

# Sponsors of Agricultural Literacies: Intersections of Institutional and Local Knowledge in a Farming Community

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Many of the agricultural literacies engendering twentieth-century farming practices and shaping contemporary concepts of food and nutrition in the United States arose through scientific research at land-grant colleges. This article examines how those literacies reached and interacted with local communities through institutional entities such as the extension service and its youth program, the 4-H.

It is easy to forget, while browsing the produce section of the local supermarket, how close to home food production once was. Vegetables and fruits now make their way to American tables from many points of the globe, providing convenience and a reduced dependence on seasonality. The literacies associated with this plenitude are complex, especially if we think of how deeply food is connected to ideologies of production and consumption. Food literacy touches on understandings of what food means to a particular culture, how it originates, how it fits into the supply chain, and how it is marketed, prepared, and consumed, among other things. One way to unpack at least some of this complexity is to consider the genesis of the modern agricultural system at the level of an agricultural community and to explore how institutional ideas of food production were shared with small-scale truck farmers.<sup>1</sup> Food literacy, from the perspective of the farmer, can be understood as agricultural literacy—an acquired knowledge that comes from experiential actions as well as written texts.<sup>2</sup> My research examines oral histories and archival materials to see how twentieth-century agricultural literacy, arising in the scientific research at the land-grant colleges, was transmitted to local farming communities. I argue that this literacy movement is a recursive, responsive process evident in the transitional space where the institutions of the extension service and its youth program, the 4-H, interfaced with local farming communities.

The community at the center of this research, Samsula, is a small rural community in Central Florida located in Volusia County. Samsula became a site of agricultural production in the early twentieth century during the Florida land boom. This was also a period of transformation for agriculture in the United States as federal and state governments became involved in creating a more profit-oriented agricultural sector. The legislative actions of the First Morrill Act, the Hatch Act, and the Smith-Lever Act, respectively, created the land-grant college system, regional experiment stations,

and the extension service to research and implement new methods and technologies of farm production.<sup>3</sup> Modernizing developments from these institutions included chemical technologies for controlling insects and disease, new understandings of soil composition and improvement, and emerging technologies for cultivating land. Modernization also meant running a farm on a budget, keeping records of profits and losses, and tracking weather, crop outcomes, and expenses—in short, treating farming like a regular business. For the primarily Slovenian immigrants who moved to Samsula in the early part of the century, agriculture was the economic mainstay of the community—it was necessary to approach it as a business for the community to survive. Some of the descendants of those early settlers continue the farming tradition today, and these are the subjects who agreed to participate in my study.<sup>4</sup>

## Agricultural Literacies and Their Sponsors

While the early Samsula community was quite isolated geographically, local farmers still had connections to the modernizing influences of the era and thus to the organizations and institutions that carried nascent agricultural literacies. In her seminal 1998 article, Deborah Brandt argues that literacy can be viewed as a commodity, and that those who provide literate skills—the “sponsors”—stand to gain something in the exchange (166, 169). In the twentieth-century history of U.S. farming, government institutions such as the USDA and extension service were among the external entities who shaped agricultural practices and who can be considered sponsors of agricultural literacy.<sup>5</sup> Literacy sponsors, as Brandt points out, also bring “ideological freight” as part of the process of literacy transfer: the resultant literacy practices reflect the perspectives, and thus may serve the interests, of the sponsors who transmit the ideas and skills associated with literate behavior (168). In the context of modernization, early justifications of institutional involvement in agricultural practices (including behaviors that can be seen as sponsorship) were promoted as avenues to economic stability.<sup>6</sup> At the local level, this exchange is revealed as a more complex process, with various exigencies and individual agendas among the participating communities. The give and take of agricultural literacy transfer occurs within multiple rhetorical situations, and literacy sponsors from outside local communities must coexist with the more local sponsors such as family, neighbors, teachers, and customers.<sup>7</sup>

In the Samsula community, various sources of sponsorship have existed over time, each of whom might regard literate functionality somewhat differently. To the extension service agents, for example, the ability of those they sponsor to understand the promotional genres that explain the agency’s ideas, methods, and materials might satisfy the criteria of agricultural literacy. At the same time, local farmers were exposed to more than one kind of agricultural literacy as they negotiated their relationships with the extension service agent, supply vendors, customers, and each other. The agricultural literacies of the working farmer came from learning based in observation and interactions with family, neighbors, outside sponsors, and direct experience with the soil, water, insects, and other location-specific factors impacting agriculture.

