expense of another. In 1971, when the  Development Plan was put in place, there were 4,543 farms on the Island. In 2024, there were only 1,195, a 60 per cent drop. In 1971, there were 12 farms between 1,220 and 1,599 acres and only 8 above 1,600. In 2016, the number jumped to 50 farms sized between 1,220 and 1,599 acres and 70 above 1,600 (Statistics Canada, 1971 & Statistics Canada, 2025).

The consolidation of farmland facilitated by the Development Plan created farms larger than ever before, and it forced a shift in what farmers were growing and how they grew it. To be as profitable as possible, big farms require mechanisation and mechanisation requires specialisation (Smitheram et al., 1982). On a farm that is thousands of acres, harvesting without the help of mechanisation would be almost impossible, so farmers had to

mechanise. Be that as it may, farming machinery is highly specialised, and diversity in crops means diversity in machinery, and most farmers simply cannot afford what that would cost. Therefore, farmers had to specialise. The pressure to grow, mechanise, and specialise forced farmers into pigeonholes of profit where cash crops, primarily potatoes, became king (Smitheram et al., 1982). Since 1971, the acreage of potato fields has more than doubled, occupying around 100 thousand acres and 85 per cent of the total crop value on the island. During the same period, other cash crops like soy went from being non-existent to occupying 45,000 acres. In this profit pigeonhole, the output per acre of whatever crop will bring in the most amount of money is placed above all else (Statistics Canada, 1971 & Statistics Canada, 2022).

Under the Development Plan, agriculture on the Island was lulled into the mould of agribusiness. Since the time of “the plan” and today, corporations have had more than their fair share of agriculture on Epekwitk, grabbing land and vertically integrating wherever they can. Land grabbing, which is “the large-scale acquisition of land or land-related rights and resources by corporate (business, non-profit or public) entities” (White et al., 2012:1), became such a pressing issue that in 1982 the Lands Protection Act (LPA) was established as an attempt to curtail it (Government of Prince Edward Island, 2022). The LPA placed a limit on the number of acres a corporation or individual is allowed to own, and while it has done a lot of good, it contains several loopholes that are routinely exploited by corporations.

The main culprits in the corporate land grabbing and vertical integration are the Irvings, Vanco, and the McCains, and they have essentially monopolised the farming industry on Epekwitk (Beingessner, 2020). The Irvings, a family from New Brunswick, are one of the richest families in Canada. Initially, they were an oil and lumber company, but they have since expanded into a litany of other sectors, including agriculture (Poitras, 2014). Vanco, a Dutch family who were attracted to Epekwitk by the relatively cheap farmland, are a major

player in the potato and tulip industries and one of the mega farming operations grabbing land. They farm conventionally and organically and, since the early 2000s, have been aggressively expanding their operation all over the Island (Vanco, n.d.). The McCains, another billionaire family from New Brunswick, started in the 1950s with a seed potato business but eventually shifted focus to frozen potato products, of which they are now the world's largest producer (Stoffman & Van Leersum, 2007)

In the corporate race to the bottom on Epekwitk, the Irvings are far ahead of the others. Successful in their vertical integration of the entire farming process, they own almost all of the equipment dealerships, the pesticide distributors, the fuel, building materials, and everything else one would ever need to run a “modern” farm (Kolinjivadi et al., 2020). Additionally, it is difficult to uncover the true extent of this monopoly as the Irvings own many companies that go by many different names and it is constantly changing as they try to exploit the loopholes in tax laws and the Lands Protection Act.

Slowly, the Development Plan and the corporate takeover it ushered in have created conditions of land tenure and agriculture that parallel those of the 19th century. Today, instead of absentee landlords taking the form of British aristocrats, they are now rich and powerful out-of-province corporations (Phelan, 1996). What started as government seizure of land to create a “productive” agriculture industry has evolved into a system of land grabbing where there are fewer and fewer farms and more and more land being accumulated by individuals and corporations.

Much like in the 19th century, many farmers today have entered into a sort of serfdom. Corporations will lease their land to farmers, estranging them from not just the means of production but the land itself, as they are beholden to the corporation they lease from in every way. Even when the land remains under their name, the debt they owe to corporations from the purchasing of equipment, seeds, fertilisers, etc., means they have

virtually no agency over their farm and what happens on it. Talking about the people stuck in this kind of predicament, Bill said to me,

> I hate to say it, but they're like glorified managers. Then again, they aren't–they own the land, and they take on all the debt. But it's the debt that turns them into managers. Owing the Irvings for the equipment they're financing or leasing, the fertiliser they're buying, the barns and warehouses they're building, and so on and so forth, gives them (the Irvings) control. The Irving's own every aspect of the industry, and the debt farmers build up essentially turns them into managers who have to do what they're told.

As farmers take on more debt, they lose more and more agency over their agricultural practices, becoming entirely beholden to corporate overlords who are constantly ratcheting up their demands for higher production and better margins (Phelan, 1996).

A dark irony of this structure is that the indentured labour of migrant workers is one of the only reasons why many farmers are able to keep their farms economically sustainable (in the loosest sense of the term). In the previous section, I discussed how the abolition movement reorganised relationships to the means of production, causing industrial farms to scramble to keep their operations profitable. The vacuum it created was the initial impetus for the spread of the migrant worker debt peonage system we continue to have today. Industrialised agriculture was designed for the input of slave labour, and because of abolition, a pivot to the closest thing possible had to be made. The answer came as migrant worker debt peonage, which is what Moon-Ho Jung calls "the legal and cultural borderland between slavery and freedom" (Melillo, 2012: 1031). Through the removal of people from familiar landscapes, languages, and cultural contexts, and the establishment of total control over their housing, labour conditions, and mobility, almost all agency is stripped from the worker, and it creates the perfect conditions for exploitation. The rampant exploitation of migrant workers is

not an accident; it is the success of industrialised agriculture recreating the working conditions upon which it was founded and upon which it depends (Melillo, 2012).

While the government will not release the actual statistics, it is estimated that almost half of all agricultural workers on Epekwitk are temporary foreign workers (Yarr, 2022). Migrant workers come to Epekwitk from all over the world and are routinely abused, exploited, and unprotected by the labour laws of the province. Every year, multiple articles are written detailing the abuses faced by workers, and yet nothing changes. In the summer of 2022, it came out that several farmers were charging the migrant workers for room and board, and by the end of the season, the workers not only made no money but were actually in debt to the farmers (Yarr, 2022). In 2023, The Cooper Institute hosted an event for migrant workers in which many had the chance to detail the abuses they faced. The stories were harrowing (Nguyen, 2023). As I write this during the first few months of 2024, it has come out that the large apple orchard extorting migrant workers for money and forcing them to live in hazardous accommodations will face no repercussions (D'Souza et al., 2024). Additionally, just two days ago, CBC PEI released an article discussing how the Temporary Foreign Worker Protection Act, passed two years ago, has yet to be proclaimed in law, and many are doubting if it will ever be proclaimed at all (Brun, 2024).

In a system controlled by corporations, they stand to benefit the most. Everyone else must carve out a living from what trickles down. Through their debt, farmers become indentured corporate land managers forced to squeeze as much production out of the land as cheaply as possible. To do this, they hire workers who are subject to even worse forms of exploitation. Trickling down further, water supplies become poisoned and exhausted, and the soils are exploited for every last nutrient they hold until they turn to dust and wash off into the rivers or blow away in the wind. In the business of agriculture, what were hopes and promises of prosperity, productivity and fertility are too often met with exploitation.

Exploitation that pools at the bottom, wreaking havoc on unknowable vast webs of living and dying.

AGRIBUSINESS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The soil of Epekwitk is a deep red, high in iron but relatively nutrient-poor. It is light, sandy, and low in clay content, which makes it uniquely prone to soil erosion. When the soils of Epekwitk are not appropriately covered in vegetation, it is easily swept away by rain or blown away by the wind. Soil that is exploited and mined to produce crops like corn or potatoes only exacerbates the erosion, and when these two crops (grown in this way) comprise the majority of agriculture on the island, it constitutes a crisis. People have been sounding the alarm about soil erosion since the 1970s, but little has been done to address the issue (MacDonald et al., 2016). On rainy days, the rivers run red with the dead topsoil, once teeming with life and capable of raising strong and healthy crops. The soil that does remain is struggling to maintain the production capacities demanded of it, and the weakened crops it grows end up susceptible to disease (MacDonald et al., 2016).

The transition to large specialised farms brought with it not only the depletion of soils but crop plagues the likes of which had never before been seen. Perhaps the most dramatic example of this occurred in 2021 when potato wart (an easily spreadable fungus that disfigures the potato but poses no health risks) was found in Island fields. Export to the United States and Puerto Rico was banned, and farmers were forced to destroy 115 million kilograms of perfectly edible potatoes (Armstrong, 2023). Along with the destruction of an unimaginable amount of food, what was left of the once-flourishing seed potato industry was wiped out overnight. Even so, agribusiness remains a base assumption and proposed solutions by the powers that be come only in the form of scientific and technological fixes (Armstrong, 2023).

Disease and hardship persist, and the rivers continue to run red with not only the soil but the fertilisers and chemicals they were overdosed with. To meet industry productivity demands and extract every last bit of fertility from their fields, farmers often overuse fertilisers–mostly nitrates and phosphates– and overapply pesticides. What does not get absorbed by the crops will run off into the ground and surface water. This poisons wells and decimates ponds and streams, filling them with silt and sedimentation and making them uninhabitable (MacDonald et al., 2016). Each year, there are more and more households with unsafe drinking water (those most affected are farmers who poison their own wells), and since 1962, there have been at least 51 fish kills directly caused by pesticide runoff (Government of Prince Edward Island, 2020).

Therefore, the control of the island's agriculture system by corporations threatens the the prospect for a livable future on Epekwitk. Each year, more and more agricultural land on Epekwitk is taken over by corporations and with it comes cascading cascading consequences that are unpredictable and often destructive.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have traced the developments in agriculture and land tenure on Epekwitk and highlighted two major events that reshaped both. First, the lot system implemented by the British in 1767 that saw the entire island divided up and given to British aristocrats. Under this system, the Mi'kmaq were cast off their land with no legal recourse as it began to fill with settlers in pursuit of colonial promises of prosperity and independence. However, the settler colonial dream on PEI was not what these settlers thought it would be, and for over 100 years, they worked and paid rent to absentee landlords with almost no avenues for owning the land they lived on and cultivated. This clashed with the very idea of what it means to be a settler, and the tenantry would not accept it. They fought tooth and nail, exercising their collective power, and finally winning freehold tenure. After their win,

conditions remained consistent for the settler farming population for quite some time. They tightly grasped the familiar rhythms of farming and living, organising to defend it with fervour fueled by their struggles.

Nevertheless, the tides of state and corporate-backed agriculture were too strong. They swept away the small-scale mixed farms of the post-land struggle era and brought in agribusiness, the second major element that would change land tenure and agriculture forever.

Agribusiness came to Epekwitk, and with it came austerity, mechanisation, and specialisation. It uprooted the established way of life and forced many farmers into a difficult choice. Relinquish control to corporations and maintain some semblance of your old life as a farmer, or walk away. Many were entice by the prospect of growth and for a lucky few, the choice greatly expanded their land holdings and their bank account. For other, new corporate control has felt like nothing but exploitation. Lucky or not, the process put into motion a system whose success is dependent on the exploitation of everything in its path and its impacts can be seen in every corner of the island.

Returning to my anecdote from the start of the chapter, the histories of agriculture and land tenure on Epekwitk are what led to my upsetting experience. For my entire existence on this earth, corporations have controlled agriculture on the island to the point that they have become an ambient presence whose violence becomes unremarkable, unnoticeable and called conventional. Though I have painted a bleak picture, at the end of the day, my thesis and my research are not about agribusiness. As all-encompassing as agribusiness might seem, no system is whole. There are always cracks, avenues of evasion, and assemblages of alternativity. These are the spaces I am interested in, and they are where many of my participants operate. At the same time, they can be volatile, ambiguous and in need of constant scrutiny.

Chapter 2

# Contesting Subjectivities: Capitalist Innovation and Organic Farming

In 2023, I spent the summer working on a small organic farm growing vegetables and flowers. During this time, I came face-to-face with the rhythms of organic farming and the moral, political, and ethical happenings they facilitate. On a farm, no two days are the same. The weather, the bugs, the birds, and the plants are all ever-changing.

When I first began at the farm, it was still peak mosquito and blackfly season, and I was struggling. I learned that I react so poorly to blackfly bites that if I get bitten enough, my eyes will swell up and close over. For weeks, I was covered head to toe in welts and little cuts, but then one day the bugs seemed to magically disappear. That morning, I noticed a flock of small birds sitting on the power line leading to the barn, and I asked Sarah what they were. She looked, let out a big sigh, and said: “Finally, the barn swallows are here”. Small birds with beaks that take up most of their faces, barn swallows nest in the rafters of barns and have an insatiable hunger for bugs. I remember the first time I entered a barn with swallows, they swooped and soared at dizzying speeds, zooming past me, millimetres away but never touching. A godsend for any farmer dealing with a mosquito or blackfly problem, barn swallows are also quite fickle and getting them to set up permanent homes in your barn is difficult. Much to our lamentation, the barn swallows moved on as abruptly as they came, and we were left yearning for our bug-free paradise.

I missed the swallows, and it got me thinking about what makes them decide to stay or leave. It is a question that can only be answered through cultivated attentiveness, paying attention to other beings and learning how to respond. On the farm, the barn had been designed in every way to accommodate swallows. The rafters were the right height with enough room, and the birds had constant access via back doors, cracks in the walls, etc. Yet they did not stay. Unperturbed, the farmers continued to make time for the swallows, even building a pond, which, among other reasons, encouraged the birds to stick around. Eventually, the swallows came back, and we were once again privileged to not be ravaged by bugs while working.

## INTRODUCTION

On Epekwetk, when organic farmers come up against the challenges and inconveniences of farming, they turn to their multispecies relationships. Faced with something like a bug problem, it is dealt with in ways that fix the problem but also foster mutually beneficial multispecies relationships. Through my work on organic farms and interviews with farmers, I came to understand that these practices and their significance to farmers speak not just to the sensibilities of individual organic farmers but to the subjectivities that form when farmers prioritise multispecies relationships and ecological sustainability. On organic farms, there is an emphasis on working with and prioritising the health of the environment, creating the conditions under which going through the trouble to attract barn swallows to your farm is encouraged. This emphasis brings with it specific subjectivities as the discourses and practices of organic farming shape farmers' modes of perception (Ortner, 2005).

