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# Cockies and Blockies:

## Cultural constructs in the analysis of rural change

*A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
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# ABSTRACT

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THIS STUDY of rural change takes an ethnographic approach to track the “downstream” social effects of the 1984 restructuring of the agricultural industry during the past two decades in a small Lower Northland farming district. It argues that the reforms marked the beginning of a period of change and uncertainty in farming that has resulted in many of the farmers of the district subdividing and selling land to clear debt or realise capital. Sale of smallholdings has attracted urban migrants from nearby Auckland, driving up land prices to the point where farm children can no longer afford to succeed to the family farm. At the same time, conflicting culturally-based understandings of rurality by farmers and smallholders manifests in behaviours that produce tension between the two groups. Each values the rural environment for different reasons and in different ways. The result is that farmers view smallholders as a challenge to their still-dominant culture. A minority of farmers welcome the diversity smallholders bring to the district.

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# *Introduction*

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THERE'S a kind of language in the way rural folk in the lower Northland farming district of Oneriri acknowledge other drivers when they meet on the road. Recognition of a friend calls forth an enthusiastic, full-hand wave; the two cars may even stop on opposite sides of the road so the drivers can share a word. An acquaintance will be accorded an upraised hand, its height above the steering wheel proportional to the length, or warmth, of acquaintance. Strangers are greeted by raising one or more fingers from the wheel: the rest of the hand stays where it is. Every oncoming car is acknowledged according to this code. The farmers say this is how one can tell whether the oncoming driver is a local. Strangers don't wave.

The presence of strangers, who may often in fact be smallholders, or weekenders whose cars have not yet become familiar to the locals, is one symbol of change in this small farming district. Two decades ago everyone waved, and almost without exception everyone derived their living from agriculture. For historical reasons the social structure of Oneriri was dense, conservative and caring. In such a community change was slow, and thus all the more dismaying when it suddenly accelerated.

From 1860 the Oneriri peninsula was progressively settled and farmed, initially by a handful of families. The original farms, or "runs", some of them as much as 4000 hectares, or nearly 10,000 acres<sup>1</sup>, were accumulated through a combination of direct purchase, and lease followed by purchase, from Te Uri O Hau hapu of Ngati Whatua (Smith, 2002 [1910]:333).

For about four generations, as these families grew, they subdivided their runs in accordance with a strictly patrilineal system of succession: sons took over the farms, daughters found husbands elsewhere. Land was bought and sold between the families

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<sup>1</sup> Despite the decimalisation of land area measurement, all who contributed to this thesis used "acres" rather than "hectares" when quantifying land. Accordingly, "acres" is used throughout except in excerpts from documents where decimal measurement is used.

as needs changed. In time farmers from outside Oneriri bought farm blocks from the older families and all prospered during the farming boom of the 1950s.

By the mid-1980s the picture had changed. Abolition of farm subsidies as part of a government programme of radical neo-liberal deregulation, coupled with diminishing returns for farm produce, caused a massive disruption of the economics of family farming. Nationally, farmers with large mortgages were hit hardest as incomes withered and interest rates climbed. Strategies employed by farmers throughout New Zealand to survive the resulting downturn began a pattern of change to farming practice that led eventually to higher value products. This now enables the national agricultural industry to compete in international commodity markets distorted by foreign domestic subsidies and punitive tariffs.

Throughout the country the structural reforms initiated by the government deepened and broadened, and vastly accelerated, the process of rural change begun by the technical innovations of the “second industrial revolution” (Watson, 1991:1) between the world wars of last century. The degree of change created pressures widely seen at the time as intolerable. But despite official predictions that 8000 farms would fail, throughout the country only 800 farming families, one percent of the total number, sold up to seek a life outside agriculture (Federated Farmers, 2002:3). The rest of the agricultural industry very quickly learned to do without government inputs.

Oneriri farmers suffered less than most from the downturn. Few of these farms at the time carried heavy mortgages and the farming families were long accustomed to coping with the lean periods of a naturally cyclical industry. However, the long-term effects of change in the agricultural sector were paralleled by social and structural changes that impacted on the conservative farming families of Oneriri. One of those changes is ending the dominance of the traditional farmers: their sons no longer want to take over the farm, nor are their daughters interested. Not only is farming seen by this latest generation as lacking the challenge and rewards offered by other, urban-

located, careers, but escalating land prices in Oneriri, driven mainly by urban people seeking smallholdings or “lifestyle” blocks<sup>2</sup>, mean they have little chance of being able to afford to buy the family farm. To retire with any measure of financial comfort, their parents are forced to sell their farms to others.

Today Oneriri – one of the many peninsulas fringing the Kaipara Harbour – can be viewed as rapidly becoming the latest in the succession of areas both north and south of Auckland’s greater metropolitan area, usually distinguished by their scenic beauty, that have become the focus of attention of high-income urban Aucklanders seeking retirement acreage, small farm holdings or blocks for weekend recreation. The subdivision of farms or parts of farms into small blocks and their occupation by non-farmers is the most visible evidence of change in Oneriri. Land on the peninsula now sells for prices far beyond its worth as farmland because of its value for development.

The farmers who contributed to this study are representative of most on the peninsula. They are within a few years of retiring, but some, out of step with the baby-boom population bulge are, in early middle-age, still struggling with the costs of succession. Both groups mourn what they see will eventually be almost an end to traditional farming, as they understand it, on the peninsula. They accept that farm parks and small blockholdings will inevitably become the dominant land use. In this expectation they are likely to seek to maximise the potential return they can gain from their land by selling their farms, or part of their farms, specifically for such developments; several have already done so. The effect of small-block subdivision of farms is that in figurative – though obviously not spatially proximate – terms, Oneriri is effectively becoming part of the urban fringe of metropolitan Auckland. The sale of whole farms or substantial acreage for bona fide farming purposes is likely to diminish, though not disappear. Some land is simply not suitable for smallholdings. While such sales are less significant in their effect on social change, it may eventually be the retention of

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout New Zealand and elsewhere people living on small rural holdings are frequently referred to as “lifestylers” and their holdings as “lifestyle blocks”. During the course of this study it became apparent that these terms, though well understood by all participants, were not accurate. Many farmers, when recounting their life histories, referred to the “lifestyle” offered by farming as their principal reason for being a farmer. Many smallholders see “lifestyler” as a pejorative description, and “lifestyle” as at least an incomplete term requiring qualification to be fully descriptive of their particular situation. Accordingly, throughout this study, the term “smallholder” will be used except where other terms are particularly nominated by participants.

this land in agricultural production which helps to maintain the rural character of Oneriri.

The principal finding of this study is that the farming community of Oneriri is currently undergoing a process of rapid, socially destabilising change largely as a result of the incursion of urban migrants, principally from Auckland. Though most farmers see that they, or eventually their successors, will benefit by selling land for subdivision, they view smallholders as troublesome meddlers who have forced unwanted constraints upon the practice of pastoral farming. A minority of farmers welcome the smallholders as long-overdue bearers of fresh ideas and innovation who are revitalising Oneriri in both economic and social terms.

### *Purpose*

Detailed studies of single places can be impressive vehicles for deepening our knowledge and evaluating theoretical ideas (Hoggart, 1990:255). The purpose of this study is to extend the discourse of rural change by focusing an anthropological gaze on the causes and effects of change in this bounded rural district as they are variously experienced by its farmers. It seeks to discover how Oneriri has been shaped – and continues to be shaped – by various cultural views of its history, physical character, land use and value (in all expressions of the term) of both the people who do, and those who do not, wave as they drive by. In doing so it offers an understanding of the interrelated dynamics of structural and social change as they apply to rural communities near major centres of population. It should be remembered, though, that in terms of rural change, New Zealand is very diverse at the local level. The level of analysis employed for this study indicates that national aggregates mask diversity and can provide a very different picture of what can be expected on moving from the national level to many, if not most, rural areas of the country (Press and Newell, 1994:1).

The changes that have shaped Oneriri during the last two decades can be examined in light of an extensive body of theory in both the social and physical sciences. Rural change can be – and is, exhaustively, – analysed from many standpoints. Social anthropology offers culture as one of the dimensions in which human behaviour can



be explained. The principal focus of this study is the human cultural understandings that underpin social expression in Oneriri, and it is through one of the most fundamental of cultural expressions – personal narrative – that the farming folk of Oneriri position themselves in their now rapidly changing, and often contested, landscape.

### *Aims*

Against an historical and theoretical background, this research explores the current political, economic and social relationships that exist between the traditional farmers of Oneriri and other residents – both fulltime and part-time – in light of their narrated understandings of Oneriri as a place-based rural community undergoing rapid change.

It argues that structural forces during the past 20 years have progressively altered Oneriri's essentially productivist character, resulting in intensified change to its social and physical landscapes. Whether such change is welcome today depends on the life views of those affected by it.

A number of broad research questions were posed to meet this inquiry:

- What are the major external influences that have led to change on the Oneriri peninsula during the past two decades?
- How are the effects of these structural forces being experienced by current Oneriri residents?
- What understandings do the people of Oneriri have of the cultural constitution of rurality?
- What is the nature of, and consequences devolving from, any social cleavage arising from perceived differences between the people of Oneriri?

### *Report structure*

The research questions above are answered in the order in which they were posed, and the discussion is divided into five chapters followed by a brief set of conclusions. Chapter One sets the scene for the ethnography, describing the Oneriri peninsula and the farmers and other residents who contributed to this study, then details the methodology employed to gather information during the research period. Chapter

Two briefly recounts the early history of farming on Oneriri peninsula, then reviews the 1984 deregulation of the agricultural industry in terms of its economic underpinnings and its subsequent effects on family farming. Chapter Three traces a sequence of rural changes stemming from the 1984 reforms that had, and is continuing to have, flow-on effects for Oneriri farmers. Changes to the roles of Oneriri farm women is examined in detail. Chapter Four introduces the concept that cultural understandings shape the way individuals interpret rurality, and compares the differing ways farmers and smallholders experience life in the country. Reasons for the urban migration that is changing the social structure of Oneriri are set out and participants detail, in extracts from their recorded narratives, some of the cultural elements that draw them to the country – or keep them there. Because of its importance in the construction of rurality, a further cultural element – community – is examined separately. Chapter Five first draws together the various social and structural influences that prompt and enable urban migration, then discursively establishes the differences between farmers and smallholders and their understandings of rurality as a basis for social cleavage.

The textual constraints on Master of Arts theses have prompted me to employ a kind of discursive shorthand to round out this chronicle of rural change and its causes and effects. Preceding each chapter is a short vignette which is intended to introduce the reader to some of the issues to come and, more importantly, add a more detailed human perspective to an account leached of a good measure of its colour by the need to preserve the anonymity of those who contributed to it. The vignettes are not fictional. The characters and events in each are drawn from my observations, but have been rearranged and compounded to maintain a contextual affinity with the chapter it accompanies.

# Friday Night and Saturday Morning<sup>\*</sup>

AT FIVE O'CLOCK on Friday there are 12 customers in the pub's main bar, none in the lounge just through the door by the pie warmer. Two women are drinking beer with their male partners. The remaining men form a loose group: two are playing pool, one stands apart but makes an occasional comment to the pool players. The remainder gossip while keeping an eye on the rugby preview on television.

None of the men are younger than 40ish. They are manual workers by their clothes, boots, hands – rough, muddy stubby. They all smoke. Rollups not tailormades.

The publican and his wife are behind the bar. They're not too busy. The boss is wearing his working uniform – a green apron with a pocket in front – drinking from a large mug of lemon tea. When he comes round to the front of the bar he takes his apron off. The publican's missus is a locally famous cook. As soon as the part-time barmaid arrives, she leaves the bar, gone to her kitchen.

From the bar there are windows to other worlds. On one side is the steady Friday afternoon stream of traffic heading north; among the cars many four-wheel drives towing small boats. On the opposite side of the bar a small window frames green paddock dotted with Friesian dairy cows. There's plenty of grass: it's been raining regularly and it hasn't been too cold. The low late sun strikes the cows, blackens the black and fluoresces white against the green green.

The men in the bar all know one another. They don't acknowledge their knowing. Conversation intense in one direction quickly switches to another. The discussion began in primary school.

A young Maori man comes through the door and hongis everyone he meets on his way to the bar. His targets, white and brown, respond unembarrassed. They know him well. Like many of the others he smells strongly of sheep.

At 5.30 the barmaid arrives for the evening shift, snapping up empty glasses from the high leaner tables as she heads for the bar. She greets regulars and relatives: "How are youse handsome jokers tonight?" The response is practised, routine, "Handsome? You been on the piss all afternoon eh?"

On the wall facing the bar is the competition board. Categories read: John Dory, Kingfish, Kahawai, Snapper, Duck, Parrie (paradise duck), Pheasant, Boar, Eel. The latest best weight is credited to each category. Against Snapper is the name of the barmaid and the weight – 7.5kg. Big fish. Against Eel is a weight of 5.56kg. It would have been the size of a man's leg.

The main door is banging open every few seconds now. For some regulars it's a long drive on dirt roads to the pub. A casual farm labourer with an old

felt hat welded to his eyebrows comes in with a slip of paper held in both hands. He speaks to nobody but looks at his handle of beer being filled as he pushes to the bar. The barmaid takes the paper and counts twenties out of the till. Six twenties and some coins. A cheque for a day's work. The pub is a bank. The barmaid knows all who write the cheques.

Several logging rigs are now lined up in a corner of the carpark facing the exit to the highway. Most of the drivers are accompanied by a woman – wife, partner. They form a group around a leaner and are immediately joined by the publican. These are his regular overnights, coming through every week on a roster delivering logs to the port of Whangarei. They will drink swiftly till 7.30 then eat. Some of the women will drive when the rigs leave before dawn. The barmaid is allocating rooms to the truckies; she notes down the names and room numbers in a book. Twenty dollars a night for a room in this pub. A young driver comes through the door with an overnight bag. He shakes his head when the barmaid holds up an empty glass. She says, "I'll put you in room five. That's got a double bed just in case you've got a sheila with you tonight". She winks at her regulars as the young driver, suddenly self-conscious, heads for the door to the accommodation wing without a word.

By six o'clock the bar is comfortably, companionably full, but not crowded. The barmaid is busy, cheerful, completely in control.

At 10.30 on Saturday morning 17 cars, vans and light trucks are in the supermarket carpark. This is a busy morning, the day before Fathers Day. Many of the vehicles are more than half covered with a thick coating of dried mud, slurry thrown up from the surface of unsealed rural roads. Inside, the supermarket is busy, people queuing at the two usually-adequate checkouts, but there are just as many in the carpark outside. They are standing in small groups, leaning against truck tailgates, sitting on car bonnets. They are talking, socialising. The groups may be mixed, but men talk to men, women to women. Nobody has dressed up for the visit. Clothing is rough, stained and well-worn. Gumboots are standard.

A clean car rolls in. The occupants, a middle-aged couple, aim for the door of the supermarket. Their clothing is clean and new and of a different style, somehow, from the locals'. Their faces are closed and defensive tight. Townies. The collective thought is almost audible.

As the rugby matches begin at the domain next to the primary school, people begin to drift away. By noon the carpark is deserted. Winter Saturdays are busy at the domain. The town has a rugby club, with one senior team and three lower grade teams. As well, district school teams make use of the rugby grounds. Local people take their rugby seriously. The son of the couple who run the local fish and chip shop is the current Maori All Blacks captain. Lack of funding for Northland rugby means most of the better players are snapped up by southern provincial teams. The fish and chip shop is left in the care of others while the owners travel to Hamilton to watch their boy play.

Fathers stamp up and down the touchline shouting at the 30 unhearing small boys. There are three matches today, all junior grade; the senior team is playing away in Whangarei. As the last match ends the rain begins once more. Muddied players and parents make for the cars; there is no after-match function today with the senior team away. The cars wind through the trees, heading for the highway.

To one side of the driveway through the bush is a small white cross decorated with plastic flowers and a large plastic propellor. The cross marks the outfall of a piped drain where an eight year-old girl was drowned in a rainstorm two years ago. All about the outfall has recently been landscaped, but the area where the cross is has been left untouched. The plastic propellor squeaks as it turns; its spindle has rusted. It spins fast in a gust of wind and makes a small scream.

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\* This essay was originally written in 2001 as part of an assignment for Massey paper 46.317 Urban Anthropology.

## CHAPTER ONE

# *Capturing discourse*

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**D**ISCOURSE is not just another word for conversation; it refers to all the ways in which we communicate with one another, to that vast network of signs, symbols and practices through which we make our worlds meaningful to ourselves and others (Gregory (1994), cited Jones, 1995:36). The ethnographic content of this thesis is built from the discourses of people who live in Oneriri. Their discourses include personal life narratives, conversations, interviews and simple chit-chat, leavened by the unconscious communication afforded by gesture and body language. This chapter describes the context of these people's lives and the methods employed to gather and analyse their discourses. It begins with a brief theoretical exploration of the character and purpose of ethnography then explains my own approach to the ethnographic research method.

The central characteristic of conventional ethnographies is that they focus on one specific culture or society and consider theoretical or comparative generalisations from the standpoint of the ethnographic example (Seymour-Smith, 1986:99). Their purpose is to achieve an understanding of a social situation which most nearly comprehends the understanding its members have of it (Cohen, 1994). Campbell (1992:91) points to the accountability of the researcher implicit in the ethnographic method as its prime strength: "There are very few other research methods which give the subjects of research any real opportunity to relate to their researcher on an ongoing basis". Ethnography as a research method therefore maintains the relationships between researcher and researched for sufficient time and at sufficient depth to arrive at as near a mutual understanding of the research subject as can reasonably be expected by both.

This ethnography of the pastoral farmers of the Oneriri peninsula is, in the above terms, wholly conventional: it seeks to describe their lives at a time of rapid change that is not fully understood by some, but is profoundly disturbing to all. In another sense this ethnography may be considered by some to be *not* conventional in that it is



deeply reflexive on two counts. The first is that the farmers' attitudes, behaviours and ideologies represented in it are those they have themselves volunteered in describing their lives. The second is that it does not presume to construe the author as a neutral, authoritative and scientific voice: ethnographers cannot stand above and outside what they study (Ellis and Bochner, 1996:19). Traditional research splits the researcher and researched, the object and subject, and the knowledge producer and the knowledge recipient (Pini, in press). Reflexivity has been defined as "the explicit recognition of the fact that the social researcher and the research act itself are part and parcel of the social world under investigation (Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), cited Smith, 1992:80).

It scarcely needs to be emphasised that researching the people among whom one lives is a subjective experience, but as Denzin and Lincoln (2000:19) point out, there are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of – and between – the observer and the observed. Indeed, modern ethnography has been described as simply diverse ways of thinking and writing about culture from the standpoint of participant observation (Clifford, 1988:9). So what validity can be placed on this one person's account of rural change as experienced and understood by the people of a small, place-based farming community? The post-modern argument would be that anthropologists can achieve more accurate descriptions of a society or culture when they adopt more self-conscious attitudes about their methods, assumptions and ideas (Hicks and Gwynne, 1996:61), and to a large degree I have succeeded in maintaining a constant awareness of my own reactions to the stories told to me. So although it is the job of the ethnographer, through training, to "inscribe patterns of cultural experience" and "give perspective on life" (Ellis and Bochner, 1996:16), this is a very personal and wholly partial account of the people who are, in all senses, my neighbours.

The degree of "accuracy" ascribed to this ethnography by individual readers will probably depend on the degree to which it agrees with their own understandings of life in Oneriri. When we try to understand other people's behaviour, the test of our success is whether the meanings we attribute to their actions correspond to the meanings they intend (Layton, 1997:185; Cohen, 1994). However, it needs to be borne in mind that any degree of generalisation requires *some* shift from the

particular. Campbell suggests that in the days when Functionalism dominated theoretical discourse it was possible for the ethnographer to create a harmonious picture of a society in equilibrium, a picture which the society in question would find comforting and non-threatening. Today most social analysis is couched within theories of society that often clash with a community's perception of itself (1992:93). I have no doubt that this account will not receive the approval of everyone who lives in Oneriri, but equally it will not be condemned by all.

Though I have taken extreme care to ensure the anonymity of all participants, inevitably a few voices will come through that will, by context or referent, be identified by some Oneriri residents. My only comfort is that identification of any person through association with any part of this ethnography implies that those readers making the connection are already familiar with the circumstances recounted, so no confidence has been unwittingly breached.

## Field description

The Oneriri peninsula is reached from Kaiwaka, a small, rural services-based town on State Highway One some 120 kilometres north of downtown Auckland. The area covered by this study is all of the land that can be reached by the no-exit Oneriri Road from its junction with the main highway in Kaiwaka, west toward Kaipara Harbour heads. The road is just under 26 kilometres long with its catchment broadened by a number of secondary and farm roads that reach tentatively toward the Otamatea River that bounds the peninsula's northern coast. To the south is the Oruawharo River. Both of these rivers are tidal and in fact could be more accurately described as fingers of the Kaipara Harbour. The Otamatea was once famous as a source of kauri logs that were felled on the surrounding hills and floated in rafts downriver where they were winched aboard sailing ships bound for Australia and San Francisco. Both the river community and the logging activities were enshrined in Jane Mander's (1938) *The Story of a New Zealand River*, said by many to be the inspiration for *The Piano* (1993), a film written and directed by Jane Campion.

Until about 1990 Oneriri was relatively sparsely populated. For this reason it lacked – and still lacks – any community facility such as a shop, hall or church that could act as



a focus for social activities. These are all located in Kaiwaka. In earlier days there was a small primary school about 20 kilometres west of Kaiwaka, and a Maori primary school a few kilometres closer in. Both schools closed when improvements to Oneriri Road meant a school bus could ferry pupils to the primary school in Kaiwaka. Despite the reliance on Kaiwaka as a centre for commercial and community affairs, Oneriri peninsula was considered by its farmer residents to be a distinct community, quite separate from that of Kaiwaka. They were even specific as to where their community began: it encompassed only those farms that were beyond the railway line that crosses Oneriri Road two kilometres west of Kaiwaka.

It was a fact that there was a right side and a wrong side of the tracks when it came to distinguishing who belonged where. One participant in this study recalled how nearly 40 years ago when she and her husband were living in a rented house close to the railway, but on the Kaiwaka side, she was asked by a friend, who was soon to marry an Oneriri farmer, to be matron of honour for the ceremony. As the date of the wedding loomed, a bridal shower was organised by the ladies of Oneriri to welcome the soon-to-be farmer's wife. The matron of honour wasn't invited. "That wasn't through people being nasty or anything like that," she said. "I just wasn't local because I had only lived in the area about three years and I didn't live in Oneriri really." She insists the Oneriri community was, nevertheless, a warm community: "Everyone who came into the road was welcomed with parties and so on".

Lying to the north, the Otamatea side of the peninsula is a little warmer than the south side and is deeply indented in places by creeks and inlets, offering extensive and picturesque views of the river from many points along Oneriri Road. Understandably, most of the smallholdings are located on this side. Early in 2003 an ambitious farm park development was completed on 500 acres of steep, mostly coastal land seven kilometres west of S.H.1, offering 50 smallholdings. The highest priced blocks are windswept, but have spectacular views of the Kaipara. Half of the land has been retained as pasture and will continue to run drystock. All of the native bush remnants have been protected and supplemented by extensive planting of native species. The development, called Takahoa Bay, takes its name from a cone-shaped remnant basaltic plug, once the heart of a volcano, that marks the centre of an extensive early

Maori burial ground and is therefore wāhi tapu. Entry to the farm park can be made only through a code-controlled gate. So far about half of the lots have been sold.

An earlier, though much less sophisticated development occupies the Raepare peninsula which juts into the Otamatea River about four kilometres from Kaiwaka. It is called the Otamatea Eco-Village. As its name implies, it is an environmentally-based intentional<sup>1</sup> community with a central ethic of sustainable living. It was established in 1996 on the 250-acre peninsula and is currently the location for 13 households, all on five-acre lots. Two further lots are unsold. The balance of 176 acres is held in common. This, too, is an exclusive community: intending residents must be approved by those already living in the village, and access from Oneriri Road is down a long, winding gravel road clearly signposted "Private access". It costs \$115,000 to buy one of these waterfront blocks.

The Oneriri peninsula was once largely devoted to sheep farming with a much smaller acreage used for dairying. With the decline of wool as a commodity and diversification driven by the deregulatory measures of the 1984 Labour Government, most farmers switched to beef farming. The concentration is on bull farming for the American hamburger market. Sheep are still extensively run with cattle to hedge the notoriously volatile beef market, but the product today is fat lambs rather than wool. Returns for wool barely pay for the cost of removing it from the sheep. Only two dairy farms remain on the peninsula.