Farmers utilized these literacies to remain resilient and adapt to the fluid variables affecting their efforts, including market fluctuations and bad weather.

Extension service agents shared some common literacies with the farmers and vendors, and other kinds of agricultural literacies that enabled them to negotiate the texts and instructions coming from the land-grant college system and legislative bodies. The literacies of the extension agents arose from institutional expectations of specialist knowledge and included formal training and mentoring by other members of the extension service community. As conduits of science-based research, agents were expected to translate findings from the experiment station, such as the effects of a new pesticide, and to know enough about the chemistry and environmental factors to put it into language local farmers could use. Agent's literacies were reflective of the most up-to-date technologies available; in addition, they needed to be well versed in the specific local situations with which they were dealing.

The multiple systems of modern agriculture—land-grant colleges, extension service, experiment stations, agricultural supply companies, chemical companies, and local farming communities—each represent a different rhetorical situation; while separate, they connect with one another in areas of interactivity or contact zones.<sup>8</sup> The communications taking place in these contact zones are dynamic, changing and responding to economic situations, political influences, and environmental fluxes. The texts many of these systems use can help us map the interactions between communities and institutions; furthermore, the sites where writings from different rhetorical systems intersect and overlap can offer insights into the activities and motivations of literacy sponsors. In the Samsula farming community, the diffusion of agricultural literacies from the extension service and the understandings agents gained from practicing farmers met in a reciprocal contact zone—a generative intersection for agricultural adaptation.<sup>9</sup>

## Local Agricultural Literacies

The interviews I conducted reveal that farmers primarily learn the basics of their craft and the accompanying agricultural literacy by immersion: they learn at the feet of others, as children, or they come into it as a community experience. Agricultural science as a formal educational venue is not the main source of understandings, since children growing up in farming families learn the ins and outs of raising produce by participating in farm work. Retired farmer Joe Bavec, a second-generation Samsula farmer, recalled an average after-school experience from his childhood:

... so you'd get home, you'd gulp down two glasses of milk, big plate full of cookies, but then you was expected to be out in the field, with a wheelbarrow, you pushed the wheelbarrow, you loaded the collard greens on it, or whatever, you pushed it up to the barn, put them in the cold water, keep them good and fresh, then worked them up and down, took them and stacked them on the cart, laid them twelve in a row, so we knew exactly how many dozen we had ... that was something I did every day.

Learning to farm came with the milk and cookies; it was just a part of life. The experience shapes the understanding of farming practices, and agricultural literacy in this description includes keeping count and keeping the greens “good and fresh” so they did not wilt.

Functional agricultural literacy also includes understanding and working with the technologies of modern farming. Some of the early settlers brought mechanical skillsets to the community from prior occupational experience, yet others gained knowledge from institutional sponsors through vocational agriculture school or 4-H programs. Samsula farmers did not call on a local mechanic shop for help when their machinery had problems but learned, primarily from other community members, how to maintain and repair their tractors, irrigation equipment, and other essential machinery. This knowledge was freely shared, as retired farmer Tony Vadnal recalled. He discussed starting out on his own, when “... there was always somebody that would help you out a little bit, we had a lot of exchange of equipment ... other farmers would help out if you needed something, and especially if you were a young farmer that didn’t have all that stuff.” Vadnal’s recollection helps us understand agricultural literacy in a community like Samsula as “collective knowledge” that is shared through both written and oral narratives, built upon and passed down from generation to generation, neighbor to neighbor.<sup>10</sup> While each farmer may have sustained an individual business, there was also a common interest in communal success. Learning acquired at an early age with the family is eventually extended, shared, and modeled by interactions with other community members through everyday discourses.