At the same time, organic subjectivities are increasingly shaped by the mounting economic, social and political pressures from the corporate takeover of agriculture on the island. In order to survive in today's agricultural climate, organic farmers have had to become more business savvy, seeking profit wherever it may be found. In the process, the

subjectivities of organic farmers are altered as they align themselves with the logics and structures of agribusiness. Subjectivity is not static, its composition is mutable and under constant construction, and while farmers' subjectivities continue to be created through organic farming practices that emphasise ecological sustainability and human-environment relationships, having to operate under the logic of an aggressively capitalistic agriculture industry is reconstituting farmers' subjectivities in significant ways.

In this chapter, I discuss the tensions and contradictions of organic farming subjectivities along with the estuary where those of organic and agribusiness intertwine. In the last chapter, I detailed the histories of land tenure, agriculture, and the various parties in conflict over the control of land. In this chapter, I discuss how this conflict persists in the fight between the two different spheres of influence over the subjectivities of organic farmers.

In my use of the subject and subjectivity, my definition comes from Sherry B. Ortner in her book *Anthropology and Social Theory* (2006). In the book, she defines subjectivity as "the ensemble of modes of perception, affect, thought, desire, and fear that animate acting subjects… as well the cultural and social formations that shape, organize, and provoke those modes of affect, thought, and so on"(p.108). Specifically, she is interested in the relationship between subjectivity, power and how subjectivities are shaped in a world of unequal power relations. In this chapter, I use Ortner's conceptualisation of subjectivity to examine how the pressures of corporate power have caused a rift in the subjectivities of organic farmers.

Along with Ortner's work, my understanding of subjectivity and power is also informed by Langley's (2007) article about the financialisation of Anglo-American subjects. Approaching neoliberalism from a Foucauldian perspective, he describes how under neoliberal governmentality, financialisation is internalised, and financial markets become technologies of the self, a means through which individuals pursue self-improvement and become successful subjects. Using this to examine the relationship between organic farmers

and the pressures from corporate agriculture, I observed how agribusiness is becoming a technology of the self as it reconstitutes organic farmers' subjectivities, placing the logics and ends of agribusiness in positions where they signal success and independence.

Further saturating my understanding of subjectivity, I use Stuart Hall's (1988) article, The toad in the garden, in which he shows how subjectivities can be made and remade through harnessing pervasive public sentiments and directing them towards new subjectivity formations. The example of this that Hall focuses on is Thatcherism and how it worked to "sever people's connections with existing discourses and points of identification and re-articulate them to new subject positions…" (Hall, 1988, as cited in Gill, 2008, p. 439). As he discusses, Thatcherism made itself a part of Britain not just through top-down enforcement but through processes of negotiation, mediation, and resistance. In this same sense, I observed how the logics of agribusiness are becoming a part of organic farming, not just as an oppressive force thrust upon farmers but as a messy and dialectic process of subjectivity rearticulation as farmers navigate the nuances of farming under the hegemonic corporate control of agriculture on Epekwitk.

## CHAPTER ORGANISATION

Organic farming on the island emerged in the wake of the destruction caused by intensive, industrialised corporate farming and now farmers are finding themselves having to make concessions to this model in order to stay viable. Therefore, in this chapter, I ask, how is agribusiness transforming organic farming on Epekwitk? And what does this mean for organic farming subjectivities? In the first section, I outline the kinds of agricultural futures organic farmers are working to achieve and the kinds of subjectivities cultivated in the process. Next, I discuss the webs of relationships between farmers, organic farming as a movement, and agribusiness. Then, I discuss how certain vulnerabilities have exposed farmers to the forces of corporate agriculture and its power to shape subjectivities. After, I

examine the primary sites through which agribusiness has infiltrated organic farming on Epekwitk and how this is influencing organic farming subjectivities. These sites are the 3 forms of capitalist innovation in agriculture as discussed by Julie Guthman (2004): intensification, appropriation, and valorisation. Finally, I discuss the consequences of this transformation and what it may mean for the future of organic farming on the island.

## THE ORGANIC FARMING VISION

In my research, it became clear that organic farming, as it is practised by the farmers I worked with, fosters a specific kind of subjectivity. Centred on the production of ecologically sustainable food, as farmers work in accordance with the principles of organic farming, it shapes their subjectivities–organising the everyday rhythms of farming as well as farmers' pathways of affect and desire. Delving deeper into the opening vignette of this chapter, I illustrate how this process unfolds.

The farm where the swallow story takes place is small, only 10 acres. Even though it is small, it is teeming with diversity. Unfortunately for me, this did not exclude mosquitoes and blackflies, and as I described, they were unrelenting. Examining how the farmers chose to address this problem is where their organic subjectivities truly shine. When looking to reduce the mosquito and blackfly population, their solutions came through mutually beneficial multispecies cooperation. Instead of going to battle with the bugs and spraying pesticides with knock-on effects of destruction, these farmers built a barn providing safe and dependable housing for swallows who are capable of eating up to 850 bugs per day each (Audubon, 2025). On top of building a barn that houses swallows, they dug a pond, providing a water source for the birds while also attracting other bug-eating animals like dragonflies, frogs, and even bats. All of this work, time and care required in the process of establishing these relationships is where subjectivities are formed. Farmers find sustainable and reciprocal solutions for problems through co-conspiratorial relationships wherein they commune with

the multispecies worlds around them. As organic farmers problem-solve within these mutually beneficial multispecies relationships, it colours their modes of perception. Embracing and uplifting their multispecies codependencies through practices like barn swallow pest control grants farmers access to specific connections, feelings, and relationships with the environment, not possible through the methods of agribusiness. In the process, organic subjectivities are created.

## SUBJECTS OF AGRIBUSINESS AND AGRIBUSINESS SUBJECTIVITIES

During the interviews I conducted, stories of multispecies cooperation were plentiful. Running alongside, however, was the reality of how difficult it is to make a living from organic farming on Epekwitk. As one farmer named Albert told me, “It's a struggle. God bless younger people if they want to choose organic farming because nothing is going to change until there's a drastic shift in thinking and economics.” Another farmer named James spoke to me about his efforts to resist folding to pressures from the corporate-dominated agriculture industry, saying,

> You put up with the tractors that break, and you don't worry that you don't have the fanciest stuff, and you try and do things on the cheap and make as much money on the other end as you can and hope that it'll all work out. It's just a different game, I guess.

Again, for decades now, agricultural corporations have been systematically overtaking the production, distribution and consumption of food, cutting costs and increasing profitability wherever it is possible. Adapting to this hyper-efficient and aggressively capitalistic industry, organic farmers have had to become more profit-oriented, aligning their practices with agribusiness in order to stay in business. In the process, organic farming subjectivities are altered. As the discourses and practices of farmers become more profit-oriented, it changes their modes of perception, reorienting the thoughts, fears and desires that animate their agricultural lives.

Prioritising the health of human and more-than-human communities on an island of agribusiness is no easy task, and agricultural futures that build livable worlds, decentre the human, and disrupt the agro-industrialist complex are increasingly polluted. Stymied by the encroachment of agribusiness, organic farmers are squeezed into adopting the ways of hypercapitalist agriculture in order to keep their farms in operation.

In Chapter 1, I detailed the history of land tenure on Epekwitk and the various camps all vying for control over who owns the land and what takes place upon it. In the remainder of this chapter, I outline another form of conflict over land, the struggle between organic and agribusiness agricultural subjectivities. As organic farmers hold on to a vision of agricultural land use that places communal health over profit, corporations see a new frontier for the expansion of their operations. This conflict continues to emerge, and organic farmers find themselves in a strange position where their farms are sites for both beautiful and profound experiences of multispecies cooperation as well as a new market for agribusiness profit-seeking.

## THE BIND BETWEEN ORGANIC AND AGRIBUSINESS

In order to understand how organic farmers on Epekwitk ended up with such conflicting subjectivities, we must first examine the messy relationship between organic farming and agribusiness.

Organic farming on Epekwitk began the same way it did in any other place–as a reaction to industrialised agribusiness. Once The Plan was thrust onto farmers in the early 70s, a handful of people searched for alternatives. They foresaw the exploitation of the soils, the animals, and humans that The Plan would bring, and they turned to organic farming as a solution. On Epekwitk, the early adopters of organics were a rag-tag group of self-identified hippies and anarchists, and when they began their work in the early ‘70s, organic farming was still an exotic and foreign concept. For quite some time, farmers struggled to find a

market, but once the late 1980s and early 90s rolled around, they began carving out a significant and lucrative niche, appealing to the urban upper-middle class and rich. Farmers' markets and "health food" stores were popping up all over the island and in the rest of the Maritimes, and it solidified organic's spot in the industry.

Still, organic farming as a movement came to life in reaction to agribusiness, and it will always be beholden to this consanguineous bond. The newfound success of organics was inversely related to the destruction of intensive chemical farming, and as the corporate monopoly became more visible and the effects of its practices impacted more and more people, they migrated towards organic products. It was the practices of agribusiness that created the market for organic farming, but the same reckless doctrine of growth that caused an uptick in the success of organic farming would eventually come knocking at its door.

On Epekwitk, by the late 1990s and early 2000s, the aggressive purchasing of land and vertical integration of agricultural production had created an environment increasingly hostile towards farmers attempting to produce food outside of the large-scale, monocultural industrial ideal (Beingessner, 2020). Today, agribusiness has an all but total monopoly over agriculture on the island, and the industry is tailored to accommodate its every whim. As such, even those trying to operate outside its purview are beholden to its constraints. According to the 2016 census of agriculture, only 47 of the 1,353 farms on Epekwitk are organic, and they constitute only 12,000 of the approximately 600,000 acres of land in agricultural production (Statistics Canada, 2017). With such a minuscule share of agriculture, it is not surprising that to survive in the industry, organic farmers are forced to compete as "nominally capitalist enterprises, at the very least making payments to land, labour, and inputs and earning returns that ensure their own reproduction…" (Guthman, 2004:87). When conventional corporate controlled farms compete against each other, they lower the cost of

production, increase yields as well as land prices and many organic farmers are left trying to figure out how to survive in this climate, let alone keep up without fully acquiescing.

As corporate farming gains more and more control over the agriculture industry on Epekwitk, it gains more and more control over the ways in which organic farming is practised and who is able to make a living from it. Under these conditions, organic farmers have to operate in the middle of two forms of agriculture with distinct economic, cultural, and social structures. In my work, I have observed how the preeminence of agribusiness and the ways that it structures farm viability make it difficult for organic farmers to remain in operation without becoming more profit-oriented. This pressure from agribusiness alters the everyday discourses and practices on organic farms. In the process, agribusiness slowly becomes a part of organic farming and a part of organic farmers as it transforms into a technology of the self, a means/end avenue of living and farming that in turn constructs divergent subjectivities.

In my research, I observed how the primary sites of change within the subjectivities of organic farmers are the areas where capitalist agriculture has managed to penetrate the furthest. These sites coincide with the three components of capitalist innovation in agriculture outlined by Julie Guthman (2004) in *Agrarian Dreams*. Firstly, to stay in business, organic farmers have had to *intensify*. The farmers I worked with did so through soil science, crop experimentation, and the use of efficiency-focused concepts from the organic movement literature. Second, organic farmers have been subjected to rounds of *appropriation* by the Canadian state and the business interests of the organic industry. The most pressing form of appropriation is organic regulations and the array of bureaucracies that accompany it. Finally, organic farmers on Epekwitk have had to *valorise* their products by seeking profit through alternative avenues of consumption instead of production. In my work, farmers valorised their operations by perpetuating cultural imaginaries of organic produce and by seeking out scarce or obscure crops that enable them to secure niches in the market. Through the

processes of intensification, appropriation, and valorisation, agribusiness is changing the discourses and practices of organic farming and with it, the subjectivities of farmers. As these three components gain traction, organic farms begin to look and run like those of agribusiness, changing farmers' pathways of thought, desire and affect.

INTENSIFICATION

Intensification is the effort to increase production through controlling and reducing the risks of biological processes. According to Guthman, it makes agriculture "more like industry: more predictable, continuous, and flexible, and less risky" (Guthman, 2004:63). On non-organic agricultural operations, this is done through a litany of practices from monocropping to spraying pesticides to purchasing bigger and more efficient tractors. Guthman even includes vulnerability as a technology of intensification that ensures a controllable workforce (Guthman, 2004). On organic farms, intensification is guided by the same principles, but the stringent rules of organic production restrict the implementation of conventional agricultural intensification methods. Instead of intensification through chemical fertilisers and pesticides, organic farmers on Epekwitk are intensifying their farms through crop experimentation, close monitoring of the soil, or through forms of selfie sufficiency like closed-loop systems that help farmers save costs on inputs.

Importantly, intensification is also about labour. Equipment, pesticides, fertilisers, and monocrops all curb labour demands, reducing costs by replacing the work that used to be done by hand. Although small organic farms are not associated with the same labour requirements and fraught labour conditions of large insustrialised farms, issues around labour are still very present and intensification is still used to reduce the need for labour. For instance, since organic farmers implement labour intensive farming practices, like multicropping or intercropping, that require sustained, consistent labour demands, intensification reduces the need to hire outside labour (often considered a failure on the part

of organic farmers), and reduces the amount of self exploitation needed to keep up in the market (Guthman, 2004; Galt, 2013).

During my fieldwork, soil research shone through as the favoured form of intensification. With a focus on nutrients and vitamins, farmers use scientific methods to determine their desired soil composition. Through controlling the composition of their soil, farmers gain more control over how well plants grow, how much they produce, and how capable they are of fending off pests, disease, and so on. As such, it has become an indispensable tool for organic farmers trying to stretch the profits of their farms. For example, Michelle, the farmer with a mixed livestock and grain farm, became so obsessed with soil health to the point that she sought out obscure minerals to add to her cattle feed so they could be deposited into the soil through manure. Commenting on soil research, she said to me,

> I think we're only beginning to understand all that soil life stuff. We're on the precipice of figuring out the gut biome in people and how important that is, and it is the same for soil. It has all of the same bacteria in it, and we're just starting to figure out what role that plays. So I hope organic agriculture continues to really dig into that side of things…

Michelle believes that the future of organic farming lies with soil research and the push to intensify by creating healthier soil. Another farmer, Geoff, explained to me how critical soil research is to his organic greenhouse operation:

> Soil research is useful in a lot of different ways to us. It is a lot of science, but it helps me keep things as healthy as possible. I take an analysis of my soil every two weeks to try to keep tabs on where the balance of everything is.

Soil research makes previously opaque processes appear understandable and predictable, giving farmers a sense of assurance and control over their farms. As the margins of profit become thinner, so too do the margins of error, and managing variables and outcomes

through scientific research has become an indispensable tool for organic farmers trying to stay profitable.