## The participants

The Oneriri people who contributed to this study can be broadly identified as being either farmers or non-farmers. Such simplistic identification is intended merely to place the farmers at the centre of this inquiry and obviously overlooks both the participants' individual perceptions of the worth, status and acceptability of others, no

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<sup>1</sup> The term "intentional community" has many definitions. Sargent's (1997:3) is probably the most precise: "... a group of five or more adults and their children, if any, who come from more than one nuclear family and who have chosen to live together for a mutually agreed upon purpose".

matter how they might be identified, and their understandings and interpretations of their own place in the Oneriri community<sup>2</sup>.

One smallholder suggested that any person who grew fruit and vegetables for their own consumption, as she does, qualifies for the farmer label: "Farms can be enormous or they can be really, really small." A parallel distinction is that of "local" as opposed to newcomer, but who has ever arrived at a clear definition of local? Throughout this study the term farmer is applied to both men and women engaged in the occupation of traditional farming, which in the Oneriri context means pastoral farming, as a principal occupation and source of income. All other participants will be identified by terms that best describe their residential and occupational relationships with the district.

With only a few exceptions the 22 farmers interviewed during this study are aged two or three years either side of 60 years and thus form part of the "baby-boom" population bulge that currently characterises New Zealand farming. The farmers not interviewed but otherwise contributing to the study are in the same age range. One 58 year-old farmer's observation points to the problem they all face, and which is one of the central concerns of this inquiry: "You go to Wellsford saleyards and you have a look at the average age of the people there. I'm probably one of the younger ones. There's not that many young guys coming through who can afford farms". Levett and Pomeroy point out that few people are aware that the New Zealand baby boom was longer, more intense and with higher fertility levels than elsewhere (1997:7). Some of the older farmers are already considering retirement, while the younger ones are looking forward to 10 or more years of active farming life yet. Not one admitted to having a clear plan for retirement, or was certain what would happen to their farm when they eventually ceased farming.

The 26 non-farmer participants interviewed for this study exhibit a much broader age range. Some have young children; others have already retired. Quite a few work either locally as contractors or principally from home, with one or more days a week in

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<sup>2</sup> In this usage, "community" is intended to denote the people who live in the particular locality of Oneriri as distinct from any other. Other interpretations of community are explored under this heading in Chapter Four.

Auckland. Only one is salaried. Their single unifying characteristic is that they can all be classified as smallholders. Each lives in a rural setting on a property of half an acre or more, ranging up to 20 acres. Many run a few head of cattle, principally to keep the grass under control. A few have attempted to establish such potentially income-producing enterprises as lavender and olive growing, and cheese-making, but with only marginal success, chiefly because Northland is characterised by generally poor, heavy clay soils and extremes of climate and rainfall. Despite this, two highly successful flower-growing operations have been established in Oneriri Road. Each grows flowers for the export market in temperature and humidity controlled greenhouses.

Almost all of the non-farmers came originally from Auckland, though four fairly recent arrivals who live in Otamatea Eco-Village came more or less directly from Europe and spent only a relatively short time in the city. Though it can be regarded as a community somewhat removed from the rest of Oneriri, the Eco-Village is separate principally because of its relatively off-the-beat location. Village members work positively to involve themselves in the wider community and despite being frequently labelled “greenies”, are viewed favourably, and with respect, by the people of both Oneriri and Kaiwaka.

## Delimitation

Besides farmers and small blockholders there are two other readily identifiable social groups within the Oneriri community which are equally both subject and contributory to the changes that are the topic of this inquiry. These are Maori, and non-farm owning farm workers or contractors. However, in Oneriri, neither of these groups could be termed discrete.

The peninsula has always had Maori farmers. There are few today compared with 20 years ago and much of the Maori-owned land is now leased to Pakeha farmers. In terms of this study some Maori could be best described as small blockholders. At the same time they may work as hired labour on the larger farms, or as contractors for fencing, shearing or other rural enterprises. Similarly, other farm workers are Pakeha; they may own a smallholding and they may also work as, or for, rural contractors.

There is obvious and considerable overlap of the activities and roles of the different social groupings that make up the Oneriri community and thus a blurring of interests. While it is acknowledged that Maori and non-farm owning farm workers may have some distinct social issues and problems, their specific consideration here within these categories would, I believe, considerably extend this inquiry to little benefit. A social accounting of Maori in Oneriri in both historical and contemporary terms would be a valuable addition to the literature of rural change in New Zealand, but clearly would need to be undertaken as a separate project.

## Methodology

Anthropologists gather data to uncover and explicate the ways in which people in particular settings come to understand, account for, take action and otherwise manage their day-to-day situation (Van Maanen (1979), cited Miles & Huberman, 1994). The farmers who contributed to this inquiry are busy people. Even those who confessed to easing up as they advance in years work daily with their stock. That is *their* day-to-day situation. For a few every day starts at 5am and ends around 7.30pm. Some found it difficult to find any time during the day to speak with a social science researcher so many interviews and recording sessions were conducted in the evenings – one in a barn while the farmer probed deep in the bowels of a tractor, interspersing his rather muffled narrative with instructions where I was to direct the torchbeam.

Based loosely on a theoretical framework of ethnomethodology, three data-gathering methods were employed in assembling the narratives of farmers for this study: life history collection, interviews using a question guide, and participant observation. Life history as a data-collection method has a function that is less concerned with the establishment of “facts” than enabling participants to crystallise their world views (Andersen, Borum, Kristensen & Karnøe, 1995:13) – as Van Maanen says, to understand and account for their day-to-day situation. This can be seen as going a long way toward meeting the ethnomethodological question “How do people make sense of their everyday activities as part of their social world?” (Wallace & Wolf (1980), cited Patton, 1990:74). Ethnomethodology gets at the norms, understandings, and assumptions that are taken for granted by people in a setting because they are so deeply understood that people do not even think about them (Patton, 1990:74). My

hope was that asking people to *describe* their lives might also result in them *explaining* their lives. In this I was reasonably successful. Though some farmers exhibited a degree of reticence while being interviewed, others were open to the point of becoming almost confessional. The reticence of some might have been the result of conservativeness or caution about what they should or should not say. Equally it could have arisen from unfamiliarity with the interview process and the presence of a tape recorder. However, in only one instance did a participant refuse to answer a question.

Life histories also aid in understanding how the individual's current world is defined by a personal set of elements and a system of various relationships (Andersen et al, 1995:13). Angrosino warns, however:

It [should not be] taken for granted that the individual biography represents the culture in microcosm or, conversely, that the group ethnography is the individual personality writ large . . . it is often held that the context, far from representing documentable fact, is actually the product of complex influences (such as gender, race/ethnicity, or socio-economic class) that can disguise more than it reveals (Angrosino, 2002:37).

This was indeed the case. Despite a broad commonality of interests, including an almost universal belief that smallholders often make poor neighbours, the farmer participants' opinions on most matters that they discussed with me could best be described as disparate. Subsequent analysis of transcripts of the life history narratives shows most are short on "fact" but rich in highly reflexive recollections, opinions, anecdotes and observations. It is this material that has enabled me to observe Cohen's injunction to anthropologists to "elicit and describe the thoughts and sentiments of individuals which we would otherwise gloss over in the generalisations we derive from collective social categories" (Cohen, 1994:4). Ethnographic use of direct quotations from personal narratives was therefore an effective way of accomplishing what Cohen terms "[giving] others back their selfhood". He agrees with Angrosino when he adds that such rehabilitation of self in anthropology does not offer the self as an alternative to society, "it proposes a view of society as composed of and by self conscious individuals" (1994:192).

The recording of life history narratives had two other, more tactical, purposes. I was offered the co-operation of members of the Kaiwaka Historical Society in assembling a body of background reading for the study and in assembling a representative list of



potential participants. As reciprocity I undertook to gather historical material from the participants for inclusion in a detailed history of the district which will be published to mark its sesquicentenary in 2009. As already noted, the life histories yielded little factual material, but they did provide an enormous fund of family stories and handed down impressions and understandings of the social and working lives of their parents and grandparents that will supply lively cladding for the dry bones of historical fact upon which the sesquicentenary book will be based. The second purpose was to initiate what in many cases became multiple interviews with a topic thoroughly familiar to each participant – themselves. In such a non-threatening context I believed I would be able to gather data in a personalised, unhurried, interactive and relatively informal manner. I felt sure much other data of an ethnographic nature would emerge also, and this proved to be correct.

Because I had met some of the participants only fleetingly, and a few not at all since coming to Oneriri, I visited each participant household first to explain the project in detail, thus giving participants the opportunity to ask questions and, I hoped, gain some confidence in me as a researcher. During these preliminary visits I asked them formally for their co-operation and made appointments for taping their life narratives at a later date. One woman refused to be interviewed: “I’ve got nothing to contribute; I haven’t got time for this sort of thing”. A married couple promised to telephone with a date to tape their stories but never did. Apart from these disappointments my procedure was successful, with the 22 life history interviews averaging just under two hours and transcribing to between 25 and 35 pages of single-spaced typing each. Once these transcriptions have been edited by the participants, they will be passed to the Historical Society for possible use in the preparation of the commemorative book.

Subsequent interviews were held with most of the farmers to amplify points arising from the life histories and to explore questions not touched on during those sessions. During these second (and sometimes third) interviews I employed a list of open-ended questions as a guide to ensure most of the issues raised by the research questions were covered adequately (see Appendix 1).

Participant observation for this study could be said to have begun at the time my wife and I first came to live in the district in 1996. At that time I had no intention of

undertaking an anthropological study of any kind; any observations I made were more of the nature of who's who, and who does what and where. It was only when beginning this project I realised I had unconsciously acquired a reasonably extensive knowledge of the people of Oneriri, particularly of the farming families and their relationships to one another. Those I had not met I at least knew about.

At this point the question arises whether the researcher should be considered an insider or an outsider. I knew that the degree of my acceptance, or otherwise, by participants would determine the quality of the data I managed to elicit from them. I doubted I was seen as a "local" and therefore an insider. The best I could hope for was recognition as an active participant in community activities, and acceptance that I was undertaking a project that would, ultimately, be of some benefit to the community. As a resident of Oneriri, by undertaking a research project among other residents I was, in effect, modifying my social status. Adopting the extra role of researcher meant I began to actively explore facets of people's lives that are, during normal social situations, merely accepted or acknowledged, rather than subjected to scrutiny or analysis. Inevitably my explanation to participants of the research process, then the subsequent data collection, changed the way I was viewed by them. Unsurprisingly, it also had some effect on my relations with people who were not participants. Toward the end of the data collection period my wife and I attended the funeral of an Oneriri identity which drew mourners from throughout the district. Repeatedly during the social gathering which followed I was asked by both participants and non-participants whether it was "safe" for them to speak to me, the question accompanied by much comically exaggerated gesturing toward microphones supposedly hidden about my person. The attempts at humour indicated, I thought, a friendly acceptance of my self-stated role, and no real suspicion or mistrust.

The question of insider or outsider status is partly answered by the farmer participants' determination of who is, and who is not, a "local". As will be seen from later discussion of this question, to most of the farmers I was clearly not a local and therefore certainly not an insider. To make matters worse, they knew me as a card-carrying smallholder. However, the fact that part of the research exercise was to gather material that would be of benefit to the community in the form of a commemorative book assured, I believe, a greater degree of co-operation and



consideration than I would have been accorded otherwise. Almost all of the farmer participants see work performed on behalf of the rest of the community as an essential part of being an effective and acceptable member of the community; perhaps, one might imagine, even earning points toward some mythic total, the achievement of which bestows automatic “local” status.

Collecting data from small blockholders was much simpler than from the farmers. All of these participants were interviewed, with each interview beginning with the question “Why did you come to live in Oneriri?” Once again I employed a question guide (see Appendix 2) but departed from it frequently to pursue issues of particular or novel interest.

This part of the inquiry incorporates data I gathered for an earlier (2002) research study of members of Otamatea Eco-Village. The purpose of that inquiry was principally to establish members’ understanding of sustainability as a life-guiding ethic, but it also closely investigated their reasons for seeking a rural lifestyle, preference for Oneriri as a place to live, and their relationships with the Oneriri and Kaiwaka communities.

All of the smallholders were enthusiastic participants, though with the exception of the Eco-Villagers it was fairly difficult to build a roster of interviews because of their extreme mobility. For most, visiting Auckland is a frequent activity, either for work or for shopping, and in several instances interviews had to be held off until participants returned from overseas.

The smallholder interviews can be understood as in part responding to some of the issues raised by the farmers. It was clear from the comments of potential participants at the beginning of the study that there was a degree of cleavage between farmers and smallholders; I needed to determine the nature of the difference or differences in both practical and social terms as a first step in understanding the social structure of the community. The presence of smallholders is the most obvious manifestation of recent change on the Oneriri peninsula, and the relationship between the farming families and these newcomers is a salient part of this study.

As with the farmers, all the smallholder interview transcripts will be returned to the participants for editing, then passed to the Historical Society.

Analysis of the transcripts and field notes followed a conventional pattern. All of the material was coded according to an initially lengthy list of topics or themes, drawn from the literature of rural change and from the interview guides, which would later be considered for grouping under individual chapter headings. Other themes emerging from the discourses were added to the list. Once the relevant material was coded and extracted (largely using the cut and paste function of the word-processing programme), the topics were gathered under likely chapter headings and new themes developed from interviews were subjected to further search in the literature.

The biggest problem was focusing the study to fulfil its central objective. It seemed almost all of the data that had been gathered was highly relevant to the study in some way: it was all part of the jigsaw that represented society in Oneriri. In the interests of keeping the thesis to a reasonable size my only recourse was grudging, but merciless, editing of the final text to remove all that was not directly relevant to the central objective of the research. A second problem, that of ensuring the anonymity of all participants, was resolved during the process of coding and subsequent analysis of the themes that emerged from the research. What was happening in the research setting I have described in general patterns derived from specific narrative and observation. In these broad chronicles individual voices and their identifying characteristics largely disappear. However unattributed quotations are used throughout the text to ensure the “flavour” of Oneriri is retained and give some idea of the ranges of feelings and attitudes inherent in the themes explored. Above all, throughout the writing of the text I was mindful of one particularly stern admonition:

[Researchers need to be] warned against making sweeping . . . generalizations lacking any hint of the agents’ own voices, [which] illustrate[s] the dangers of imposing blanket-like academic discourses onto all the ‘otherness’ of individual and local constructions and reconstructions of the rural (Jones, 1995:41).

Chapter Two begins with a brief history of European settlement of the Oneriri peninsula then discusses the deregulation of the New Zealand farming industry from 1984 and the role it played in hastening the process of rural change.

# Spraying the rams



THE OLD MAN spoke very quietly and very slowly, with long pauses between phrases, as if he had trouble finding exactly the right words to express his thoughts. How long, I had asked, had his family farmed this land? Before venturing to taste the first few words of his reply he stared over the close-cropped paddocks toward the big hill that marked the southern end of the valley. Below the hill was a sizeable remnant of native bush, with the distinctive bright green conical shapes of regenerating kauri piercing the dense agglomeration of lower-growing totara.

"My grandfather was a timber getter before he bought this farm," he said. "He worked in the gang that felled the kauri on that big hill and on these slopes here". He gestured downward and away. "Here and there they left the odd tree that was too hard to get at or was a little bit runty . . .". The pause was longer this time. "You can't see them from here, but they're bloody big now. The ones on this place are down there in that patch of bush by the creek. They don't stick up above them rickers because they're growing from the bottom of the gully".

After the kauri was felled – sometimes long after – the land was burnt over then seeded with grass, but the wetter, rockier gullies were left as useless for pasture, with slowly regenerating bush providing shelter for stock from high summer temperatures and the surprisingly cold winters of lower Northland. The old man had inherited this farm from his father who in his time, with his three brothers, had taken over the original 3000-acre run, splitting it up immediately after the grandfather died.

"They knew there'd be trouble once the grandfather went; nobody to keep the peace." He pointed to a far distant line of trees to the west. "That's where the boundary of the original farm was. By the time I came along the three other blocks had been sold. Two of my uncles were killed in the First World War and the other one just cleared off somewhere; sold his place for bugger-all, Dad said. He wanted to buy it back but he didn't have the money."

The old man was becoming more animated as the memories grew brighter. "This is good country here," he said. "It's a bit puggy in the winter with the rain, so it's better to run sheep. They keep the place looking nice and tidy, and that's important." His father raised sheep but also ran a dairy herd: most farmers did in those days when every district had its own co-op dairy company, but the old man had run sheep exclusively since taking over the farm in the



late 1940s. He was well stocked at the time of the wool boom sparked by the Korean War, when wool hit 240 pence a pound. His wool cheque that season was greater than the capital value of the farm. "Of course that £1 a pound price was for some flash high country merino wool from the South Island, but I did alright too," he recalled.

He seemed almost about to smile at the memory, then grew dour again as he described his sheepfarming years since the boom. It was a story of cycles, of wax and wane, of selling off a few acres some years, renewing fences and applying fertiliser in the good years. He gestured toward the rams penned next to the rotary sprayer: "But these seem to be out of fashion around here these days. Everyone's running bulls for export to America. They make 'em into hamburgers."

Some farmers joke about raising bulls – they call it McFarming. Bulls are hard on the landscape and the fences. They dig holes in the pasture and often fight, knocking fences flat despite electric hotwires. Their heavy bodies drive their hooves deep into the ground when the pastures become rainsoaked, leaving water-filled pugholes. They also break down the banks of streams, allowing the dislodged soil to wash down to the Kaipara estuaries and form mudbanks. Where they meet the salt water most of the streams are now choked with mangroves growing in the mud.

The old man wouldn't have a bloody bull on the place. "Mind you, sheep are a lot of trouble;

you've gotta look after them a lot more than cattle," he said. "They get bloody flystrike and they get bloody footrot. Then there's facial bloody eczema, though that's not such a curse as it used to be. You've got to bloody crutch them and bloodywell shear them and put them through this bloody sprayer. The bloody work never stops."

He stopped talking to prod one batch of rams out of the rotary sprayer with a long pole and open the hatch for another dozen to enter. If sheep were so much trouble, why didn't he switch to bulls like the others? He was suddenly fierce, almost shouting. "I'm too bloody old to change now," he said. "I've got no kids to take over this place. When I retire the farm'll be sold and the next bloke can raise bloody bulls . . . or any other bloody thing he wants." He paused defensively. "Anyway, I like sheep. They're a lot smarter than you'd think; smarter than cattle by a long shot."

I had a feeling I'd somehow touched a raw nerve. The old man turned towards the ram pens. He seemed to have shrunk a little. He was the last of his family to farm this land; when he went the family name, well respected in Northland farming circles, would go with him. He kept his face turned away, his eyes on the rams remaining in the pen – scrawny creatures with enormous scrota almost reaching to the ground. I needed to change the subject: would it soon be time to put the rams with the ewes? He looked at me questioningly for a moment then seemed to relax, the momentary discomfiture gone. He explained that was why he was spraying the rams. The parasites had to be eliminated before tupping started. He was now speaking in a normal tone; I was on safe ground. What else needed to be done before the rams were let loose among the ewes?

"Well," he said, "some blokes reckon you need to run them up and down the hills for a week or two to get them fit. They say it makes them keen to get to work." He fell silent for a moment, then: "But I'm not so sure" – another pause – "I never needed to run up and down no bloody hills."

A minute passed, then the old man began making a strange rumbling sound that seemed to rise from his boots. His eyes squinched shut and his face grew red. Was it a heart attack?

Suddenly he let out a huge machinegun roar of laughter, followed by another and another.

I think the old man had been waiting for a townie question like that.

## CHAPTER TWO

# *Contexts of history and reform*

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TWO HISTORICAL contexts underpin this ethnographic description of the people of the Oneriri peninsula. These contexts serve two purposes. First, they describe the human endeavours and structural forces that have contributed, and those that continue to contribute, to rural change in New Zealand nationally, and at the local level. Second, they establish the origins of social and cultural understandings of some of the aspects of rurality that contribute to the current social structure and behaviours of the Oneriri community. Succeeding chapters will continue this exploration of causality.

The first section provides a brief outline of European settlement of the peninsula and the development of family farming as the principal occupation of its inhabitants. The second section summarises the deregulatory reforms of 1984 and their effects that profoundly changed the face of the agricultural industry and initiated changes to rural life that have yet to be fully played out.

### European settlement

The history of European settlement of the Oneriri peninsula is closely bound to that of its surrounding districts, and to Kaiwaka in particular. This is due to two factors apart from geographical proximity. The first is that at the time of the first land purchase from local Maori in 1858, the only access to the area from Auckland was by boat to Mangawhai on the east coast, then by foot west across the ancient Maori canoe portage to the Kaiwaka River, a tributary of the Otamatea River. This path later became a bullock track, but for several years was the only road to the outside world. The second factor is that because there were so few roads, most travel around the district was by boat. The rivers and estuaries that dissect the landscape surrounding the open waters of the Kaipara Harbour fulfil the functions that roads do today. For example, until the 1930s Oneriri farmers relied for day to day supplies on a store at Batley, on the opposite, northern, side of the Otamatea River. The store ceased trading



when improved roads gave Oneriri farmers direct access to Kaiwaka. From that time social relations between neighbouring districts separated from each other by water slowly withered from lack of regular contact; many houses were shifted from riverside to roadside as the power poles carrying electricity to the peninsula stepped down Oneriri Road, and the common means of transport became the motor vehicle, not the skiff. What once took an energetic rower a few minutes, the journey today from Oneriri to Batley takes about half an hour by road.

Much of the following brief historical outline of the district is drawn from handed-down accounts recorded in the Commemorative Booklet and Souvenir Programme published to mark the 1959 Centennial of Kaiwaka. Other information is referenced.

It is believed the first Pakeha to visit the Kaipara was the Rev. Samuel Marsden in 1820. On a journey by boat north up the harbour he noted the Otamatea River and three months later in Whangarei decided to make the portage from Mangawhai to Kaiwaka to descend the Otamatea. He discovered in Whangarei that this would be impossible; the local Ngati Whatua inhabitants of the Otamatea valley had fled from a Ngapuhi war party, taking their canoes with them.

The common thread to most of the subsequent early observations of the district was its evident suitability for farming. Twenty years after Marsden, Ernest Dieffenbach identified the Oruawharo, Otamatea and Kaiwaka rivers and reported himself impressed with the potential of the area for settlement. The following year, Henry T. Kemp, the Acting Sub-Protector of Aborigines, noticed and reported the fertile country on the banks of the Otamatea. The first missionary arrived at this time and remarked that the land bordering the Oruawharo River was "fertile and of wide extent".

The first purchase of land from Maori was made by the Crown in 1858 near what is today the township of Kaiwaka. The Crown paid £500 for 8128 acres. John Rogan, the District Land Purchase Commissioner, was so impressed with the quality of the land that he bought part of the block for himself. Other land in the area, principally in Oneriri, was bought by settlers directly from its Te Uri O Hau owners. It was usual to lease a property for some years and then purchase it outright. The 1959 Kaiwaka

Centennial booklet notes the district had always been fortunate to receive settlers, not speculators. "Many of the farmers today are descendants of the earliest arrivals, and few of the farms have suffered more than two or three changes of hands" (p.23).

Land purchase in the district was accomplished with few problems. In 1863, to promote friendly relations between Maori and Pakeha, local chiefs Paikea te Hekeua and Arama Karaka Haututu held a feast at Rangiora, on the Oneriri bank of the Otamatea River. Paikea stressed to his Pakeha visitors that land had been sold by local Maori to the Crown to encourage settlement and bring peace (between Maori) to the area. He said: "You are now my Pakeha, and I and my tribe will be ever ready to protect you with our bodies. You have much to teach us, and you may learn many things from us that will be useful to you. May we be brothers forever. That is the wish of Paikea" (p.22).

For many years the land price was 10 shillings an acre, and some of the wealthier settlers were able to establish substantial "runs" on the Oneriri peninsula. Sheep raising in Oneriri was pioneered on one 10,000-acre run, but the attempt was made with merinos which failed to thrive in the humid climate. Another run, of 8,500 acres, was a racehorse breeding estate as well as a mixed farm.

Maori contributed much to the success of white settlement in the district. Provisions frequently ran low, necessitating a long walk to Mangawhai or further afield, returning carrying a bag of flour or other supplies. "Many a lost and weary traveller was guided by the Maoris to safety," the booklet records. "They supplied food to settlers: kumaras, fish, watermelons, peaches from the trees introduced by the missionaries which were such a feature of the district in those days" (p.22).

### *She's a hard life . . .*

Following almost 30 years of recession toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, farming in the early 1900s was still largely subsistence only. Cash work to buy farm needs and day-to-day home essentials often took men away from their homes. Many camped at scrubcutting jobs and the gumfields, coming home only at weekends to restock with food and clothing. The settler wife struggled to keep the home going and care for



small children. The centennial booklet observes: "At the same time she would be preparing for her husband's return and his weekly supplies, not to mention bearing the strain of responsibility in his absence" (p.69). Women's normal duties included milking the house cows, cutting the firewood, collecting and bottling fruit and gathering any other crops, in addition to the housework, making bread, churning butter and making candles and soap from home-rendered fat. Children looked after younger siblings and had a range of chores before and after school.