References to reading about how to farm are rare in my interviews, but descriptions of planting, cultivating, weeding, watering, picking, cleaning, packing, and selling abound. Anecdotes about practical farm experience, such as Bavec’s and Vadnal’s memories, convey tacit learning practices, as novice farmers learn by watching and doing. Agricultural literacies in these contexts mean reading the land, weather, plants, technologies, and people—understanding the environments, economies, and discourses within which agricultural works are conducted. An understanding of agricultural literacy thus shifts according to who is rendering it, and creates a tension between experiential understandings and what one farmer referred to as “by the book” knowledge.

Experiential stores of knowledge may count as a form of agricultural literacy not only for the farmer involved in them, but also for those external agents who benefit from the knowledge gained through such practice. As farmers performed the methods and technologies shared by the extension service, agents could see how these ideas worked. This recursive exchange illustrates the intersections or contact zones where local literacies overlapped with the literacies of the experiment stations. Techniques, new products, and innovative farm tools may be tested under controlled situations at the experiment stations, but it is not until they are tested in the real-world situation of a working farm that all participants know whether they will be effective. Farmers’ fields served as open-air laboratories for these ideas; as Bavec observed, “it was feedback both ways ... they have experimental farms ... But they’ll have a 10 by 10 plot, You know,

you go look at a 10 acre or an acre [field], you get a lot more realistic view than that little 10 by 10 plot.” The current extension service agent, Mary Sanderson, puts it even more succinctly, noting that the experiment stations actually rely on the farmers quite a bit, “because it’s real life. The farmer will go out and spray exactly what the farmer would go out and spray. He’s cost effective; he’s not going to spray just because he wants to.” Sanderson notes that the experiment station is an idealized, “too perfect” situation, and it benefits from the opportunity to see, through the work of the extension service and cooperating farmers, how their ideas and products actually perform in less controlled circumstances.

Martin Jager, who farmed the same forty acres for over sixty years, recalled an early experience with the extension service that illustrates this interplay between institutional sponsorship and vernacular agricultural literacy. After serving in WWII, Jager enrolled in agricultural vocational school; newly married, he was working the farm he inherited from his father, a piece of land on which he had practiced farming since he was a child. Jager was growing sweet bell peppers, a big cash crop in Samsula for many years. One of the agriculture courses was taught by a college graduate from another state, a literacy sponsor who “went by the book” and advised his students to improve their soil for better production. According to the institutional instruction, farmers needed to add dolomite to their soil, advice that was given on good faith but with little knowledge of Samsula’s physical geology. The dolomite was freely delivered by truck and spread over the ground, but as Jager recalls, “from then on we never grew a bell pepper that was fit” to sell. The ground had been made “too sweet” (alkaline) for the peppers. Sixty-plus years after the event, the details are still vivid in his anecdote as a cautionary tale and a reflection on the multiple literacies that undergird successful farming. Presumably the extension service also learned from these kinds of experiences.

Sponsorship is thus a reciprocal process. Through the extension service, the agricultural literacies of the land-grant colleges and experiment stations may be introduced into the local community, but they are shaped in the process of application and adaptation. Farmers know their own land through experience, trial, error, and success; they test and try the new ideas and technologies, talk to each other, compare results, and reiterate lessons from the past, and then provide valuable feedback to the extension service. Bavec provided another example of how this might work when he noted that sometimes farmers would come up with their own chemical combinations, based on prior experience, to work against a pest or weed. As he pointed out, “of course the university couldn’t do it because the label said they couldn’t,” but farmers might cautiously go around those constraints. Bavec explained to me that, if such an application was successful and the results were shared with the agent and vendor, eventually the chemical company would come out with a product that adopted the new combination. The agricultural literacy these farmers were practicing did not ignore the label because they could not read nor understand it, but because—from shared experience and acquired agricultural literacies—they felt confident in trying something new.