Another form of intensification I observed on organic farms was the pursuit of a "closed loop" system. An idea often referenced during interviews, it is something that most organic farmers on the island seem to be striving towards. Simply put, a closed-loop system is the idea that a farm can be entirely self-sufficient, requiring zero off-farm inputs. It is a term coined by practitioners of permaculture, a form of holistic sustainable agriculture popularised by Bill Mollison in his 1988 book *Permaculture: A Designer's Manual* and his later collection *An Introduction to Permaculture* (1997). The goal of intensification is efficiency through control, and a closed-loop system is the pinnacle of control on organic farms. If farmers do manage to achieve a closed-loop system, their farms are able to reach levels of efficiency and productivity that rival or even surpass those of conventional agribusiness.

Beyond scientific research and closed-loop systems, organic farmers on Epekwitk are intensifying their farms through methods like intercropping, multi-cropping, and experimentation with varieties. For example, the farm where I conducted most of my participant observation both multi-crops and experiments with crop varieties. By multi-cropping the land several times per season, they were able to drastically increase the output per acre and subsequently the revenue per acre.

Through crop experimentation, the farmers I worked with were able to determine which varieties of which crops produce the highest yields under organic growing conditions. During the summer I worked on the farm, we planted at least 6 different varieties of fingerling potatoes. Some were bright purple, others red and white like a radish, and one was even a pinkish colour that quite literally looked like human fingers when I dug them up from

the soil. A couple of the varieties almost completely failed to produce, while others were shockingly plentiful.

Intensification, like the kinds I observed on organic farms, is multifaceted. Intensification itself can be used for various ends–involved processes like crop experimentation, closed loop systems, multi-cropping, and soil science require profound mobilisations of care and a great deal of attention to the needs of the multispecies communities in the environment. Learning about every living thing in your soil, and making sure your cows are pooping the perfect cocktail of vitamins and minerals, has radical potential to intensify diversity, codependence, and multispecies flourishing. However, when a farmer must intensify to stay in business, the economic and structural pressures of capital co-opt the reasons for doing things like soil science, closed loop systems or crop experimentation—transforming the ethics, practices, as well as the ends of farming organically. As the economic squeeze tightens, practices of intensification contributing to a vision of organic farming that prioritises sustainable and reciprocal human-environment relationships are transforming into ad-hoc solutions for increasing profit. Unfortunately, intensification as capitalist innovation in organic farming is just that. It is never static, obligating constant growth in the direction that makes farming more uniform, predictable, and concentrated. For organic farmers on Epekwitk, even though their current methods of intensification contain glimmers of potential to deepen multispecies relationships of care, as long as the pressure from agribusiness maintain the necessity for unabated intensification as capitalist innovation, it ultimately means one thing—a slow creep towards farming and farms that have more in common with the 1000 acre industrialised potato farms of Epekwitk than what organic farmers are currently living with. Under continued pressures to intensify, what were once practices that foster flourishing and codependence can blend into profit-seeking coercion, and when this becomes the case, the relationships between farmers and their

environment are reorganised, and it changes their subjectivities. Under the pressure of agribusiness, intensification on organic farms has become the stage upon which two forms of subjectivities battle it out. As agribusiness penetrates further into organic farming through intensification as a method of capitalist innovation, it creates new subject positions, reorganising farmers' connection to the discourses and points of identification behind their practices. In the process, subjectivities fracture as intensification on organic farms inches closer to the edge of becoming purely for the sake of capitalist innovation and maintaining farms as viable businesses.

APPROPRIATION

Appropriation is the efforts by the agriculture industry to expand wherever there is value to be extracted. It is the search for more dependable streams of profit away from the crops and fields (Guthman, 2004). Within agribusiness, examples of appropriation include food processing plants or the production of inputs like chemical fertilisers and pesticides. In the case of organic farming, the example of appropriation I encountered the most was certification. It is a massive revenue stream for the industry and a telling example of how agricultural corporations are staking their vision for land through their increased control over organic farming.

In the early days of organic farming on Epekwitk, there were no certification bodies, so farmers devised impromptu solutions. For instance, Reg, one of the early adopters of organic farming, decided to guarantee wholesale buyers that his produce was organic by writing up contracts detailing how exactly he would grow the crops, what he would use on them, and what he would not. His method worked for some time, but in the late 80s and early 90s, more and more farmers on the Island started growing organically, the market continued to expand, and the need for a standardised structure for certification became apparent. The solution that organic growers decided upon was a body for collective certification wherein

farmers collaborated and outlined the procedures and practices for becoming certified organic. The group would go around to each other's farms, observe, and then decide whether or not to certify the farm. If a farm were to fail and the farmer still wished to be certified, the community would help them change their practices to meet the proper criteria and then grant them the certification.

Farmers I spoke with who were around during this time felt that, generally, collective certification was democratic, accommodating, and fair. As one described it to me,

> In the old days, we would all get together and share. It was like 'here's what I'm doing, here's a struggle I have, and here's how I'm looking to address it', and everyone would give you help and feedback. Or when an inspector would come, they would give feedback. And sometimes they would say, 'oh you use that product? Well you're not going to be able to be certified if you keep using it.' Back then, it just felt like more of a community–more of a learning environment, an encouraging environment.

In 1999, the government of Canada released the first Canadian Organic Standard, and it completely changed the certification process (Library of Parliament, 2020). Homogenising the practices and procedures that must be followed to receive organic certification, the new Organic Standard turned certification into a baroque bureaucratic nightmare. When creating the standard, the government "consulted" organic farmers, and some of my participants even took part in their surveys and interviews. Reg was one of the farmers who participated in the consultation for the Organic Standard, and he told me that the process was just the government listening to what farmers had to say, telling them they were crazy, and doing something completely different.

Once the Organic Standard was implemented, collective certification groups like the one on Epekwitk were no longer considered legitimate. Under the new regime, organic farms had to be certified by a body accredited by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA).

From this arose the industry of certifying bodies, a major feature in the appropriation of organic farming and a leech on the back of small organic farms. Certifying bodies are private businesses focused on generating money, and unfortunately for farmers, the best way for them to do this is by making the certification processes as expensive and as complicated as possible. Expressing her exasperation about this, Michelle said to me that “it's been several years of folks feeling frustrated and demoralized ever since the standards went national and it became a business.” another told me, “These days, certification just feels like ‘okay here comes the bad guy to find something wrong.’ and I know a lot of farmers who also feel this way.” Through the organic certification appropriation complex, an entire ecosystem of appropriation is created, and farmers are left having to front the bill. They start to feel like every little decision they make on their farm involves more paperwork and fees. As Geoff put it,

> Between organic certification, food safety certification, Safe Food for Canadians Act, et cetera–all those different things– it's just so much and it feels like such a paperwork bureaucracy. I'm a medium-sized operation and it's hard enough for me to get it all figured out, get it done, and be able to pay for it. For a smaller operation than me, it would feel impossible.

In this quote, Geoff is getting at an interesting mechanism in the appropriation of organic farming, which is that appropriation favours farms that are able to further appropriate, and it strangles those that are not. On a small organic farm, opportunities for appropriation are sparse. There is no off-farm labour, few if any off-farm inputs and no middlemen between growing and selling. On larger farms, appropriation is plentiful. Fields require machinery and off-farm labour, crops are less diverse, needing more inputs to keep them healthy, and harvests are big, requiring brokers and sellers to get them into the market.

Since large farms are more conducive to appropriation, the mechanisms of appropriation, like certification, are tailored to them, and small farms are being forced out of organic farming because of this. To small organic farmers like those I interviewed, certification feels like

> Somebody is coming onto the farm to just be like, ‘Oh, you're not doing this right. And this isn't right. And you should be doing this differently.’ And I know that we're losing a lot of small-scale farmers for that reason, because once you have your customer base established and they trust you, paying that extra fee and going through all that extra hassle is not worth it anymore.

As a machine for appropriation, The Organic Standard is built from the blueprints of agribusiness, favouring appropriable large scale farming. This fact becomes glaringly obvious when you delve into the specifics of how the certification process is structured. Bill, one of the owners of the small organic farm I did my fieldwork on, would often remark upon this. He told me:

> I remember one certifying body made us use acreage. With vegetables, we grow in square feet. I had to report like .0075 acres of tomatoes; it was just stupid. It was really stupid. Like you could tell they're geared more towards bigger farms than smaller farms.

Since their farm is only 10 acres, one of their methods of production is multi-cropping, and it is a certification nightmare.

> We might have a 50-foot bed of vegetables, but we'll flip it three or four times in the season. So it's a lot of work and a lot of paperwork to be like okay, well that bed had lettuce then radish then… and it confuses the inspectors.

On the same topic of crop diversity and certification, Michelle remarked:

> I'm not gonna say it's not as hard when you're a grain farmer compared to a mixed vegetable producer, but the paperwork tends to be a little bit more straightforward when it's 500 acres of one crop rather than 10 acres of 100 crops.

As these quotes illustrate, organic farming regulations favour large and uniform farms that resemble their industrialised counterparts. It is my contention that, as the primary mechanism for appropriation in organic farming, certification is wielded in a way that forces the logic of agribusiness onto organic farmers. Current regulations make it so that multicropping, bed rotation, and other small-scale organic farming practices come with a bureaucratic slurry that takes up precious time and money, forcing farmers to either adapt to the regulations or get out.

If one wishes to see the consequences of this model of certification, they need only go to their local farmers' market. Walking around the Charlottetown Farmer's Market, it is filled with small farmers who have abandoned the certification process, even though their produce is grown organically. As I spoke with farmers, they all made the same remark–why spend all of the time and money to receive certification when everyone who buys their produce knows who they are and how they grow their food. One farmer even told me that they offer tours of their farm to anybody who might be sceptical of their practices.

Regardless, current forms of organic certification are changing the landscape of organic farming, enforcing a vision of agriculture that favours uniform, scalable and profit-oriented farming while eschewing small-scale, diverse and experimental agriculture that prioritises communal and environmental health. Small and diverse farms have been the foundation of organic agriculture since its beginnings. More diversity in the field creates more diversity in the soil, growing healthier and stronger crops that need fewer inputs. The structure of the Canadian Organic Standard is pigeonholing organics away from this model and towards the more appropriable model of industrial agribusiness. The appropriation of

organic regulation has been a major revenue stream for the organic industry, and the structures it imposes are profoundly impacting the ways in which organic farmers are able to care for their farms. Before national standards, regulation on Epekwitk was more local and democratic. Today, organic farmers are surveilled by corporate cronies who ensure that their companies are as profitable as possible and that organic production is scalable, efficient, and its products are able to be stamped organic no matter where in the world they are shipped to.

Organic regulation in its current form is primarily concerned with production and profit, and this is forcing farmers to make concessions to agribusiness at a cost to the core social, political, and environmental beliefs of organic farmers on Epekwitk. The structural constraints enforced by the organic standards create material conditions that open up avenues of change in how farmers know and experience organic farming, and in turn how their subjectivities are formed. As farmers mould their farms to please regulators, they make their farms more amenable to agribusiness, transforming the discourses and practices of farming, along with their modes of perception.

VALORISATION

Lastly, valorisation is the creation of alternative profit avenues within the sphere of consumption. In organic farming, valorisation involves processes like bringing new and niche crops to the market or creating an image around a product that enables it to be sold at a premium. (Guthman, 2004). In an agricultural landscape dominated by large corporations, organic farmers have had to valorise, embracing their position on the periphery, exploiting niches and other areas where agribusiness does not operate. Discussing this, Geoff said to me,

> I don't kid myself, I'm in a niche business. That's how the small survive and thrive while the large make their money off of getting bigger. To survive in agriculture, you need to either be a big operation expanding constantly, which takes a couple of lifetimes to get to, or you have to have a niche. And you know we're aiming for the niche.

As he is suggesting, small organic farmers have no hope of being financially successful trying to directly compete with large industrialised corporate farms, so they turn to the niche. While agribusiness continues to dominate the industry and propagate its vision for land, valorisation has enabled organic farmers to carve out a slice of the market.

In my research, there were three examples of valorisation that farmers were employing in order to generate profit in a market dominated by large corporations. First, organic farmers must play into specific ideas and meanings placed on organic produce within the public consciousness. Organic food has "symbolic attributes of class, place, healthy living, and sensual experience constructed into the commodity" (Guthman, 2004:33) and these symbolic attributes add symbolic use value, allowing farmers to sell their produce at higher prices to customers who are buying into the symbolic attributes. Speaking on this, Michelle explained to me,

> I think if broader society knew why our food is so cheap–how conventional livestock suffers for it, how our soil suffers for it, or how our waterways suffer because of runoff. Those costs aren't felt in the pricing that we see in the grocery stores… We don't see the cost of a fish kill in french fries. The price of organic food is more expensive because it actually reflects the cost of producing it. Take a loaf of bread, our prices reflect the fact that there wasn't glyphosate used on it and there was a cover crop the year before, etc.

She goes on to say that before becoming a farmer, she was a mother, "choosing between two products, and that's what would get me to buy organic. Even though the price of this item is higher, it actually reflects the cost of producing it." Whether true or not, it is a compelling idea. You pay more for organic because it takes into consideration the actual cost of producing the food. The implication is that if conventionally grown food reflected these costs, it would be astronomically more expensive than organic. Therefore as a consumer,

conscious of food safety and the environmental impact of farming, you pay the extra cost for organic produce.

Without the ability or desire to artificially deflate production costs, the prices of organic products are always going to be higher in comparison to non-organic products. As a result, organic farmers have become dependent on the valorisation of organic produce through the creation of a certain image that justifies the higher price of the product. However, this form of valorisation comes with a bind. Maintaining the price premium of organic comes at the cost of pricing out large chunks of the population. Price premium valorisation allows farmers to stay in business, but in the process, further binds them to a small area of the industry where their practices pose no real threat to the domination of agribusiness.

Another prevalent form of valorisation within organic farming on Epekwitk comes through certification. Valorising organic agriculture through narratives of health, safety, and sustainability would mean nothing if it were not for institutional and regulatory backing. The discursive legwork done by regulatory and institutional bodies creates consumer trust and maintains a specific image of organic produce. As Bill said to me when talking about certification, “It's a prestige thing. It means that if it does say certified organic, you bet your ass that whoever has grown the food has done their due diligence.” Perhaps most importantly, certification creates scarcity. In the last section, I discussed how convoluted and serpentine organic regulation can be, and whether purposefully or not, the difficulty of receiving certification ensures stability in the rate of new organic growers entering the sector. Certification acts as a control valve, maintaining an artificial scarcity of growers and keeping prices high. However, it is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, certification enables organic growers to receive a good price for their products so they can maintain a share in the market dominated by conventional agribusiness. On the other hand, it places vested interest in keeping the organic sector small since an influx of certified organic producers would

naturally cause prices to drop. Therefore, valorisation through certification has placed organic farmers in a difficult position. Certification allows them to have a semblance of control over earning a living and staying viable as a business, yet it prohibits the kind of growth in the industry that would allow organic farmers to escape the squeeze from agribusiness and freely pursue a vision for farming that does not place profit above all else.