The farms of the men and women who followed the earliest settlers were in most cases not farms in the modern sense. Their inherited properties were usually still only roughly cleared holdings, and they faced the task of consolidating the work of their parents and transforming the land into economic units. In the 40-odd years since first settlement enormous effort had changed virgin bush and scrub to pasture, but not the lush pasture of today. Fertiliser was not used and much of the grass was of inferior species. Average carrying capacity of such land was one sheep to the acre. The gradually spreading roads were little better than clay tracks and in winter became deeply muddy and almost impassable. Horses were the main means of inland transport, and were also pressed into service for ploughing and harrowing, and pulling the family buggy, wagon and sledge.

Many farmers were milking small herds of 10 to 15 cows and producing a surplus of butter for sale to the local store, usually as



*Milking was done by hand, and in the paddock.*



barter for other supplies. The price paid was about sixpence a pound. Prices for cows ranged from £4 to £7 for a first-class beast. They were mainly beef cattle so that unwanted calves could be raised for sale to the local butchers. But much of the land taken up by settlers was not being properly utilised for farming. As early as 1890 a North Albertland (near Kaiwaka) correspondent raised an issue of concern to the whole of lower Northland. He complained there was too much dependence on kauri timber and gum for farming to develop (Ryburn, 1999:132). However, work on the farms intensified gradually as the outwork available to augment farm incomes began to disappear or become too far distant to allow for working in conjunction with the holding. For instance, kauri in the district was being cut out rapidly. By 1912 nearly all the Otamatea kauri had gone (Ryburn, 1999:110). Farmers were compelled to look to their farms to provide full support for themselves and their families.

This shift in work patterns led to intensification of farming effort in Northland, and of dairying in particular. For the budding smallfarmer, dairying was the best chance for Jack to be his own master. McLauchlan (1981:197) notes that onerous though dairying was, if you had made it through the “bad, early years” and could afford some labour saving devices, it could be a rewarding life. By 1911, when butterfat reached a shilling a pound, dairy farmers began to enjoy a reasonable standard of living. “But”, McLauchlan notes, “they were still the navvies of the farming industry”, a condition that has not changed since then. Between 1906 and 1919 there was spectacular growth in dairy farming in lower Northland. In Otamatea County the number of dairy cows nearly doubled (Ryburn, 1999:154). In and around Oneriri, farmers hedged their bets and ran sheep as well as dairy cattle. Some concentrated on sheep raising in conjunction with small herds of beef cattle, and over time this became the dominant land use. Some idea of the style of farming and life on the peninsula from that time onward can be gained from the descriptions of farms self-penned by subsequent landholders and published in a “vanity” book (Tait, 1958):

From 1906 the land was grassed after burning, and later ploughed, cropped and sown when and where practicable. The farm is of 320 acres of which 30 or 40 acres are flat, with the balance undulating easy slopes. The Jersey herd is over 100 cows, nearly all bred on the farm. The farm has a Romney flock of 200 ewes primarily for fat lamb production. In addition a stud Southdown flock of 150 ewes is maintained and approximately 50 to 60 Southdown rams are sold each year to fat lamb breeders (p.420).

The farm, of 506 acres, is of easy, undulating contour, about two-thirds limestone and the balance mainly gumland clays. The land was unimproved when bought from the Maoris in 1914. There was no road access and the owner used to row once a week to the nearest post office at Batley. Following World War II the carrying capacity was doubled by topdressing and regrassing. It now runs 1700 sheep, including 1350 breeding ewes and 200 polled Angus cattle (p.425)

The 500 acres on the Otamatea River carries 1000 Romney sheep and 290 cattle. To achieve this, five tractors, a hay baler and a wide range of implements are used. Four thousand bales of hay are made each year for winter feeding-out. The family have shaped a flourishing farm from practically worthless bush and scrub during 68 years of ownership (p.418).

Since 1939, 140 acres have been bought and added to the original 900. Continued clearing with crawler tractors, giant discs and rollers to knock down the scrub [preceded] burning, then sowing with English grasses. Sufficient natural shelter was preserved for the Hereford cattle and Romney sheep bred and fattened on this warm, down-type limestone land. The present homestead was moved intact from Batley by barge and hauled from the beach by two horses driving a whim (a winch operated by horses) (p.439).

The big runs were broken up over the years by subdivision to serve succeeding generations, but productivity remained high. During the 1950s wool boom, at least one farm sold a season's clip for more than the capital value of the 1500-acre farm itself. Some years later, in a fruitless appeal to the bureaucracy in Wellington to gain funding to upgrade and seal the whole of Oneriri Road, petitioning farmers pointed out that the value of production from farms on the road was greater than any other in Northland. Though farming fortunes fluctuated considerably over the following years, it was not until the deregulation of the farming industry in 1984 that this mix of dairying, sheep and beef farming on the Oneriri peninsula changed to any great degree. Some have not changed at all. Several of the farms visited for this research project still farm a mix of sheep and beef; two others continue as dairy farms. Most farmland in Oneriri is now devoted to raising bull beef for export.

## The rural downturn

The reform of New Zealand's agricultural industry from 1984 is the starting point for any discussion of recent rural change because of the profound – and varied – effects the reform measures had on individual farmers and the infrastructure that they routinely employed. The degree to which farmers were affected by the farming



reforms and wider deregulatory initiatives implemented by the new Labour Government elected that year varied according to individual financial circumstances. The significant<sup>1</sup> Oneriri farmers were able to weather the subsequent downturn<sup>2</sup>, but their responses to lowered incomes meant many on-farm and casual farm workers and farm contractors were forced to look elsewhere, often to different vocations, to survive.

As already noted, deregulation accelerated the process of rural change in New Zealand. Nearly two decades later the shock of the reforms has faded and the agricultural industry has adopted a new world view. However, some of the consequences of the deregulatory measures, and the underlying global economic factors which forced their adoption from 1984, continue to be a force for change:

The shape of rural communities has been transformed not only by the reforms but by the economic pressures which led to government interference in the first place. Many of the trends apparent in the post-reform era are a continuation of long-term patterns and are a reflection of the global capitalist economy (Levett and Pomeroy, 1997:7).

This section surveys a selection of the literature documenting the reforms and the background to their adoption, and presents a comparative review of recent research which explores, as this study does, aspects of the impact of change on specific rural communities. It also points to the financial uncertainty of farming as a factor compounding issues of farm succession.

It should be noted that it is misleading to attribute all the changes which have been observed in farming in the past 20 years to the 1984 reforms alone. Many issues in New Zealand agriculture, such as farm indebtedness, diversification, off-farm employment, changes in farm size and occupancy, the role of farm women, and the decline of farm labour, are of concern in other advanced capitalist countries, and were already apparent in New Zealand before deregulation (Wilson, 1992:39). The slightest

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<sup>1</sup> The New Zealand Department of Statistics classifies farms into two broad categories – “significant” and “small”. Significant farms are those where all or most of household income is derived from the farming operation. Small farms, which the department also classifies as “lifestyle blocks”, are rural units owned by families who have chosen the rural life while pursuing another job or profession which provides the main income, or who own it as a secondary residence (Gouin, Jean & Fairweather, 1994:39).

<sup>2</sup> The years 1986 to 1988, when many farmers experienced extreme financial difficulties, are popularly referred to as “the rural downturn” (Tipa (1992), cited Wilson, 1995:419).

examination of the agricultural media shows these issues continue to concern the farming sector. In view of the voluminous literature on deregulation, there is little point in presenting a categorical exposition of the subject<sup>3</sup>; this summary is intended to establish a context for rural change and its outcomes as understood by the people of Oneriri.

As foreshadowed above, the literature of New Zealand's agricultural reform is broadly presented from two perspectives: the first is macroeconomic; the second gives a humanistic, microsocial view:

Restructuring is both an economic and social phenomenon. Although it was initiated at government level, its effects were felt most directly by people in places (Le Heron and Pawson, 1992:373).

### *The economic perspective*

In the 1970s New Zealand had one of the most protected and state-directed economies in the OECD. By 1984 producer subsidies of all forms had reached \$2 billion, equal to six percent of GDP (Britton (1991), cited Le Heron and Pawson, 1992:373). Total Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF) expenditure peaked in 1984 at close to \$800 million, of which more than \$600 million was for subsidies (Gouin, Jean and Fairweather, 1994:18). That year, nearly 40 percent of the average New Zealand sheep and beef farmer's income came from government subsidies (Federated Farmers, 2002:1). Up to this time, in a climate generated by the protectionist policies of the National Government, the farming sector had a financial and political clout unmatched by any other industry. Farmers regarded themselves as the backbone of the country, and particularly sheep farmers had high status (Levett and Pomeroy, 1997:1).

Subsidisation of the farming sector from the 1970s was an attempt by government to increase the level of agricultural exports and improve the balance of payments following the twin shocks of the United Kingdom's entry into the (then) European Economic Community in 1973, which partially closed access to a traditional market for NZ agricultural products, and Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) moves to drastically raise the price of oil (Gouin et al, 1994:7). Subsequently,

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Fairweather, 1989 & 1992; Gouin, Jean & Fairweather, 1994; Le Heron & Pawson, 1992; Sandrey & Reynolds, 1990; Wallace & Lattimore, 1987; Cloke, 1989.



in the early 1980s farmers throughout the developed world (Cloke, 1989:34) experienced the onset of what has been termed “the international farm crisis” (Goodman and Redclift (1991), cited Wilson, 1995:417). The crisis was caused by over-production as a result of protectionist government policies, falling world prices for agricultural commodities and high interest rates (Wilson, 1995; Cloke, 1989). The USA and the EC responded by maintaining their high levels of protection while the Australian and NZ governments did the opposite: they chose to expose their farmers to global market forces (Share et al (1991b), cited Wilson, 1995).

Shortly after taking office in 1984, the Labour Government acted swiftly, ending the Supplementary Minimum Price (SMP) scheme by which farmers were guaranteed minimum prices for their commodities, and forcing producer boards to pay commercial interest rates for funding from the Reserve Bank, rather than the nominal one percent interest rate they had previously enjoyed. Subsequent significant deregulatory measures are outlined by Fairweather (1989):

- Interest rates on producer loans from the Rural Bank were raised to market rates.
- Direct subsidies to farm inputs and outputs were abolished.
- A system of user pays was introduced for all information, research and rural extension services.
- Radically new livestock taxation scheme introduced.

These measures represented an attempt to achieve internal growth, stability and employment through greater emphasis on market-based efficiency criteria in the productive sector and less intervention by government in private sector decision-making (Fairweather, 1989:2).

In July, 1984, the NZ dollar was devalued 20 percent, favouring exporters and farmers, but when exchange control was abolished the following year, the value of the dollar climbed as a result of increasing interest rates (Gouin et al, 1994:27-31). Interest to service debt became the single highest item of annual farm expenditure (Fairweather, 1989:3). The New Zealand Meat and Wool Boards’ (MWB) economic service reported that in the 1985-86 and 1986-87 seasons interest was almost one-quarter of all farm expenditure (MWB (1987), cited Fairweather, 1989:3). The effect of inflation was even more disastrous. In 1984-85 six percent of sheep-beef farms had less than

half equity, but by 1985-86 it was 24 percent. Of this 24 percent, one in 20 – or 1100 farms – had zero or negative equity (MWB (1988), cited Fairweather, 1989:7). The macroeconomic situation in 1985-86 can be summarised:

The high value of the New Zealand dollar reduced farm product prices and their effect was compounded by weak international markets. Taking these factors together, farmers were hit by lower prices for their products, together with high costs of servicing debt, over a period in which the government's measures to reduce inflation were seen to have been taking a long time to act. The net result is that farm incomes were reduced to their lowest level in real terms for many years (Sheppard and Lattimore, 1993:4).

The situation was particularly galling for farmers in that they had little chance of relief; they no longer enjoyed their traditional level of influence on government (Fairweather, 1989:3).

### *People in places*

Very little empirical research into the immediate on-farm effects of deregulation is available. Experiences at the local scale barely feature in mainstream discourses (Johnsen, 2003:128). Pomeroy points out that the real social and economic situation of farmers and rural communities has become clouded by modern folklore (Pomeroy, 1997:1). While Pomeroy may simply be referring to by now clouded memories of the exigencies of coping with deregulation, it can be argued that both the government and the national farming lobby, Federated Farmers New Zealand, now tend to focus on “favourable elements” of the deregulatory process to the exclusion of any other (Johnsen, 2003:129) – a politicised kind of folkloric rhetoric. For example, Federated Farmers claims the removal of farm subsidies in New Zealand has given birth to a “vibrant, diversified and growing rural economy”, and that the transition to a market economy proved less daunting [for farmers] than expected (Federated Farmers, 2002:1,3). Johnsen says:

The argument that New Zealand farmers emerged from the deregulatory crisis relatively unscathed in the medium term . . . is contested only by the reports of a few detailed studies that explored the experiences of individual farm households (Johnsen, 2003:130).

Johnsen's own account is of the struggles of a community of South Island beef and sheep farmers to cope with the effects of deregulation. It describes the variability of farmers' experiences of, and responses to, the agricultural restructuring, documenting



their experiences at the local scale. She says many instances of stress and physical ill-health arising from individuals' experiences of deregulation and the following downturn were sustained well into the 1990s. In contrast, farmers with high degrees of equity in their enterprise, typically on farms with a long family history (like many in Oneriri), had more room to manoeuvre in adjusting to deregulation. She concludes that there is a need to appreciate the nexus of relations between individual actors, elements of the family farm unit (enterprise, household and property) and local context when seeking to understand the dynamics of family farming (Johnsen, 2003:147).

Wilson (1995) reports on her 1993 study of farm families' responses to deregulation in the Gore district of Southland. The initial response of the families she studied was typical of the rest of New Zealand: an immediate cutback of expenditure on farm inputs such as fertiliser and machinery, and reducing labour costs. She notes, though:

The families with no or minor debts were only minimally affected, whereas those with high debt levels, many of whom had bought land in the early 1980s when land values were at their height, had to struggle in order to retain their farms (Wilson, 1995:422).

Her findings are similar to Johnsen's in that they indicate differences of experiences and responses among her 65 participant families, with some farm families expanding while others barely survive.<sup>4</sup>

Gilling (1997) researched mid-Rangitikei farmers during a period when low commodity prices were depressing farming returns. She found many farmers were still disappointed or angry about what happened during the downturn. She said many continued to suffer, with high debt servicing as a result of paying too much for their land, and high interest rates, but:

Not one person intimated they considered subsidies should/could be restored, nor were they suggesting a turning back of the clock. They do, however, want recognition of what they do, as farmers, and the contribution they make

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<sup>4</sup> Wilson unfortunately felt diffident about questioning this latter group of her participants closely about their experiences. She says: "I felt uncomfortable asking these respondents to talk about this difficult period of their lives" (Wilson, 1992:42)

to the country. . . . [They feel] they are insignificant, invisible and irrelevant to those in power (Gilling, 1997:23).

Smith noted in Eastern Southland soon after the affects of the deregulation began to be felt (her research covered the years 1985 to 1987) a growing sense of powerlessness. The Labour Government was seen by rural dwellers as being particularly callous and discriminatory towards farmers in its economic policies. “Loss of political power was a painful experience for these ‘true blue’ communities who were reputed to have had a great deal of influence on preceding National governments” (Smith, 1992:83). Early in 1987 there were suggestions that a new rural political party be formed to contest the General Election later that year, giving weight to the belief that many rural people perceived that they had reduced political power and that class relations in rural areas were changing (Taylor, Abrahamson and Williams, 1987:8).

In summary, the pattern of settlement of Oneriri from the mid-1800s placed ownership of the most favoured and productive land on the peninsula with a handful of families. The result was that Oneriri became a farming district of notably high production, despite less fruitful soils than in much of New Zealand and less than ideal weather patterns. The reasons for such success probably lies in the intergenerational accumulation of skills necessary to farm successfully in such circumstances as sons succeeded fathers on the land. Throughout the country farming intensified from the early 1970s under the stimulus of agricultural subsidies aimed at increasing exported produce at a time when world prices for primary products was falling. The result was an increase in land prices and over-production. Market signals identifying surpluses and falling prices for our meat and dairy products were hidden by the subsidies. The sudden withdrawal of agricultural supports by the new Labour Government in 1984 had profound effects in rural areas and many predicted thousands of farmers would leave the industry. This did not occur to any significant extent, but the legacy of the reforms is that today, many farmers – who self-identified as “the backbone of the country” – feel they now have diminished political influence and lack of recognition of the contribution they make to the national economy.



While not all rural change in the past decade can be attributed just to agricultural restructuring, most change outside of technological advance can be traced to the broad regime of deregulation that marked the latter years of the 1980s. The subsequent economic and social reshaping had inevitable effects in rural areas as well as the cities. Chapter Three details the principal elements of this ongoing change, comparing the experiences of Oneriri farmers with the effects of the deregulation throughout the rest of the country.

# The dog trial

WE ARE a couple of kilometres down a gravel race off Oneriri road at the back of a farm. The Kaipara Harbour is in sight to the north; to the west is an enormous and steep grassy hill dotted with flags. At the foot of the hill is a small pen, just large enough to hold a handful of sheep. On the face of the hill a small mob of sheep are dawdling their way down toward a pen. Behind them a muddy dog maintains a discreet distance, flashing hyperactively back and forth to remain within the sheeps' peripheral view and so keep them on track. The sheep seem to scarcely notice they are being driven: this is the skill of dog trialling. Not far from the pen a gumbooted man, stick in hand and an attitude of total concentration, whistles and shouts a constant stream of commands to the dog. The aim is to keep the sheep within the flagged bounds as they are driven down the hill and into the pen. One could easily believe it's the dog that does all the work.

Dog trials are held on this course annually. For a few years the trials here were filmed for television and were rated higher than the soaps. Today is the first day of this year's event. Everywhere there are dogs: tied to fences, on the back of utes and light trucks, being walked on makeshift leashes of baling twine, some confined in mobile kennels. They are all colours and sizes and, apart from the occasional border collie, are of no discernible breed. None could ever grace a show ring. These are working dogs – sheepdogs – skinny and unkempt. They are professionals, not pets; they have no function other than working sheep as commanded by their masters. All share one attribute: if they look at you, they look you directly in the eyes, and their eyes are sharp and intelligent.

Hundreds of hours are invested in their training. The triallists don't physically abuse their dogs to train them, but verbal abuse, of a highly refined and imaginative order, seems to be an important part of the process. If it doesn't make the grade a dog usually becomes someone else's pet. Sometimes an obviously talented dog cannot seem to reach the level necessary for trialling, yet under another master blossoms into an outstanding performer. The triallists say the personalities of dog and master have to click if the mutual understanding necessary for successful competition is to be achieved. If a dog fails and there is no other recourse, it is shot: there is no room on a farm for a dog that won't work.

Next door to the males-filled drinks tent is the lunch bar staffed exclusively by women, wives of the triallists hosting this event. Every year the same roster of women prepare food in the little shed built for this purpose and sell it, at cost, throughout the three days of the event. "We've always done this," one says. "I suppose it's the best way we can contribute." Another said: "We're the ones behind the scenes who make sure everyone's happy and everything's according to Hoyle."

But there is at least one other female here today. She is out on the short head course. Young and attractive, she has a sheepdog with her. So women do compete in these events? The bread buttering and sandwich filling stops for a moment. "Oh yes, but it's not very common, especially once you get married; there's no time then."

How about being a lone woman competing against all those men? "Well, sometimes the swearing's a bit hard to take, but there's no . . . funny stuff, you know?"

One last question: are there any lifestylers competing? The women laugh. "Oh no, we never see any. Dog handling isn't something you can pick up quickly. You need to be brought up with it and working your dog all the time. Townies wouldn't know what they're doing."

Well back from the start of the course a row of farm vehicles provides a kind of stand-up, lean-on grandstand for the crowd of spectators and triallists waiting their turn. The many dogs tethered to the vehicles are ignored. The farmers and farm workers – they are all men – are mostly clad stereotypically in jeans and checked shirts. They lean forward, one foot up on the tailgate or wheel, their forearms crossed loosely on the upraised knee. In each tightly stretched right back pocket is the bulge of a wallet; from most left pockets pokes the bright tuft of a tobacco packet. The mens' eyes never leave the man/dog/sheep microdrama being





enacted on the hillface before them as they converse. The talk is of farming, and the politics of farming. Such convergence of interest provides a fertile context for the exchange of ideas; the trial is as much a venue for the exchange of information as it is a sporting event.

"This is the best place to pick up what's really going on," I was told. "The newspapers and farm papers wouldn't have a clue, and the stuff that's shovelled out by the government's just bullshit. Needs to be a few more farmers in Parliament I reckon."

Later, in the drinks tent, an experienced-looking farmer, whisky glass in hand, is being congratulated by equally weatherbeaten companions. He and his dog took second placing in a keenly-contested event.

"Had the usual trouble with the dog though," he says to the tent at large. The other drinkers wait expectantly. They know this man well. He is widely respected as a competent and hardworking sheep breeder; his reputation, though, does not rest on his success in dog trialling. "Had to drag the buggler to the start on a lead. If I'd tried to walk him he'd of hid under the judge's truck or bugged off back to the ute. This time I got him started okay and he seemed to forget his troubles." This was by way of introducing a lengthy and technical discussion of the competition course, the influence of the weather, the size and flightiness of the sheep and the degree of impairment suffered the eyesight of both judges and timekeepers. But what is the matter with the dog?

The tentative inquiry elicits the firm opinion that the dog has an inferiority complex: "He's okay at home, does his work without missing a beat. A great dog he is. It's just that when he gets to the trials he seems to go to pieces like he's intimidated by the crowd and all the other dogs and wants to hide. Stage fright you might call it."

But he performed well in this trial? "Best he's ever done. I was proud of him today."

Was it possible the dog understood he had done well? "Oh he knew all right, there's no doubt about that," the farmer confirmed.

How could he know? "Because this time when we finished I patted him on the head. He usually gets a boot up the bum."



## CHAPTER THREE

# *Trajectories of change*

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THE RESPONSE behind the farm gate to the deregulatory measures was immediate. Specific strategies to cope with the downturn included modification of farm scale; reduction in expenditure on enterprise operation; reduced household consumption; reorganisation of labour; adoption of low-maintenance farm practices; increased emphasis on economic proficiency; and increased participation in off-farm employment. In addition, those farmers with well-developed farms at a later stage of the “enterprise lifecycle”<sup>1</sup> were able to direct more capital into entrepreneurial farm adjustment strategies.

It is possible that many of the strategies for survival were intended to be temporary only – undertaken until full adjustment to the new conditions had been made. Time has shown that where strategies adopted were successful they became the norm, that farm operations did not align once more with practices applying pre-deregulation. This appears to be the most direct and obvious force for rural change arising from the agricultural reform measures. This chapter traces the principal changes stemming from deregulation and farmers’ survival strategies, focusing particularly on some that are now of particular concern in Oneriri. It links deregulation to a subsequent period of uncertainty within agriculture that has made farming a less desirable career path for farm children; farm succession for most Oneriri farming families is now problematic. The role of women in farming is discussed at some length. Because elsewhere in this study their voices are not distinguished from others, this section uses extensive extracts from their narratives to comparatively position Oneriri farm women in relation to recent theoretical and feminist views of the roles of women in farming.

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<sup>1</sup> Also called the “development cycle”, the term describes the passage of a farming family through the years of hardship while paying off the mortgage they assumed to buy the farm, to the time when the farm is freeholded. The family’s standard of living is dictated by how far they are along in this cycle; in normal conditions, the closer to the “mature” end of the cycle, the more disposable income is available (see Hatch, 1992 for a full analysis).

## Pulling the farm belt tighter

The initial response of all farmers was to cut back expenditure on farm inputs such as fertiliser and maintenance. All types of farm expenditure that could be decreased seems to have been (Gouin et al, 1994:70). It appeared that farmers would continue to practice low-input farming while the future of agriculture remained uncertain (Wilson, 1995:422). Nationwide the consumption of fertiliser halved (Gouin et al, 1994:70) and many farmers made do with second-hand machinery instead of new (Wilson, 1995:422).

The strategies of most Oneriri farmers paralleled those adopted in the rest of the country.

- *We just did more ourselves instead of hiring contractors. I enjoy working so I did what I enjoyed.*
- *We tightened our belt as it were. You cut back on the farm to what was absolutely necessary. You mended fences instead of replacing them; you didn't change your vehicle.*
- *I ended up selling a lot of my breeding ewes just to exist.*
- *We cut back to the stage where we were doing only just enough maintenance to stay in farming.*
- *The wife increased the amount of work she was doing. It was pretty important to have a bit of off-farm income.*

The sheep sector was the most supported by subsidies and therefore was the most affected by deregulation. Gouin et al (1994:40) point out this sector was already in decline before the revision of agricultural policy, but this decline increased considerably five years after the reforms.