## The Business of Farming: The Farm Record Book

As sponsors of agricultural literacy, the overall goal of the land-grant college, experiment stations, and extension service was to improve the viability of farming as a business. While many of my interviews revealed that farming can be an unpredictable business dependent on many variables not within the bounds of human control, archival texts from the extension service suggest that this uncertainty could be overcome if only farming was organized after the fashion of other industrial sectors. The 1939 *Annual Report of Work* describes one of the methods the extension service developed toward this end, a system to help the farmers keep track of “farm record work” (Nettles and Clayton 3).<sup>11</sup> W. T. Nettles, the District Agent, observes that in 1936 he and his team had “handled, summarized, and taken back to farmers 409 farm accounts and cost of production records covering citrus, poultry, potatoes and dairy work,” and that they planned to use these records to help the grower understand “the weak as well as the strong points in his modus operandi” (3). The state account from 1939, the *Silver Anniversary Report*, describes the two record books that are part of the program as “one book ... intended for those who desire to keep detailed records by enterprises,” and another “arranged for chronological entries only ... for monthly and annual summaries. It is intended for use on small farms ... ” (27). *The Silver Anniversary Report* goes on to indicate that not only will the record books help the farmers using them, but they will provide data for longitudinal analysis on a broader scale (28).

Farm record books, in one form or another, were a part of the extension service from early in the program’s existence.<sup>12</sup> A state report describes their successful implementation:

Farm record books have been supplied to more than 2,000 farmers and assistance has been given to many of them in entering inventories and otherwise posting their books. Noted improvement has been made by farmers in their record keeping during 1944 as a result of their realization of the advantages to be obtained from accurate records when they compute income tax returns ... (1944 Report 24)

What is most interesting from the perspective of this research is how the language shifts and changes over time around the idea of farm record books, reflecting the different ways in which this genre generated and participated in literate activity. A genre arises in response to a recurring situation, so the implementation of formal record-keeping might indicate an inability or unwillingness of some members of the farming community to formally manage agricultural procedures.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, an equally compelling recurring situation might be the need of the extension service to have more visibility of the processes undergirding farm practices. From the comments about longitudinal observations in the *Silver Anniversary Report*, it seems clear that the extension service used the data acquired from these records for at least some tracking purposes of its own. If farmers kept detailed, verifiable records, the extension service would also have statistics to back up their claims of efficacy.

We can thus see the farm record book as an example of an intermediary genre that served the purposes of the literacy sponsor at least as much as it served the needs of the farmer. The record books affirm that the generative institutions—the USDA and the state extension service—were invested in the standardization and regimentation of farm production, as the introduction of the farm record book regularized both the processes of agriculture and the kinds of information that could be tracked. Farm record books, as data collection instruments, could be collected, analyzed, and quantified to show the changes taking place through progressive farm science techniques, thus ensuring a data-based assessment of agricultural progress and a validation of the extension service’s value as a literacy sponsor.

In my Samsula research, Jager was the only interview participant who spoke of learning record-keeping from the extension service (in conjunction with his vocational agriculture classes in the 1940s), and he made light of the exercise. The “bookwork,” from his perspective, did not take into account the vagaries of weather, insects, and other facts of farm life, and made no allowances for these effects on profit and loss situations. The other study participants (who took over family farms in the 1960s and after) did not make mention of farm ledgers or book-keeping, although they all spoke of running their farms as profit-generating businesses. In trying to understand what the records intimate as ubiquitous practice and the relative invisibility of farm record books at the local level, I came to believe that the practices of record-keeping might be entering the community through another route, one that could be explored by looking at a related adaptation in Samsula agricultural literacy: the connection between the extension service and community youth.