Finally, organic farming on Epekwitk is valorised through speciality cropping. A successful method of generating economic rent, farms grow crops that are valued for their scarcity and/or exoticness. For example, heirloom tomatoes. They are incredibly tedious to grow, produce low yields, and are highly perishable. For the same reason, they sell for high prices, and if you are a small to mid-size organic farm, you can give them the required time and care. Several of the farmers I worked with have indeed jumped on this opportunity.

Beyond heirloom tomatoes, during my time working on a small mixed vegetable farm, I was constantly encountering plants and crops I had never heard of before. All kinds of strange gourds, varieties of kale, mixed greens, peppers I cannot remember the name of, edible flowers like borage or pansies, and as I already discussed, varieties of potatoes exclusive to one single farm. With small and adaptable operations, organic farmers are able to jump from trend to trend, to whatever is new and exotic, far quicker than large industrialised and monocropped farms. As such, they are able to capitalise on crops that have yet to be monopolised by agribusiness. This strategy of valorisation–reaching for the obscure, exotic, and the difficult to grow–has been a lucrative way for organic farmers to make a living. At the same time, it upholds organic farming as a small and exotic form of agriculture that hops from trend to trend and is unable to advance substantial challenges to the domination of agribusiness. Again, we can see how agribusiness is re-articulating the discourses and practices of organic farming and directing farmers towards different subjectivities. As farmers valorise to increase profit and remain viable businesses, agribusiness seeps in and

becomes ambient in the rhythms and discourses of organic farming. Reaching for capitalist innovation through valorisation, organic farmers change what they choose to grow, how they choose to grow it, and who they try to sell to. In the process, means/end rationales are altered, and with them, the subjectivities of farmers.

Therefore, capitalist innovation in the form of valorisation has allowed farmers to generate more profit in 3 ways: capitalising on the broader cultural imaginary of organic farming, keeping prices high through artificial scarcity, and securing higher prices by growing crops that are exotic and difficult to grow. However, in their reach for profit through valorisation, it has allowed agribusiness to seep into organic farming through the ways in which it influences farmers to change how they talk about organic farming, what kinds of crops they grow, the clientele they target with their produce, as well as the ways they view regulation and the spread of organic farming more broadly. In this process, agribusiness is capturing organic farming, becoming a part of farmers' phenomenological surround and stringing together new configurations of agricultural discourses and practices that in turn fashion new subjectivities, and create splits in old ones.

## WHAT AN AGRIBUSINESS FUTURE MEANS FOR ORGANIC FARMING

On Epekwitk, the pressures of agribusiness are changing the discourses and practices of organic farming. As these processes unfold, they transform the subjectivities of farmers into a brackish mix where two very different ways of envisioning agriculture and agricultural futures come to meet. In one vision of farming, farmers continue to prioritise working with their environment, taking the time to implement practices like pest control through building barns and digging ponds in specific ways to attract birds like barn swallows. In the other vision, attracting barn swallows is inefficient and bad for business.

As it stands, these distinct forms of conceiving agriculture exist alongside each other. However, they are irreconcilable, volatile, and the profit-oriented version is quickly taking

over. This is happening because intensive croporate agriculture requires constant growth, and in order to maintain this growth, companies have perfected the ability to co-opt, assimilate and profiteer from whatever they can get their hands on (Schmelzer, Vetter, & Vansintjan, 2022). As a profit-oriented vision of agriculture continues to gain ground, it places organic farming on a trajectory where profit incentive consumes the possibilities of practising organic farming in ways that centre communal and environmental health. If things continue as they are, it will not only lead to kinds of organic farming devoid of the practices that advance alternative agricultural futures, but also the disappearance of the kinds of organic subjectivities I discussed at the outset of this chapter. Subjectivities created through practices like barn swallow pest control. Again, going through the trouble to attract barn swallows is demonstrative of more than just a single farmer's personal convictions and orientations. It is an example of how organic farming subjectivities, specific pathways of thinking, feeling, and understanding, are created through practices that foster multispecies flourishing and collaboration. If organic farming continues to bend under the pressure of capitalist innovation, it will lead to a place where accommodating barn swallows no longer occurs, and these kinds of organic subjectivities are deposed.

Returning to the barn swallows, within current forms of organic intensification, calling on barn swallows as a form of pest control exists as both a means of multispecies cooperation and an economically viable form of pest control. However, if the wheels of intensification are not stopped, it will unrelentingly reconfigure organic farms to be more like factories, more like science labs where all variables are controllable and predictable. With this, practices like taking extra time and money to accommodate barn swallows, when cheaper and faster pest control options exist, will become unthinkable. Under current forms of appropriation, despite the challenges of certification, organic farmers are still able to operate small and diverse farms that leave room for accommodating swallows. Yet, if organic

farms continue to be appropriated, they will be forced to grow larger and less diverse to the point where barn swallows will be rendered ineffective as cooperators in pest control, unable to cover enough ground or deal with the elevated risk of pests that accompanies monocropping. Not to mention, as guidelines grow stricter and more baroque, the disposable time and income to accommodate swallows will grow more sparse. Finally, as organic farmers continue to valorise their productions, they will remain tied to the whims of the market when deciding upon what crops to grow, how to grow them, and how to sell them. It will also ensure that the conditions of organic farming remain volatile, pliable, and beholden to consumption trends. Like those of intensification and appropriation, these characteristics of valorisation almost invariably lead to organic farming futures without the kinds of farming that make time for barn swallows.

## CONCLUSION

Organic farmers on Epekwitk find themselves in a watershed moment, when their ways of farming are slipping away. Pressures from agribusiness continue to mount, and farmers are having to make pragmatic moves and concessions in order to keep their lights on and their doors open. As farmers make these concessions, altering the discourses and practices of organic farming, agribusiness and its logics are slowly seeping in and metastasising. New and competing subjectivities are formed, and courses are plotted towards an organic farming future wherein care for growing livable worlds, for nurturing environmental, social, and political communities, is forced to take a backseat to making money.

This pressure from agribusiness, as I have demonstrated, has manifested in a split in the subjectivities of farmers. In this chapter, I discuss how the primary site where this change can be observed is in the practices of capitalist innovation on organic farms. As processes of intensification, appropriation, and valorisation continue to gain momentum, they assert a capitalist vision of organic farming that, unchecked, is liable to overtake forms of organic

farming whose primary focus is anything other than profit. It might seem hyperbolic, but small changes and trends in farming, like fixations on efficiency, changing farms to make certification easier, or focusing on niche and hard-to-grow crops, create small changes that compound into larger shifts. As Haraway (2016) explains in *Staying With The Trouble*, small changes in practices, discourses, and even how we think about practices and discourses have world-altering effects: “It matters what thoughts think thoughts. It matters what knowledges know knowledges. It matters what relations relate relations. It matters what worlds world worlds. It matters what stories tell stories” (35). It matters why and how farmers conduct soil research, organise their farms for certification, and select which crops to grow. And it matters who is farming organically, why they are farming organically, and how they are farming organically. In this chapter, I have detailed how agribusiness is changing the who, what, why, and how of organic farming on Epekwitk and in the next chapter, I detail how organic farmers are pushing back, propagating their own ways of imagining sustainable agriculture unbound by the oppressive forces of industrialised agriculture and large corporations.

# Chapter 3

## Organic Discourses and Practices of Resistance

It is nearing the end of August, and the sunflowers have opened up. They point to the sun and tell me to enjoy it while I still can. The grass is tattered, the leaves are starting to tire, and crickets are chirping all day, alerting to the season's end. The roses have turned to hips in anticipation of the coming cool nights, the winds have changed, and the salty air wafting in from the ocean bites my nose. The blueberry harvest has arrived.

The soil in the blueberry field is soft and sandy, cushioning our feet as with backs bent over, we rake berries from their bushes. Some berries have been left too long, squishing as we try to pick them, but filling the air with their sweet, fresh scent that reminds me of the pies I help my grandmother make this time of year. Blueberry fields are magnets for fragrance. Surprise guests like baby spruce trees, fern, bay and raspberry bushes all stand alongside their blue companions, combining into a cacophony of smell that makes my heart flutter with joy.

While we harvest, we begin to talk. At first we talk about the difficulties of maintaining an organic farm in today’s agricultural climate. Reg is in his early seventies, and he thinks a lot about what is going to happen to the farm when he can no longer run it:

> You know a lot of us older farmers don't know what to do. The last thing we want is to sell the farm to a corporation but it's hard to find anyone to pass it on to. It's so hard for young people to make a go at it.

He has already sold one of his smaller blueberry fields but everything else he tells me, is going to go to his 16 year old grandson. We go on harvesting and talking and the conversation eventually shifts towards the 19th century tenant struggle, an event he is very passionate about. On the Eastern end of the island where his farm is, was one of the epicentres of the movement and he tells me about the stories his grandfather and great uncles would relay to him about the events of the time. Reg then draws the connection between the tenant struggle and the takeover of agribusiness today and says "I think it's important to look at the whole history of what's happened on the island here. To show that it [the land struggle] has happened and that the people have the potential to change things around." There is historical precedent for farmers organising and defeating oppressive power structures and if they were able to do this in the past, we can do it again today. From what I could gather, this sentiment has informed his entire agricultural life. From his decision in the 70s to transition his family farm to organic, his involvement with the Lands Protection Act, to the other forms of activism he pursues today.

Finally, our attention turns back down to the field, and we talk about blueberries. Wild organic blueberry farming stands out as particularly unique. They call them wild since the land is neither planted nor cultivated. Farms are not "created" or carved out of the land; they must be found and then nurtured into something that can eventually be called a farm (Drummond et al., 2009). To start a wild organic blueberry farm, you must first find a place where blueberries already grow. Once you find a patch, you must learn how to give them the care they require. To do this, you need to start thinking like a blueberry. What kind of life would you want to live? What kind of company would you keep? And how do you plan on

reproducing? To be an organic blueberry farmer, you must sink your senses into the soil. Your mouth waters for wet soil, peaty and somewhat acidic to the tongue. Your best friends are all fungi, without whom you could not eat or drink. Your body aches for the sun as you spend all winter building up resources for when it finally comes, and you can wrap yourself in its warmth. But with your short stature, you are partial to wide open spaces where the sun is abundant, and the views are nice.

Only once you can act like a blueberry will you become a good wild organic blueberry farmer. To be a good blueberry farmer, you have to become-with the blueberries (Haraway, 2008). Farming wild organic blueberries sucks you into relationships of attentiveness where both you and the blueberry teach each other how to care for one another. Blueberries act on the farmers, showing them their needs. Farmers act on the blueberries, helping them grow healthy and plentiful and teaching them where to spread and where not to. Both benefit from this affective togetherness, from directing each other's actions in a game of multispecies flourishing.

## INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, I discussed how the dominance of agribusiness has forced organic farmers to adapt and make certain sacrifices in order to remain in business. The pressures of capitalist innovation have created entry points into organic farming on Epekwitk, wherein processes of intensification, appropriation, and valorisation have altered how organic farming is done and what kinds of organic farming subjectivities are formed. Farmers have been backed into a corner, forced to embrace these changes or risk going out of business. The result has been a slow but persistent erosion of organic farmers' capacity to pursue a vision of organic farming that does not place profit above all else. In this chapter, I discuss how, despite this, organic farmers are not taking the encroachment of agribusiness lying down. They have indeed lost ground over the years, but are constantly pushing back, asserting their

own visions of agricultural futures and leading the charge in the pursuit of sustainable agriculture.

Despite the intrusion of capitalist innovation, there are localised discourses and practices that function to secure a farmer-led future for organic farming on the island. In this chapter, I detail what these primary discourses and practices are and how farmers' unyielding vision of agriculture comes through in their everyday ways of knowing and doing organic farming.

The conversation I had in the blueberry field that day almost perfectly encapsulates the three key discourses and practices that motivate farmers to continue farming organically despite the challenges they face. First, intra-settler oppression within histories of land tenure and agriculture on Epekwitk. More specifically, the through-line between the 19th-century tenant struggle, the Development Plan, and today's corporate control of agriculture has bestowed organic farmers with specific political convictions and understandings. The fight for freehold tenure on the island was a seminal moment of intra-settler conflict, colouring how farmers perceived the Development Plan in the late 70s, and informing how farmers view the relationship between themselves and power in the present. Second, organic farmers are refusing to submit to agribusiness by holding on to the structures and ideas of the agrarian family farm. With a strong aversion to corporate and state intervention and a veneration for the small mixed farms of the past, where agricultural corporations favour large and intensified farms, organic farmers are determined to stay small, with low levels of mechanisation and little off-farm labour. Finally, organic farmers are resisting the takeover of corporate agriculture through their relationships with the environment. They continue to prioritise the health of ecosystems and communities, mobilising the affective bonds created in the process, and using them in their resistance to agribusiness.

In the discussion of resistance, I refer to Scott's (1986) differentiation between public and everyday resistance. Public resistance is publicly declared, pronounced and in search of de jure results. Everyday resistance is everyday resistance, which, to borrow from Vinthagen and Johansson's (2013) revision of the concept, is "(1) an everyday act; and (2) That it is done in an oppositional relation to power, which compels power to respond; i.e. being an everyday interaction."(p.18). I contend that the three distinct themes in the discourses and practices of organic farmers make up both public resistance and everyday resistance.

## THE TENANT STRUGGLE AND AGRIBUSINESS

On Epekwitk, organic farmers are using historical instances of agricultural oppression in their current struggles against agribusiness. The 19th-century tenant struggle was a defining moment in agriculture, and its valuable lessons about power have been passed down through generations. To this day, farmers hold a deep-seated suspicion of top-down control of the means of production as well as a visceral understanding of the strength in grassroots collective action.

As I discussed in Chapter 1, during the late 18th century, the British had cemented their control over the island and divided it into 67 lots, gifting them to aristocrats living in England. Newly named Prince Edward Island and its inhabitants were left beholden to capricious absentee landlords with little to no recourse. Most of the population did not own the land they cleared, lived on, and farmed, and as they dug deeper roots, the land became more valuable, creating more and more profit for landlords who could evict them at any time for any reason (Sharpe, 1976).