- *When the subsidies went off the sheep weren't worth anything, and I did have a bit of a mortgage. I didn't have time to adjust. It was like trying to pull up a bloody battleship from full speed in just three feet.*
- *We couldn't give sheep away, you know. Well, we did give some away because there was no sale for them. If you sent them off to the works you would have got a bill.*
- *It was subsistence, a lot of it. You worked your arse off and when you looked at what you were actually getting for a return, farming was a bloody bad joke.*



The decrease in the number of sheep farms was compensated for by an increase in other types, and especially for beef (Gouin et al, 1994:40). There was also diversification toward non-traditional sectors. People began discovering other new uses for the land, including horticulture and viticulture and rural tourism. In pastoral farming there was diversification into non-traditional sectors such as goats and deer. There was exploration and experimentation and both success and failure (Levett & Pomeroy, 1997:1).

The number of farms in New Zealand increased between 1986 and 1990, mainly because of subdivision and the creation of smallholdings: the sale of farmland has traditionally been a source of capital for New Zealand farmers (McShane, 2003:6). Growth in the number of smallholdings had actually been increasing from the early 1970s as part of a broad demographic pattern of urban to rural migration (Fairweather, 1993:2). The forced sale of all or part of significant farms allows for expansion in the number of smallholdings, and between 1988 and 1990 the number of significant farms decreased (Gouin et al, 1994:39). Smallholdings, owned mainly by families who have chosen the rural life while pursuing another job or profession to provide their main income, are little affected by external conditions that are detrimental in either the short or long term to the farm sector proper. However, the flow-on effect of the stockmarket crash in 1987 was that the demand for smallholdings reduced (Gouin et al, 1994:39). It seems likely that this drop in demand delayed for several years any benefit from small-block subdivision that some farmers might have hoped for as a strategy for weathering the rural downturn<sup>2</sup>.

In Oneriri, subdivision was a successful strategy for some. One farmer described how he had just taken over the family farm from his father when SMPs were withdrawn. The subsequent fall in wool prices compounded his money problems. "My way out, of course, was to subdivide and that was the start of this great movement [of

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<sup>2</sup> The literature on smallholdings (see for example Moran, Neville, Rankin & Cochrane, 1980; Fairweather, 1993) fails to make clear that growth in the creation of smallholdings is not necessarily matched by sales and occupation by households. Rural "lifestyle" subdivisions in some areas are often slow to sell. From a practical point of view the small blocks continue in use as part of the farm they were split from, so there is little or no loss of productivity, but they continue to exist as separate titles and, therefore, statistical entities.

smallholders] onto the land". He sold nearly 100 acres in small blocks and survived the rural downturn. Subdivision was, for some, the only way to stem increasing debt.

- *We owed all this money, and continued to owe more and more because farming wasn't profitable. We were able to live off my salary which, for a woman, was very good. We planned a programme of subdivision; it was not like slice by slice from the whale.*

However, it is clear that in Oneriri the degree to which the downturn was felt was in direct proportion to the level of debt carried. Those with freehold or near-freehold properties were affected least.

- *It seems we've always been paying somebody off or out, but we've never had big debt loads so it didn't affect us too badly.*
- *I don't remember it being much of a problem; I was probably well enough established by that stage – no overheads and totally freehold.*
- *It was a pretty tough time in that interest rates were up to 19.5%. You had to watch your debt and it was hard but we didn't get into any trouble.*

Deregulation triggered two major changes that were to have a profound effect on the Oneriri landscape. The first was that the withdrawal of SMPs forced the majority of sheepfarmers on the peninsula to switch from wool production, an industry already in decline, and concentrate mainly on beef farming. The second was the realisation that subdivision and sale of small blocks of land – often of borderline quality for farming – was a ready source of capital in a time when returns from farming were marginal.

## Uncertainty in farming

During the past 20 years, family farming in New Zealand has become less profitable than before deregulation. This is because of the ever-decreasing real prices of our products (Polson, 2002:2).

One of the ways that family farms survive hard times is by reducing living standards and paying family members reduced rates for their contribution to the enterprise, or ceasing payment completely. These are short-term measures. Longer-term responses are to increase productivity, to increase production by farming more land, to add value to existing production, and to diversify into more remunerative ventures (Polson, 2002:2). To varying degrees farmers throughout New Zealand are pursuing one or more of these strategies as a consequence of the 1984 deregulatory measures.



Federated Farmers of New Zealand claims that “New Zealand’s experience . . . of reform has thoroughly debunked the myth that the farming sector cannot prosper without government subsidies . . .” (Federated Farmers, 2002:1). The reality is that, while this may be true, returns from farming are, without subsidy, forever at the mercy of international economics and climate – factors beyond the control of the farmer – and are subject to considerable fluctuation year to year.

In recent times, average taxable farm incomes peaked in 2001/02 at \$118,000 following a rollercoaster period of eight years in which income, in 1995/96, dipped as low as \$26,000. Returns are now sliding again, and average farm income for 2003/04 is predicted to be around \$74,000 (Meat & Wool Innovation, 2003:1). The president of Federated Farmers, Tom Lambie, told delegates to the farmer group’s 2003 conference in June that with the exception of one month, in every one of the previous 14 months New Zealand had earned less from farm exports than for the same month in the previous year. “If we were farming pre-1984 and faced the economic outlook we see today, I suspect we would have been pushing for . . . government support,” he said (Lambie, 2003). While not suggesting farmers contemplate such a strategy, he made the point that in the current world market environment, farmers are facing a cost price squeeze.

Uncertainty about the future of farming in terms of financial return is as pervasive in Oneriri as in the rest of the country:

- *It’s hard when you’re not operating off a very good financial base. Unless you have a big acreage you are virtually treading water.*
- *A lot of people have sold their land because it is a way out of debt and I don’t condemn that at all. I understand that.*
- *In the early 50s farming was exceptionally lucrative. In my time it has never been anything like that. It has been a real struggle. We have had a few ups, but a lot of downs.*
- *We’ve had two good years but things are tightening up right now. People are starting to get nervous – as usual.*
- *[The farm] just pays for itself barely, and that doesn’t allow for any fancy spending. We haven’t maintained the place as well as we should have because we didn’t have the money to spend on it.*



- *Some years we don't earn dole wages from the farm. We live on our overdraft and then hope that next year we'll crawl out of it. It's a good life, but there's some hard parts to it.*

Mouton & Korkie (2000:16) theorise that the decline in real prices for farm products will continue to be gradual, but will be long-term. They suggest global population growth and diminishing land area available for food production should place a premium on the value of farm products. However, advances in production technologies mean that it will be some time before demand outstrips supply. "Only then will a reversal of the long-term downward spiral of real farm gate prices be seen," they say (2000:16). This long-term decline in farm incomes is seen in Oneriri as a major issue in farm succession – the process by which the family farm is passed from generation to generation.

## Succession

According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF, 2003), agribusiness has been considered by many to be a declining "old economy" sector. A ministry policy statement says this perception has detrimental impacts on the sector because it makes it more difficult to encourage young and skilled people into it. The literature, however, suggests that the reasons why young people are reluctant to seek a career in farming are much more specific than that, and are not necessarily new. An article in *The Farmers' Advocate* (June 1, 1922) quotes a farmer's daughter as saying: "I'd soon tell them why the country girl and boy get to the city as soon as they can! If you had to milk three gallons of milk to get eightpence and had to milk 50 cows morning and night because you could not get help, how would you stand it?" (cited Hunter & Riney-Kehrberg, 2002:141).

The uncertainty of farming is, from a purely financial perspective, the most obvious and possibly most powerful disincentive to take it up as a career, and its corollary is the availability of rewarding employment opportunities elsewhere. The result is that some parents with no child willing to succeed to the family farm remain trapped on their farms (Fairweather, 1992:17). Elizabeth Mortland, a Community Education Officer in Taihape, quotes one of her clients: "It's a form of child abuse to expect your son to take over the farm" (Levett & Pomeroy, 1997:6).

Farmers, not unexpectedly, appear to be more concerned with the succession of their own farms than whether young people are entering agriculture by other avenues; for parents, the essence of the family farm is not its capacity to make money but its capacity to connect people with land, nature and the past (Comstock, 1987:xxv). So succession is not just about the transfer of land, it is also about retaining the family identity with land. In this context, succession becomes a process whereby the traditions, skills and capital of farming are passed on to the next generation (McCrostie Little & Taylor, 1998:1), which is of particular significance in Oneriri where some properties have been farmed by a single family for well over a century.

- *It adds to the significance of the family farm if it has gone through the generations; the aspect of sentiment comes into it. There are many farmers who have changed farms yet it is still the family farm: the family input doesn't change, but the sentiment probably isn't as strong.*

However, continuity of the tradition of succession is becoming less certain. South Island high country sheepfarmers, for example, believe that families should have long-term commitment to this type of farming, but those families are now finding difficulty in transferring their high country runs to the next generation. Morris, Fairweather & Swaffield (1997:56) say the dire economic straits of many of the properties, which will be compounded as the older generation draws money from them for retirement income, deters sons from taking over even if they wanted to. In other cases sons did not wish to take the property over because of other attractions. They quote one farmer: "It's a change of generations. The excellent schooling, and technology the way it is, there are so many other opportunities out there for people who, rather than dag sheep and drive tractors all day, would rather be in the corporate body putting their brains to work." Many Oneriri farmers had similar comments. This one is typical:

- *Farmers have encouraged their sons to do something other than farming because it's such bloody hard work for the return you get; a nine-to-five job is easier. Having said that, it doesn't do you any harm. Dad got to 85 working like a dog, and he was quite happy with it.*

Research in New Zealand shows that, without any pressure from the next generation to enter farming, there would be little impetus for farmers to retire (Keating & Little, 1994:33), but where succession is sought, the younger farmers waiting for the farm to



become available from parents see control of the business through access to management and ownership as essential to entry. The fact that their parents are less likely to see these conditions as part of the retirement process means each generation must wait a long time to be in control, and transfer of control is made only reluctantly (1994:32). Another factor affecting succession is that, in New Zealand, the method of acquiring the succession farm is predominantly through purchase by the successor from the family, usually at the full market price (McCrostie Little & Taylor, 1998:1).

One of the farming couples contributing to this report have transferred half of their farm to their son, who is now in his mid-forties. The son paid for his share over a period of years and they expect him to buy the balance from them when they retire “in the next few years”. Of the dozen remaining farms included in this study, only two have any chance of being taken over by the next generation, and in neither case has succession yet been planned.

- *There is a huge decline in farming effort in Oneriri. It's because there are very few of us who actually had children who wanted to farm. That generation ran away . . . well, maybe we chased them away because farming wasn't economic.*
- *I never pressured the kids in any way. I wanted them to do their own thing. I didn't want them to feel that because I was farming that they had to farm too. I felt there were so many opportunities available these days possibly better than farming.*
- *We've got no more farmers in the family. It's one of my biggest disappointments and I don't know what to do about it. I'd like them to keep the farm; I think they all love to come home to the farm, it's where their roots are.*
- *[One son] was always going to do something agricultural, but [farm returns] weren't even good enough to be able to make him an offer. It would have been nice if he was able to take over the farm from us but we couldn't afford that. I was too young to retire and we needed an income.*
- *How the hell could you expect somebody . . . to buy out a place of this value? We bought from the previous generation, but the next generation simply couldn't do it; the farm can't earn enough to pay for the mortgage.*

Oneriri parents were not always as liberal as these latter-day quotes indicate. One participant described how, while still finishing boarding school, he received a message from his father: “If you don't come home there won't be a farm to come home to”. He understood that if he did not start to take some interest in the farm it would be sold. Another said: “In those times sons were expected to come home and work on the farm. My father really had his finger on me because I was the only boy.” A common ploy

was to buy a son a puppy and encourage him to train it to work stock. This served as an introduction to one of the more satisfying skills of pastoral farming.

It can be seen that there are three possible reasons why, in Oneriri, succession of children to the family farm is becoming more and more unlikely. The first is that they know that the monetary rewards for the hard labour of farming are small. They have lived through the downturn and, in most cases, have witnessed the struggle their parents had to keep the farm going. The second reason seems to be that parents are now reluctant to coerce their children into taking over. While generational farming might be their goal, parents today tend to defer to their children on the issue of retaining the farm within the family. They believe it is more important that the children should be happy and that they, the parents, are fair to them all, even if it means not retaining the farm (McCrostie Little and Taylor, 1998:8). The third reason involves the economics of succession in Oneriri. The value of waterfront farms on the peninsula has risen substantially in the last decade, driven by their potential for subdivision into smallholdings. Market value for most properties is well beyond what they are worth in terms of farming return. One medium-sized Oneriri farm with nine kilometres of water frontage sold recently for \$6.5 million.

Despite these issues, farm succession is viewed by most New Zealand farming families as important, enabling a career option for children, and a means whereby the rewards of hard work in one generation can be passed on to the next (McCrostie Little and Taylor, 1998:9).

## Women in farming

The term “family farming” implies participation in the agricultural production function by all or some members of a family. While the stereotyped view of women’s participation has traditionally been determined less by individual participants’ preferences than by gender-driven assumptions as to what women’s farm roles should be, the reality is that, in Oneriri anyway, the farming women who weathered deregulation were prepared to become involved in the tough, dirty and hard work side of farming when their help was needed. This is borne out by the narratives of the farm women who have contributed to this study, as will be seen.



The considerable body of literature on the subject indicates that women's roles in agriculture are changing. In New Zealand in relatively recent times these changes have come about largely as part of overall survival strategies sparked by the 1984 deregulatory measures. This section examines women's roles in family farming as a contextual framework for the Oneriri experience both before and after deregulation.

The stereotyping of farming women has been narrow and simplistic:

The domestic labour of women is more important on farms than in non-farm households. The [New Zealand] farm wife produces a greater number of products for home consumption than other women and the organisation of the family farm requires an interdependence between the domestic and the farm work spheres that is not common in other areas (Walton, 1991:22).

This observation implies a gendered analysis of women's farm roles that has "farmers' wives" confined to a primary responsibility for domestic household labour, analysis that Whatmore (1991a:71) insists "obscures the very different and unequal positions of individual members [of farming families] which build upon, and are reinforced by, the gender divisions of labour". Further, the stereotype of the rural woman's "natural" role, that of a family woman, traditional and conservative, absorbed in the care of the home, is not woman's natural state, but constructed and reinforced through patriarchal relations (Hughes, 1997:126). Hughes adds that if we are to understand and explain the domestic experiences of rural women we need to take account of the ways women both "adhere to<sup>3</sup> and contest dominant constructions of womanhood".

Historically in New Zealand this stereotype seems not to have been as dominant as elsewhere. From the time of the economic depression of the 1890s, New Zealand suffered from a chronic labour shortage which the government attempted to fill with assisted migrants from Britain. The way in which farmers filled their labour needs, however, was far more traditional: they made use of their wives and daughters as well as their sons (Hunter and Riney-Kehrberg, 2002:137).

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<sup>3</sup> One participant in this study told me the best advice she received on her wedding day was from her (farming) mother-in-law: "never learn how to milk the house cow. Do it once and you do it for the rest of your life".

Whatmore (1991a:73) suggests that in family farming, where the dominant form is the conjugal household unit, the identity and rights of women are mediated by their relationship to their husbands. She identifies some as “incorporated wives” who become incorporated into the farm labour process by virtue of marriage, in the sense of having their working lives structured by their husband’s occupation. Not only are they married to their husband’s job but, since there is no geographical separation between home and work in farming, they are permanently living on the job (Whatmore, 1991:97). In a wide ranging discussion of findings from analysis of farm women’s recorded oral autobiographies, Osterud (1988) observed that while some women were able to see themselves as active agents in their life histories, most saw themselves as responsive subjects; telling their stories became another way to create meaning in their lives. They thought of themselves not as having shaped their situation, but rather as having fulfilled its demands. Additionally, women who married into long-established farm families developed new identities as members of their husband’s families.

Based on two surveys in Britain, Whatmore concludes that women participate in the farm labour process under conspicuously different relations and conditions from those of their husbands and sons: “Whatever else women do on the farm it is clearly in *addition to*, rather than *instead of* (emphasis in original) their domestic tasks and responsibilities” (1991a:74). Haney and Knowles (1988:7) point out that individual characteristics like age and educational level influence women’s choices. Family characteristics as well – particularly family goals, family determinations of men’s and women’s roles, the nature of the family decision-making structure, and the stage in the family life cycle – are also consequential to women’s options.

In light of recent research (see particularly Johnsen, 2003) it seems clear that farm women’s contribution to the farm sector has long been underestimated. In New Zealand, farm women’s responses to the changes in family farming caused by the 1984 deregulatory measures had the effect of assuaging, if not destroying, the stereotypes normally accorded them. During the past two decades their responses have included increasing their labour and/or financial contribution to their farms; by coping privately with their own and their partners’ stress; by forming their own



support networks; and they have also begun insisting on appropriate recognition of these contributions (Teather, 1996:7):

In difficult economic periods it would seem that it is often the women who can see more clearly the decisions that need to be taken and who provide the focused energy to bring about changes (Webber and Rivers (1992), cited Teather, 1996:8).

Teather notes that the typical family farm is becoming a part-time business, or a business run by at least two people on top of other paid or non-paid work, and that spouses often replace a hired farm worker with unpaid labour. Ten years after deregulation, agricultural census data indicated that of the 44,600 farms in New Zealand with one or more working owners, 50 percent had at least one female working owner (Burborough and Cumberworth, 1999). The monetary contribution women make to the family farm is principally from off-farm waged work. Teather quotes Women's Division Federated Farmers figures that show that in the early 1990s 30 percent of farm women in New Zealand considered their off-farm earnings essential to support farm income (Teather, 1996:7).

The downturn in market prices and the economic restructuring of the mid-1980s led women to contribute more both on and off the farm. Not only were many women's skills used in handling and managing the emotional demands of increasing debt and decreasing returns, but they frequently managed the books and undertook an increasing amount of physical farm work. For some, undoubtedly, it was just more of the same; for others it was a change of role that contributed to the retreat of gendered stereotypes. Above all, it gave farm women the opportunity to break down the familial gender division of labour by which women's identity is bound up in ideologies of wifehood and motherhood which naturalise gender inequalities (Whatmore, 1991a:75). The changes became norms. For example, Burborough and Cumberworth (1999:1) tell us that though many farm women were going out to work to support the farm in the 1980s, the situation had changed by the 1990s. "Women still went out to work, but increasingly it was to meet their needs, not the farm's."

There is no Oneriri farm woman stereotype, but all who participated in this study identify with one stereotypical gendered role: that of responsibility for the domestic sphere. None of the men admit to any involvement with household work other than

such chores as bringing in the firewood. The most frequent response to questions about allocation of household duties: “I leave all that to her”, accords precisely with Whatmore’s belief that the naturalisation of women’s responsibility for domestic work is “central to the ideological process of legitimation in which lived experience presents what is socially produced as natural and beyond human control” (Whatmore, 1991a:75). However, with the exception of two women who work full-time at jobs off the farm, all Oneriri women work reasonably frequently – and seasonally sometimes full-time – outside with stock or at other farm chores, with varying degrees of enthusiasm: “If I didn’t do it we’d have to employ someone else to”, is a common sentiment. There are some who have always contributed substantially, and relish the farm work:

- *I have always worked on the farm. I either milked, or at one stage he was milking and I was rearing pigs. We had 40 sows. That worked out to about 400 pigs at a time I was working on. I enjoy the animals. I still rear calves; a couple of years ago we did 300, but I have to admit it’s getting a bit harder now as you get older.*
- *There are times when there is a lot of work to be done. I know I will end up docking 900 lambs this September. I’m not afraid of physical work.*

All women but one acknowledge that their husbands make the farm business decisions; theirs is a “helper” role. Most say they are happy. Two live lives of quiet despair with husbands indifferent to their aspirations.

Few of the husbands offer a detailed analysis of their wives’ roles in the running of the farm:

- *She’s been a damn good backup to me over the years.*
- *I’m not sure that I had any expectations of [my wife] on the farm. I knew she was a good outdoor girl. She probably had those qualities that really made for a happy farm marriage. She’s pretty good with stock and all that sort of thing.*
- *She’s helped rear the calves for nearly 25 years, and she does the accounts. Fortunately she likes that because I’m hopeless with bookwork.*
- *I think that women do as much or as little as they are interested in doing and their husbands want them to do.*

Some furnish stereotypes:



- *On a farm a woman's got to be able to accept that she can't just run down to the dairy every 10 minutes. It does keep you organised. Every time you go to town you plan it carefully.*
- *Women usually very much share in the running of the operation. Maybe not so much in the practical way. Men do the practical, physical side of it.*

Some are admiring:

- *Their role is huge really: they're the mother, they do all the rearing of the children; they do all the housework. They are also unpaid workers on the farm because most of the time you can't afford workers. They do that, they come home and do the tea, they do the laundry, they do the vacuuming, they do everything. Women are basically unpaid workers and yet they are not recognised by anybody as part of the work force.*
- *Women can do the job as well as we can, and in animal care probably better than men. They could well be better farmers than us, given the opportunity. Maybe they wouldn't drive things quite so hard.*

One holds a jocose but distinctly agricultural view:

- *Not many of the girls stayed in Oneriri because they had to go away to find work. But there were quite a few who came to the district to teach or nurse or whatever and very few escaped. Which is probably just as well otherwise we would have been awfully inbred around the district.*

The women's views of their roles tend to mesh with that of their husbands – manifestations, perhaps, of Whatmore's "incorporated wives":

- *I consider myself as [my husband's] helper really. I just fill in the gaps. I help on the farm which is quite often. I do quite a bit outside with the stock. You're part-time secretary as well, I suppose. If I didn't work on the farm someone else would have to be paid to work here. I could never be a full-time labour unit because you have always got home and house to think of.*
- *[My husband] is the dominant person in this household. He runs the farm, he runs the business, he sets the pace. He sets quite a cracking pace. If you feel like lagging behind it doesn't last for long because you get swept up in it pretty quickly.*
- *My role was to be a farmer's wife. I had to prepare three hot meals a day for [my husband] and the farm worker, and if they needed help with draughting in the yard, or at shearing time, I would help.*
- *He was one of those farmers who went out and did a lambing beat, so he'd arrive home with armloads of these poor bedraggled orphan lambs and I had to revive*

*them and feed them. I had never done anything like that at all. The kitchen was full of half-dead lambs and I was busy shoving them in the warming drawer and towelling them down. I can remember crying on his shoulder saying you didn't tell me it was going to be like this.*

- *Women are an integral part of running a farm, even if it's just getting the meals prepared. It's a vital side of it.*
- *My husband has always kept the farm books. I have thought perhaps he should teach me more in that respect. I know some farming wives don't like the feeling of being a kept woman, as it were, that they don't have control of their own finances. I have a small cheque account which I can use for personal things. I have never had to go down on my knees and beg for money like some.*

Some are more independent:

- *I would be the shed hand if that was needed. I can use a handpiece and crutch if need be. I can put down a bale of wool. It was my choice. I didn't have to [do this work], but I quite often did. I would go and grub thistles if they needed grubbing.*
- *Right from the start I ran the business end of the farm. I enjoy that type of work. Any major decisions we do between us, but he does all the day-to-day running of the farm. When it come to strategy and buying and selling stock he likes to be in control of that, but he needs to ask me how much is in the account: how much can he spend.*
- *I've always worked with the stock. My children were brought up, basically, in the cowshed. We had a cot over there and we had them in the pram when they were smaller.*

A few are frustrated:

- *My life has not been as fulfilling as I might have wished. It has been very restricted because of the fact that I lived on the farm. My career was really constrained by where we lived. I've still got the urge; I feel that I have got a lot to offer, that there are a lot of rooms in me that have never been tapped, really.*
- *[My husband] made the decisions. A lot of the time that's still the case. He does the books and he's never let me be part of the financial side, so for years I didn't know how we stood financially and that was not a nice feeling. But he wouldn't understand that.*

The narratives of Oneriri farm women seem to indicate they broadly adhere to, rather than contest, dominant constructions of their roles. At the same time, most exhibit a positive engagement with farm work and enjoyment of life as a farming women. The greatest physical change to their lives caused by deregulation was the intensification of unpaid work outside the home as they replaced hired farm workers the farm could



no longer afford. The extra labour did not mean any lessening of domestic responsibilities, confirming Whatmore's (1991a) conclusion that financial hardship has the effect of increasing the contribution of women to the overall running of the farm.

All of the changes discussed in this chapter can be seen to at least partially stem from the agricultural deregulatory measures of 1984. Some were already under way but their progress was intensified under the spur of deregulation. The need to cut back expenditure led to the layoff of farm workers and to women taking on more work outside the home; the need to maintain farming operations saw farmers resort to subdivision as a source of working capital; the withdrawal of subsidies forced woolgrowers to switch to raising beef as the principal farming activity; exposure to increasing globalisation of commodity markets is now reflected in fluctuating returns and uncertainty about the future of pastoral farming; this, in turn, has meant the sons and daughters of farmers now look elsewhere for careers.