In both the interviews and extension service reports, the 4-H youth program stands out as a place where two cultures—the local community and the extension service—overlap and illuminate another contact zone. Two of the farmers I interviewed had been active in the 4-H as youths, and between their recollections and the information contained in the extension service documents a picture of literacy sponsorship, genre use, and practical learning comes into focus. The agricultural aspect of 4-H clubs brought the experience and formal knowledge of the extension service agent together with the young men who had an interest or a background in farming.<sup>14</sup> Nationalized in 1914 as part of the extension service, the 4-H has its roots in the boys and girls clubs organized at the beginning of the century (“4-H History”). Early mentions in the state reports categorize the clubs by livestock or vegetable, such as “Pig Club,” “Calf Club,” or “Corn Club” (*Annual Report, 1925* 28-29). The local agents oversaw and helped organize the clubs, and this work was seen as significant enough to the overall goals of the extension service that agents reported the time spent “devoted to club work” (*Silver Anniversary* 50). The 1918 state *Annual Report*, for example, shows that agents dedicated to boys’ club work had equal status with the district agents and that the youth programs were considered “one of the most important features of the agent’s activities” (27).

Local 4-H chapters not only interfaced with the county extension agents, but also with other 4-H clubs from across the district and across the state. Club members



were brought together at annual recreational camps; short courses at the University of Florida (a land-grant college); county, regional, and state fairs, where they exhibited; and local, state, regional, and national competitions, where they vied for awards and recognition. The reasoning for the different events is spelled out in the reports, in which each activity is seen as contributing to the development of the individual and the organization. For example, the annual camps are seen as a social exercise and reward for work accomplished, and also as a way for “the county agent [to] hold his members from year to year” (*Annual Report, 1924* 43). Club members had certain criteria to meet in order to attend camp, as recorded in the 1954 Volusia County report, which notes that “fifty-six boys were selected to attend camp on the basis of meeting attendance, project work, and record books” (Townsend and Luttrell 7).

Short courses are another reward-based opportunity that exposed Samsula youths to agricultural literacies through the University of Florida. The 1925 state report describes the experience as thus:

The winning boys in every county gather at the University. They receive practical instruction in agriculture but the greatest good derived is from the inspiration to go to college which gets hold of the boys ... Each year the number of former students that enter the University increases. All these boys do not enter the College of Agriculture; but better a successful lawyer or doctor than an uneducated, dissatisfied farmer. (30)

Boys could earn scholarships to the short courses from local civic organizations such as the Kiwanis and Lions Clubs, and business and government associations such as the Chambers of Commerce and Board of County Commissioners (Townsend and Luttrell, *Annual ... 1954* 7). In addition to the short courses, other incentives included scholarships and trips, awards supported by entities such as Amour & Co., which sponsored an annual trip to the Chicago International Live Stock Show; the Florida Banker’s Association, which awarded scholarships to the Agricultural College (*Annual Report, 1924* 43); and the Sears-Roebuck Foundation, the State Department of Agriculture, and local feed stores, which contributed to prizes in the Dairy-Poultry Show at the county fair (Townsend and Luttrell, *Annual ... 1954* 8). These organizations and institutions, acting as literacy sponsors, saw the value of enculturating agricultural literacy in upcoming generations of potential farmers since these programs were also grooming future associates and customers.

All of the rewards were predicated on 4-H projects and their accompanying project books. While the earliest boys clubs only had a limited range of activities such as the corn club and the pig club, later programs expanded the breadth of subjects and interests. In 1955, for example, the *Annual Report of Volusia County* listed projects in “Corn, Irish Potatoes, Sweet Potatoes, gardening, poultry, citrus, goats, beef, swine, rabbits, bees, forestry, nursery, ornamentals and citrus, bulbs, farm and home electricity, farm and home safety, soil conservation and tractor maintenance” (Townsend and Luttrell 6). The boys were guided in these efforts by parents and by the



agent or other representatives of the extension service. “Demonstrations and lessons in agricultural subjects” were given to groups, and the agent would also visit individual 4-H member’s homes “to aid the club boys in carrying out the latest and best methods in agriculture” (Townsend and Luttrell 6). In 1955, these efforts in Volusia County resulted in 421 completed projects by 232 club members (6).