The stark material conditions created by this intra-colonial oppression led to a well-organised and island-wide tenant movement. After decades of localised resistance, a tenant league was formed in the mid 19th century and in just a few short months, most of the island's tenants had joined. Collectively, they withheld all rent to landlords and established an

autonomous zone on the Eastern end of the island (Sharpe, 1976). The league was highly organised, and despite efforts to topple the movement (like Britain sending troops to quell protests), the tenants prevailed. The entire episode lasted for 100 years, yet the tenantry never wavered, fighting tooth and nail to gain freehold ownership of the land.

The tenant movement of the 19th century saw profound acts of solidarity amongst the island's population, which, as Reg Phelan (1996) puts it, "were sufficiently mature to sustain rural peasant community values for many years to come"(p.76). A defining moment in agriculture on the island, farmers passed down the lessons and values they acquired during the struggle and worked hard to stabilise their conditions. Though they were successful for quite some time, the tides of the industry eventually began to change, and by 1969, they had swept over Epekwitk in the form of the Comprehensive Development Plan. The Plan opened the doors for corporate takeover of agriculture, unleashing processes of industrialisation, consolidation and rationalisation that would forever change Epekwitk. In time, farmers were all but forced to submit to this new corporate status quo, but they did not do so without a fight. Farmers protested all throughout the island, shutting down highways and forcing meetings with government officials. A few of the farmers I worked with helped organise and took part in these protests, and as they fought against agribusiness, they looked to their ancestors who defeated the landlords in the 1800s. After the implementation of The Plan, farmers believed that they were witnessing the unravelling of post-tenant struggle conditions and the beginning of an agricultural system that would mirror the one their ancestors had worked so hard to fight off. A cogent example illustrating this link between the tenant struggle and the implementation of The Plan is this folk song from the early 70s by Rev. Andrew MacDonald called No! No! Don't Sell P.E.I.

No! No! Don't sell P.E.I.
It's our homeland; it's our heritage
And we want to make it free.

No! No! Don't sell P.E.I.
It's a gift of the Almighty Made for sharing equally.

When the Micmacs walked our Island Back in those days of yore;
they loved and they respected
Every hill and field and shore.

They preserved it for this day of ours for their children and for us.
The land was only to be used
And handed on "in trust".

When Acadians came and lived here They tilled and cropped the soil
It gave food and clothing, shelter
And rewarded all their toil.

But the British came and drove them out. And sent them far away.
Ils sont exiles de l'Ile St. Jean
Bannis de ses foyers.

When the British lotteried P.E.I.
To landlords far from here;
Tenant farmers raged against their plight
For full 100 years.
It was only a determined fight
That got the Island Back.
Shall we return to serfdom now
Or halt the invading pack?

Just think! When the King of Glory comes. On that dire and fateful day.
He'd be told the Island's Irving-owned, And if he wants it, he must pay!
But the earth would be so mined-out.
That it's just a pile of sand.
And the Lord himself couldn't grow a thing If he could buy back the land!

So, let the legislators make the laws
To stop this present threat
Of corporate speculators.
Buying all the land they get.

Let the Premier and his ministers. Not have to take the rap
For allowing themselves to fall into A multinational trap! (Bolger, 1973: 69)

As the song indicates, the fight against absentee landlords provided islanders with a blueprint for understanding the ramifications of corporate-controlled agriculture. They understood the power dynamics at play and could foresee the consequences.

The development plan oficially lasted for almost 15 years, but it put in place political, legal, and economic structures that persist to this day. The Plan handed corporations the keys to island agriculture, and they began grabbing land, industrialising, and consolidating the industry at a dizzying pace. What resulted was a total transformation in agriculture and a drastic shift in farmers' relationships with the means of production.

Farmers began finding themselves in a position bearing a frightening resemblance to that of the 19th-century tenants, and instead of absentee landlords in the form of British aristocrats, it is now absentee landlords in the form of out-of-province corporations like the Irvings. Through the vertical integration of the agriculture industry, corporations have successfully stripped farmers of their power and agency over their farms. Instead of paying rent to landlords, a farmer will become a contracted grower, beholden to the every whim of their corporate lords. For example, say a potato farmer gets a contract to grow for Cavendish Farms (Irvings). They buy their seed potatoes from other contracted farmers and sow them with big expensive tractors (leased from the Irvings ), which guzzle gas (from the Irvings). The seed potatoes grow into crops that then require fertiliser and pesticides (produced by the Irvings), and are eventually harvested by a different specialised tractor and sent to processing plants (owned by the Irvings). It is an extreme example, but one that is becoming more commonplace.

Organic farmers, operating outside of the normative agriculture industry on the island, have managed to avoid this kind of situation better than their non-organic counterparts. However, as I detailed in the last chapter, the shadow of agribusiness looms ever larger, and they have had to make sacrifices. As organic farmers on Epekwitk stare down the barrel of indentured corporate servitude, they continue to use the 19th-century tenant struggle as a tool in their fight against corporate domination.

For some of the organic farmers I spoke with, using the 19th-century land struggle to understand and discuss their resistance to agribusiness came naturally, as they could still remember firsthand accounts of the struggle and still farm the land their family members fought to take from absentee landlords. For them, the tenant struggle has always been front and centre in their agricultural lives, and they would say things to me like "it took our ancestors a long time you know–to get our land back from the landlords. Today we're going back in time and it's the same story, just a different version", and to use Reg's quote from the opening vignette again "I think it's important to look at the whole history of what's happened on the island here. To show that it [the land struggle] has happened and that the people have the potential to change things around." For these older farmers, when they participated in acts of public resistance, taking to the streets in their tractors to protest corporate takeover, or passing the Lands Protection Act, which limits the amount of land able to be held by corporations, it was directly motivated and informed by the 19th-century tenant struggle.

In this older generation who lived through the development plan, their everyday acts of resistance, motivated by the land struggle, take shape in their choice to pursue organic farming. Several of these farmers told me that the struggles of their ancestors are what compelled them to transition their farms to organic as it was a viable means of staving off corporate interest and thus resisting the repetition of the hardships faced by their ancestors. Every day, as they continue to farm organically, they challenge the hegemony of agribusiness, leaning on the tenant struggle for guidance.

For younger and newer organic farmers, as they inherit the agricultural traditions of the island, they inherit the tenant struggle as a tool for understanding how their material interests are placed under threat by agribusiness. When speaking with younger farmers, they would reference the tenant struggle as precedent for the importance of defending farmland from corporations, pointing to the circumstances that could befall them if they do not push

back. In discussion of the future of agriculture on Epekwitk, a livestock and grain farmer named James said to me, “ The last thing we want is to be enslaved to absentee landlords again.” Another Farmer named Sarah pronounced, “You know, we're not gonna have the absentee landlords again, but we're almost back at that point. This time it'll be the absentee landlords in New Brunswick.” In both quotes, the farmers are referring to the Irving family from New Brunswick, whose fervent land grabbing and vertical integration has expanded the limits of corporate subjugation. For these younger organic farmers, they heed the lessons of the tenant struggle, and it shows through the choices they make in their farming practices. Like the older farmers, this manifests in the everyday resistance of their refusal to farm in accordance with the standards and practices laid out by corporations and enforced through market and regulatory control. Every day, as they continue to farm on small, diverse, mixed, and sustainable organic farms, they enact forms of everyday resistance informed by the lessons of the tenant struggle.

Beyond their use of the teant struggle in their everyday resistance to corporate control, the farmers I spoke with also used the tenant struggle in their public resistance. For example, many of the farmers I interviewed were involved with The Cooper Institute, an organisation dedicated to food sovereignty, land and water protection, and improving the conditions of migrant workers on the island (Cooper Institute, 2011). The institute is named after William Cooper, who was a leader in the fight against absentee landlords in the 19th century. On their website, they explain their name, stating “The choice of a name was very deliberate…It was significant the new institute had made the land and primary producers its first and lasting priority and would want someone who had this same passion”(Cooper Institute, 2011). They go on to explain that,

> Little is said about those who challenged power and proposed alternatives from the bottom up. The lack of honour given to William Cooper as an advocate for Islanders and their

> land has meant that very few Islanders know his name. However, most people in PEI would know about the 100 years of absentee landlords. This is a story that runs through our veins.

The Cooper Institute puts it well, the struggle against the absentee landlords runs through the veins of islanders, a constant reminder of both the heights that can be achieved through collective organisation and the potential consequences of unchecked power. As organic farmers, young and old alike, attempt to understand the current agricultural climate on Epekwitk, and navigate the encroachment of corporations, they lean on the 19th-century tenant struggle and people like William Cooper. When farmers pass on the knowledge gained from the tenant struggle, its political consciousness is kept alive, lending farmers a positive precedent and structure for their resistance to agribusiness.

Therefore, the 19th-century tenant struggle is deployed in the discourses and practices used by organic farmers in their resistance to corporate overreach in agriculture, undergirding how they understand their place in an agricultural landscape that is increasingly hostile towards their politics, morals, and ethics. Today, as farmers navigate the challenges of protecting their livelihoods and fighting against outsider invasion, the legacy of the land struggle has been an indispensable tool that they mobilise in their resistance, providing them with a deep-seated defence of the land and a potent understanding of their class interests.

THE AGRARIAN FAMILY FARM

The second major theme within organic farmers' discourses and practices of resistance to agribusiness is the agrarian family farm. Similar to the tenant struggle, the family farm was galvanised as a mainstay in organic farmers' pushback against agribusiness as a result of the Development Plan and its ramifications. For organic farmers on Epekwitk, the concept of the family farm developed through the convergence between the reaction to patrician oppression of the island's tenantry and the inherited protocols of organic farming. Then, the hegemony of

agribusiness and its threat to the family farm intensified its importance within farmers' resistance to the intrusion of corporations.

Defining the family farm can be tricky. Its nebulous nature gives it different meanings in different contexts, and as agriculture continues to evolve, it takes on new meanings. Today, the family farm has grown to encompass any farming operation that is not run by a co-operative, commune, or non-family corporation. As Bronson, Knezevic, and Clement (2019) explain, with such broad parameters, "a wide diversity of farms could fall under this political category: from small plots to thousands of acres, from income under $10,000 to over $200,000, from single-product to mixed operations" (105). Broad as the umbrella of the family farm may be, what organic farmers on Epekwitk refer to when discussing the family farm and thus how I refer to it in this section, is an agrarian model derived from both the post-tennant-struggle small mixed household production farms, along with the histories of agrarianism within organic farming.

Agrarianism has a long and complex history (Thompson, 1990), but at its core is a reverence for small, privately owned and operated farms (Guthman, 2004). Under the agrarian vision, farmers are virtuous stewards of the land and deeply suspicious of state and corporate intervention. Moving forward, I unravel how the farmers I worked with came to an agrarianist conceptualisation of the family farm and how it organises their pushback against agribusiness by informing their understanding of past and present agricultural land use on the island, along with their visions, hopes, and dreams for its future.

Within my fieldwork, there was a generational divide in how farmers came to the agrarian family farm and their use of its structures in their resistance to agribusiness. In the older generation of farmers, the defining moment was when the agricultural conditions they grew up with were shaken up by the Development plan.

In the opening vignette of this chapter, Reg explained how, when he was younger, small family farms were sufficient to maintain relatively stable and comfortable living standards. For him and other farmers I spoke with who lived through this time, they were fortunate enough to experience a stable time in agriculture that would come to inform their vision of what farming could and should be.

This period of relative success for farmers on Epekwitk began once the dust from the tenant movement had settled in the late 19th century. With freehold tenure came a surge in small agrarian farms, and by the turn of the 20th century, things were looking good for family farmers. Household commodity production proved to be a significant leap forward in the evolution of commercial agriculture, and the success of the family farm meant that capital was flooding into the island, bringing with it economic independence and power over emergent international markets. It also brought higher wages for farmers who could use PEI's dependency on the family farm as leverage (Friedmann, 1978; Smitheram et al., 1982)

With their newfound success, agrarianist sentiments dominated, and farmers were determined to protect the agricultural conditions they had built from the ruins of the absentee landlord system (Sharpe, 1976). Within this post-tenant-struggle environment, private property was a bulwark against a return to the feudal past, and farmers worked hard to ward off any state or business interests perceived as a threat to their autonomy. For the better part of the 20th century, farmers successfully safeguarded their way of life and again, it was these agricultural and economic conditions that many of the farmers I spoke with were born into. Growing up, they were accustomed to a comfortable life on small family farms.

The moment when everything was turned on its head came when the Development Plan was implemented, and farmers once again found themselves in an existential battle with the powers that be. The agrarian vision of farming came under direct attack as The Plan made household commodity farming almost immediately unsustainable. In its stead came

industrialised agribusines. Ever since this traumatic transition, the model of the family farm that had cemented itself in the imaginaries of islanders was essentially industrialised out of existence, and the older generation of farmers I spoke with came face to face with the unviability of the family farms they grew up with.

Seeing the incoming loss of control and destruction caused by corporate controlled agriculture, farmers turned to organic solutions. For this older generation of organic farmers on Epekwitk, not only was organic farming a way to combat the environmental and economic destruction brought on by agribusiness, but it also acted as an avenue to maintain the viability of the agrarian farms they were accustomed to.

Since the beginning of organic farming, the practice has always had strong ties to agrarianism. As Barton writes “Agrarian ideals in Britain, Europe, and the United States all fed directly into romantic farm literature in the 1920s–30s, and formed the fertile soil from which organic farming protocols spread.” (Barton, 2018:19). Like agrarianism, organic agriculture prioritises small mixed farms as they regulate labour demands, reduce market risk, the need for inputs, and therefore improve the resiliency of the operation. Organic farming, like agrarianism, is also precious about private land ownership as a way to safeguard independence. What’s more, organic farming has always been suspicious of state and corporate intervention into agriculture, as it has been responsible for funding and spreading the kinds of destructive and exploitative farming that organic farming is a direct reaction to (Guthman, 2004).

Therefore, for many farmers in the older generation, they experienced a targeted attack on the kind of agriculture they were accustomed to, and organic farming provided an escape chute to both preserve their agrarian convictions and counter the other destructive forces unleashed by the state and its corporate collaborators.

For younger and newer organic farmers, although they did not have firsthand experience with the Development Plan and the initial breakthrough by agribusiness, they have inherited the agrarian family farm through their pursuit of organic farming. As I discussed, since the beginning of organic farming, there have been strong bonds with agrarianism (Barton, 2018). When someone decides to become an organic farmer, they are adopted into its agrarian tradition.

