

Reviews

Public Values Private Lands: Farmland Preservation Policy, 1933-1985, by Tim Lehman. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995. xii, 239 pp.

Reviewed by John C. Allen, Department of Agricultural Economics, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Public Values Private Lands is a must read for individuals interested in the structure of agriculture, environmental legislation, or political science focusing on regulation. The book is organized around five major chapters. These include "The Rise and Fall of the New Deal," "Agricultural Land Use Planning;" "The Reemergence of Agricultural Conservation;" "Farmland Protection on the Federal Agenda and Farmland Protection in Congress;" and "The National Agricultural Lands Study." Each chapter, as it develops, is linked to the book's core question: *If private land has inherent public values, how is it to be governed in a society that resists regulatory controls?*

According to Lehman, attempts to regulate agricultural land use at the national level have been undertaken in response to anticipated shortages and resource abuses. Only two such attempts in U.S. history have been serious, first during the New Deal of the 1930s, and again during the 1970s. The New Deal was a "sad story" of what might have been, according to Lehman. He argues that the primary impetus for the New Deal land use reform was a natural outcome of historical agricultural production practices that resulted in soil exploitation. Tracing this exploitation to the rapid expansion of farmland from 1850 to 1930, where over 300 million new acres were brought into production, he presents a sound argument that this expansion increased erosion by entering environmentally sensitive areas. As early as 1850, agricultural practices were observed to have dramatic adverse environmental consequences. This was a period of increased mechanization, land consolidation, and movement towards monoculture. John Strong of California claimed that grain production was a complete illustration of how man failed to understand the linkages between agricultural practices and the environment. By 1878, John Wesley Powell argued for land classification and planned settlement in the arid West. Within Powell's classification scheme were three categories: irrigation, timber and pasture.

Although many decades of accumulating concerns for the environment in general -- and the soil in particular -- played important roles in influencing the New Deal, another source of concern was the "Country Life" movement. This movement focused on improving the quality of life in America, in part through an efficient agriculture. The Commission on Country Life issued a report in 1908 expressing worry that the land's declining productivity was due to the mining of its virgin fertility. The social condition of any agricultural community was said to be closely related to soil quality. The Commission report argued that poorer individuals were forced to move to areas of lower quality soil. The report also warned that continued soil deterioration could reduce farmers to a dependent class.

These arguments, according to Lehman, led political figures to support land use planning. In 1931 Secretary of Agriculture Arthur Hyde sponsored a national conference on land use. Hyde opened the conference stating that the epic of land settlement had been completed, and it was now time to write a new "epic" that would limit agricultural produc-

tion, check erosion, and conserve our land inheritance. Within a few years the federal government began buying up sub-marginal lands through the Agricultural Adjustment Administration. Supporters argued that public land acquisition was only part of a much broader agenda. This agenda included the use of publicly owned land as a catalyst for multiple social and environmental purposes. Land reform was very tightly linked to social reform. The development of a political constituency increased the speed of social conservation and social issues linked to monoculture agriculture and exploitive practices. By 1933, the Soil Erosion Service had been established. By 1935, this agency had been given permanent status as the Soil Conservation Service (SCS), part of the Department of Agriculture. A primary theme echoed through policies of the Department of Agriculture during this period: farmers did not have the inalienable right to allow their lands to erode. The federal government had the right to intervene.

At this point in the historical narrative, Lehman takes us straight from the New Deal era, and jumps ahead three decades to the 1970's. The changes in agricultural structure, the movement from farming to agribusiness, is important in displacing agricultural interests from a Jeffersonian pedestal to the ranks of yet another special interest group. As land became a less important part of the productivity equation between 1950 and 1970, Lehman suggests that the conservation ethic, which had animated the land economists of the 1930s, gave ground to the dominant notion that agricultural land was more a commodity than a resource. In 1951 Theodore Schultz argued that technology had replaced nature's constraints and that agricultural land was declining in importance.

