WP 2003-06
February 2003

Working Paper

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Impacts of Changing Agri-Environmental Policy on Countryside Conservation

A Report of Focus Groups Held in Association with Skaneateles Lake Watershed, Skaneateles, NY, USA, and High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Goudhurst, Kent, England, UK

David Gross and Nelson Bills

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by

David Gross and Nelson Bills*

Abstract

Utilizing area-based agri-environmental programs, our work involves focus groups and interviews with program managers, landowners, and elected officials to assess the impact of on-farm managerial interventions on broader countryside conservation issues. Initially, two areas were compared: The Skaneateles Lake Watershed Agricultural Program (NY) and the High Weald Land Management Initiative (England). The organizing principle for this research is that the British experience with countryside management provides crucial insight from which New York agricultural and environmental interests can benefit. For example, one difference is that contributions and challenges of land management by farmers in England are understood and discussed by a much wider set of agricultural and community interests than in the U.S. Yet in New York (and most of the Northeast) changes in agriculture have played out on the landscape (i.e., countryside) but with far less discussion about other nonfood, public benefits derived from the working landscape. Better understanding the British view of countryside as "lived-in landscapes" that are protected through positive managerial incentives for farmers may provide important insights for New York agricultural, community, and environmental stakeholders. Adopting a British approach to land management, explicitly taking into account the cultural and political realities in the Northeast, could help New York communities be more responsive to overall community environmental management.

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Acknowledgements

The researchers express their appreciation to all the participants for their thoughtful contributions to the focus groups. We especially thank Matt Thornton of Cornell Cooperative Extension for his oustanding help in organizing the Skaneateles Lake watershed session and Professor Emeritus Bryn Green for his commentaries that day. For the High Weald session, we are most grateful for Allison Wright's invaluable assistance in organizing the event. We also thank our colleagues at Imperial College at Wye for their on-going assistance: Bryn Green, Clive Potter, and Eunice Simmons.

Funding for this project was provided by the Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station, Hatch Project NYC147805.

Impacts of Changing Agri-Environmental Policy on Countryside Conservation

Background

For most of us, farming is synonymous with food production, but first and foremost, farmers are land managers, taking action to achieve preferred outcomes for their investment of human and financial capital. The role that farmers play as land managers is central to the purposes of this study. In fact, we regard farmers as producers of "multifunctional agricultural landscapes" exhibiting specific patterns of management in space and time.[1] In this wider context of land management, farmed areas become part of a mosaic of land uses that define the countryside, as we know it. Patterns of land management make land a template that records virtually all social, economic, and political developments (Appleton, 1996). In addition, how the land is used invites policy intervention periodically to achieve a blend of private and social objectives, and to enhance or mitigate matches between agriculture, food production, and the wider natural environment.

The interplay between farm endeavors and the working landscape hardly stops at international boundaries. All modern nations deal with these questions with increasing regularity. Our frame of reference in this study is the United States (U.S.) and the United Kingdom (U.K.), England in particular. The U.K., in concert with other members of the European Union (EU), have complemented their price support/supply management programs for farm and food commodities with new initiatives expressly designed to accomplish environmental objectives. These initiatives and how they inform companion interests and concerns in New York and the Northeast are the primary focus of this report.

In Europe, reforms of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) began in the early 1990s. The general thrust has been to weaken the link between production and farm income by reducing direct price supports and shifting subsidies to area-based payments for programs, or "schemes" in British parlance, to provide new incentives for meeting environmental objectives. Recent revisions in CAP regulations provide for "modulation" or country-by-country decisions by EU members to shift some of their CAP funds to rural development and agri-environmental programs. In the U.K., a vigorous debate is centered on the pace of that adjustment. In 1999, the EU made provisions to shift 2.5% of all direct payments to farmers under CAP commodity regimes to either rural development or agri-environmental initiatives by 2001, with this proportion expected to approach 5% by the mid-2000s (U.K. Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food, 2002). Even more recently, it is expected that income support for commodity producers in the U.K. will decrease even more to assist with the funding needed to bring new Eastern European partners into the EU (European Union, 2002). These political developments will only intensify the concern for turning support for British farmers to programs that deal with environmental enhancement.

[1] Our use of the term "multifunctional landscapes" builds on a literature and a policy discussion that predates an animated debate underway since the mid-1990s under the aegis of WTO trade negotiations (see USDA, November 1999). Trade concerns go to ongoing disputes between countries over farm commodity policy and whether subsidies and border protections that affect commodity prices are warranted because farming is multifunctional, i.e., leads to both food and environmental goods and services (OECD, 2001). Interestingly, much of the recent economic literature being generated in both academic and government circles saves the term "multifunctionality" for discussions of policies leading to freer trade (see OECD, 2002; Blandford and Boisvert, 2002). For our study, we embrace a wider context and address the fundamentals of a farming presence in the countryside and the values that food and agricultural pursuits produce for local communities.