In the mention of “latest and best methods in agriculture,” we hear the continuing drumbeat of progressive farm practices. As in their work with adult farmers, the extension agents used a variety of methods to inculcate these ideas and practices, such as live demonstrations and workshops. Additionally, 4-H members were encouraged to compete, individually and in teams, with each other. Project competitions could take the form of demonstration, such as the tractor-driving competition in which Vadnal participated in 1954, or showing a prize pig at the county fair. Competitions could also affirm the protocols of USDA programs. Bavec remembered learning how to grade vegetables in a 4-H competition, a skill that he carried into his adult farming experience. He related that “they started the vegetable judging team, when I was one of the older members in the 4-H club ... you had to identify weeds, you had to identify diseases, you had to identify all the varieties, different varieties of cucumbers, cabbage, carrots, peppers.”

When asked to describe the process, Bavec remembered working in a team and filling in a form, like a test sheet. This genre guided the participants through the produce judging process:

You go to the state contest and they’ve got a cabbage plant here with black rot, and it’s A, B, C, and D, and one of them is black rot and that’s the one you check, then you go to the next area and they have a crabgrass and you go there and it may be a fill in the blank: this is “crabgrass,” and you go to the next one, and there would be three cucumbers. And the first one is straight, the next one is crooked, and this one’s got a ... yeah, a little bit of decay on it, and you had to give it a grade, just like the federal standards of grading produce.

While his team did not place first, the experience gave Bavec a feeling of authority on the subject. As a retired farmer, he jokes that he felt confident around the federal inspectors because of his 4-H knowledge, and he would tell them “if you don’t judge my produce right, I’m going to appeal it, you know, because I know enough.” Whether or not the sponsors in this case intended to give those they sponsored the confidence to challenge USDA decisions is debatable, but the outcome of the literacy gains from 4-H coupled with Bavec’s experience in the farming community had that effect.

Young people in 4-H selected projects from the available choices, and then track of everything that was associated with the project in a record book. One research participant remembered a turkey project that he undertook in 4-H over sixty years ago. While some of the details were lost to time, he remembered that the birds were “Bronze Wagonwheel strain” and that he heard “the grandfather, if there’s such a thing for turkeys, weighed in excess of 60 lbs.” He also recalled that he had to keep records

on them, “feed, and medications, the initial cost,” a chore his father helped him with since he had “never been tasked to do something like that before.” The knowledge gained through projects such as this was experiential, but part of that experience was assimilating the specific literacies needed for keeping a record book. Exposure to the 4-H project record book was immersion in the kinds of information the extension service valued, and the types of genres necessary for the business of agriculture.

While the 4-H project record and the farm record book might respond to different rhetorical situations, they are genetically related in origin and purpose. The project record genre is an introductory text, with simplified ledgers and self-reflective pages; it provides the rationale for record-keeping, such as “To train yourself for future work” (*4-H Project 2*). It also asks for goals—at the start of the project—and things learned—at the end of the project; these self-reflective sections help the project owner develop meta-awareness of the process they are going through. The short ledger section is patterned on actual farm ledgers, but simplified for the beginning entrepreneur. For the extension service sponsors, the goal was to get young people thinking in terms of costs and benefits and organizing those thoughts on paper. The ideas and values of modern farm production thus entered the experience and helped shape the perceptions of young 4-H participants. The information they recorded in their project records helped fulfill project work, but it also shaped their agricultural literacies for adult farming pursuits.

As a genre in the rhetorical overlap between the Samsula agricultural community and the extension service, the project record brought the “new” knowledge the young people learned in their 4-H activities together with their community farming experiences. For someone like Bavec, who grew up around truck farming, learning the formal aspects of judging vegetables in 4-H gave him the confidence to speak with authority when he marketed his own produce as an adult. Vadnal completed many projects and had opportunities to attend short courses at the University of Florida. In 1954, he won the state Farm and Home Safety Award Program; he also won the state Tractor Driving Contest, for which he received a gold watch and a chance to compete in the Atlantic States Operators Contest in Richmond, Virginia (Townsend and Luttrell 8). In 1955, he received a county award in leadership (Townsend and Luttrell 7), and in 1956 he served as an officer on the 4-H leadership council. While he has farmed as an adult, his primary vocation, as stated during his interview, is Certified Public Accountant. Vadnal does not attribute his career to his experience in 4-H, but it does seem that the kind of exposure to process and organization facilitated by 4-H project work is a good foundation for a career in accounting.