Lehman also argues that the Soil Conservation Districts became an agency of engineering that spoke the language of marketplace, private gain, and technological solutions to cultural problems. The political climate also influenced the positions taken by the SCS. Lehman demonstrates that in 1947, in the face of uncertain Congressional funding and recurring hostility from the Farm Bureau (and its allies in the Extension Service), the SCS created the National Association of Conservation Districts. During this historical period, Lehman argues that conservation values were sacrificed while the SCS was reorganized from a regional to a state basis and most technical services were shifted from the SCS to the land grant colleges and the Extension Service.

The re-emergence of agricultural conservation during the 1970s is linked to several factors. Agricultural areas were being subjugated rapidly to accommodate suburban growth. A recognition was growing in the U.S. of a need to feed the world. It was also during this period that soil erosion was "rediscovered." The environmental movement of the 1970s influenced the re-emergence of agricultural conservation. The argument was that for rural democracy to survive, ecological stability and sustainable agriculture must be achieved. This blend of ecology and agrariansim was not entirely new; much had been discussed during the New Deal of the 1930s.

The Nixon administration of the early 1970s promoted a number of policies with the premise that land use control is a legitimate public interest. The first major change in land use policy of the 1970s was the Coastal Zone Management law, which moved the power of land use from local jurisdictions to the state. The argument was that the key to environmental land reform lay in activating the power of the state to regulate private property. By 1973 Congress had enacted the Land Use Policy and Planning Assistance Act. A key feature of the act was to preserve farmland.

As the legislation moved through Congress, the Department of Agriculture seemed to lag behind even its administration, according to Lehman, and the new legislation was interpreted as a criticism of USDA conservation policies. Lehman argues that division with USDA about land use planning and soil conservation practices revolved around the conservationists and economists within USDA. He states that the economists, centered in the Economic Research Service (ERS), believed that government was an inefficient interference in the private marketplace.

By 1979 Congress was discussing a federal land use bill but it failed to pass. Failure of the bill's passage was linked to the perception that this might be the first step toward national land use planning. Strong fears were voiced that such policies would lead ultimately to a situation where government tells every landowner what they do with their property.

Lehman presents three primary conclusions from the examination of land use legislation. He argues, successfully, that on the political level, the movement for agricultural land preservation in the 1970s provided environmentalists an important inroad into agricultural policy making. Social science research was enhanced as many of the issues dealt with the social phenomena rather than strictly physical issues of land. These discussions renewed the focus on the ecological restraints on agriculture, enhancing the perspective that agriculture was moving from an era of abundance into an era of uncertainty about land, water, and energy resources.

Lehman concludes that farmland preservation should be viewed in the context of a more encompassing scope of federal and state policies. Export policy, agricultural research, federal grants, tax policies, federal interest rates, and even birth control policies, all of which are part of the context of land preservation in the 1990s. Given the increasing importance of land preservation, the movement within USDA to include sustainable agriculture in their discussions about agricultural production, and the increasing linkages between environmental and rural groups, this book makes an important contribution. By placing in context the federal policies influencing farmland preservation Lehman has provided a service to those of us who study and work with agricultural, environmental, and rural interests.

Prophets of Agroforestry: Guaraní Communities and Commercial Gathering, by Richard K. Reed Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995. xiii, 251 pp.

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The Guaraní language is an anomaly in lowland South America. It is the only native American Indian language with more than a million speakers in that vast region--indeed, it numbers more than three times that amount. Most of the thirty or so surviving languages of the same family (Tupí-Guaraní), which are spoken in a broad expanse across lowland South America, exhibit fewer than 1,000 native speakers; many have fewer than 500 speakers. I know of one Tupí-Guaraní language originally spoken in the region west of the lower Tocantins River valley, that has only two known native speakers, a not so uncommon occurrence in today's lowland South America, with its sadly diminishing native language diversity. The Guaraní language, in contrast to threatened native languages, is spoken along with Spanish by about 90 percent of the inhabitants of Paraguay, most of whom, it seems, do not consider themselves to be "Indians" (*índios*), but rather Paraguayans more generally. It would be as if most of the citizens of the United States spoke the national language of business and government, English, in addition to a mother language, Penobscot, but who otherwise continued in every other way to be Americans as we think of them today. The analogy is extreme, but it helps illustrate the concept of an unusual nation in South America, Paraguay, that is bilingual but not really bicultural.