Beyond the legacy of agrarianism, for many of these new organic farmers, creating an organic farm in the form of an agrarian family farm was financially necessary. Especially for people entering organic farming without already having land, starting an organic farm that is not based on an agrarian model is prohibitively expensive.

Regardless of how the organic farmers I worked with came to their convictions and predilections towards the agrarian family farm, the ongoing struggle to survive in an agricultural landscape that grows ever more hostile towards their vision of the family farm has fomented agrarianism as a mainstay in their resistance to agribusiness and their activism against its encroachment on organic farming.

When speaking to farmers both young and old, the prevailing sentiment was that "Things are grim because it has become so hard for small family farms to survive" or "there's hardly any small farmers left, and it has become so difficult to survive". As these farmers see things, the small organic family farm is the antithesis to the large industrialised agribusiness operation, and the death of the small family farm would be the death of their vision of agriculture. Therefore, when discussing the future of organic farming and the struggle against the takeover of agribusiness, farmers emphasise the importance of the small family farm. As the farmer Albert asserted,

> And if we got our ideal situation, it would be to get land back for small family farms. But as it stands, smallholders can't make a living anymore, so we have to start talking about changing the economics around agriculture so that a small farmer can survive.

As this quote suggests, through my conversations with organic farmers, it became clear that the agrarian family farm is a major point of tension between their vision of agriculture and that of agribusiness. Farmers believe that as long as they are able to preserve the agrarian family farm, they will be able to preserve their vision of organic farming. Their primary method for doing this is by living it every day. As I said, every farmer I spoke with during my research lived according to the tenets of the agrarian family farm. All were small, privately owned, and required no off-farm labour and in an agricultural climate aggressively dominated by agribusiness, such an existence is a powerful example of everyday resistance. In the first chapter, I went over the numbers detailing the catastrophic drop in the number of farms on Epekwitk and the coinciding massive increase in farm size. As agribusiness continues to pressure farms to consolidate, industrialise and grow, the everyday existence of small agrarian organic farms is a direct and increasingly pronounced challenge to agricultural power.

Beyond their everyday resistance to agribusiness, farmers also used the agrarian family farm in their public resistance to agribusiness. The clearest example of this within my research was when I attended and participated in a local National Farmers Union (NFU) meeting in which 4 of the participants were farmers I interviewed. The NFU has a long history of advocating for the family farm, writing on their website that the family farm is "the most appropriate and efficient means of agricultural production" (NFU, 2025). With specific reference to Epekwitk, this public statement nicely sums up the link between the NFU, the family farm and its importance in the resistance to agribusiness on the island. The statement proclaims,

> The NFU was instrumental in having the Lands Protection Act passed in the P.E.I. legislative assembly in 1982 to prevent corporate and foreign interests with deep pockets from gaining control of Island land to the detriment of family farms and rural communities. We make no apology for trying to prevent our land from becoming a commodity of the few. We find it perplexing that others are not assuming a larger role in the fight to hold the provincial government to account in protecting our primary natural resource. (NFU, 2025)

As the statement suggests, the takeover of corporations is the takeover of the family farm, and as long as the land is in the hands of family farmers, it is protected. During the actual meeting, this sentiment rose to the top of the discussion. The conversation was almost entirely focused on the family farm, with everyone putting forth motions geared towards helping the small family farm fight against corporate takeover. I could sense the urgency in the room, and the meeting ended on a fairly flaccid note in which some actions were promised, but most of the farmers felt that it was not enough.

Besides the NFU, as I mentioned, many of the farmers I worked with were members of other advocacy groups like the Coalition for the Protection of P.E.I. Lands and the Cooper Institute. As well as their focus on corporate land grabbing, both organisations explicitly fight for the protection of family farms.

In sum, organic farmers on Epekwitk derive their allegiance to the agrarian family farm through both the post-tenant struggle agricultural conditions as well as the traditions of agrarianism within the organic farming movement. In their discourses and practices, organic farmers assert the importance of the agrarian family farm within their vision of agriculture and stress that its proliferation is essential to the struggle against the takeover by agribusiness. According to the organic farmers I worked with, if there are more family farms, then there is more land protected from agribusiness–and as they live and farm in accordance

with the agrarian family farm ideal, they commit everyday acts of resistance that project agricultural futures beyond the aggressions of agribusiness.

MULTISPECIES RELATIONSHIPS

Finally, organic farmers are resisting the advancements of agribusiness using the affective bonds between them and their environment–bonds facilitated by organic farming practices. Despite mounting pressures muddying the waters of multispecies relationships on organic farms, farmers continue to prioritise and maintain sustainable and meaningful relationships with their environment. Through the affective bonds created in the everyday rhythms and mundanity of organic farming, farmers are securing their visions of agriculture and resisting the kinds of logics and multispecies relationships that a profit-driven agribusiness-oriented farm would delegate.

In the interviews I conducted, farmers told me that one of the primary reasons why they decided to pursue organic farming had to do with their opposition to the environmental relations created through corporate controlled intensive agriculture. For one, this kind of agriculture destroys and exploits the environment and thus thwarts the possibility of reciprocal and sustainable relationships between farmers and their environment. Writing on the destruction of agribusiness, Reg said that,

> The problems are manifested in many ways; through a loss of fertility, erosion, soil compaction, and chemical pollution of air, surface and ground water, and food. Animal and plant health have declined, and cyclic outbreaks of pests are common with the heavy use of intensively applied pesticides. Local crop varieties have been replaced, resulting in the loss of genetic diversity. (Phelan, 1996, p.100)

Conversely, organic farming is a way to continue to farm in an economically viable way without wreaking havoc on the environment. As it was explained to me, organic farming “respects people and the environment” and involves a “respect for, and desire to understand

nature and the laws which govern it". It is through this respect and understanding that farmers form the affective bonds that define who they are as organic farmers and derive motivation to maintain a specific vision of agriculture in the face of an industry that wishes to reorganise their human-environment relations.

Another consequence of intensive industrialised agriculture that coincides with its destruction of the environment is how the industrialisation of farming alienates farmers from the land and severs their affective ties with their environment. Ties that organic farmers told me are not only maintained with organic farming practices but actually enhanced. Discussing this phenomenon, Stella said to me,

> At one time, farmers on PEI could go out, walk through their fields, and they would know every inch of that soil, and they could pick it up and feel the life in it and smell it. And it was almost a spiritual connection. But today, you've got million-dollar equipment travelling from one end of Kings County to the other, going in and wiping fields clean. And so I think you have to go back to some of the more holistic methods and having a relationship and a connection to the land.

Working on small, relatively unmechanised farms without the use of chemical pesticides and fertilisers, organic farming brings farmers into closer contact with their environment. In the process, affective bonds are formed. As Michelle explained it to me, through organic farming, you:

> Get to know your soil and get to know each individual part of the field and how, along this hedgerow, this does this, but along this other hedgerow, that does that. During a wet year, this will happen, and in a dry year, this will happen.

She goes on to express how, through this closeness and getting to know her farm, organic farming becomes a "shared experience with nature". A shared experience that fosters intimate relationships between farmers and their environment. As Sarah said to me, "We work with

the land, it is ours, and it is precious to us. As [organic] farmers, we think everyone could learn from a deeper relationship with the land." What she and others expressed to me was that farming organically, as they do it, facilitates uniquely robust connections between farmers and the land.

This kind of human-environment relationship has been fundamental to the success of organic agriculture since its beginnings. Advocates of the movement have long stressed the importance of the environmental relations the practice creates, underlining that where chemically dependent industrialised agriculture fails to work with the environment and understand the interconnectedness of nature, organic farming succeeds. For example, the influential farmer Elliot Coleman (1995) in his book *The New Organic Grower*–a book that almost every farmer I spoke with cited as an influence–describes this relationship using a metaphor about a tapestry in a grand hall. Depicting "the natural world in all its elegance", there are a relative few who are able to admire its greatness from the front. On the other hand, behind the tapestry is a crowd of people trying to decipher its loose strands and vague shapes. In this metaphor, the people at the front represent organic farmers whose efforts to nurture and harmonise with the natural world have allowed them to see and revel in the beauty of the tapestry. Stuck on the other side are those who are wed to industrialisation and convinced of the planet's inability to efficiently produce food. As Coleman writes, unlike large industrialised farms dependent on chemicals and heavy machinery, organic farmers are "in partnership with nature" (Coleman, 1995, p.11). Bringing this metaphor back to the organic farmers I worked with and their efforts to ward off agribusiness, their position at the front of the tapestry has afforded them cherished connections with their environment that a return to the back of the tapestry would obfuscate. These affective bonds with their farms are what define their organic practices, and they are what motivate them to push back against agribusiness. This comes through in how farmers responded when asked about their favourite

aspects of organic farming and what drives them to continue farming organically. As Michelle said to me, through raising organic beef she gets to see her cattle “expressing their core intuition–rolling in the dirt or chasing a bug and that's where I really find my true joy–in giving those animals the very best life that they can possibly have until their very worst day.” In pursuing organic farming practices, she feels that she is able to give her animals the best lives possible, and this is where she derives her “true joy”. As Michelle explained to me, this joy is why she “latched on to the actual philosophy of organic farming and really started to believe in it” and it is where she derives her motivation to push back against any vision of agriculture that threatens to disrupt her relationship with her farm and her animals. As Geoff said to me, farming organically means that he is able to

> Pick that fresh red tomato right off the vine and eat it and have it be safe, and fresh, and good. There's no better feeling than a nice sunny day, where I can pick my own produce, off my own plant, and eat it right there or feed it to my little nieces and nephews and not have a concern in the world that it's nothing but the best.

Geoff deeply cherishes the peace of mind that organic farming gives him. He knows that his produce is safe, healthy, and sustainable, and this is a major factor in what motivates him to keep farming organically. Bill, when discussing these same themes, said,

> At the end of the day, I feel good because I don’t have to be near sprays. I can farm and walk around barefoot and not have to worry. It just feels natural. It makes perfect sense to me. And I feel like I am leaving the land better than when I first visited.

As I discussed, Bill was one of the farmers with whom I worked the most, and every day I watched as he walked around barefoot, slowly but skillfully harvesting, grazing, or simply checking in on the health of different plants. As I observed his everyday rhythms of farming, I realised that the human-environment relationships that organic farmers hold so dearly, the ones that form and galvanise their identities as farmers, lie within the profundity of the

mundane. Whether it is watching your livestock flourish, picking your produce and feeding it to your family, or walking around barefoot, grazing, and feeling confident in your practices, it is these everyday affective experiences that define organic farmers and they are what gives farmers the strong convictions that they depend upon in their battle to preserve their visions of agriculture and everything they love about farming.

Through my participant observation working on a farm, I was fortunate enough to get a glimpse into these affective bonds that organic farming affords within the everyday and mundane. Specifically, when I was tasked with harvesting a half-acre of potatoes with just a shovel and a bucket. The shovel allowed me to loosen the potatoes from the soil, but the rest had to be done with my hands. Day in and day out, I sank my hands into the soil, pulling potatoes up one by one and throwing them into buckets. At the beginning, the work was incredibly slow, and I had not realised how evasive potatoes can be. Often, they flee their mother tuber by burrowing deep into the ground or by making a horizontal mad dash–outwitting my attempts to dig them up along the way. Eventually, the process sped up as my mental image of the plants' anatomy grew stronger,  I learned how to read the topsoil better, and my fingers calloused. Finally, after almost two weeks, I had finished the job. And while I left the potato field, it did not leave me. Beyond the hundreds of bug bites, an aching back, and hands permanently stained with dirt, I left with a bank of knowledge I had not anticipated. As the days dragged on, I observed the subtle changes in the season. I came to know what kinds of bugs lived there, what time certain birds would come visit, or where weeds like lamb's ear or pigweed would pop up. I learned which variety of potato had which flowers, how they grew, how much they yielded, how pest-resistant they were, etc. and by the end of it all, I came away from the potato patch feeling a connection. In a co-constitutional process, I was "becoming-with" the potato patch, attuning myself to the lives and rhythms of

its inhabitants and communing with them in ways not possible had I harvested the potatoes in another way (Haraway, 2008).

Were I to be harvesting potatoes for the industrialised farm on the other side of the road, I would be in a big tractor harvesting a hundred acres of one variety of potato (Russet Burbank) from soil with a shockingly low amount of organic matter. I would have left with a very different bank of knowledge.

Instead, through organic farming practices, I was made aware of and became implicated in a myriad of multispecies relationships that fostered unique feelings of connection with place and the agricultural practices that facilitated this connection. My time in the potato patch was relatively short, but it afforded me a small taste of the bonds that form between organic farmers and their farms. Bonds that propel farmers to persist in their ways of farming and motivate them to push back against the corporate and state actors trying to disrupt them.

There is no doubt that the forces of agribusiness will keep trying to wear down organic farmers. Still, farmers remain steadfast, cultivating everyday resistance through the supercharged multispecies relationships facilitated by organic farming practices. Along with the prioritisation of sustainable and reciprocal relationships with their environment, the proximities that come with the lack of chemical sprays, big fields and big machines, form affective bonds that are unachievable on large industrialised farms. Like the 19th century tenant struggle and the agrarian farm, the multispecies relationships of organic farming structure farmers' resistance as they mobilise their affective bonds for the sake of perpetuating their practices and their visions of agricultural futures.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there were three themes that structured the discourses and practices used by organic farmers in both their public and everyday forms of resistance to agribusiness.

First, the 19th-century tenant struggle has given farmers an invaluable consciousness of their positionality that is expressed in their understanding of collective action and their distrust of corporate and state intervention. The lessons of the tenant struggle echo into the present, encouraging farmers in their fight against agribusiness and informing what kinds of activism and organising need to be done. Second, organic farmers on Epekwitk resist agribusiness by emphasising their allegiance to the agrarian family farm. Where agribusiness demands intensification, larger and more mechanised farms that require outside labour, organic farmers assert everyday resistance by continuing to create farms that are small, independent and operated by the family unit. Finally, the multispecies relationships created on organic farms are sites of profound affective bonds whose very existence flies in the face of an agribusiness vision of agriculture. Organic farmers are developing close, reciprocal, and sustainable relationships with their environment and, in the process, asserting forms of farming that are not easily co-opted by capitalist innovation.

Each of these themes approaches resistance to agribusiness from a different angle and each theme is intertwined with the other, weaving webs of everyday agricultural rhythms informed by the struggles of the past, grounded in affective relationships in the present, and concerned with sustainable futures. While the forces of capitalist innovation continue to creep into the lives of organic farmers, they are held at bay by the everyday and public forms of resistance mobilised and organised by the tenant struggle, the agrarian family farm, and farmers' multispecies relationships. Organic farmers resist publicly through protesting in the streets, passing the Lands Protection Act, or by organising with the NFU, The Cooper Institute, and the Coalition for the Protection of PEI Lands. Organic farmers also resist agribusiness every day, as practices like maintaining a small family farm in the face of mandated growth or prioritising multispecies relationships instead of mechanisation and efficiency become everyday challenges to power.