These changes are still having their effects which, in Oneriri, are compounded by a number of factors, not the least being the district's increasing ease of access from Auckland. The significance of this factor is manifested by the growing interest of Aucklanders in the peninsula as a place for weekend relaxation, retirement and family living. This interest, stemming from culturally-based beliefs and understandings of rural life, is the subject of the next chapter.

# Early retirement

IT BECAME obvious when the transformation of the Public Service began. Under the twin neo-liberal mantras of deregulation and rationalisation there was bound to be a massive shakeup in the upper echelons of the Department. The quickest way to flatten the management pyramid was to lop off the top three levels. Too bad that these contained the most experienced men (he was one) – experienced, yes, but expensive as well. He hadn't wasted his time at the management courses the Department insisted he attend. He would have done it that way too.

The early retirement package was generous. Before the salary stopped there was time to explore options for the future. His wife, also management trained, and eager for change had firm ideas about what they should do. After 30 years of suburbia, kids and commuting to the heart of Auckland, they should look for a block of land in the country big enough to generate an income to supplement his pension, yet small enough to run without outside help. They knew what they had to spend and having no mortgage was crucial for the success of the venture.

The search for the right block – they realised they would need between 100 and 200 acres – was carefully planned and based around a large map of the top half of the North Island that they pinned to the wall. Because their children were in early married life and settled in good jobs in the city, they wanted to remain within reasonable distance of Auckland: no more than two hours' drive, preferably closer.

Rural areas at each end of the north-south motorway were quickly ruled out. Plans for a new university and associated services meant prices in the Albany basin to the north were pitched at developer level and those in the south dictated intensive horticultural enterprise on small blocks, certainly not what they wanted to do; their thoughts ran mainly to cattle. Further north, between Coatesville and Kaukapakapa, prices were prohibitive – this was commuter country – and it was the same in the south, between Pukekohe and Bombay.

They began plotting prices on their map, gathering figures from the real estate publications and *The New Zealand Herald*. It soon became obvious that it was pointless looking south. Once past the Bombay Hills land prices were dictated by the Waikato dairy industry and, therefore, tied to the fluctuating milk payouts. Even farms with marginal returns were well out





of reach. Further north, beyond just-commutable and therefore pricey Warkworth, their search began telling them land prices were easier. The next town, Wellsford, in their estimation was "a miserable place" and was therefore ruled out, despite there being affordable blocks close by. The soils tended toward heavy clay, more suited to sheep than cattle. Toward the east the land was better quality, but consequently much more expensive.

The search stopped at Kaiwaka, though they were prepared to go as far as the Brynderwyn hills 15 minutes further north. This oddly east-west range of hills they saw as an obvious barrier for anyone with attachments to Auckland. East of Kaiwaka prices, regardless of land quality, rose steadily according to distance from the surf beach and all-weather golf links of Mangawhai. Already this seaside settlement had acquired the character – and all the problems – of the suburban Auckland they were seeking to leave. Westward was the Kaipara Harbour. They found the block they wanted partway along the Oneriri peninsula that points crookedly at the harbour entrance. Within a year the couple broke even on their venture and began to generate an income – modest, but adequate in their circumstances.

By coincidence, their suburban house sold the day they paid for their Oneriri block. In desperation, and with only weeks to go before having to vacate the house, they contracted an Auckland building company to prefabricate a small but comfortable house that could be trucked in pieces to their block. It was to be pre-wired and pre-plumbed so it could be connected simply to the services that would be installed on the site. However, siteworks took longer than expected, and as a result the house had to be erected in one day, the same day they handed the keys to the new owners of their old house in Auckland. Though it still needed painting and other finishing work, the new house was liveable by nightfall.

The following afternoon, while still in a considerable muddle, they had visitors. On their doorstep appeared a man and his wife, brandishing a welcoming bottle of wine. After introducing themselves as near neighbours "from just a bit further down the peninsula", they said they were originally from Auckland "too".

"How did you know we were from there?" was the natural question.

"Well," the visitors said, "we went to Auckland yesterday and there was nothing on this site when we went past in the morning. When we returned last night the house was up and the lights were on. So we knew at once you weren't locals. You're going to love it here. After a while you'll find you begin to slow down."



## CHAPTER FOUR

# *The culture of rurality*

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THE MOST obvious evidence of recent change in Oneriri is the ever-increasing number of smallholders who live there. One farmer said: "A few years ago when these people started coming in I used to joke about the Oneriri rush-hour in the mornings. Now it's a fact". Most of the farmers in Oneriri have spent their lives on the peninsula earning a living; the newcomers are drawn there for other reasons. Both groups have their individual understandings of rurality and the nature of their engagement with its elements. For farmers, rural is the central cultural signifier of their lives; urban dwellers migrate to the country and become smallholders because of their culturally-based expectations of rural life.

The concept of rural can be categorised in two ways. The first, and most obvious, is as a spatial entity where land use, landscape and settlements are patently different from their city equivalents by dint of scale, density, remoteness, and predominant forms of economic production and land use (Cloke, 1983:3). However for this discussion rural cannot simply be counterpoised to the urban. Murdoch & Day (1998:187) believe the rural is far more complex than this, that it has been "splintered into many ruralities" that may not have much in common with one another. In the second instance, rural can be viewed as a category based on differentiation of values (Share, Gray & Lawrence, 1991:122). A key issue is that the rural experience is not the same for all; there is no one rural experience. Nor does everyone share the same notions of rurality and what it can offer (Hughes, 1997:182). This categorisation of the rural introduces the possibility of conflict generated by different understandings of rurality. It also invites examination of what the differences are.

Discussion in this chapter is informed by the literature describing the array of cultural constructs that shape people's notions of life in the countryside. It nominates culture as a determinant in interpreting human behaviour and relationships in rural

communities and assays the influence of the rural idyll in the perpetuation of rural sentiment. This discussion provides an introduction for a synchronous comparison of farmers' and smallholders' discursive perceptions of a range of key elements in the constitution of rurality. Because the perceived loss of community is seen as a significant marker of change, it is examined in some detail to round out the discussion of the culture of the rural.

## Culture of the rural

The cultural construction of the rural and its representation is rooted in a set of assumptions, expectations and values (Cloke & Little, 1997:279). People derive their own sense of the rural, reinterpreting dominant images through their own cultural practice (Crouch (1992), cited Jones, 1995:39). The rural, therefore, is a "dynamic and unstable" (Hughes, 1997:124) social construction and an arena in which the hopes, values and prejudices of social groups can be played out (Murdoch & Day, 1998:191), and culture is essentially a matter of ideas and values, a collective cast of mind (Kuper, 1999:227). Cloke & Milbourne extend these notions, suggesting that some of the problems experienced in rural lifestyles arise from conflict between cultural constructs of rurality: conflicting cultural norms and practices (which they refer to as "competences") and symbols (1992:360). They point out that cultural meanings of rurality are circulated at national, regional and local levels, and at the local level any composite construction of the rural will inevitably include individuals' own experiences of the rural: "[T]heir experience of the rural is replete with meaning, and such experience will then inform reflexive communications made to others about the nature of rurality" (1992:364).

Understandings of "rural" in Oneriri are clearly experientially based. Both farmers and smallholders in Oneriri speak of the rurality they know, rather than an unattainable ideal. Analysis of the range of defining characteristics of rural from both groups drawn by the question "What comes to mind when you think of the term 'rural'?" shows that Oneriri farmers have a greater range of focused views of rural life



than smallholders but, predictably, are less concerned with amenity values than smallholders<sup>1</sup>, as shown by central response phrases:

FARMERS	SMALLHOLDERS
<i>farmland; mainly grassland</i>	<i>surrounded by farms, space, privacy</i>
<i>living happily alongside others</i>	<i>lots of countryside</i>
<i>rural is commercial farming</i>	<i>an open fireplace, solitude, quiet</i>
<i>farms and paddocks; isolation</i>	<i>quiet, privacy, soft landscape</i>
<i>it's not the city</i>	<i>open space, trees, animals</i>
<i>open space, sky, wind, seasons</i>	<i>animals, bush, water, space</i>
<i>grass and animals</i>	<i>freedom from people living close</i>
<i>grass, trees and few houses</i>	<i>green, animals and trees, isolation</i>
<i>open country, low population</i>	<i>open spaces, animals, horticulture</i>
<i>productive farmland</i>	
<i>living in a supportive community</i>	

More than half of farmers’ responses relate directly to farming, shown by such key words as “grassland”, “farming”, “animals” and so on. Where smallholders nominate similar terms, they appear to do so from a more self conscious standpoint. The reference to others – stated desires for privacy and “freedom from people” – contrasts with farmers’ positive acceptance of neighbours and community<sup>2</sup>. One fundamental difference between each group’s understandings of the rural arises from the fact that, through their land management practices, farmers have created the landscape which is experienced – even consumed – by their smallholder neighbours. Other than there being a much greater number of houses today then 10 years ago, the Oneriri landscape has been little modified as yet by the activities of smallholders.

<sup>1</sup> Goodwin et al (2000:62) suggest “commonly understood” elements of rural amenity include a sense of spaciousness; privacy, quietness and absence of traffic; landscape relatively free of structures; and a clean environment characterised by fresh air and clean water.

<sup>2</sup> In this analysis of community, the attitudes of members of Otamatea Eco-Village to community are not included. As community is central to the ideology of the village, I felt reporting their wholehearted celebration of this concept would distort the comparison drawn between farmers and other smallholders. Elsewhere their views are included.



The idea that rural space can be experienced by non-occupiers is extended by Mormont. He says there is no longer one single space, but a multiplicity of social spaces for one and the same geographical area, each of them having its own logic, its own institution, as well as its own network of actors (1990, cited Murdoch and Pratt, 1997:57). A space may therefore be understood in terms of the outside forces that combine to confer value on it (Share et al, 1991:122). Thus, in addition to the farmer owners and their smallholder neighbours, Maori, professional consultants of various persuasions and disciplines, environmental activists and local government officers could all be “acting” on the same space, potentially giving rise to competing claims based on sectional interest. These interests arise from both collective and individual understandings of rurality. One example is the sense of “visual ownership” of the South Island high country felt by many urban New Zealanders who oppose its occupation by leaseholding sheep farmers (Dominy, 2001:25).

If the understanding of rural is culturally based, it follows that the way countryside has been shaped and reshaped by human occupation and use is the practical expression of that cultural construct. The landscape, over time, becomes a palimpsest, each occupier leaving some tangible imprint, with the reshaping deriving from socially and economically driven change. Examples in Oneriri are the remnants of homesteads and gardens close to the river, abandoned when roads became a practical alternative to river transportation, and milking sheds with their concrete-paved yards standing unused on farms converted to bull raising. Berque (1990) suggests that people represent a given milieu through the way they use it and, conversely, manage this milieu following the way they interpret it (cited Paquette & Damon, 2003:2). In this way distinct landscapes are shaped by the everyday practices and experiences of rural residents.

Paquette & Damon’s study of rural in-migration in southern Québec seeks to discover whether landscape attributes influence migration. They pose the question of whether the influx of new migrants to rural areas accelerates rural landscape transformations or, conversely, whether it helps to maintain an area’s current attributes. They point to the essential link between cultural values and rural place:

An urbanite purchasing a rural property with a view of the surrounding countryside . . . also represents a distinct manifestation of the individual's values associated with rural places (2003:2).

Their conclusion that, indeed, the appeal of some landscape characteristics “seems to be a determining force shaping the social recomposition of rural communities” (2003:17), is borne out by individual migrants' uniformly laudatory estimations of the Oneriri landscape:

- *We came and had a look and fell in love with the view.*
- *Look at this view. If you had that in the city it would cost you an absolute fortune.*
- *Good mature bush like this attracts people like magnets. People want to walk in the bush and have a piece of it for themselves.*
- *The minute we saw this place we thought, God, this is us. This is what we had been looking for. We love this landscape.*
- *The view, the river, the landscape . . . .*

The findings of Dutch researchers van Dam et al (2002), who interviewed people to explore the reasons behind their stated preference for rural living, reveal other rural characteristics may be more important in other contexts. The characteristics of rural life that they identified as motivating factors for migration were relatively modest. Attributes of the rural landscape such as distant views were not an issue. The rural characteristics preferred by the urban residents tended toward greenness, peace and quiet, space and safety. However, they note, these can also be realised in urban and suburban areas with the development of “country style” enclaves. A large majority of their respondents said they would like to move to such a pseudo-countryside residential development (2002:468).

The first section of this chapter has linked three key concepts in the discourse of rural change to demonstrate that “rural” is a complex cultural construct, rather than merely a spatial nomination. Murdoch & Day's suggestion that it has split into many disparate ruralities points to the fact that, culturally, rural can have many meanings, and that different interpretations at the local level may be capable of sparking conflict. Mormont takes the thought further: that different understandings of rural also permits



the existence of a multiplicity of interpretations for a particular geographical area, once more, perhaps, creating opportunities for conflict. Paquette and Domon make a direct link between cultural values and rural place to introduce the idea that the physical appeal of landscapes, as socially represented, acts to attract migrants to rural areas. All of these ideas exemplify the cultural construction of rural as seminal to an understanding of how people both place themselves, and cope with living in rural milieux. The multiple cultural constructs of rurality are unified in the notion of the rural idyll.

## The rural idyll

Understandings of the rural idyll, or Arcadia<sup>3</sup> are generally associated with the motivation of rural residents to seek to migrate to the country (see, for example, Swaffield & Fairweather, 1998; Little & Austin, 1996; Matthews, Taylor, Sherwood, Tucker & Limb, 2000; Cloke & Little, 1997; Boyle & Halfacree, 1998; Boyle, Halfacree & Robinson, 1998; van Dam et al, 2002). The rural idyll presents happy, healthy and problem-free images of a rural life safely nestling with both a close social community and a contiguous natural environment (Cloke & Milbourne, 1992:359). Short (1991) nominates the countryside as “the refuge from modernity”:

The countryside as contemporary myth is pictured as a less-hurried lifestyle where people follow the seasons rather than the stockmarket, where they have more time for one another and exist in a more organic community where people have a place and an authentic role (cited Boyle et al, 1998:141).

Lambert (2003:25) says urban dwellers also persist in sentimentalising the rural past, hoping to rediscover the simpler life of the country-dweller. When they visit the country they want to be shown resourcefulness, the old skills of hand and eye working in harmony, and a sense of community. “They don’t want to be reminded that the life of the country poor was one of back-breaking misery . . . They’d rather have their pastoral fantasies confirmed.” Arcadian ideals such as these commonly emerge in overseas studies of motivations for migration to rural areas. Swaffield and

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<sup>3</sup> The term Arcadia is generally associated with the structure of feeling and sentiment known as “pastoral” or the “rural idyll”. Though derived originally from an area in Greece, the mythical Arcadia is a dreamscape which to a greater or lesser extent contrasts with the realities of everyday life (Swaffield & Fairweather, 1998). In this discussion the terms Arcadia and rural idyll are used interchangeably.



Fairweather (1998) found that in New Zealand too, the Arcadian ideal continues to have a major influence upon migration to rural lifestyle smallholdings.

In Western society the movement of urban people into rural communities reflects a desire for a particular kind of living space. Boyle and Halfacree (1998:193) say that for these incomers, rural life *means* life in a community; and if no such community exists, it will be created, as incomers weave together the old with the new into a hybrid rurality. They suggest the rural is also seen as “natural”, it has more “environment” than urban areas. Nature as a domain free from human contrivance is still more easily imagined in the countryside than in the urban environment. Pivotal to these and other myths and images surrounding rural life is a nostalgia for the past and an escape from modernity. Short (1991) identifies the countryside as the location of nostalgia and the setting for the simpler lives of our forbears whose existence seems idyllic “because they are unencumbered with the immense task of living in the present” (cited Little & Austin, 1996). Mingay (1989) concludes that the rural idyll provides a cognitive framework “within which many people are, consciously or unconsciously, making their decisions to join the urban exodus (cited van Dam et al, 2002:464). Campbell suggests propagating the “myth of the rural idyll” is important in New Zealand for developing the campervan tourist trade and cashing in on the retirement industry and the resettlement of urban middle classes in the country. He says the ideological manifestation of the rural idyll is a key commodity in the future economic viability of rural areas (Campbell, 1992:93).

As will be discussed below, many values expressed in the exposition of rurality can be linked directly to the rural idyll. In this context, Oneriri smallholders express sentiments consistent with the rural idyll, and continue to do so in many cases after years of rural life:

- *We love Kaiwaka for its small, villagey atmosphere.*
- *The thing of looking after one another is why I want to be part of the community.*
- *So countryside . . . the special architecture of the countryside.*
- *The fireplace, the kitchen, the herbs, the vegetables and fruit.*
- *Helping each other out like in the old villages in Europe.*

- *Living sustainably with people who want the same.*
- *A fresh tomato which you pick as you walk past. That's the day. The tomato is hot from the sun and you are eating the sunlight.*
- *As simple a life as possible, almost like going back to the Iron Age.*
- *I like to live amongst friends.*

The persistence of some of these sentiments even after years of life in the country demonstrates that realisation of the rural idyll depends on how it is constituted by individuals.

Visions of the rural idyll are usually closely associated with representations of the English countryside, but they are visions that seem to travel well. Swaffield and Fairweather (1998) note that Arcadian values were exported from Britain over several centuries of colonial expansion, and New Zealand continues to display features of British culture. In the New Zealand case Swaffield and Fairweather (1998:114) point to the irony that the ideal country life so avidly sought rests upon sources of income external to rural occupation; the ideal cannot be sustained on its own terms, and its ideological opposite – the city – is essential to its success. They say that in this sense the pursuit of the rural idyll links town and country within an overall economic system.

Once a person faces the realities of rural life, the imagined Arcadian lifestyle that brought the former urban dweller to the countryside becomes less relevant in face of the question of *how* rural – how well adapted to rural life – can they become when their idyllic dreams yield to, or perhaps complement, the practicalities of life in a rural community? Mormont (1990:34) suggests their feelings about rurality could be influenced according to how they use their space, and the nature of the local relationships they establish with other users. To answer the question of how Oneriri smallholders experience rural life the first of these categories of analysis will now be explored. The second, the nature of their local relationship with farmers, will be explored in Chapter Five.



The rural idyll is simply the collective images of what rural living should be (Newby (1985), cited Gorton, White & Chaston, 1998:228), and therefore can be seen as a framework for rural living that can be deconstructed so that its salient parts can be examined as key elements in the cultural constitution of rurality. Individuals' discursive perceptions of the key elements arising from this inquiry throw into relief differences in the way they are understood or experienced by farmers and smallholders – the users of rural space in Oneriri. These discursive differences create a continuum of context for the reality of life in this farm-based community, and provide the first hints of cleavage between farmers and smallholders:

[T]he discursive formation of the rural rests on a complex hegemony of domination which both materially and culturally constitutes an acceptance and belonging for some, and a marginalisation and exclusion for others (Cloe & Little, 1997:7).

The first of the key elements is the most frequently nominated attribute of rural life, or reason for wanting to live in the country, quality of life.

### *Quality of life*

"Quality of life" is a term that no longer seems to require such qualifiers as "wonderful", "good", or even "adequate". It has become shorthand for an existence that is celebrated by all of the farmers and smallholders contributing to this study, and can also loom large in the minds of intending rural dwellers, as will be seen. It is linked inseparably with the terms "lifestylers", which is frequently applied to rural in-migrants, and "lifestyle", implying that rural living has a quality different from that found in the city, and that the quality is superior. When considered this way it is immediately apparent that quality of life is also a cultural construct and, further, that it is a highly subjective one that is likely to be coloured by issues such as occupation, wealth, gender and age. Though their views of rural life are obviously different, the expectations of both farmers and smallholders as to its quality are inevitably similar. The reality is here reflected in responses to the question "What are the defining elements of your life as a farmer / your life in the country?"

### FARMERS

- *It's a lifestyle and a hobby. I like the life; I've never been a city person.*
- *... wonderful lifestyle. There's nothing to equal it in the sense of your freedom.*



- *[Farming] is not a profession, it's a way of life.*
- *In farming, you do things together as a family. So it is togetherness.*
- *Healthy air, doing your own thing. A great lifestyle.*
- *It's my whole life, but I certainly don't plan to be still farming when I reach 70.*
- *We don't make a lot of money, but we still enjoy a reasonable standard of living.*
- *It's a good feeling you get from running a farm. This is our lifestyle, our life.*
- *If your land is virtually freehold, you have a good standard of living.*

## SMALLHOLDERS

- *We spend as much time as we can up here. We enjoy getting out of the city.*
- *Nothing could ever make me want to leave this place.*
- *We feel safe here, not vulnerable at all.*
- *We have a feeling of freedom here; of not being encroached on by other people.*
- *. . . just to sit with the mist rolling in. You don't know where the end of the land is.*
- *I love country living. If I could come back in another life I'd be a farmer or a ranger.*
- *[It] means breathing good air, quiet, and a feeling of self-sufficiency.*
- *We don't want lots of other people to come and spoil this landscape. I am unashamedly selfish about this. It's a nimby thing.*

There is a clear difference of approach here. The farmers are generally more concerned to describe their quality of life holistically, or definitively; smallholders in the main opt for a vignette that indirectly illustrates their attitude to country living. The difference is possibly the product of the pragmatic approach to life that is stereotypically the hallmark of the New Zealand farmer, but both types of response indicate each individual's or group's state of well-being. Johnston (1994) defines well-being as "the degree to which the needs and wants of a population are being met" (cited Boyle et al, 1998:128). It is implicated in all life-course moves, such as those linked to marriage, relocation or retirement, and involves attempts by the individual or household to improve their everyday living situation in tune with their changing wants and needs. The comments of both farmers and smallholders show that their rural environment satisfies this ambition.

## *Urban-rural polemic*

The association of the rural with high quality of life implies that conceptions of urban life are the opposite, a situation that Furuseth et al (1999:1) call “different geographies in conflict with one another” – the city versus the country. Swaffield and Fairweather identify a number of dimensions to the ideological separation of town and country that relate directly to idyllic perceptions of life quality:

A celebration of rural peace as opposed to urban noise and activity; of relaxation and pleasure in the countryside against the need for work in the town; the social stability and harmony of rural life in contrast to the political uncertainty of the city; of material wealth and comfort in a rural “country” house instead of financial risk in the city; and of the honest simplicity of rural dwellers compared to the sophisticated but perhaps morally suspect manners of urbanites (1998:113).

For the people of Oneriri, Auckland is “the city”. Whangarei, only 45 minutes away, has the status of a regional town and service centre. For many farmers Auckland is a place with which, through necessity and/or time spent at boarding school, they are quite familiar, but would prefer to avoid. A few enjoy the city. Smallholders seem not to leave the city behind completely when they migrate to the country. For most, Auckland has its place as a contributory, if not necessary, part of their way of life. The views of both groups were sought by the question “How do you feel about Auckland?”

### FARMERS

- *Last time I went to Auckland was three or four years ago. I'm not interested in getting tangled up in traffic. I hate the place.*
- *I like Auckland. I know it pretty well. I went to school there and I have a lot of relatives there and friends. In addition we have lawyers, accountants and our dentist in Auckland so we go there quite a bit.*
- *Rural people think about Aucklanders as demanding an unfair share of resources, and therefore they are thoughtless, uncaring, demanding. I think this is abject nonsense really, maybe because though I'm the wife of a farmer, there's a large part of me that's still townie.*
- *I go to Auckland as little as possible. As a city I hate Auckland. It seems to be a scrambled, jumbled up, hard to get around city. The place drives me nuts.*
- *The thing I hate about Auckland is the traffic, but apart from that Auckland is an all-right place. I don't have much anti-Auckland attitude. I'm not pro-Northland either. I sort of don't care.*



- *I didn't go to Auckland much when I was younger and I don't go there much now. My wife loves shopping so she goes there and I stay home. She takes the chequebook and all.*
- *There is good and bad in all of us, but in Aucklanders I find an arrogance that is difficult to cope with. They aren't as giving in life as rural people are. We are very community-minded, generally speaking.*

## SMALLHOLDERS

- *Our coming here was really a retreat from Auckland. I love silence and to have silence anywhere is a real treasure to me. We have it here. But the other side of the coin is that I also like the liveliness of a lot of people, like in the city, so it is quite a difficult balance.*
- *If I was glib I'd describe Auckland as a necessary evil. But it's like anything else: you need a dynamo, you need a hub. You need something that generates commerce and industry. I think Auckland's a wonderful city, but I prefer to live here.*
- *It's easier to get to know people and form friendships in a country situation than in towns and cities. And there's more of a community spirit as well, for sure.*
- *Oh I love Auckland. I love zooming in over the motorway and seeing Rangitoto when you come over the Orewa hill, and then through Albany and there is Rangi again and the Sky tower and you can see the television mast in the Waitakeres and ...*
- *If I were fabulously well-to-do it would be wonderful to have a little pied a terre [in Auckland], small but perfectly formed, and totally insulated, non-leaking and not hearing the neighbour's toilet flush.*
- *If you go into an Auckland suburb in the middle of the day they are empty. Nobody in the houses. They are all locked up, heavily secured, whereas here we interact as we choose to.*
- *I have lived in Auckland, I've worked there. And now I've come to the country. Yes, I bring many urbane and urban attitudes, but my loyalty is totally to here.*

One farmer volunteered when answering this question that Oneriri farmers “tend to be blinkered” as a result of their “we” and “they” attitude toward townsfolk – especially Aucklanders: “Country people are consumed by comparing their life with urban life, but I don't think urban people care at all what country people are doing”. Survey evidence in New Zealand shows that the primary attractions for moving to the country are the opportunity to raise children in a rural environment, and the perceived



qualities of that environment. Agricultural interests rank relatively low as motivation for migrating to the country (Swaffield & Fairweather, 1998:115).