These proposals and initiatives come at a time when markets for many farm commodities are stagnant and, consequently, when farm incomes are falling. The specter of stagnation and falling farm incomes is hardly a foreign concept in the U.S. In fact, these developments essentially parallel those in the U.S. Congress. New federal farm legislation—the 2002 Farm Bill—reinstitutes income support and supply management control for key U.S. farm commodities but also boosts spending authorities for a suite of federally sponsored environmental enhancement programs (Harl, 2002). While these congressional initiatives are generally thought of as the centerpiece of U.S. agri-environmental policy efforts, the American policy scene is actually far more nuanced, with several layers of government in play. Such layering eludes many commentators who focus instead on the U.S. Congress and the high profile programs administered by Federal agencies. Missed are enormous amounts of discretion over agri-environmental issues devolved to state governments and, in turn under state constitutions, to thousands of local governmental units. Nongovernmental conservation organizations are also making an increasingly important contribution to agri-environmental efforts.

Preoccupation with Federal environmental policy for agriculture can cause mischief in several ways. The first and probably the most important way is that one's impressions of public investment in environmental improvement are distorted both in dollar and geographical terms. But secondly, fixation on the Congress and Federal environmental initiatives leads to compartmentalization of environmental objectives, and a focus on just a few. Alternatively, when the broader sweep of public interventions is considered, efforts in the U.S. to achieve a balance between agriculture and environmental quality have involved two distinct policy tracks: 1) farmland protection and 2) water quality management.

The farmland protection track addresses the land use conflicts that can stem from population spillovers into American farming communities and attendant land conversions to developed uses. The U.S. scene with respect to land use conversions differs sharply from that in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Western Europe. In the U.K., land conversions, greenfields development in particular, are regulated at the national level with reflexive oversight by local regulatory authorities (Lowe et al., 1999). In the U.S., most land conversion decisions are at the other end of the spectrum, with individual property owners best leveraged in decisions on new land uses. Farmland protection in U.S. parlance refers to a family of programs to influence the decisions individual landowners make on either the timing or location of greenfields conversion from farm to developed uses (Bills, 1996; Kline and Wichelns, 1998).

The second U.S. policy track focuses on the environmental side effects of crop and livestock production systems on water quality. Although the distinction between management of land and management of water is artificial (one always affects the other), separating agri-environmental discussions into these two dimensions has made an impact: each policy track has developed its own constituency and programs. Each program set cultivates an exclusive list of policy tools and remedies.

This fragmented intellectual and policy milieu that now defines land use and environmental protection lacks a broad view of the rural, working landscape; it fails to consider the implications of farm and food production on landscape diversity, biological resources, wildlife habitat, and among numerous (and hard to quantify) other open space land interests. Too often, the conversation about Northeastern U.S. agriculture and environment moves in parallel universes, each suited to the particular purposes of academic disciplines or program managers. Only with a wider, integrated discussion will all the benefits that farm and food production generate for local communities be appreciated and come under close scrutiny.

This Study

This research grew out of a recognition that the agri-environmental agendas of all modern nations have expanded to encompass a number of

social objectives in recent years. This project represents the beginning of an effort to build formal, cross-country comparisons into the debate about farm policy in the U.S. For this purpose, our attention instinctively turns to Western Europe and the United Kingdom in particular. Many cultural antecedents present in the northeastern U.S. trace to Great Britain. Comparisons between Britain and New York are compelling. Driven by reforms in EU agricultural policy, the U.K. has been experimenting with a suite of pilot programs to enhance production of environmental benefits from food and agricultural production.

The organizing principal for this research is that crucial insight can be obtained by reviewing the British experience with countryside management. This approach allows access to a policy dialogue in the U.K. that dates to the formation of the European Union and the evolution of a common agricultural policy (CAP) in Western Europe. As patterns of land settlement, greenfields development issues, and the status of water quality are debated and reviewed in the U.K., policy dialogue has often arced over these matters with countryside and its management as the interlocking theme. In essence, the rural economy and the countryside and its amenities have been seen as indissoluble from the practice of farming (Green, 1996). The difficulty is that the sort of farming practices that produced the countryside is often not commercial any more (U.K. Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food, 2002). This framework has provided the conceptual underpinnings for the series of programs designed to engage the English agricultural community in environmental improvement.