The future of agriculture on Epekwitk continues to be volatile, and where corporate hegemony and attempted takeover of organic farming project a negative prognosis, there is hope embedded in organic farmers' discourses and practices of resistance.

Chapter 4

# Building Organic Futures With Caution

Up to this point, the focus of this thesis has been the relationship between agribusiness and organic farming on Epekwitk. After agribusiness staked its claim on the island, it gave rise to an organic farming movement that was reacting to not just its environmental destruction but its hostile reorganisation of land tenure. In chapter 2, I discussed how the forces of agribusiness are changing the agricultural landscape of the island to the point where it has become difficult for organic farmers to remain in operation without making sacrifices to its logics and structures. In chapter 3, I highlighted how, despite these sacrifices, organic farmers resist the intrusion of agribusiness, fighting for their own vision of organic farming and sustainable agricultural futures. In this brief chapter, I analyse this vision of organic farming along with the discourses and practices farmers mobilise in their resistance to agribusiness. I contend that although the agricultural futures organic farmers are working towards are utopian in comparison to the technofeudal dreams of agro-corporations, there remain some discursive blind spots which, if left unaddressed, will undermine organic farming's legitimacy as a sustainable and ethical alternative to agribusiness, and will impede farmers' ability to foster agricultural futures that place communal and environmental health above profit. In the previous chapter, I used James Scott's conceptualisation of resistance as a framework for organic farmers' pushback against the aggressions of agribusiness. While useful, it is often criticised for casting the dominated as a uniform and unambiguous front, glossing over the "domination within domination" (Chin & Mittelman, 1997). In this chapter,

I discuss the potential for domination within domination that I observed throughout my research and how, as farmers do their best to devise solutions for the ongoing threat of agribusiness, it has obscured the structures of settler colonialism within organic farming on Epekwitk.

As I outlined in the last chapter, organic farmers are building futures founded in the lessons of the 19th-century land struggle, wherein family farms are agrarian in structure, and multispecies relationships flourish. Yet, within this vision, there remain settler colonial blind spots and legacies that require attention as farmers continue their pursuit of sustainable and ethical organic farming.

## SETTLER COLONIALISM

Settler colonialism is the term that refers to the kinds of colonialism occurring in places where settlers seek to establish permanent colonies. It is structurally different from imperialism and franchise colonialism and therefore has different logics and behaviours in its modes of oppression and control (Konishi, 2019). Where imperialism and franchise colonialism focus on domination and exploitation of Indigenous populations, settler colonialism seeks permanence and, by extension, the elimination and replacement of Indigenous peoples. In settler colonies, settlers come to stay. Setting up institutions and structures, settler colonialism has the express goal of taking Indigenous land, eliminating Indigenous life, and replacing it with settlers who create new states and take on new identities, independent from the colonial homeland (Veracini, 2011).

Unsurprisingly, the ideas that would later find their footing in settler colonial theory have been circulating within Indigenous communities for well over a century, and the first scholars to distinguish settler colonialism from franchise colonialism and imperialism were also those living under its oppression (Whyte, 2018). For example, Fayez Sayegh (1965) or Haunani-Kay Trask (1999) from Palestine and Hawaii, respectively, articulated the

uniqueness of settler colonialism long before the concept gained broader scholarly attention in the 2000s. It was not until 2006, with the publication of Patrick Wolfe's Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native, that the field really cemented its footing. In this article, Wolfe makes several observations about settler colonialism that are essential for understanding the term and its function. First, settler colonialism above all else is a territorial project. Settler colonial states desire land, and the Indigenous life that is already on the land is its biggest "problem", and must be eliminated. Second, settler colonialism is a structure and not a past event. As a territorial project whose task is not complete, settler colonialism and its structures of land acquisition and Indigenous elimination are enduring (Wolfe, 2006).

## SETTLER COLONIALISM AND AGRICULTURE

According to Wolfe (2006), agriculture is

> inherently sedentary and, therefore, permanent. In contrast to extractive industries, which rely on what just happens to be there, agriculture is a rational means/end calculus that is geared to vouchsafing its own reproduction, generating capital that projects into a future where it repeats itself" (p375).

Agriculture as a technology of settler colonial accumulation is uniquely effective. As Wolfe notes, agriculture is permanent, settler farmers occupy large plots of land and place them into perpetual production, generating both the capital and food needed to maintain the settler colonial state. Along with its great ability to hold borders, fund, and feed settlers, agriculture forms bonds between settlers and the land. As farmers work season after season, depending on the land for their livelihoods, it forms feelings of closeness and creates generational ties that are not easily broken.

## THE TENANT STRUGGLE

With an understanding of settler colonialism and how it interacts with agriculture, I will now discuss the ways in which it comes through in the three themes used by farmers to assert their

unique vision of organic farming and organic farming subjectivities. First, the 19th-century tenant struggle.

The historical struggle between tenant farmers and the colonial administration of PEI provides farmers with both a historical precedent for successful collective action and a political framework for understanding the corporate takeover of agriculture. In their current fight against the encroachment of agribusiness, organic farmers use the 19th-century tenant struggle as an example of successful resistance against oppressive use of power. At the same time, within farmers' use of the tenant struggle in their resistance to agribusiness, there is a latent tendency to erase Mi'kmaq presence and negate Mi'kmaq sovereignty.

This occurs because as farmers borrow from the 19th century tenants, they also adopt problematic justifications for land ownership. Primarily, as organic farmers borrow from their agricultural ancestors, they adopt a Lockean argument for land ownership. Working under the idea that he who mixes his labour with the land has a legitimate claim to the land, the tenants in the 19th century argued that it was the tenants, not the landlords, who transformed the land into productive farms and because of this, they are the ones with legitimate claims to said land (Sharpe, 1976). Today, in a similar fashion, farmers argue that since they are the ones who live and work on the land, they should be the ones who own and control what happens upon it, not the corporations.

The Lockean claims to land put forth by tenants in the 19th century are a potent example of successful pushback against power, and similar arguments have been useful in subverting corporate claims to land in the present. At the same time, this angle undermines Mi'kmaq claims to land. Under this framework, settler farmers become the legitimate owners of the land by virtue of their labour and in the process, private property is taken as a given while historical and present Mi'kmaq land labour is viewed as unproductive and therefore unqualified to count towards ownership. Essentially, the ways in which organic farmers

borrow from the 19th-century land struggle are founded in what Wysote and Morton (2021) call “pioneer lies”, which are the lies that settlers tell in an attempt to convey their claims to land as legitimate and non-violent. In this case, farmers are firstly erasing Indigenous histories to establish their own and then advancing claims to the land that further disqualify those of the Mi’kmaq. Organic farmers are rightfully challenging the legitimacy of corporate control over land, but at the same time, they are doing so in a way that inadvertently undermines Mi’kmaq sovereignty and obscures histories of dispossession and violence. A good example of these pioneer lies within the movement against corporate control of agriculture is the folk song I included in the last chapter. For instance, lines like:

When the Micmacs walked our Island
Back in those days of yore;

they loved and they respected
Every hill and field and shore.

They preserved it for this day of ours for their children and for us.
The land was only to be used.
And handed on "in trust".

In this section of the song, Rev. Macdonald completely does away with the notion of Mi’kmaq presence or land claims by first speaking of them as if they have disappeared, gone with the passage of time through some mysterious circumstance. Then, in the next breath is the assertion that they preserved the land for settlers and handed it on “in trust.” Through narrating the transfer of land as peaceful, and by dismissing the Mi’kmaq as relics of the past, Rev. MacDonald sets the stage for farmers to make what are presented as unproblematic claims to the land in the present.

Beyond the inhereitcance of Lockean land claims from the their agricultural ancestors, there is also a tendency amongst farmers to slip into a kind of settler nativism when using the tenant struggle in their fight against agribusiness. At the base of it all is the fact that in order to conceptualise the 19th-century struggle or the takeover of agribusiness in the present day

as one group of settlers taking land from or invading another, it first needs to be established that certain settlers have more rights to the land than others. The tenant struggle accomplishes just that. To use the quote from the Cooper Institute again, the tenant struggle is a story that "runs through our veins", and in the discourses of farmers, it has become a sort of origin story, a point in time when settlers on Epekwitk stopped being from Europe and instead became "Islanders". Through the intra-settler oppression that took place during the tenant struggle, certain settlers were transformed into Prince Edward Islanders set on defending their home at all costs. Going back to the song by Rev. MacDonald, when discussing the prospect of corporations causing a return to the conditions under the absentee landlords, he writes

It was only a determined fight
That got the Island Back.
Shall we return to serfdom now
Or halt the invading pack?

These lines raise the question of for whom was the Island gotten back? Inevitably, it is the settler tenants who had to rip it from the hands of British aristocrats. Again, "we" is clearly a category reserved for a specific group who, as the rightful inhabitants and owners of the land, are facing the invasion of corporations. Therefore, the oppression of the tenantry by absentee landlords has allowed for a sort of eschewment of settlerness, a deflection of settler identity that obscures settler privilege. This, along with the use of Lockean claims to the land, function as what Tuck and Yang (2015) describe as settler moves to innocence. Through the narrative of oppression at the hands of the absentee landlords, settler farmers are able to paint themselves as part of the oppressed, not responsible for colonialism while at the same time benefiting from their position as settlers. The same goes for their use of Lockean land claims. Since a Lockean framework of ownership renders Mi'kmaq claims to the land illegitimate, this allows farmers to project innocence as their claims to the land are asserted as unproblematic and uncontested.

Therefore, in their current form, the ways in which organic farmers on Epekwitk look to the successful campaigns of their agricultural ancestors in their work to stave off agribusiness are complacent in settler colonial structures of oppression. Moving forward, it is imperative that organic farmers continue to glean lessons from the tenant struggle, but that they are lessons that undermine the perpetuation of settler colonial structures and discourses while making way for settler-Mi'kmaq collaboration in the fight against the destruction of agribusiness.

THE AGRARIAN FAMILY FARM

A foundational element of both the organic ideal and the post-tenant struggle/pre Development Plan agricultural conditions on Epekwitk, the agrarian family farm is highly regarded amongst the island's organic farmers. For these farmers, the agrarian farm is a bulwark against the corporate control of agriculture, and they believe that as long as farms stay small, relatively diverse and privately owned, they will be resistant to the overreach of agribusiness. On a practical level, this has been effective. As I detailed in the last chapter, in their adherence to the principles of agrarianism, organic farmers enact everyday resistance against a system that wants them to consolidate, grow, and industrialise. The underbelly of this, however, is that agrarianism continues to be an indispensable tool of Canadian settler colonialism for both the seizure of land and the creation of national myths and histories.

Since the beginning of the Canadian settler colonial project, agrarian family farms have been at the centre. Lacking in labour but flush with land, seed, and tools gifted by the state, families established the agrarian ideal that would dominate agricultural production well into the 20th century (McMichael, 2009). Along with the production of food to feed settlers, agrarian farms are mobile, adaptable and highly effective at advancing the frontier, shoring up land holdings, and generating liquidity. Additionally, the bonds created between farmers

and their farms makes it the perfect technology for ensuring the enduring control of Indigenous lands by settlers (Wolfe, 2006).

Vital to the seizure of land and the creation of the Canadian settler colonial state, the agrarian farm is also key to settler colonial soft power in the form of histories and myths told by the state to validate its existence. In history books, venerated works of literature, etc. the idea of the independent farmer who owns the land is romanticised, and the agrarian farmer is cast as the great pioneer whose toil turned virgin soil into something habitable and productive upon which civilisation could be built (Mamdani, 2015; Wysote & Morton, 2019). As Beingessner, Magnan and Wendimu (2022) discuss, this soft power of the agrarian ideal remains prominent even as the number of agrarian farms dwindle and they are replaced by the state sponsored takeover of large corporate farms. This can be seen in the ways farming continues to be presented to the public through media and advertising, and how independent family farms and the moral panic surrounding the so called “death of the family farm” remain prominent in the cultural consciousness.

Therefore, while agrarianism remains part of the foundation of organic farming on Epekwitk, it is also key to the Canadian settler colonial project for both the control of land, and the creation of national myths and histories. For this reason, organic farmers must move past agrarianism and envision ways of safeguarding their practices without playing into the Canadian settler colonial project. So long as agrarianism remains part of organic farmers’ core convictions, its enduring structures of settler colonialism will make it difficult for farmers to advance solutions to the ills of agribusiness that also meaningfully challenge the continued occupation of Mi’kmaq land and work to disrupt the structures of settler colonialism that farmers are complicit in.

MULTISPECIES RELATIONSHIPS

In the last chapter, I discussed how the practices of organic farming form deep affective bonds between farmers and their farms, creating flourishing relationships with the environment that are less likely on larger industrialised farms. These feelings of oneness, of deep satisfaction that arise from farmers' connection with their environment are crucial for building and maintaining sustainable and ethical food systems, and they are very powerful in giving farmers the emotional armour to continue their organic farming practices despite the pressures of agribusiness. At the same time, it is critical that as organic farmers form relationships with their environment, they do so in a way that do not create pernicious forms of settler colonial belonging and erasure of Mi'kmaq presence.

There is a long legacy of settlers on the island who, in their quest for harmony with the land and connection to "Nature", narrate settler colonial innocence into the land, obscuring the state/legal systems that allow settlers to occupy spaces and feel forms of comfort and personhood in relation to the land. This is visible in both the kinds of relationships with the environment that early settler farmers were described as having in history books, and in works of literature like the writings of Lucy Maund-Montgomery. In each case, there is a tendency to establish connections with the land that in effect, obscure or obstruct Mi'kmaq presence and sovereignty.

For the early European settlers on Epekwitk, they were said to have cultivated a sense of "partnership" with the land and an understanding of "how nature and the laws that governed it worked" (Phelan, 1996:36). However, these relationships were established under the doctrine of Terra Nullius and with the impression that their cultivation of the land gave them legal ownership over it.

In the case of Lucy Maud Montgomery, she described feelings of ecstasy in relation to her connection with the natural world of Epekwitk, and this was the inspiration for the great

attention given to Anne Shirley's relationship with nature in *Anne of Green Gables.* However, the kinds of relationships with the environment espoused by Montgomery have had the effect of erasing Mi'kmaq presence, particularly in her creation of place names and the environmental history of the island that she presents in her books (Geissler, 2007; Ledwell & Mitchell, 2013). Rob Shields (2018) calls this 'settler affect' as Montgomery's writing worked to uphold her intense attachments to settled territory by discursively emptying the land of others who might complicate such attachments.

