# Enchanting resilience: Relations of care and people—place connections in agriculture

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## ABSTRACT

The practices and decision-making of contemporary agricultural producers are governed by a multitude of different, and sometimes competing, social, economic, regulatory, environmental and ethical imperatives. Understanding how they negotiate and adapt to the demands of this complex and dynamic environment is crucial in maintaining an economically and environmentally viable and resilient agricultural sector. This paper takes a socio-cultural approach to explore the development of social resilience within agriculture through an original and empirically grounded discussion of people—place connections amongst UK farmers. It positions enchantment as central in shaping farmers' embodied and experiential connections with their farms through establishing hopeful, disruptive and demanding ethical practices. Farms emerge as complex moral economies in which an expanded conceptualisation of the social entangles human and non-human actants in dynamic and contextual webs of power and responsibility. While acknowledging that all farms are embedded within broader, nested levels, this paper argues that it is at the micro-scale that the personal, contingent and embodied relations that connect farmers to their farms are experienced and which, in turn, govern their capacity to develop social resilience.

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## 1. Introduction

"We have huge challenges ahead in boosting agricultural productivity, increasing resilience to the effects of climate change and variable weather patterns, effectively managing the countryside and natural environment … we are really positive about the future of farming and our ability to create a sustainable, resilient and competitive industry"

Future of Farming Review Report (2013: foreword − 5)

At present, the world produces enough food to feed one and a half times the current global population (Holt-Giménez et al., 2012) but still more than 800 million people suffer from chronic hunger worldwide (World Food Programme, 2014). While Holt-Giménez et al. (2012: 595) argue that this highlights the fact that 'hunger is caused by poverty and inequality, not scarcity', distributional and equity issues remain largely unaddressed in conventional discourses surrounding the combating of global hunger. In 2009, the

UN response called for world food production to double by 2050 (UN, 2009), which both reinforced the hegemonic productivist paradigm (Silvasti, 2003, Holloway et al., 2014) and continued the pressure on producers to innovate in order to achieve this end. However, it must be recognised that this is not the only factor driving the governance of the agricultural sector, with concerns around global environmental change, public health, social responsibility, biosecurity, biodiversity and animal welfare, amongst others, adding further complexity and external pressures to contemporary producers' decisions and livelihoods (Ahnström et al., 2008).

This establishes the farm as a complex moral economy in which the needs of, and responsibilities to, both human and non-human actants establishes a contingent, relational and collective entanglement of social relations (McEwan and Goodman, 2010) in which what it means to be a 'good' farmer is highly contextual. Silvasti (2003) notes the social scripting that occurs within every community to shape what is deemed to be acceptable and which, in this context, influences individuals' attitudes towards land, nature, environment and governance. Although there are clear differences in how different groups of farmers negotiate these issues — grounded in their varying ideologies, production practices and

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locations (Falconer, 2000; Burton and Wilson, 2006; Reimer et al., 2012) – a common aim of all farmers is to maintain the continuity of their farm (Silvasti, 2003), particularly against the contemporary backdrop of 'volatile food prices, climate instability … and losses of resilience in agro-ecological and institutional food systems related to the restructuring of global agri-food regimes' (Cadieux and Blumberg, 2013).

Understanding how individuals and communities can negotiate and adapt to this environment of unpredictable and sometimes crises-driven change is important for both government policy and farmers' own management responses (Maclean et al., 2014). Resilience thinking offers a useful conceptual framework to engage with processes and experiences of change and transformation, and is defined here as 'the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganise while undergoing change so as to still retain essentially the same function, structure, identity, and feedbacks' (Adger et al., 2011: 758). Resilience theories recognise the intertwined nature of social and ecological systems but, despite Adger (2000) questioning the relationship between social and ecological resilience 15 years ago, Maclean et al. (2014) argue that the inherent challenges in bringing the social and ecological together within resilience theories has left understandings of the social elements lagging behind. Through engaging with the conceptualisations prevalent in the social and health sciences, academics have begun to focus attention on 'social resilience' through work on community resilience (Magis, 2010; Berkes and Ross, 2013) and social factors in international development (Cuthill et al., 2008; Dale et al., 2008). Following Maclean et al. (2014: 146) I understand social resilience as 'the way in which individuals, communities and societies adapt, transform, and potentially become stronger when faced with environmental, social, economic or political challenges', and in this paper I work to expand understandings around this critical but under-theorised concept.