### *On being a local*

An obvious point of difference between Oneriri farmers and smallholders is that farmers are “locals” and, in farmers’ eyes at least, smallholders are not. The local / not local divide contributes to the otherness of smallholders from the farming culture. This is underlined by farmers’ use of different – sometimes pejorative – terms to refer to smallholders: blockies, lifestylers, townies, yuppies and so on. Bell (1992:73) suggests that by use of such terms farmers claim and grant membership into a bounded social group – that of locals. And they get to set the rules too:

- *You need to have some sort of background in the community – a family connection; somebody who has basically been born and bred within the Kaipara as it were.*
- *A local is someone who has been here a long time and who gets involved in the community. Some people have lived here a long time and not become part of the community. If we don’t know them we don’t think of them as local. But I suppose there are people who choose not to become locals.*
- *There are degrees of being local. There is the person who has never left the area. He is really local. If you’re a local who has experienced life away from the community you are not as local as the really local. Whether you have to be born here I can’t answer with any degree of objectivity.*
- *In locals’ eyes now, because that older generation has gone, we are now the older generation, and so I’m perceived to be a local even though I wasn’t born here, by virtue of being married [to a farmer] and being in the district. So you can become a local.*

If you are an incoming farmer it seems that you can gain or claim local status – but only after demonstrating commitment to the district:

- *I feel that if you go into a new district you’ve got to make the move; [other farmers are] not going to rush after you. They might come to see you once, but you’ve got to make a move to get to know them. After 21 years we’re sort of locals now.*
- *Obviously time must play a part in being a local, but also involvement in the community. Marrying a local probably helps; it might give you . . . marrying a local probably gives you 10 years straight away.*
- *A local has got to have a certain amount of history in the area. It may not be a lot, but they have to have been here for some time. They must earn the title of local;*

*they are not local from the day they arrive. You get to know the community and the people and then you become a local.*

- *I think of myself as a local now. You have got to live in the area for a while. That's enough for me. Pretty much this place has become home. That's what I reckon a local is: it's when you feel at home.*

Perhaps in light of these comments, a smallholder might, over time become considered a local by some, but certainly not if your presence in the district is sporadic:

- *If you've been here 10 years I guess you're a local. But if you just come here for the weekends and spend the rest of the time in Auckland you can't become a local because you spend more time there. Absentee owners aren't locals. How can they be when they're absent?*

Few of the smallholders believe that they are locals, and in making the distinction express qualifications for local status that are similar to farmers'. In effect, the smallholders are subjectively "othering" themselves:

- *If you play rugby or are a dog trialler you might be a local. I think you have got to earn people's respect to become a local too.*
- *You have to do something for the community to become a local and I've never done anything. I don't contribute to the community, that's my trouble.*
- *I don't think the locals classify you as a local unless you're fulltime. So I think they regard us possibly as sort of transient townies. I don't think that is necessarily a negative, but it means you can't really be part of the community.*
- *The locals are the people who live here fulltime and have lived here probably in excess of one generation.*
- *We don't think of ourselves as locals really because we are not really involved in the community as such.*
- *The qualities that make a person a local is that thing of tangata whenua; that you are committed to the land; you've invested in it and you're sticking around to see the outcome of your investment. You are connected into the community in this way.*
- *Can you ever become a local just because you really love the land and the people and what it all stands for? Maybe that's what makes you a local, but whether you are accepted by the other locals as a local I don't know.*

Some smallholders believe that they will qualify as locals in time, and a few are sure that they have already made it:



- *A local is defined by a sense of belonging, a sense of being, a sense of place. It's one of those indefinable things. It's just heart, and if your heart's in a place and you love every aspect of it, then you can call yourself a local.*
- *Now after seven years I think of myself as a local. New Zealanders become locals very quickly. In France it is three generations and you can sort of squeak in.*
- *Yeah, I'm a local. I don't seem to get too involved in community events or meet that many people, but I would definitely say I am a local. Definitely.*

With the exception of the last, these extracts show that the smallholders generally have a good understanding of their social position in Oneriri (class is not implied here) in terms of their difference from traditional farmers. How the two groups self-identify in the context of their rural lives extends exploration of this difference.

### *Notions of self*

Both farmers and smallholders had considerable difficulty answering the question "How do you identify yourself in relation to your life in this district?" Some simply could not come up with an answer. The farmers who did expand beyond "Well, I'm just a farmer" or something similar, were unexpectedly varied in their responses. The first quoted below went straight from boarding school back to Oneriri, earmarked from birth as the successor to the family farm:

- *I don't think I was born to be a farmer – not particularly. I'm saying I didn't have any other burning ambitions so it sort of worked out okay, you know, because I gradually got more interested. I'd always participated on the farm in the school holidays and from 12 I always had a dog, but I probably would have appreciated doing something for a while before I farmed. Whether I would've farmed or not I don't know.*

This farmer's comment shows that problems with farm succession are not confined to the present generation. On occasion a number of the older farmers expressed regret that they had not been able to study further, perhaps thereby gaining entry to another career if that option was ever sought. Others were sorry they had not made the traditional "O.E." trip to Europe or America. One confessed he had always hankered to be an accountant: "I was always pretty good with figures".

One farmer was unexpectedly candid about his higher feelings:

- *I tend to look at life more spiritually than materially. I put life in a completely different perspective. Losing something material is not that important to me any*



*more. I want to get on with some of the things that I would like to do in my life – personal growth – rather than chase around silly animals all day long. They are an evil necessity, I guess, in my case.*

This farmer later expanded at length, explaining that it was the laid-back lifestyle and his enjoyment of living in the country that kept him farming.

Others confessed to a degree of confusion about the nature of their identity:

- *I am not afraid of physical work and I am not exactly a lady. One of my wishes when I was young was that I grow up and be elegant. I would never be beautiful, but I could be elegant. But I haven't even got to that yet.*
- *If anything I'd like to think of myself as a custodian; a custodian who is not doing a particularly good job at the moment, but who hopes to get better for this piece of land.*
- *I am one of the townies of this world. When I first came here thirty-something years ago you were either a local or a townie. I don't identify as a farmer; I am married to a farmer. Since I stopped working I am a farmer's wife now, I suppose. That was something that used to piss me off hugely when I was younger: the fact that I had to have a label. For a while there my labels were wife, mother, playcentre helper. I wasn't myself.*

These comments show a different, more humanistic face of the farming community, and that it would be wrong to assume too great a commonality of thinking and attitudes behind the farm gate. One surprising discovery was that several farmers were completely unconcerned that their farming efforts fell below standards maintained by their neighbours. As Loveridge and Morris (1998:34) have noted, some farmers have aims and goals which are not necessarily accepted as valid by production-oriented farmers. The comments above are expressions of how some farming folk position themselves differently in relation to the assumed norms of rural life. In contrast, most smallholders' views of their rural lives tend to converge on their past or current associations with the urban:

- *We are urban dwellers in the country because we don't fit any other role. We are not lifestylers because we don't have 10 acres; we are not farmers because we don't have any other land. We are just living in an urban-style environment in the country.*
- *We earn a living outside of here; we work in the city during the week, but that's not really what we want to do for much longer, but you could say that, currently, we are commuters.*
- *I am a townie, basically, and I have been all of my life. And I have never given that more than two minutes' thought.*

- *I wouldn't call myself a lifestyler because my lifestyle here is much the same as it would be in town. It's just my surroundings are different. I am not doing anything here different from what I would be doing in town. To be a smallholder I think I would have to be doing something with crops or stock.*

Not all conform with this pattern:

- *Somebody who is growing their own fruit and vegetables for their own consumption qualifies as a farmer. I think of myself as a farmer, in a funny way. It's not how someone with a 80-a-side herringbone cowshed would think of me, but I am. We are concerned about the same things, really. It's been raining for a long time, the ground is wet underfoot and you worry about the weather. You worry about how your soil is. I worry about clover just like a pastoral farmer would. It is linked to the health of your soil and for them it is linked to the health of their stock. Where's the difference?*

The maintenance of a strong urban orientation evinced by some smallholders is only slightly countered by the identification with farming expressed in the last comment.

The depth of engagement smallholders have with the rural is usefully augmented below by their views of the spaces they occupy in the landscape.

### *Attachment to land*

Perhaps the most striking difference between farmers' and smallholders' understandings of rurality is in their separate expressions of attachment to the land they own and live on. As noted earlier, for farmers, the essence of the family farm is its capacity to connect people with land, nature and the past (Comstock, 1987:xxv). However, in Oneriri, the relatively small size of the peninsula means that most farmers brought up in the district attained a deep familiarity with the whole peninsula at an early age. For some, their attachment extends well beyond the farm boundary.

- *Farmers here have, I think, a spiritual feeling about their land. It's, like, God's land and you've been given it. You treasure it and you care for it; you don't trash it.*
- *I have this strong feeling for the Kaipara. I can't explain it but when we sold [the big farm] I didn't want to move away from the Kaipara; it has always been part of my life.*
- *The farm is part of me. My roots are here. My Dad developed quite a lot of it and in my early years I helped with that.*
- *I have a great love for this area. The piece that we have here, there is a little creek where as a kid I used to chase sprats with the little girl next door. I have memories of damming the creek to trap the sprats. Memories like that tie you to a place.*



- *I know this place intimately. I know every creek. Every part of it has some sort of memory: of a tractor getting stuck, of getting firewood, of catching eels. It is part of my essence I guess.*
- *The land defines what you are. If [farming] is a serious part of what you do, it defines who you are and what you are. You wouldn't be the same person if it were not for this piece of land.*

There is obviously a strong correlation between familiarity with, and attachment to, land, but the above extracts also suggest that land, worked as a family farm, plays a major role in establishing identity, and its maintenance contributes to farmers' feelings of self-worth, as will be seen. Smallholders view their association with land more dispassionately and objectively:

- *I don't have a tangata whenua-type feel about land, but I do care how land is used, and I would care if I thought the land around me was being abused.*
- *I think land might be just a commodity to me. I understand people using it – like farmers – but I don't have a strong attachment to it. I haven't really got involved with the land here.*
- *I don't see land as some sort of trophy or commodity; it is something to work with. The landscape is great here. God did it but man has made quite a few messy things here and I'm taking away the mess: the cutty grass and the gorse and the blackberries and the dead wood, returning it to garden.*
- *I identify with the land because I came from farming stock. I spent until my teenage years on a farm.*
- *I think all Westerners have a deep connection to landscape. New Zealanders in particular have a very strong connection to the land. I guess one of the responsibilities I feel is to restore land which has been degraded by excessive use for which it is not suited.*

Further insight into smallholders' relationship with their land is offered by their comments as to the amount of land they need to fulfil their rural dream. Most are aware of the drawbacks of having too much land:

- *We are just short of an acre and that's big enough, otherwise we'd have to grow something or do something. Romantically I'd like to grow lavender but this isn't the right land for it and [husband] would like to grow grapes, but that's too much work. So we sit here and enjoy everyone else's hard work around us.*
- *We didn't want to have a lot of land because we were aware that we wouldn't be very good at looking after it. We thought no more than an acre, and we've got even less than that.*



- *We were very adamant that we didn't want a 10-acre block. That was not what we were looking for. We wanted something much less than that.*
- *Neglected 10-acre blocks are pretty common. Ten acres or bigger takes a lot of hard work to look after, but I think there is a feeling among many urban people moving into the country that it is a piece of cake.*
- *People are beginning to realise that you can't make a living off a 10-acre block. You have to have more land or considerably less and just find a job.*

The narrative extracts quoted in the past few pages demonstrate that farmers and smallholders hold different views of just about everything except the notion of “local” status. Here, though attitudes coincide, division remains, dictated by convention.

Both groups agree that the rural environment affords them the quality of life they desire, but farmers define their lifestyle directly in relation to the practice of farming whereas smallholders analyse it from more intangible viewpoints: contrast with urbanity, personal safety, isolation from other people, and scenic beauty. Attitudes of farmers to the city are predictable; most have a strong aversion to the heavy traffic and bustle. Though the smallholders have turned their backs on the city as a place to dwell, they do not share farmers' detestation of it, possibly because some still work there, others because it is where friends and family live.

Farmers fundamentally view themselves as just that: farmers, and have little inclination to elaborate or explore further. The few who did revealed widely disparate attitudes to the farming life, possibly reflecting degrees of regret for having chosen – or having been thrust into – a farming career. In the rural context most smallholders cling to their largely urban origins and living style. The general view is that the country satisfies cultural elements they perceive that it offers, but that is the extent of their engagement with it. Theirs is a consumption-based, rather than production-based, understanding of rurality. This is borne out by their generally only partial attachment to the land they live on, whereas the farmers all attest to deep and abiding relationships with their land based on familiarity and, in many cases, historical family ties.

The differences revealed by these comparisons indicate a wide diversity between farmers and smallholders in their cultural understandings of key elements in the

constitution of the rural. The final element of rurality raised in this inquiry is the notion of community.

## Community

In 1965 Pahl observed that the wealthy middle class has a high degree of mobility which allows it to choose places in which to live (cited Murdoch, 1995:1220). This mobility enables these people to live in rural areas but conduct much of their lives outside it; work, friendship networks, leisure activities and shopping may all take place elsewhere. Pahl states: "Middle class people come into a rural area in search of a meaningful community and by their presence help to destroy whatever community was there" (cited Murdoch, 1995:1221).

The word "community" evokes everything we miss and what we lack to be secure, confident and trusting: "It is nowadays another name for paradise lost – but one to which we dearly hope to return and so we feverishly seek the roads that may bring us there" (Bauman, 2001:3). It is clear the notion of community is central to the dream of the rural idyll, but is capable of withstanding the assault of experience-based pragmatic reality that can destroy other aspects of the idyll, possibly for the reason that community promises an enrichment of self through interaction with others (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976:31). Tönnies' (1887, cited Hofstede, 1980) imagined and idealistic *Gemeinschaft* of mutual sympathy, habit and common beliefs – the world of the village and the rural community – is a more collective expression of the same construct. Bauman believes the difficulties inherent in developing any sense of community means that, in fact, it can never be achieved. Community, he says, stands for the kind of world which is not available to us (2001:3).

Bauman bases his argument on two central points. The first, drawn from Tönnies' work, is that community depends upon the existence of a common understanding among people; the second is that for community, one must pay through loss of autonomy. The kind of understanding on which community rests precedes all arguments and disagreements. Such understanding is not a finishing line, but the starting point of togetherness (2001:10). The second part of his argument means that autonomy and community cannot effectively co-exist. Community offers the security



of friendship and belonging. Missing community, he says, means missing that implied security; gaining community would soon mean missing the freedom expressed by autonomy or self-assertion (2001:5). The conflict rests on the fact that (abstract) community both implies and requires the conformity of people for the good of the (material) community.

Bauman's theoretical standpoint is simplistic in that it makes no allowance for the existence of different intensities or degrees of community, but his inference is a powerful one: the attainment of any real state of community relies on people's acceptance and understanding of the views of others, and willing participation in local affairs. All but a few Oneriri farmers believe that any sense of community that existed on the peninsula has now largely gone as the result of social change, a situation noted elsewhere in Northland by Scott et al (1996):

- *I don't think Oneriri is as much of a community as it was years ago when it was just a few families.*
- *The sense of community in Oneriri is being lost. People just lead their own lives.*
- *I still think of it as being the older, conservative, traditional families, but of course now there is a far greater range of people.*
- *Oneriri used to be a community when there were fewer people who all knew each other.*
- *The newer people don't want to know; they don't want to involve themselves in the community.*
- *There was a huge bond in Oneriri and somehow we have lost that now.*

Not all farmers regret that change has occurred. One observed that Oneriri residents all knew a lot about each other's business; rumours were rife: "Once it got back to me that I was pregnant with twins when all I had was a cold". Another pointed out that the Oneriri community was formerly "very conservative and very narrow". Several welcomed the diversity that smallholders brought to the district: "It's not just farming now and not one nationality. It's a real cooking pot and that's good. You don't just talk farming". One reason volunteered for the perceived loss of community was the improvement in transport: "People can move around more and visit their friends in Auckland rather than the people just down the road".



Swaffield and Fairweather (1998:8) cite the findings of a number of overseas studies, and a survey of smallholders near Christchurch that suggest that community is more important to people in the Europe, where rural in-migrants usually move into high-density mini-estates, than in New Zealand, where migrants generally build new houses on blocks of up to 20 acres. "This emphasis upon isolated rural dwelling means that there appears to be less concern for community life than in Europe," they say. Solitude and privacy take precedence over aspirations for rural neighbourliness and friendliness. This observation is broadly echoed by some Oneriri smallholders:

- *I've never really felt the need to belong to any particular community.*
- *I don't think there is community here. Everyone keeps very much to themselves and that suits me.*
- *I get enough interaction with the community just shopping at the supermarket.*
- *I don't feel we have a duty to contribute to the community more than we do now by buying groceries at the local store and using the local post office.*

Just as many smallholders see this part of the rural idyll as important in their lives:

- *I feel safe in country communities, that's why I want to be part of this community.*
- *Community gives heart and soul and purpose to the locale. I think we are richer for it.*
- *Knowing your neighbours is more important out here because support services are not as good as in town.*
- *Belonging to a community is important. Where else do you get challenge to your thinking and new ideas?*
- *Community is caring for each other in both physical and social terms. I think this does exist in Oneriri.*

As an abstract concept, community may best be defined in relation to what it is not: alienation, estrangement, anomie, rootlessness, loss of attachment. These conditions can be identified as part of the crisis of modern mass society (Plant, 1974:1), consequently some degree of separation from the social mainstream may help in the pursuit of community. Community has traditionally designated a particular form of social organisation based on small groups, such as neighbourhoods, villages, or a

spatially bounded locality (Delanty, 2003:2). One defining presumption, that the anonymity and isolation inherent in urban life is absent from community (Herman, 1981:4), implies that community is more likely to be found in a rural setting. Consequently a distinction needs to be made between its use in different contexts.

Community, though often confused with geographic locality, in reality may have little to do with spatial proximity (Scott et al, 1996:5). Geographic proximity is thus not an adequate basis for definition; it ignores the qualities implicit in the abstract *Gemeinschaft* construction of the word, and it does not account for the notion of “community of interest”, which may not rely on proximity for its existence. “Community” is also frequently used when referring to particular groups: the churchgoing community; the Oneriri community and so on, which merely denotes an identifiable segment of society which may, or may not, have a spatial referent.

In an exploration of its rural milieu, Liepins (2000) extends the conceptual setting of community. She asserts the term has a complexity that is rarely addressed in studies of the rural, that it has more often provided a shorthand term for the significance of a social space or arena, and a set of cultural meanings and practices which continue to have great significance to rural people (2000a:23). As examples of the “practice” of community she cites a range of formal and informal ways people conduct their economic, social and political life:

For instance, the circulation of meanings and memories through newsletters and meetings; the exchange of goods and services at a local store or health clinic; the creation and maintenance of social groups and rituals; and the operation of local government boards are all examples of ways in which we might trace practices of community. Such social exchanges highlight the material and politico-cultural ways in which meanings of community are articulated and circulated through either a place-based or interest-based community (2000a:32).

Liepins sees rural communities as a social phenomenon indicative of a local scale of activity and a relatively bounded, place-based sense of connection. However, referring to the findings of a study of rural communities, she points out that community is not a social institution open to all rural dwellers; there is a process of defining boundaries and constructing “otherness”. She gives as an example the long-term residents in a small New Zealand town who identified solo parents and beneficiaries as “other” because of their inability to assimilate or support their community in material ways.



She comments: "The most striking feature of these accounts is the clear discursive distance that . . . residents constructed between themselves . . . and those they are othering" (2000b:332). As Scott et al (1996:8) observe, communities need to differentiate themselves from other communities; to include and exclude by maintaining boundaries. "Community encompasses both a sense of belonging (to us) and a sense of differentiation (from them)." Morris et al's (1997) study of change in the Mackenzie/Waitaki Basin found that the social consensus implied by the term community was, in their study area, "weak or non-existent" (1997:81). Community was not based upon any strong patterns of communal activity but, rather, expressed in relation to perceived interrelationships with others (1997:83).

Community can be seen as a slippery concept. Pahl's middle-class migrants expect to find community, not realising that their active participation is required for its maintenance. While denying its existence, Bauman emphasises that the pursuit of community demands a more than usual social and cultural intimacy with others and results in loss of personal autonomy through adherence to community norms. Both conditions seem to create opportunities for both personal and ideological conflict. Liepins brings pragmatism to the discussion by outlining the day-to-day ways community can be – and is – practised. She also notes that community can provide a setting for the formation of otherness, a phenomenon also noted by Scott et al.

Community as it exists in Oneriri today appears to parallel that described by Morris et al. There is little or no communal activity on the peninsula outside the ecovillage (where it is a requirement for maintenance of communally-owned land); community is largely expressed in relationships between individuals. The reasons for this are principally geographical: Kaiwaka serves as the collective centre for Oneriri and the rest of the surrounding district and is the site for the practical expressions of community nominated by Liepins (above). It has the school, St John Ambulance, fire brigade, shops and a hall. The ambulance and fire brigade are the focus of true community activity in that they are conducted by volunteers. The school has its trustees drawn from the district. Oneriri may once have been the site for a kind of social consensus, but it was based largely on kinship and the intergenerational friendships of a handful of families bonded by the relative isolation imposed by distance and poor roads. Very few of those who were part of that community still live



on the peninsula. One farmer summed it up: "History disappears every time one of the old families goes".

This chapter has outlined the cultural understandings latent in conceptions of the rural and the nature of rurality. Oneriri farmers signify their understanding of the rural mainly in terms of the partnership they have with the landscape and the food it produces, defining this partnership and the lifestyle that results as the central expression of their lives. Smallholders in Oneriri commonly view the rural from a consumerist or observer point of view which provides a direct focus, uncluttered by the need to farm for a living, for their experience of the rural lifestyle. The persistence of elements of the rural idyll in rural migrant discourse even after years of rural life suggests that it may be a cultural construct that is continually reflexively reshaped to conform with reality. Elements of this practical view or "working model" of the idyll are understood differently by farmers and smallholders. Definition of rurality as a cultural construct leads inevitably to an inference that there is a degree of cultural difference between the two groups.

The notion of community is perceived by farmers as a quality of Oneriri life that has largely disappeared, squeezed out by modernity and changing social attitudes. Smallholders are divided: some seek the social support and caring implicit in community, others prefer to stand back. Community in fact persists in the voluntary services concentrated in Kaiwaka; community of the kind Oneriri farmers mourn diminishes as their kin leave the peninsula.

The next – and final – chapter describes the factors and structures that contribute to urban migration into the Oneriri peninsula, then links the discursive differences in cultural understandings of elements of rurality with the nature of cleavage and conflict between farmers and smallholders and the reasons for its existence.

# Gateway to discord



SEVEN KILOMETRES down Oneriri Road west of State Highway One an imposing set of high gates – painted black and with no latch – closes off a sealed road that winds down toward a small lake then up a steep hill, disappearing from view around the hill's flank and into a dense patch of bush. A secondary road branches off the main drive, looping around the other side of the lake. Along both sides of this secondary road are white-painted posts marking the position of boundary pegs that describe the perimeters of individual blocks of land. Between the posts are signs giving the number of the block and its size. There is no mention of price. Many of the signs bear "Sold" stickers. If you were to follow the main drive up the hill you would find many more of these signs. There are 50 in all, fronting the roads that web this 202Ha enclave, formerly a drystock farm.

This is Takahoa Bay, a residential farm-park developed specifically for the well-heeled seeker of rural peace and quiet. Prices for the choicest hilltop sections are as eye-watering as the prevailing south-westerly winds that scour these riverside slopes. For a spectacular view of the Otamatea River and the pastureland that rolls northward from the farther shore of this arm of the Kaipara Harbour you can pay upward of half a million dollars.