Within the broader organic farming movement, these same trends can be observed within the ways harmonious relationships with the environment are nurtured and then deployed in a manner that allow settler farmers to imagine themselves as the rightful and ancestral stewards of the land. As Lauren Kepkiewicz (2020) points out, "Canadian food sovereignty narratives often suggest that settler farmers' land rights are justified not only by hard work but through connectedness to land and ability to 'positively' contribute to the soil and local food systems."(p.265). Even though settler organic agriculture functions under the banner of sustainability and environmental reciprocity, this does not detract from how agriculture in general functions to perpetuate and shore up settler colonial expansion. Additionally, in ways that conventional farming does not, organic farming reframes connections with the land, creating intimate relationships and embodied passions of place which have the potential to translate into more vehement feelings of settler ownership. Since the agricultural practices of organic farming are more aligned with ecological sustainability and farmers work so closely with the land, they see themselves as having deeper connections with the land, and as better stewards who are more capable of contributing 'positively'. This kind of relationship is vulnerable to slipping into deeper convictions of ownership and belonging–antagonistic towards Indigenous sovereignty and land claims.

With regards to the farmers I worked with and interviewed and their proximity and complacency in these kinds of settler-environment relationships, I am sure that all would claim that their relationships with the land and their farms do not supersede or negate Mi'kmaq histories and claims to the land. In reality, the truth of this varies from farmer to farmer. Many of the organic farmers I spoke with were keenly aware of their position as settler farmers. Some have established relationships with Mi'kmaq communities, and one farmer was in the process of researching and changing the place names on their farm back to their original Mi'kmaq names. These farmers were at least cognisant of the histories of colonial violence on the land, how their ownership of the land came to be, and the politics within their relationships to the land. Other farmers, however, when asked about the idea of being a settler and if they had relationships with the Mi'kmaq, either admitted to not having thought about it or turned the question into a discussion about Indigenous health trends and how the Mi'kmaq should also be eating organic produce. For these farmers, the likelihood of slipping into affective formations and settler-land relationships that perpetuate the continued occupation of Mi'kmaq land and undermine Mi'kmaq sovereignty was far greater. Nevertheless, no matter how farmers conceive of their connection to nature, the land, and its histories, it is important that all farmers become aware of the latent settler colonial violence within these relationships.

## CONCLUSION

In this brief chapter, I have given an overview of what I believe to be an oft-neglected but important hurdle in farmers' pursuit of sustainable and ethical organic farming: navigating relationships to structures of settler colonialism. As organic farmers fight an uphill battle against an agricultural system hostile to their ways of knowing and practising farming, it is not difficult to see how, in this situation, they might overlook their complacency in violent structures that are not always easy to discern. Even so, as farmers continue to work

towards sustainable and ethical food systems, it is not possible to do so without coming to terms with the structures of settler colonialism and how they may perpetuate and benefit from them. After all, food systems that benefit some while undermining the sovereignty of others will never be sustainable and ethical.

Moving forward, organic farmers must interrogate their own logics, practices and discourses and how they relate to settler colonialism–beginning with what I have outlined in this chapter. Firstly, the 19th-century tenant struggle is an incredible example of what can be accomplished through class consciousness, solidarity, and collective action, and there are many lessons to be taken from the struggle that do not perpetuate a settler colonial understanding of belonging and ownership. For instance, instead of using the tenant struggle to put forth Lockean arguments to land rights, it should be used to highlight the power of the masses to organise and bring forth a more just and equitable society. As Bohuniky et al. (2021) explain, "the dominant food system operates on the capitalist logic of the ceaseless expansion of production, consumption, and profit, and is fundamentally exploitative, wasteful, irrational, and inhumane to Indigenous Peoples and to society as a whole" (p.157). Society as a whole is facing the destruction of the dominant food system, and in this, there is room for collaborative relationships between the Mi'kmaq and organic farmers. Each group will experience our food systems differently, yet there is always space to come together and create something better. Along the way, it is necessary that this collaboration is non-exploitative, moves past politics of representation, while respecting and uplifting the sovereignty of the Mi'kmaq.

Second, in order to create sustainable and ethical food systems, organic farmers must look past the agrarian family farm and its settler colonial legacies. For this to happen, there needs to be a fundamental shift in the ideas of what constitutes a farm and what avenues of defending it from agribusiness are possible. At the core of this is a change in farmers'

allegiances to private property. As Kepkiewicz and Dale (2019) explain, “If settler food sovereignty activists are serious in our commitment to creating sustainable and equitable food systems in Canada, we need to consider the tensions inherent in owning Indigenous lands” (p.996). Private property is the nucleus of the agrarian family farm, but it is unbreakably bound to settler colonialism and the current capitalist food system. As Sarah Rotz explains, it was the imposition of private property rights that created the conditions for agribusiness and what she calls “agri-food industrialization” (2017,p.159). Private property is a key element in the nexus of settler colonialism, capitalism and the environmental destruction of agribusiness and moving away from private property and current forms of farm ownership works against both the pervasiveness of settler colonialism and the agribusiness complex wreaking havoc on organic farmers. What this will look like long term, I cannot say. For now, it is urgent that farmers start asking themselves what steps can be taken to tangibly move away from this model of farming in ways that account for the structures of settler colonialism as well as the pressures faced from corporations.

Finally, as farmers continue to mobilise their multispecies relationships in resistance to agribusiness, it is important that they do so in ways that do not reify settler ownership of Mi’kmaq land. Such beautiful and deep relationships do not beget property rights but are rather a necessary step in working towards our (settlers') responsibilities to the land. As organic farmers deepen their multispecies connections, it should not make them more assured in their ownership of the land but instead help them question the politics, morals and ethics of their relationship with the land and its original inhabitants. Farmers should interrogate their positionalities to understand their place in the island's agricultural landscape and how best to use their relationships with the land in the fight for sustainable and ethical food systems. As the Indigenous Circle (2010) encourages, settlers should create sacred and spiritual relationships with the land, understanding that their connections to the land are not and

cannot be the same as those of the Mi’kmaq. Every farmer’s relationship with the land is unique, powerful and should be fostered in ways that continue to refuse to bend to the logic of agribusiness while also supporting Mi’kmaq struggles for sovereignty.

## Conclusion

### In Spite of it All

In this thesis, I have stitched together various historical and economic elements in order to contextualise the current state of organic farming on Epekwitk. Beginning with the history of land tenure and agriculture on the island, I discussed the British seizure of land that displaced the Mi'kmaq and transformed settlers into tenants. Under this absentee landlord system, tenants had no solidified rights over the land. They worked to clear it and build livelihoods, but could be kicked off for any reason by their capricious landlords. Fed up with their conditions, tenants organised and successfully gained freehold tenure by the late 19th century. The momentum carried from the tenant struggle was strong enough to maintain stable agricultural conditions well into the 20th century. However, in 1969, the government of PEI put in place the Comprehensive Development Plan in an effort to "modernise" agriculture, and things quickly changed. The post-tenant struggle conditions were uprooted as Industrialisation and consolidation took hold, and large corporations staked their claims.

As the industrialisation and corporatisation of agriculture gained momentum, farmers watched as the absentee landlords of the past came back to haunt them in the form of off-island corporations. Farms were shoved into the mould of agribusiness, and this collision between the post-tenant struggle agricultural climate and the abrupt takeover of agribusiness is what gave birth to the organic farming movement on Epekwitk. The founders of the movement could perceive what was on its way and were determined to avoid the environmental, social, and political consequences that agribusiness would bring. The early

organic farmers on Epekwitk established the movement as the frontline against the exploitation of agribusiness and began the work of reorganising the way agriculture on the island was conducted. Forming deep bonds with the land, they farmed to foster multispecies flourishing, prioritising the health of ecosystems and the social, political and economic goals required to bring about sustainable and ethical food systems.

In chapter 2, I discussed how on Epekwitk, organic farmers remain on the frontline in the struggle for alternative forms of agriculture. At the same time, the takeover of agribusiness remains unrelenting, and the mounting pressure this places on organic farmers is impacting the discourses and practices of organic farming as well as the subjectivities of farmers. To create a clear picture of how this came to be, I first established the relationship between organic farming and agribusiness. Organic farming as a concept and a movement is always preconditioned by exploitative industrialised agriculture. As exposure to the destruction of agribusiness increased on the island, many people turned to organic products, and the industry quickly took off. Yet, the same processes that caused a rise in the popularity of organic food eventually caught up with organic farmers. In order to fuel the growth imperative of agribusiness, there is a constant search for new spheres of profit generation, and as agribusiness continues to assimilate and integrate every aspect of food production on Epekwitk, it has placed organic farmers under significant economic strain. Increasingly, organic farmers are having to make concessions to corporate-controlled food systems, adapting to become more profit-oriented and more business savvy. In chapter 2, I discussed how, as organic farmers adapt to agribusiness, it changes their discourses, practices, and subjectivities. To illustrate this, I focused on its manifestations in the three forms of capitalist innovation in agriculture set out by Julie Guthman (2004). I demonstrated how, as farmers struggle to stay in business, they are subjected to rounds of intensification, appropriation, and valorisation that co-opt their practices and discourse and mobilise them towards

profit-oriented ends. As focuses shift towards profit, the methods that organic farmers choose to use and the ways in which they talk about their practices do as well. When farmers use soil science to intensify their production, when they change their methods and practices to please regulators, or when they adapt what they grow, how they grow it, and who they sell to in the search for profits, it changes the lived experience of farming, the everyday rhythms, and it changes the kinds of subjectivities created in the process. In this sense, I have observed a bifurcation in the subjectivities of farmers. On the one hand, organic subjectivities continue to be derived from an emphasis on communal flourishing and placing sustainable and ethical farming over profit. On the other hand, new subjectivities organised by the forces of agribusiness gain ground as its squeeze tightens on organic farmers and the need for profit reorients their discourses and practices.

In Chapter 3, I examined how, despite the intrusion of agribusiness into organic farming on Epekwitk, farmers are pushing back and asserting their own localised organic agricultural futures. More specifically, farmers are drawing on the lessons of the 19th-century tenant struggle for their current struggle against corporations. They are holding on to the agrarian farm as an agricultural model that guards against the perils of agribusiness. And they are leaning on the cherished multispecies relationships, agricultural rhythms, and assurances that organic farming affords them. On Epekwitk, the 19th-century tenant struggle was a defining moment in the history of the island's settler population, and many of its difficult lessons have been passed on through the generations. As today's conditions come to parallel those of the absentee landlord system, organic farmers are looking to their agricultural ancestors to understand the power of collective action and the dangers of corporate and state interests.

Alongside lessons from the tenant struggle, the agrarian family farm has been an important tool in organic farmers' pushback against agribusiness. For organic farmers, their

partiality to agrarian farms arises from the strong agrarian sentiments after the tenant struggle, and the historical ties to agrarianism within the organic farming movement. As farmers see things, small, mixed family-owned and run farms represent the natural alternative to large, monocropped and industrialised productions. Additionally, agrarianism is highly defensive of private property rights, which organic farmers see as one of the last defences against agribusiness.

Finally, organic farmers are using the affective relationships facilitated through organic farming practices as motivation to continue to do what they do and as reminders of why they choose to farm organically in the face of an industry that is hostile to their politics, morals, and ethics. Whether it is watching cows enjoy a high-quality life, feeding loved ones fresh and safe tomatoes, or being able to walk through fields barefoot and know that they are safe and pesticide-free, the rewards within the everyday rhythms of organic farming have created deep emotional bonds between farmers and their organic practices. Organic farmers understand that their favourite aspects of farming would not be possible on large, industrialised farms, and this is what motivates them to stick with their practices, despite the additional difficulties and hardship it might bring.

In the last, brief chapter of this thesis, I gave an overview of what I believe to be the most pressing potential blind spot in the ways organic farmers resist agribusiness: the relationship between settler colonial violence and the discourses and practices used by organic farmers to resist the takeover of corporate agriculture. Traditionally, agriculture has been one of the primary means of settler colonial expansion. Not only does it involve the permanent seizure of large areas of land, but it also shores up borders, funds and feeds settlers, and facilitates affective connections between settlers and the land. As organic farmers mobilise certain discourses and practices in their pursuit of sustainable and ethical agriculture, they risk perpetuating violent structures of settler colonialism. Therefore, as they

move forward, it is critical that organic farmers understand any complacencies they may have in structures of settler colonial violence and actively work to address their role within these structures.

## AFTERWORD

Overall, the picture I have painted of agriculture on Epekwitk is not one of great optimism. Throughout the island, agricultural conditions grow ever more dire. Droughts are becoming more frequent, waterways are more polluted, and people are sicker. All the while, corporate growth and progress march on and, as organic farmers go about the task of confronting the consequences of this intensive, extractive and irresponsible agriculture, they go up against an almost omnipotent manifestation of corporate and state power.

However, as I have outlined the difficulties that lie ahead, I do so not as an invitation to nihilism or acquiescence but in the hopes that through understanding the present challenges, they will be easier to confront—easier to do what Donna Haraway calls "staying with the trouble". Staying with the trouble is about "getting on together", about the need to "make kin lines of inventive connection as a practice of learning to live and die well with each other in a thick presence. Our task is to make trouble, to stir up potent response to devastating events, as well as settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places" (Haraway, 2016, p. 1). Staying with the trouble to create sustainable and ethical food futures requires getting dirty, charging into timely, messy, and urgent collaboration with unexpected beings and uncomfortable ideas.

In thinking about staying with the trouble, my experiences with organic farmers are a source of great hope. In my time working on farms, visiting farms, interviewing farmers and speaking at conferences, I have never met people more ingenious, resourceful, creative or more equipped to stay with the trouble as organic farmers.

Therefore, to end this thesis, I leave you with a poem by the late Milton Acorn about this very idea, about the liveliness and gumption that organic farmers take with them as they rise to the task of farming against apocalyptic futures. I encountered this poem on the day I went to Reg and Stella's house to conduct their interviews. Browsing the pictures, paintings, and poems filling the walls and spilling into the halls, I found “Reg At The Gears” written by Milton one day as he watched Reg “do the hay.”

No fish so weird, in salt-sweaty
Glass tank sea as you are
Directing your great Harvester

With a happy quizzical
Look of power…

Sorcerer thinking new magic
While your machine raves songs
Like ghosts shaking chains;
You’ll give the day, tomorrow
A new bouquet of tricks.

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