To date studies exploring resilience in agriculture have largely focused on financial and economic approaches (Maleksaeidi and Karami, 2013; Ranjan 2014); agro-ecological management methods (Björklund et al., 2012); subsidies and policy (Hammond et al., 2013); and mental health (Greenhill et al., 2009; Hunt et al., 2011). However, farming is not purely a business or mechanism for policy implementation but can also be an immersive lifestyle grounded in embodied, experiential relations. Increasingly, the socio-cultural factors within resilience are being brought to the fore with Dwiartama and Rosin (2014) reflecting on an ANT approach to resilience and Forney and Stock (2014) discussing the impact of farm conversion on succession, the community and the family farm. Here, I build on this existing research to further develop this more holistic understanding, embedding resilience within the internal and external socio-cultural understandings, practices and networks in which all farmers are enmeshed.

A consensus of thought has established people–place connections as one of the key attributes of social resilience (Berkes and Ross, 2013; Maclean et al., 2014) and yet Berkes and Ross (2013: 17) comment that 'more work is needed about the values and behaviour that bond communities and cultures with their environment'. In this paper I argue that a key element in structuring and enhancing these people–place connections for farmers is enchantment. This refers to an embodied encounter that connects an individual 'in an affirmative way to existence' (Bennett, 2001: 156) and, I argue, to the places or things that trigger this emotional and experiential being-in-the-world; in turn, this establishes 'relations between peoples and places and significantly expands intersubjective space-time beyond the self' (Tilley, 2006: 14). I position enchantment as being triggered by both positive **and** negative emotional experiences, which moves

behind the romanticising discourses of the 'rural idyll' and provides a more grounded sense of the emotional geographies of enchantment. As Wilson (2010) comments resilience is both an outcome and a process, and so here I analyse the moral economies of the farm as everyday *doings* that ground ethical obligations in concrete relationalities in the making (McEwan and Goodman, 2010).

In this paper, I first provide a background to farmers' engagements and relationships with their farms before positioning the concept of social resilience, and conceptualising its relationship with enchantment. I then introduce the research context, which is positioned through the key stressors that are currently impacting on farmers in this area and grounds the subsequent empirical discussion. The paper concludes that while panarchy suggests that attention needs to be paid to all levels of a system, and acknowledges the nested nature of these levels, it is at the micro-scale that farmers experience and practice their connections to the land, which forms a key part of their social resilience. Drawing on 19 semi-structured interviews conducted in 2014 with farmers and industry stakeholders in Southern UK, this paper offers an original, socio-cultural conceptualisation of the establishment and maintenance of farmers' connections to the land; this in turn opens out the inherent social aspects of resilience because, as an English farmer commented in Harrison et al.'s (1998: 311) study, 'if it was just a matter of economics we would not be here'.

## 2. Agri-cultures: the relations between farmers and their farms

Although agricultural geographies were slow to engage with the cultural turn (Morris and Evans, 1999), the shift to more socio-cultural approaches over the last decade or so has been critical in providing more grounded and qualitative understandings of the micro-geographical socio-spatial relations that govern how farmers engage with and understand their environments (Geoghegan and Leyshon, 2012). By exploring, for example, 'everyday experiences' (Rose, 2002: 457) a more complex understanding of the discourses of power, relations between nature and society and role of 'more-than-human' actants has emerged, which in turn has moved away from homogenising agriculture into a single cultural enclave, recognising its inherent diversity (Morris and Evans, 2004). Interactions with the farming landscape remain, however, a habitual element in every farmer's life, whether physically or virtually, but landscapes are always sites of power, being 'contested, worked and reworked by people according to particular individual, social and political circumstances … they are always in process … structures of feeling, palimpsests of past and present' (Tilley, 2006: 7). Agricultural landscapes are thus lived and practised, and so cannot be understood in isolation from the internal and external discourses that govern them (Gray, 1996). As Marsden and Sonnino (2008) note agrarian policy increasingly emphasises the essential 'multi-functionality' of agriculture (Wilson, 2008, 2009) within a diverse rural economy:

> 'Landscape is not primarily to be conserved or preserved, but to be cultivated and shaped'

> (Silvasti, 2003: 147)

Whether farmers are organic, biodynamic or conventional, their very role as producers of food and commodities indicates a common view that the role of a farmer is to cultivate land, although they differ in their practice of this. During my research both organic and conventional farmers commented on their historic and current