Confidence, organization, and other leadership qualities are results of the transitional literacies 4-H members experienced. The literate skills they gained from 4-H were not in opposition to the community dialogues and understandings with which they grew up, but were structured in a way that supported the goals of the extension service and all the literacy sponsors with which it aligns: the experiment stations, the land-grant college, and the USDA. In addition, other corporate and civic sponsors had access to these young people through systems of incentives and awards, subtly

establishing future relationships. The ideologies brought to bear by these sponsors, like the processes inculcated through the project record, are not always visible, even if they are always shaping perceptions of modern American agriculture.

Combined with the archival materials from the extension service, the narratives provided by the local farmers of Samsula provide insight into the responsive nature of agricultural literacy sponsorship. This research depicts the ways in which sponsorship is a recursive process, as local farmers who employed institutional knowledge were contributing to, as well as assimilating, the new ideas, methods, and technologies of twentieth-century agriculture. While much research remains to be done in this area, this study shows that the extension service, and in particular the 4-H youth clubs, promoted agricultural literacies which reinforced USDA guidelines of what premium quality vegetables look like and how they should be grown, and in the process influenced new generations of agriculturalists. Institutional pressures to manage farming as a predictable business, as revealed in the farm record book initiatives, would in time translate to the factory farming practices of the current era, leaving small-scale truck farmers unable to compete in large markets. Instead, the farmers who survived at this level of agriculture, such as several of my interview subjects, found new customers in farmer's markets and roadside stands. Understanding the milieu out of which these produce vendors came, and the agricultural literacies that influenced them, can in turn help us understand some of our own expectations and preferences—our own food literacies—when we look at fresh vegetables in the produce aisle.

## Endnotes

1. "Truck farming" describes moderate-sized operations—10-20 acres—that might grow a variety of crops.
2. Brewster defines agricultural literacy as "a functional literacy characterized by the acquisition of knowledge and skills required to perform in particular contexts or to assist sponsoring agencies in achieving particular aims" (36-37).
3. For a description of significant agricultural legislation that set the stage for agricultural knowledge to become a formalized sphere for technical and scientific inquiry in the United States, see Cresap 220-224.
4. I will use fictitious names for all interview participants in this paper.
5. See Brewster 36-37 for a discussion of organizations and institutions contributing to modern agricultural literacies.
6. The 1909 *Report of the Country Life Commission*, initiated by President Theodore Roosevelt, stressed that "the business of agriculture must be made to yield a reasonable return to those who follow it intelligently, and life on the farm must be made permanently satisfying to intelligent, progressive people" (17).

7. The idea of multiple literacies in this study aligns with Brandt's perspective of literacy sponsors working in and responding to specific, local situations. See also Barton for a discussion on interconnected communities and the various literacies at work within and between them.

8. For an explanation of contact zones as areas of cross-cultural dynamics and fluid boundaries, see Pratt 35-37.

9. Brandt argues that literacy sponsors and those they sponsor share a "reciprocal relationship" (167).

10. See Brown and Duguid's perspective of collective knowledge in *The Social Life of Information* (103).

11. The material analyzed for this research (texts spanning dates from 1915 to 1970) comes from archival extension service reports housed in the University of Florida Special and Area Collections and available in University of Florida Digital Collections.

12. An example of a blank 1934 farm record book can be seen at the *HathiTrust Digital Library*.

13. This view of genre poses genre texts as social responses to recurring rhetorical situations. See Miller's 1984 article "Genre as Social Action"; also Bazerman and Devitt. As social responses, genres can also help us discern a community's "norms, epistemology, ideology, and social ontology" (Berkenkotter and Huckin 497).

14. While some young women engaged in the agricultural aspects of 4-H, most were channeled into what was at the time considered "woman's work" in projects such as canning, sewing, and home management. This was reflective of the sexual dichotomies persistent in the culture of the times, and not the abilities or proclivities of the participants. For the purposes of this paper, references to 4-H projects and rewards focus on boys' work.

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