This is the upmarket crest of the wave of smallholding developments that have encouraged a small flood of urban migrants into the Oneriri peninsula over the past decade. The smallholders are the most visible evidence of the changes that today mark the peninsula's post-productivist status. It is no longer purely a farming district. Though most of the landscape is dotted with cattle – its main function is still to produce food – Oneriri is also a place to live and, for those whose weekdays are spent working in the city, a place to relax and to play. Takahoa Bay is symbolic of change, but its dependence on the city, first for its development funding, second for its wealthy would-be inhabitants who will soon begin building their country dream homes, demonstrates that change in city and countryside are interdependent. They are primary elements of the same social and economic system.



At the human level in Oneriri there is no recognition of such interdependence despite the paradox that has farmers subdividing land for sale to “townie” smallholders they would sooner not have as neighbours. The differences between smallholders and farmers are the differences between urban and rural, town and country, and for some farmers the code-controlled gates on Takahoa Bay are unwelcome reminders of the differences. For people who seldom lock their doors the gates are an affront; they say they are not trusted by those who are to live behind them. The gates also carry another message for the farming fraternity. Said one: “Those gates are all about social status. We can do without that. It’s making Oneriri upper class I guess”. The farmer thought for a moment then found a solution. “If the Maoris want to pinch those bloody security gates they can do so with my blessing. I’d even give them a hand.”

Maori concern about the Takahoa Bay development is in fact much greater than what might be signified by a set of gates. Takahoa is the name given to a flat-topped hill of basalt, the “plug” of an ancient volcanic cone that rises beside a small lake near the entrance to the farm park. The land around the base of the hill and the shores of the lake is an old Maori burial ground and are therefore wāhi tapu. At the highest point of the block are the remnants of a large fortified pa. Maori fear that both historic sites will be desecrated once people start building houses.

Local Maori tried to delay work on the development to discuss how the two sites might be protected, but they had heard about it too late: all the approvals had gone through and work was beginning. One kaumatua voiced the fears of the Te Uri O Hau people: “We have little hope that people will respect these sites. Over generations we have seen that these places are just walked over in time if there is no one there to prevent it. It’s a very important, very spiritual place, but its value to us and its history are now facing death”. The kaumatua did not blame the district council for the breakdown in communication. “The council notified the people who they presumed were the representatives of the people, but two people don’t represent a whole iwi.” He said the right procedures were not followed and by the time news of the development filtered through it was too late for any consultation. “We believe that these places shouldn’t be placed in danger without consideration first from not just one or two, but a large number of people in the district, both Pakeha and Maori. You know, there are a lot of Pakeha who have just as much respect for those places as we have. Unfortunately some of our own have gone the opposite way and look at monetary value first before they look at the historical value.”



## CHAPTER FIVE

# *Flight from the city*

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A REGIONAL profile of Northland prepared by the Statistics Department concludes with a brief comment that encapsulates the relationship between Oneriri and Auckland, and its consequences for the change that is transforming the peninsula today:

... the southern part of the [Northland] region has the potential to be affected by the burgeoning growth of Auckland, and it is possible that the future Auckland population will encroach upon the region (Statistics N.Z., 1999:10).

In the five years since those words were written, smallholdings in Oneriri have sold steadily. A few have become olive groves or grow exotic flowers, but most now have a house and a few head of stock. The incomers are tolerated by the peninsula's farmers, but relations between the two groups are distant – by about the length of a farmer's arm. The smallholders are an ever-increasing reminder of the nearness of New Zealand's most populous city. Farmers see that the dynamics of pastoral farming are changing, that average-sized family farms will soon no longer be able to guarantee an adequate income. Where this is the case the choice is amalgamation to form much larger units, or sale. The demand for smallholdings offers big returns from subdivision, but it also means the end of a sustaining lifestyle and departure from a district that in many cases has been called home by five and even six generations of a family.

- *Growth slowly crept in and bits got knocked off farms. People moved houses in and everybody threw their arms up in the air. It's a very diverse population now.*
- *Subdivision just seemed to creep in bit by bit until suddenly Oneriri Road was a very busy place.*
- *I would know hardly anybody who lives out here now because so many of the farms have been sold into smaller blocks.*

Even smallholders who have been in Oneriri for a few years have noticed that immigration is increasing:

- *I wonder if we should start looking further north because Auckland's catching us.*

- *It feels like Oneriri is being swallowed up. Even the short time we've been here we have noticed so much change.*

People's residential choices are increasingly influenced by considerations of quality of lifestyle compared to proximity to work and services (Lee and McDermott, 1998:100), so it appears Oneriri will increasingly play host to more and more smallholders. The character of a rural area depends on, and is shaped by, the nature of the rural economy which underpins it (McShane, 2003:15). Inevitably change will result from growth and the landscape will reflect changes as the pastoral monoculture yields to other land uses. The present realities of change and uncertainty about the future has brought about resistance from long-established residents to what they see as threats to their lifestyles and to the landscapes which have for so long been exclusively theirs. This chapter will explore factors which contribute to the migration of people from the city to the country, then describe contexts for conflict between farmers and smallholders and how that is expressed by both groups.

## Transforming the rural

The technological revolution following the Second World War drastically changed farming's image as a traditional sector forming the bedrock of a stable rural world (Marsden, Lowe & Whatmore, 1990:2). The way that the changes to agriculture also had far-reaching effects on rural society was initially of little interest in a world more concerned with post-war reconstruction. The development of policies in Western countries aimed at increased agricultural production meant most rural issues were bent or warped to fit in with the productivist viewpoint (Fairweather, 1992:6). This productivist era for agriculture persisted till the late 1970s, and was characterised chiefly by a sense of security for those engaged in the industry, particularly in respect to land rights, land use, finance, politics and ideology. Agriculture maintained "a central position in local society, economy and politics" (Boyle & Halfacree, 1998:6). Now, however, this focus is seen as no longer sufficient for rural policy; the suitability of a narrow productivist view has outlived its usefulness (Fairweather, 1992:6).

Today rural policy needs also to take into account the expanded use of rural places for consumption-oriented activities – such as amenity, environmental protection, leisure



and, above all, residence – rather than as areas dominated by primary production (Marsden et al, 1990:2). A substantial body of literature in rural studies has begun to rethink and redefine rurality as dynamic and unstable social constructions rather than as fixed geographical entities (Hughes, 1997:124), and no longer uniformly representing agricultural interests and activities. Marsden et al (1990:12) locate what they call “the contemporary predicament of rural areas” at the intersection of the two major forces transforming them: the reorganisation of the international food system and the social and economic restructuring of rural regions under the pressure of capitalist recombination.

The effects in New Zealand of the first of these forces was considered in discussion of the flow-on from the 1984 deregulatory measures; the second – social and economic restructuring – is the force that brings about the most obvious manifestation of rural change in New Zealand and, seemingly, the whole of the Western world:

Migration of people to the more rural areas of the developed world . . . forms perhaps *the* central dynamic in the creation of any post-productivist countryside (Halfacree & Boyle, 1998:9)

The notion of post-productivism is integral to an understanding of counter-urbanisation, or the drift of urban people to the countryside.

## The post-productivist countryside

Until the late 1970s agriculture’s hegemonic position in the New Zealand countryside was secure. Pomeroy (1997:1) says rural communities tended to be seen as synonymous with the agricultural sector. People not directly involved with production either provided services to those who were, or to businesses and people involved in processing or transporting agricultural products. Other industries did not have the financial or political clout of the farm sector. “Farmers regarded themselves as the backbone of the country . . .”, she says. But, as Fairweather (1992:10) noted more than a decade ago, while agricultural production still plays a role, it no longer dominates rural policy. In the post-productivist countryside there is a growing role of farmers and other rural residents in activities not traditionally associated with the production of food, such as bed and breakfast accommodation or rural leisure activities. However the idea of a post-productivist countryside does not mean a



countryside in which agriculture is either no longer present or in which it has been eclipsed in significance by other land uses. Halfacree & Boyle note:

The diversity of rural change suggests a divergence within agriculture, between those farmers concentrating on subsistence, those combining agriculture with other gainful activities in order to make a decent living and those shifting to a more agribusiness mode of operation. Overall, post productivism suggests that agriculture will remain the principal land use in rural areas, but that its hegemonic cornerstone position in the rural economy, local society and politics will no longer be assured and will increasingly be highly localised to certain rural areas (1998:7).

In the Netherlands, as an example, rural areas are transforming from agricultural productivist countryside to “multifunctional consumption space and postmodern countryside” (van Dam, Heins & Elbersen, 2002:461). From both a land use and a functional perspective, the domination of agriculture has lessened and consumption activities like recreation and tourism, nature conservation, landscape protection and residence have been introduced and extended. “This commodification process can be identified throughout rural areas in Western urbanised societies and this process is immense, far-reaching and irreversible” (van Dam et al, 2002:461).

In some cases it seems post-productivism has come about for less obvious reasons. Halfacree identifies the British countryside as post-productivist in that the agricultural industry has been “mired in a state of crisis” (1997:70) for such a long period that there has been a shift from a productivist to a post-productivist era. Increasing public concern with the negative environmental effects of many agricultural activities coupled with the in-migration of people from urban centres has caused many British farmers to experience an increasing sense of insecurity and uncertainty as regards their position in both agriculture and rural life generally. “Moreover, this was also the perception of the general public, who increasingly questioned and criticised farmers’ status as guardians of the countryside . . .” (Halfacree, 1997:71).

In New Zealand the process of change to a post-productivist countryside is still under way. In a country where agricultural products comprise half of total exports and the farming industry contributes around 17 percent of GDP (Polson, 2002: 2), grassroots productivism can be expected to prevail in practical terms almost everywhere except in “fringe” areas conveniently accessible from major urban centres. Scott, Park, Cocklin & Kearns (1996:1) nominate in-migration to rural communities, particularly

from nearby urban areas, as a major force for rural change. They also cite land use change and “shifting economic fortunes” as factors for social change. Quoting Marsden (1996), they state that the rural is increasingly defined in terms of production-consumption linkages, food networks and the institutional dynamics and practices of rural restructuring (1996:13). Taken together, all of these factors for change tend to indicate that the New Zealand agricultural industry is, indeed, progressing steadily toward post-productivist status.

Under close examination, Oneriri can be seen as becoming a showcase for post-productivism. The symptoms are felt deeply by the farming community as the need to expand to remain economic becomes more and more pressing, yet the high cost of land in Oneriri makes expansion virtually impossible. Some farmers grope for a solution:

- *Farming's not viable from the economic point of view so I guess we've got to look at other ways of getting a living off the land. Economic issues have brought about change and you have to adapt and cope with it.*
- *Oneriri land is multiple-use land, that it can be used for a lot more than just grazing the grass. If you'd said that to me when I was twenty or thirty I wouldn't have wanted to know about it, but I've changed. I'm not so sure about the other [farmers] though.”*

Some have doubts, though, that any alternatives will be adopted:

- *Established farmers will listen to ideas, but when someone tells them what to do, even if they want to do it they won't.*
- *Some farmers won't accept change; they are traditionalists. They are still farming the same way as their fathers did. They haven't adjusted to the dollar side of farming.*

The subject of subdivision and its effects is never far away during discussion of change. There is recognition of a certain inevitability about the process that is transforming Oneriri from a tight farming community into a haven for urban migrants, but the recognition is tinged with varying degrees of regret:

- *The major area of change is definitely subdivision. I see it as inevitable as access time to Auckland is shortened with motorways, but it is a pity that such a lot of farmland has gone into subdivision and is not being farmed in the traditional way.*
- *It seems to be the end of an era for the peninsula. The old families are selling up their farms. Some of the land is going into subdivision and some of it is still being bought up and farmed. There is a huge amount of land out there.*



- *You look back and there are some things about those times that you wished were still part of your life now: the social scene and just being part of a community.*
- *I've tried not to analyse subdivision as either good or bad. I have been sad to see farming go down, but you have to realise we are only an hour and a bit from Auckland, and at some stage Auckland is going to spread.*

The essence of these comments is that the process of rural change is well under way in Oneriri. The post-productivist status the peninsula has so obviously acquired is following the certain pattern established by Franklin District and other now semi-rural areas near Auckland. Farming will continue in Oneriri as the dominant land use for the foreseeable future; there is no suggestion or likelihood that its landscape will ever become a suburban one. Though the landscape *will* be modified by new landowners over time, the principal changes at present are social ones: the other face of post-productivism is that of change to the social structure of rural communities.

For all but a few patient souls, Oneriri is not yet within comfortable daily-commuting time of Auckland, but the patterns of development that can bring a once-distant locality within the orbit of the city fringe are firmly in place between Auckland and Oneriri.

## Rural-urban fringe, shadow or hinterland?

What was once a clearly-identifiable edge separating the city from the countryside has become blurred. The development of better and more extensive roading systems around and extending from cities and a more mobile population pursuing both real and imagined delights of living outside the city means that, apart from local political definitions, it is difficult to say where the city stops and countryside begins. Instead, there is a variety of environments radiating from the city centre, each segueing to the next. Different terms such as “fringe”, “inner fringe”, “rural-urban fringe”, “urban shadow”, and “the exurban zone” are used sometimes interchangeably, sometimes to identify quite separate areas, but usually overlapping to some degree (Martin (1975a), cited Bryant, Russwurm & McLellan, 1982: 11). Pryor (1968) states:

[The fringe] is the zone of transition in land use, social and demographic characteristics lying between (a) the continuously built-up urban and suburban areas of the central city, and (b) the rural hinterland, characterized by the almost complete absence of non-farm dwellings, occupations and land use (cited Bryant et al, 1982:11).



In their exhaustive discussion of what they call “the city’s countryside” – that area around cities in which various processes of change in land use occur – Bryant et al make the point that it is not so much the extent of the resource base contained in the countryside around cities that makes it critical to society, but rather the fact that the land and its resources are subject to competing, often conflicting, demands (p.3). They point out that the physical environment in which these zones of transition develop may vary significantly between cities, citing Auckland’s isthmus as an example of a “constrained” location (p.11). In a diagram somewhat like a cross-cut onion they apply different terms to rings or zones radiating out from the central built-up area of the city:

The *inner fringe* is characterized by land in the advanced stages of transition from rural to urban uses – land under construction, land for which subdivision plans have been approved. The *outer fringe* which, together with the inner fringe forms the *rural-urban fringe*, is an area where, although rural land uses dominate the landscape, the infiltration of urban-oriented elements is clear. Further out . . . may be an area of *urban shadow*, an area where physical evidence of urban influences on the landscape is minimal, but where the urban . . . presence is felt in terms of . . . a scattering of non-farm residences. Finally, the urban shadow merges into the *rural hinterland*; even there metropolitan and urban influences do not stop – urbanites may still own properties for weekend retreats and cottages, and the rural people themselves certainly cannot help but be influenced by urban values and ideas that are transmitted through the media (pp.13,14).

They observe that the high cost of land closer to the city has resulted in what they (p.16) call “leapfrogging”, where development, instead of occurring in the urban fringe adjacent to existing urban areas, “jumps” over large tracts of land which are being held speculatively by their owners, to less accessible land which is cheaper.

In this theoretical context Oneriri can be seen as sited in the urban shadow, where farming predominates, but the urban presence is signified by non-farm residences.

One conclusion that is drawn from this progression of households outward from the city is that the connection between city and countryside has become closer and more intimate (Furuseth & Lapping, 1999:1). Another is that the rural-urban fringe is a “rural-urban battleground” for water and land, loss of farmland, wildlife and countryside, and “a refuge of the geographically mobile who, by fleeing the city, trade commuting for a mythical piece of Arcadia . . .” (Audirac, 1999:7). Notwithstanding

such ideas, as has been noted, people everywhere are seeking their own special piece of Arcadia in increasing numbers.

### *Land use control*

As long ago as 1946 a minimum subdivisional requirement of 10 acres was fixed by the Counties Act, to apply in rural areas outside a borough or town district. Any person who wanted to subdivide land into lots smaller than 10 acres had to submit a scheme plan to the local county office showing the proposed subdivision. The legislation proved largely ineffective in most counties because few had delimited what areas were urban and what were rural. Mawhinney (1974:3) notes that some farmers were still free to subdivide their road frontages into quarter-acre sections, which led to ribbon development in many locations. An amendment to the Act in 1962 sought to impose further control by upping the minimum size of subdivisional lots to 50 acres. This amendment was repealed just nine days after being passed as a result of lobbying by rural interests, principally Federated Farmers New Zealand which saw the legislation as an infringement of the democratic right of landowners to dispose of their land as they saw fit, without the approval of local councils (1974:4).

Mawhinney's study of 10-acre subdivisional lots in Manukau City and Franklin County found that the increasing value of farmland in these close-to-Auckland areas was the principal reason nominated by farmers for subdividing their land (1974:16).

Today, Franklin District Council (formerly Franklin County) is still trying to rein in small-block subdivision within its borders. A District Plan change (September, 2003) attempts to restrict subdivision to lower quality land, leaving land with high grade soils for agricultural use. The council notes (2003:2) that a key issue is the effects of an increasing "lifestyle" population on a largely rural area. Many of the newly created lots are used for "lifestyle" purposes only and not for the rural activities for which they gained subdivision approval. "This has often resulted in rural residents buying larger properties than they want or can manage."

This parallels the Oneriri experience where many smallholders have purchased blocks far larger than they need, simply because any landowner can subdivide, as of right, blocks of 10 acres or more. Anything less requires a much more complicated and



lengthy process. Both farmers and smallholders agree that 10-acre subdivisions should be a thing of the past, mainly because 10 acres is an area of land that is too small to actually farm other than for intensive horticulture, and too big to otherwise look after, leading to the stereotypical tidy country cottage on a fenced-off quarter-acre, surrounded by nine and three-quarter acres of weeds. In 1998, Oneriri farmers joined with others in nearby Maungaturoto in an attempt to modify the council's policy on rural subdivision. They submitted that the 4Ha controlled activity standard was inappropriate because it had resulted in a decrease in productivity and economic activity, and that there was no requirement for residual land to be kept in sustainable agriculture. The farmers said if that situation were left unchecked the district would be fragmented. Properties totally subdivided with only a couple of lots sold would result in the balance of the property being poorly farmed (Dunn, 1998:3).

Both farmers and smallholders broadly favour the farm-park concept where each landowner has a small residential block well distanced from others and a collective interest in the balance of the land, which remains in production. Each landowner effectively has 10 acres but needs only to maintain a residential section. Kaipara District Council has recently approved two such developments in Oneriri.

### *Commodification*

From a farming perspective, urban migration may offer an opportunity to capitalise on the accompanying surge of land values – especially when the farm's economic viability is threatened. In some circumstances the sale of some farmland enables farmers to remain agriculturally competitive as they intensify farming operations. Sale of the farm altogether enables them to move farming operations to cheaper land (Furuseth & Lapping, 1999:8,11). In these circumstances there is a change to land use patterns that is likely to have a flow-on effect in value terms to other farming properties in the district. Bryant notes that land use change also changes the nature and character of local communities (1995, cited Halseth, 1999:164). The influx of urban migrants to a farming district in pursuit of perhaps idealised perceptions of rural living results in the commodification of farmed land.



Nowhere is this more obvious than in Oneriri. During 2003, a 58-acre block sold for \$1.2 million – more than twice the price it was bought for three years previously; an 80-acre block, all in pasture, sold for \$2 million; and a 1600-acre farm sold for \$6.5 million. As farming propositions none would be worth half the price it sold for, but each of these properties is bordered by the Otamatea River, affording direct boat access to the Kaipara Harbour. Even land without water frontage is at a premium as long as it has a water view. Farmers have mixed views of this phenomenon:

- *Compared with what they were worth 10 years ago, the money being paid for these small acreages means that we're going to have a rating problem after a while. Some of the land may well become too expensive to farm. It's happened in other areas.*
- *Farmers subdivide because their land here is so valuable in small blocks and because it is more rewarding than farming. Maybe they are coming to the age where they want to capitalise and take things easier – especially if they are near retirement.*
- *The land is so valuable you'd be silly not to subdivide it. This is why the community is changing so fast.*
- *In essence all subdivision maximises the value of your land when you turn it into cash. It enables farmers not to have to make the ultimate decision to sell. They can make a little decision, take off a little bit of land and still keep their farming lifestyle going.*

In moving from urban places to the countryside, in-migrants in effect “purchase” the experience of being in a rural community and landscape. Halseth (1999:164) says this purchase of an experience or of a lifestyle occurs just as a consumer would purchase other goods, services or activities. Turning the rural landscape into a saleable commodity is having increasingly important social and economic consequences at the community level. Non-rural people attach their own perceptions and imagery to rural places (1999:164). Developers and real estate agents are well aware of such perceptions. Halseth notes: “It is the idealized image as much as the actual landscape which has been turned into a commodity for sale through the real estate market” (1999:166).

### *Migration to the countryside*

Urban migration to the country can be seen as having three major dimensions. First, it has place utility – the value put on different living environments; second, there must

be an ability to move away from the economic and personal attachments one has to present locations; third, there must be a willingness to move – the motivation to relocate to a non-metropolitan locality (Gorton et al, 1998:216). Migration can therefore be seen as a selective process, and also influenced by age, income and direction (van Dam et al, 2002:464).

The phenomenon of colonisation of the countryside around many cities by former urban dwellers brings groups of people together who are different in terms of occupations, origins and lifestyles (Bryant et al, 1982:44). Rural in-migrants are by no means homogeneous in terms of such features as where they have come from, their previous environment and life experience, the type of rural area they have sought out, the degree of permanence they attach to this change in their lives, the motives behind their moves and the degree of attachment they have to an urban area. Champion (1998:31) cites British research identifying three specific groups of migrants constituting the largest elements of in-migration. The first is retired people, second are those who move to be close to a new job, and the third comprises commuters who, though they have moved house, continue to work in their previous home area. The first and third of these groups are relevant to this discussion.

The practice of people moving from the urban to the rural on leaving paid employment produces a dual effect: as their lives are changed by the *rite de passage* of retirement, these in-migrants also, more than other migrants, change the rural area they have moved to (Harper, 1997:193; Halseth, 1999:167), probably because they have more time available. The changes arise from the new skills, ideas, attitudes and money they bring with them. In New Zealand enjoyment of retirement has much to do with the pursuit of an active lifestyle. Lee and McDermott (1998:100) say that as people live longer and enjoy greater mobility, so are they more likely to choose pre-retirement and retirement places to dwell in keeping with more active lifestyles. They say it cannot be assumed that they all aspire to apartment living, nor to the consumption choices represented by inner city or gentrified suburban dwelling.

Space and rural or coastal amenity beyond the city edge will still feature prominently in the housing choices of a significant group of recent and pending retirees. This will result in the partial urbanisation of highly-valued natural environments (Lee and McDermott, 1998:100).



Retired people are well represented among Oneriri smallholders:

- *We came here directly from Auckland when I retired. I just wanted to get away from the city and all the associations with the work I had been doing for the past 15 years. It was tough at first; we didn't know much about country living, but we soon learned.*
- *What do you do after retirement? The prospect of sitting in a little apartment watching Sky TV and getting fat is not very attractive. So you try to find a way of being able to survive with a high quality of life and have something to keep you fit and healthy.*
- *We came here in 1993 as part of our planned retirement project. We knew we needed something that was going to be a challenge physically, socially and intellectually, otherwise we would get bored; that was our motivation for coming here.*

According to Lee and McDermott, in rural districts within reasonable distance of cities, older population groups are a significant and growing population component. "The elderly, although unlikely to be a numerical majority at the local government level, may be influential beyond their numbers due to their accumulated wealth, experience (including political experience) and the fact that they – unlike commuters – are full-time residents" (1998:102).

Swaffield and Fairweather (1998:8) cite the findings of a number of overseas studies, and a survey of smallholders near Christchurch that suggest that commuter-based smallholding by people in search of privacy, picturesque rural settings and a benign environment for family life is a common feature of late 20<sup>th</sup> Century post-colonial cultures. As already noted, for most, Oneriri is too far from Auckland in terms of travel time for daily commuting as yet, but many people work two or more days a week in the city, staying overnight with friends, family or in rented accommodation. From Otamatea Eco-Village, members of five families travel more or less regularly to Auckland, maintaining part-time jobs. Some people are able to telecommute – working from home and in constant touch with clients or workplace by computer:

- *The internet allows people like me to work here, because I am no longer disadvantaged by living in the country. I don't have to live next to a library or a university; I have got library resources that are infinite, and low-cost telephony enables me to stay in touch with clients worldwide. We are just so connected now. Going to the country used to mean that you cut yourself off from everything.*



Together, retirees, “semi”-commuters and the rural-based self-employed constitute what Lee and McDermott call the “third wave” of urban decentralisation. The first wave, which occurred early last century, was driven by tramways and the desire for “garden cities”. The second wave, during the post-war years, was driven by the motor car and the desire for the “quarter-acre paradise”, and

the third wave is being driven by communications technology, even cheaper and more efficient motor cars, extended years in semi or full retirement, and the desire to get close to nature and to rediscover New Zealand’s “rural” traditions and a “natural” life experience (Lee and McDermott (n.d.) cited McShane, 2003:7).