New York State—with a landmass, arable land base, and trends in farm structure that bear some similarity to England—is beginning a similar trajectory with a blend of programs geared to the use of incentive-based schemes to induce preferred patterns of resource conservation and enhancement. This effort to foster New York/English comparisons will assist in determining if refinement of the New York policy milieu can come from close scrutiny of the U.K. situation. A constant danger for a study of this sort is the willingness, in some quarters, to automatically reject studies that span two cultures. However, we believe that England makes for a logical choice for this study. Two-thirds of the Northeast states are named New England. English influence is manifested many ways, ranging from inherited legal doctrine to place names. This makes the cross-country case studies proposed here an effort to understand first, rather than fourth or fifth, derivatives. We think the chances for learning something useful about some potentially new American pathways for conservation behavior in rural settings are higher in England than they are elsewhere.

An underlying premise for this project is that the current policy efforts in environmental management are not fully exploiting opportunities to achieve both water quality protection and broader land use goals. Sometimes lost in the discussion is the critical and central role farmers play in the local community both by contributing to the area economy and as managers and stewards of the rural landscape. An essential component of the discussion is precise problem definition. What exactly constitutes the challenges and barriers now facing farm and food producers who want to sustain and grow their businesses? On the other hand, how do these considerations play into the dynamics of the local community? Community concerns range from specific, well-documented issues regarding water quality and use to much less evident but important interests in aesthetic beauty, wildlife enhancement, and open space. For the purpose of this study, benefits that the community derives from farm and food production are considered as a part of the broader economic circumstance of sustaining agricultural enterprises. In other words, the primary focus is on the "working landscape" as compared to viewing farmland ownership as merely an alternative means of preserving open space or achieving other environmental goals (Daniels, 2000).

The project investigates the convergence and divergence between British and American agricultural environmental management. For example, one difference is that contributions and challenges of land management by farmers in England are understood and discussed by a much wider set of

agricultural and community interests than in the U.S. This is in part because the post-war countryside in Britain attracted new areas of investment by farmers who sought to satisfy the public's interest in agri-tourism and nature enjoyment, resulting in improved relations between towns and countryside (Deverre, 1995).

Important policy contrasts can also be made between the U.K. and the U.S. In the U.K., growing concern about the public health effects of agricultural pollution merged with a long established concern about landscape change (biodiversity, aesthetic, heritage) resulting from intensification in agriculture (Potter, 1998). In the U.K., paying of farmers to deliver not only food but also amenity environmental goods such as wildlife, beautiful scenery, access and clean water is beginning to transform conservation policy and practice. Those concerned with wildlife, cultural systems, and informal recreation are all interested in the same basic resource, natural and semi-natural landscapes and in the same use of them, namely, amenity (Green, 1996). In Europe, most conservation values, from biodiversity to scenic sites, are integral parts of agricultural landscapes. When these landscapes change as a result of agricultural policies, natural values – species, habitats, and landscapes – are usually affected (Oñate et al., 2000). However, the future countryside will not be the accidental by-product of farming as it was in the past (Green, 2002). In the U.S., agri-environmentalists have never been particularly concerned by the implication of agricultural intensification on landscape diversity, biological resources, wildlife habitat, etc. Instead, policy dialogue has largely focused on protection of water quality through nonpoint source management. Agricultural pollution, landscape change and loss of biodiversity due to the intensification and concentration of production remain very European concerns (Potter, 1998).

Finally, this study seeks to determine if any refinement/resolution of water and land use issues in New York State (and the U.S.) can be derived from scrutiny of the U.K. situation. The intent is to identify the U.K.'s convergence with and divergence from American agri-environmental programs. For example, one goal of the study is to identify locally held views about the full range of farm conservation interventions, including looking at whether "multifunctional" agriculture is perceived as generating environmental benefits important to quality of life on the farm and in surrounding communities. We also seek answers to such questions as: How do economics and the local context influence conservation behavior? Do ownership patterns condition conservation response? Do core economic principles prevail in both countries? Does holistic conservation behavior require integrated public policy? Do farmers fully acknowledge the wider role they play on the countryside? To what extent would landscape/wildlife objectives be met automatically if agri-environment land management schemes focused principally on soil, water, and air resource issues? What role should the greater community play in assisting farmers in maintaining or enhancing the environment?

Study Approach

A critical first step in any research is one's definition of unit of analysis. This is especially true for subjects pertaining to land use, where political boundaries and a host of environmental considerations enter into the research equation. A deliberate choice made in this study was to use small, area-based land units calibrated to the scale of agriculture, population, and size of landmass. Interestingly, definition of study unit highlights the bifurcated U.S. policy environment mentioned above in very stark terms. Namely, water policy is almost uniformly implemented along hydrologic or watershed boundaries; over the past two decades, emphasis on targeting strategies for public funds and technical assistance for farmland owners with water quality concerns have accentuated the watershed emphasis through definition of priority watershed program areas. In sharp contrast, U.S. farmland protection policy runs in program channels defined exclusively by political boundaries. Statutes and programs related to farmland protection are now well entrenched at the state and local levels. The statutes and programs, for the most part, are completely silent on water qual-

ity issues. Similarly, in the U.K., regardless of program emphasis, watersheds or "catchments" are not typically a reference unit for Britain's very extensive agri-environmental program efforts for small areas.