The contribution to the landscape of this third wave was observed by Hunt (1995). He found that the owners of smallholdings are planting trees and hedgerows more than the farmers before them. They are improving the life-supporting qualities of the soil and are more likely to take an active interest in conservation. He found that “lifestylers” were conserving natural resources for future generations by tree planting and conserving soils; safeguarding and maintaining wildlife habitats; and avoiding, remedying or mitigating any adverse effects on the environment (cited McShane, 2003:16).

This section has situated Oneriri within the urban shadow as part of the city’s countryside, where processes of change in land use are occurring despite what many farmers and rural migrants see as outdated land-use policies. The nearness to Auckland and the desirability of rural living in a picturesque landscape has led to substantial escalation in land prices on the peninsula. Retirement has proved to be a prime reason for people to seek a place in the country and increasingly, the availability of instant world-wide communication in the form of the internet is drawing others.

For many, country life means safety, tranquility, beautiful scenery, friendly people. In response to these idyllic notions of rural bliss, it needs to be asked whether rural living is better than urban. Waldegrave & Stuart’s (1998) exhaustive survey of migration from urban centres to rural communities nominates a lack of facilities ranging from medical care to shops, lack of employment opportunities and isolation as disadvantages of rural living. Despite these disincentives they make the point that counter-migration seems to be a consistent feature of population movement in New

Zealand. There is one other aspect of rural living which, while not necessarily a disincentive, is both negative and unavoidable: farmers and smallholders do not always see eye-to-eye.

## Cookies v. Blockies

One of the farmers contributing to this study had this to say about smallholders:

- *There's good lifestylers and bad lifestylers. The good lifestylers will take an interest in everything that's going on around them, and take an interest in trying to keep their place looking smart. The bad lifestylers are the ones that cause trouble, pinpricking about everything that's not necessary. They've got to remember that we've got a farm to run, and run the best way we know how, and I suppose spray must come into that. I know we've got to be careful with spray, but some of them go a bit silly about it.*

This pronouncement is notable for a number of reasons. The first is that it embraces the two most frequently voiced criticisms that farmers direct at smallholders – that few control weeds on their land (“keep the place looking smart”), and that they are almost certain to object to farmers’ use of herbicides. The second is that the worth of the “bad” smallholders’ opinions is minimised, dismissed as “pinpricking” and “not necessary”. The third element of note is that the whole tone of this comment clearly identifies smallholders as “other” to the speaker, especially in terms of farming knowledge (“farm . . . the best way we know how”). To sum up this analysis, in this farmer’s reckoning smallholders are clearly Others who know little or nothing about farming. There is thus a clear discursive distance between this farmer and the people who are “othered”.

Why should there be this distance? This final section will attempt to answer this question, exploring along the way various points of contention between farmers and smallholders. Farmers’ observations about the presence and practices of smallholders as consequences of rural change to which they, as a class, have contributed, are compared with smallholders’ views of current Oneriri farmers and farming practice.

## Constituting otherness

Twenty years ago, traditional family farming was the dominant culture of the Oneriri peninsula, a situation that had changed little for more than a hundred years. Even 10 years ago there were few smallholders, but shortly after their numbers began to build



steadily. Today smallholders by far outnumber farmers, but traditional farming remains the dominant culture of Oneriri for two reasons. First, almost all of the farmland of the peninsula is devoted to pastoral farming. Though a breakdown of land use between farming and smallholding is not available, Kaipara District Council's planning maps showing individual titles indicate that smallholdings would occupy less than five percent of the peninsula. Second, farmers constitute a readily identifiable and clearly visible sector of Oneriri's population by virtue of their occupation. There is little commonality among smallholders in terms of land use and occupation.

For much of the farming community the otherness of smallholders manifests in two categories: social relations and farming practice.

### *Social relations*

Some farmers volunteer excuses or reasons why they have little or no social interaction with smallholders:

- *You hear so-and-so's bought that block down there and the next thing there's somebody else on it. It's not a snooty thing that we don't mix with [smallholders], it's just that you can't keep up with them.*
- *We haven't socialised a lot with new people who've come into the area. It's not because we've set our faces against them. Work consumes most of my time so my other time I preciousely guard and give it where I want to – mostly to my family and old friends.*
- *I don't think of people as established farmers or whether they are lifestyle block owners. We judge them on the people they are. But the established farmers are the people we have been socialising with all our lives, so they are old friendships and we all know each other really well.*
- *We have such a full social life that it's very hard to find time to add much more.*

Other farmers make no excuses:

- *I don't think I know any lifestylers – not close, personally. I know of them, but our paths in that respect haven't crossed community-wise.*
- *I guess there's a gap because I don't know any [smallholders]. I don't know them out this road . . . maybe enough to say 'hi', but not enough to talk to. There are lots of different lifestylers but I would prefer my neighbours to be farmers.*



- *I have had a bit to do with a few of the lifestylers, but then there's not so many of the farmers left. There are not the big farms there used to be.*

Smallholders clearly signal that they regard farmers as Other in the social sense by the way they objectify them almost as a separate species. Possibly this is mainly because so few know any farmers:

- *I don't know how I would meet any farmers really, so I wouldn't know about them.*
- *I haven't met a lot of farmers. I introduced myself to one when I was doing my walk to the end of the road one day. He was moving sheep along the road so I walked to the end of the road with him.*
- *The people in Oneriri are very pleasant and chatty on the surface, but I haven't really got to know any of them well. There's a sort of veneer, and I don't know whether that's because you're seen as a stranger or what.*
- *There are boundaries. I assume that the old farming families all know each other pretty well, though I don't know how much they socialise on a regular basis.*
- *There is a cleavage between us and them and I don't really see that there is anyone to blame for that, or indeed if it's a bad thing. I don't think it's a bad thing. I am quite a private person; I don't really want to know all the farmers.*

With some exceptions there exists a clear social divide between farmers and smallholders. It is equally clear that it is not a hostile divide. Rather, it seems to reside in a reluctance on the part of farmers to seek new friends outside their existing social network, and the lack of a community of interest between the two groups. This conclusion resonates with survey evidence from Newby et al (1978) which shows that farmers' social networks are extremely confined. In general, they conclude, farmers simply do not have non-rural, non-local friends. They rarely meet socially with people from outside agriculture (cited Murdoch, 1995:1222).

### *Farming practice*

In terms of land use and the practice of farming, many Oneriri farmers maintain a rigid distance from smallholders, exemplified by the attitude of the farmer quoted in the introductory paragraph to this section. A minority recognise that those smallholders who run stock or otherwise farm their blocks need time to learn agricultural skills. They are, therefore, more tolerant of the shortcomings vilified by their farming cohorts. The complaints of the less tolerant have become a credo:

- *They have got to learn about the spraying. They need to appreciate it has always been done and they can't expect it to be stopped just because they've come. Of course, all farmers are considerate about that anyway. We would never spray when it is blowing over the neighbour.*
- *Some of the people who've moved here have moved without a mission. They've moved onto properties because they've either had a redundancy or [an inheritance], and they don't work, some of them. They don't want to do much so they're not going to contribute much to a community; usually they will be passengers.*
- *There are [smallholders] who appreciate the country lifestyle and those who abuse it. A lot are ignorant about looking after animals and getting rid of weeds. A lot are ignorant about the soil; if you look after the soil right it's going to grow good grass.*
- *It's getting out of line a bit, the encroachment of lifestyle blocks on our farming. We have to be so careful [about spraying] now. We don't use a lot of it now, but I used to use a couple of hundred litres of 2,4,5T a year just to keep gorse under control.*
- *The blockholders don't want to involve themselves in the community. They tend to just keep to themselves and their little pockets of friends.*
- *There's the ones that come into the community and then expect city conditions. They should accept the community and the farming practices that go with it without [behaving in a way] that makes it hard to be neighbourly and get on.*

The core concerns of farmers about smallholders are threats to their weed eradication regimes, failure to properly maintain land and stock, and failure to contribute to the community. Surprisingly, most smallholders are reasonably sympathetic to, and echo, farmers' concerns:

- *I wouldn't say that the blockholders are incapable of looking after their blocks, but there are some that don't seem to have made much progress. Some of them now have more thistles and gorse spreading on them than they've ever had.*
- *There are lifestylers who move here without a penny left over and can't improve their lot in any way because they can never get on top of the financial burden from buying in here. Their blocks obviously suffer.*
- *A lot of people bite off more than they can chew; they don't keep the damn weeds down and that really breeds resentment among the farmers.*
- *I would like to think that when we leave [this land], we leave it better than when we picked it up. I would also like to think that what I do doesn't detrimentally affect my neighbours and vice-versa.*



- *Land has got to be looked after responsibly and sensitively. If it is overrun with weeds that is both irresponsible and insensitive.*

At the same time, smallholders can be critical of what they see as poor farming practices in Oneriri:

- *I don't see the land around here being abused, but in terms of good farming practice, there hasn't been a lot of it necessarily.*
- *It seems to me there are parts well looked after and parts that aren't. There is a lot of gorse and other weed about. My father always said you could tell a good farmer by looking at his fences. There are an awful lot of bad fences on the peninsula.*
- *It's sad the Oneriri farmers don't look after the land well. I don't know whether it's a matter of economics; perhaps they can't afford to pay more attention to their land.*
- *Farmers have this grass mania. Every blade of grass counts, doesn't it? They still farm the old ways; they won't put up shelterbelts because they cut down their grazing.*
- *I hate to see animals standing out in the baking sun when [the farmer] could plant a few trees and let the animals have a modicum of comfort.*

New meanings and cultural understandings of the rural will challenge those of the existing dominant culture, according to Cloke and Milbourne. They say new meanings, values and practices are continually being created and it will depend on the degree to which these are incorporated into the dominant culture as to whether opposition leads to direct and sustained cultural conflict (1992:365). They point specifically to the way the expression of cultural opposition tends to focus on unimportant, or only marginally important points of conflict:

Where they exist, it is crucial to gain an understanding of the symbolic nature of cultural oppositions, whereby discord between different lifestyles in the same place may be brought about by the lack of symbolically crucial but materially straightforward cultural competences which are not being observed by one group of people to another (1992:366).

### *Good neighbours, bad neighbours*

In Oneriri, apart from what is construed as interference, or meddling with, farming practices such as herbicide spraying, farmers' complaints about smallholder behaviour centres on what they believe is ignorance or lack of consideration:



- *Yes, a lot of [smallholders] are keen to learn and they read books. The trouble is that then they try to tell us established farmers what we should be doing. Well, you just have to humour them.*
- *There is conflict when Auckland people buy small blocks up rural roads and then don't respect farmers moving their stock on the road, travelling too fast and creating havoc for the farmer.*
- *They just don't realise that for this community to have such good services, they have to be maintained and people power does that. They have to be involved.*
- *What a person does with their own land is their choice – as long as they're not living off me. If they are on the welfare system and they are able to work then they don't have my respect. If I work I expect every other bugger to work.*
- *We don't mind them riding [horses] over our land but when they leave the gates open I see red. They just don't think.*

A recent edition of the community news sheet circulating in Oneriri reported an incident where wandering dogs were shot. The owner of the dogs reacted by threatening to kill the person responsible for shooting them (Kaiwaka Bugle, 2003).

Smallholders seem to have fewer specific complaints about farmers, though many bemoan the “acres of cowshit” left on roads by driven stock. Smallholders are more concerned about the reaction of farmers to their presence on the peninsula:

- *The more people travel overseas the more their eyes are opened to other people's ways of life. These are the people who are much more open to newcomers. Those who haven't travelled much from this peninsula, they are the ones who resist change and resent people with different lifestyles coming in. They are especially suspicious of anything that smacks of “green” culture.*
- *One farmer said to us “It's you damn lifestylers that are causing us to go to extra expense and take extra care because we are so damn scared that we are going to [spray] your trees and things”. This has created a bit of a wedge [between farmers and smallholders].*
- *I always think the big old farming families have an almost feudal feeling that they own the place. They probably feel that they are losing their status. I think they feel that something has shifted. Well it has: we are all here.*
- *I feel that most [farmers] resented us being here. It was said several times to us: total amazement that we were planting trees. Why do you want to plant those trees? What are you going to do with all this grass? Where are your animals? It was such a new concept for them. They didn't plant trees.*

The opening up of Oneriri to new interests has clearly prompted a number of dimensions of dispute and division. Halfacree and Boyle (1998:8) say such material struggles very much involve contrasting representations of rurality, with various actors attempting to impose their respective representations of the rural over others. This seems to suggest a reason why, as observed by Cloke and Milbourne (above) that such oppositions are culturally based and, therefore, largely symbolic. The pre-existing social and cultural constitution of Oneriri by the dominant culture thus becomes a foundation of resistance to rural change from within (Barlow and Cocklin, 2003).

### *The power of money*

The loss of established farming families from the peninsula has been felt keenly by many, and while smallholders are not blamed for their departure, they are seen to have an indirect influence. One farmer regretted the recent premature departure of colleagues and kin, attributing it to the fact that urban migrants' interest in Oneriri meant the farmers were able to "sell well" and were thus persuaded to sell earlier than they might. Other farmers see this situation differently:

- *Selling-wise, lifestylers are a good thing. The properties that have already been developed make it more attractive for other townies to come and have a look too. It means that you're going to put your farm on the market with development in mind.*
- *I struggle, generally speaking, with Aucklanders, but we certainly need their financial resources. In Oneriri they are the potential lifestylers who will pay the top prices for our land.*

Despite cultural differences manifested in conflict over behaviours that farmers perceive as unacceptable, the existence of smallholders in Oneriri has come about only because farmers themselves have permitted it. Some, acting through necessity, or because they are leaving the district, have actively sought to sell expressly to smallholders as a way of maximising capital. The cultural conflicts between farmers and smallholders arising within the new social context that these land sales have created have resulted in varying degrees of marginalisation of smallholders, and feelings on the part of farmers that their way of life is somehow under threat.



### *Some of my best friends are lifestylers . . .*

Not all farmers feel threatened, however. Many view new people in the district in a positive light, suggesting the terms “locals” and “blockies” oversimplifies the nature of this seemingly problematic social relationship. Allan and Mooney point out that close inspection may show that boundaries between locals and others are far from well-defined. “Rather, they have different connotations depending on the context in which they are used, and can be both inclusionary and exclusionary” (1998:285).

The following extracts from farmers’ narratives show that some are finding reasons to welcome the presence of smallholders:

- *The change has been for the better from my point of view. There is a lot more culture and a lot more interesting people – a lot of artistic people and others with good energy and attitudes. The impact of new blood and subdivision has been a good thing.*
- *I’ve got nothing against blockholders. You know I quite enjoy a lot of them and I think it’s brought a diversity to our community.*
- *The influx of new people I see as a good thing. A lot of rural communities around New Zealand are suffering from depopulation and this area clearly isn’t. When farms obviously can’t support labour because of declining profitability, well the next obvious choice must be alternative land use, and I suppose subdivision is alternative land use. And is that intrinsically worse than having pine trees over a thousand acres?*
- *Small blockholders have added another dimension to this district. They are a fringe group and can make it quite difficult to farm, but many come in here with resolution. They buy a little bit of land and come up with some marvellous ideas for using that land that somehow the established people would never think of in a hundred years.*
- *The positives are that we are getting a diverse population, a multicultural population. A lot of them have brought good ideas and different ways of doing things into organisations in the community. It isn’t just the very narrow, staid little farming community it was where a few families had been here for generations and would never believe that things could be done another way.*

This chapter has examined the phenomenon of urban migration as it applies to Oneriri peninsula and as the most obvious evidence of rural change in that district. It describes Oneriri as an example of a post-productivist countryside where agriculture will remain the principal activity but other land uses will assume increasing importance over time, largely as the result of migration of urban dwellers to the



district. Oneriri is positioned in the so-called urban shadow, as yet too far from a motorway connection for daily commuting to Auckland, but near enough for smallholders to maintain close and often working relationships with the city. It is within this theoretical context that brings farmers and urban migrants together that their cultural differences are compared and reasons sought for conflict between them.

Cordial social relations between Oneriri farmers and smallholders scarcely exist, not because of conflict, but because no community of interest exists. However, conflict does arise between the two groups where the practice of farming becomes an arena for disputation. Farmers believe smallholders' objections to herbicide spraying are a threat to proper pasture management. They see smallholders as having unreasonable expectations of life in a farming district. Smallholders can be sympathetic to farmers' concerns, but also criticise them for what they see as poor farming practices. The underlying reasons for the conflict, it is suggested, stem from differing cultural understandings and expectations of rural life. In short, farmers and smallholders do not understand one another because of their generally different cultural backgrounds.

# Conclusions

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CHANGE usually comes slowly to rural areas. Most changes are small and they take time to become widespread. Farming folk are necessarily conservative, and it is the nature of farming that its processes cannot be hurried. The result is that farmers are usually slower than their urban counterparts to accept innovation. For example, of the 22 Oneriri farmers who contributed to this study, only two know how to operate a computer. Both are women.

Sometimes, however, change is sudden, and because it is sudden its effects are felt all the more keenly. The starting point for this thesis is one such change. The 1984 deregulation of farming in New Zealand and its accompanying withdrawal of farm subsidies began a sequence of changes which are still being felt in Oneriri today. By tracing this sequence in light of the responses to it of the people it has affected, and continues to affect, this study has been able to fulfil its purpose and its aims.

Its purpose has been to determine how the farming community of Oneriri has responded to change during the past two decades. Its example extends our knowledge of rural change in general, and some consequences of urban migration in particular. The focus of the aims of the study has been to explore the current relationships existing between the farmers and other residents of Oneriri. This it has done ethnographically, comparing farmers' rural life views with the differently-based cultural understandings of rurality held by smallholders.

The principal changes stemming from the 1984 reforms have altered the Oneriri landscape. Velvety paddocks speckled with sheep have given way to pastures roughened and torn by bulls; there are houses dotted on hilltops and ridgelines, surrounded in some cases by new plantings of trees and shrubs, in others by weedy plots supporting a few head of cattle and the odd horse. The bulls are a direct agribusiness response to farmers' exposure to the demands of global markets; the new houses locate the smallholdings subdivided off by farmers pressed for development capital or weary of debt.

Farmers know all the jokes: How do you make a small fortune? Start with a large fortune and go farming. Asked what he would do with his jackpot Lotto winnings, the cockie said, "I suppose I'll just keep farming till it's all gone". The jokes don't raise much of a laugh in Oneriri. It's true that nobody starves, but over time farm profits are small and getting smaller. Farmers' true wealth lies not in the value of what their farms produce, but in the ever-rising value of the land the farms occupy. This anomalous situation, brought about by high demand for smallholdings, means farms that have been in the hands of families for generations will pass to others, most likely investors or developers, a process that has already begun. Even if farming was a more desirable option as a career, most farmers' children could never afford to buy the family farm.

The farming downturn also brought women out of the farmhouse kitchen and into the stockyard to replace the hired labour the farm could no longer afford. A few women found jobs off the farm, but most accepted this change of role even though the farm work was in addition to, rather than in place of, their existing domestic chores. Farming in Oneriri retains its patriarchal structure.

The arrival of ever-increasing numbers of urban migrants in search of smallholdings for weekend relaxation, retirement or family residence has brought social tensions to the peninsula. The smallholders are drawn to Oneriri by values that mirror traditional and rural lifestyles embedded in the rural idyll. It is the farmstead landscape that attracts them to the countryside. Improvements to State Highway 1 are decreasing the time taken to journey between Auckland and Oneriri, positioning Oneriri in the "urban shadow" of the city. For a few it is already a daily commuting proposition.

Farmers and smallholders agree that the rural environment affords them the lifestyles that give them the greatest satisfaction, but they define their satisfactions very differently. Similarly, farmers' views of the nature of community as a concept, and of the duties it imposes are interpretations the more urban-oriented smallholders do not share generally. These examples suggest that people place themselves in the rural milieu and experience it according to the cultural constructions in which they view it. More simply, rural place is interpreted in light of cultural values.



Tensions between farmers and smallholders arise from their different understandings of rurality. For farmers, the rural is a place where they can employ land for its production capability; their philosophical aim is to create and maintain a setting for the efficient production of food. Most smallholders value the rural for its scenic qualities and for the solitude, privacy, contact with nature, and open spaces it offers. Agricultural interests rank low as motivation for leaving the city.

Different understandings of rurality result in different behaviours, producing points of tension. At the most specific level issues revolve around complaints by smallholders about farmers' use of herbicidal sprays, and frequently the noise of stock and the fouling of roads when stock is driven on them. Farmers in their turn complain about weed-infested small blocks, uncontrolled dogs and the lack of consideration "townies" display when negotiating stock being driven on roads.

These issues, while specific and frequently aired, can be accounted for by differences between the cultural expectations of both groups. The cultural understandings of urban people, even after they have spent some time in the rural environment, can be seen as a challenge to farmers who represent the existing dominant culture on the peninsula. However, it is unlikely their differences will be resolved as long as fresh urban faces appear in the Oneriri landscape. With very few exceptions, as a class, farmers do not seek social interaction with smallholders, and vice-versa; there is no community of interest and thus little understanding or even discussion of each other's values and views. The paradox is that farmers subdivide land for sale to people they do not want as neighbours. A corollary is that smallholders – especially recent arrivals – are seen by farmers as heedless of the need to care for the landscape that brought them to Oneriri in the first place.

The few farmers who welcome smallholders do so for two very different reasons. The first group sees incomers as potential purchasers of their land, thereby possessing mere utility value. The second view is that fresh blood brings fresh ideas and diversity to the district. For this group smallholders have value for the community as a whole.

Because of the volatility of the Oneriri property market and the enormous effect potentially that even just a few farm sales could have on the social structure of the peninsula, I see a follow-up study to this research in, say, five years – to allow time for the completion of the planned toll road link to Auckland's motorway system – would provide a valuable picture of a rural community coping, or not coping, with social pressures engendered by proximity to a major urban centre.

# APPENDIX ONE

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## QUESTION GUIDE – Farmers

1. What have been the main forces for change in Oneriri during the past 10 years?
2. Tell me about the sale of lifestyle blocks in Oneriri.
3. Is Oneriri a single community?
4. What makes a good “community person”?
5. What do farmers say about the doings of smallholders and other non-farmers?
6. Why do you think Aucklanders want to come and live here?
7. Do you think there is a social cleavage between farmers and smallholders?
8. Do you know any lifestylers?
9. What don’t you / do you like about smallholders?
10. Would you regard yourself as a “guardian” of the countryside?
11. What are the conflicting interests in this farming district?
12. If farmers “make” this landscape, do new residents “consume” it?
13. What are the unchanging features of Oneriri in this time of change?
14. What are the identifiable distinct communities in Oneriri?
15. Are they family-based, or what?
16. How do you feel about the land you farm?
17. What are the defining elements of your life as a farmer?
18. How would you define the term “farmer”?
19. Is there greater attachment to the land if it has been in the family for a long time?
20. How were you affected by the withdrawal of SMPs in 1984?
21. What did you do?
22. How would you judge the success – or otherwise – of other farmers in Oneriri?
23. What do you see is the role of women on farms?
24. What comes to mind when you think of the term “rural”?
25. How do you feel about Auckland?
26. How do you identify yourself in relation to your life in this district?
27. What do you think about Takahoa Bay?



# APPENDIX TWO

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## QUESTION GUIDE – Smallholders

1. Why did you come to live in Oneriri?
2. What was it that drew you to country living?
3. Why are there so many lifestylers here?
4. Is Oneriri a single community?
5. Where do you do your regular shopping?
6. Are you interested in doing any volunteer work in the district?
7. Do you think you are a good “community person”?
8. What does “community” mean to you?
9. How do you feel about the farmers here?
10. Do they farm well, in your opinion?
11. Is there some sort of social hierarchy in Oneriri?
12. Do you know any of the farming people?
13. What do you / don’t you like about farmers?
14. Who are the “guardians” of the countryside?
15. What do you think about the Takahoa Bay development?
16. What comes into your mind when I suggest the term “rural”?
17. How do you feel about Auckland?
18. What is the downside about living in the country?
19. What are the defining elements of your life in the country?
20. What do you like most about rural living?
21. How do you feel about the land you’re living on?
22. What are your principal links with Auckland?
23. Do you feel you should have a say about the things your farmer neighbours do?
24. How do you identify yourself in relation to your life in this district?
25. What sort of social life do you have here?
26. What would motivate you to leave Oneriri / the countryside and live elsewhere?
27. Have you changed in any way since you came to live here?
28. Do other smallholders look after their land well?
29. Do you see a link between Oneriri and Auckland?
30. Where do you call home?

# APPENDIX THREE



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