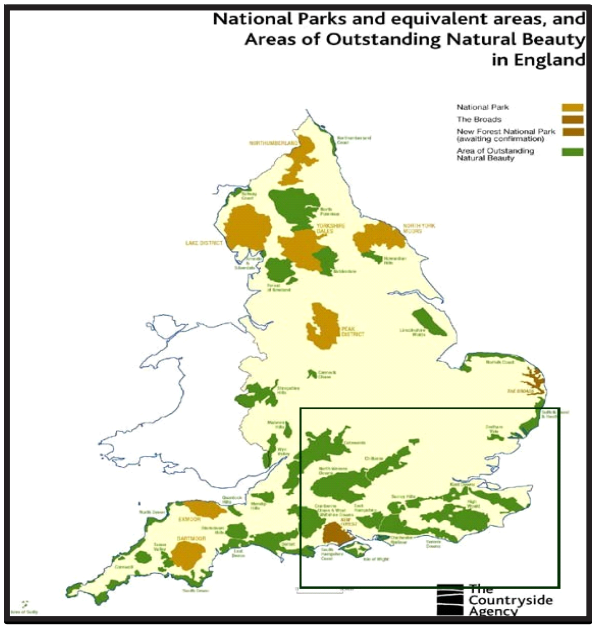
A pair of case studies and information were reviewed to analyze issues related to program outcomes. Collateral studies and information will be reviewed for each of the intensive area programs. The work also includes survey or focus group contacts with farmers, organizational leaders, and local officials to assess the impact of on-farm managerial interventions on broader countryside conservation issues. As a research tool, focus groups or directed discussion with selected stakeholders provide a cost-effective way to gather views on countryside management issues.

The Case Studies

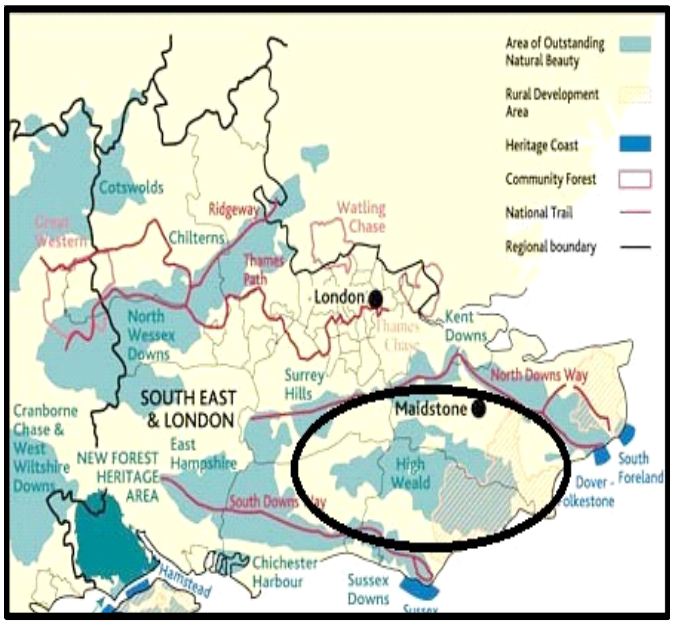
1. The High Weald Land Management Initiative of Kent and E. Sussex, England

Thirty-seven rural areas covering 15% of England are currently designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and described as the jewels of the English landscape. The primary purpose of an AONB designation is to conserve natural beauty. While recreation is not an objective of designation, AONBs attempt to meet the demands for recreation as far as is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other users. The day-to-day administration of AONBs rests with the local authorities. AONBs benefit from the Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) Countryside Stewardship Program, an initiative that offers payments to farmers undertaking management to conserve and restore important landscapes or features and to improve public access to them. Countryside Stewardship is the government's main program for the wider countryside which aims, through the payment of grants, to improve the natural beauty and diversity of the countryside, enhance, restore and recreate targeted landscapes, their wildlife habitats and historical features, and to improve opportunities for public access. Farmers and land managers enter 10-year agreements to manage land in an environmentally beneficial way in return for annual payments. Grants are available for capital works such as hedge laying and planting, repairing dry stonewalls, etc. (UK DEFRA, 2002).

National Map - England



Southeast England - High Weald



The High Weald AONB of Kent and E. Sussex is an ancient landscape derived from a highly integrated and labor intensive land management system, where agriculture and woodland were managed as one system on every farm holding. Despite its proximity to London, this 1,450 square kilometer landscape of hills and ridges, numerous small valleys, small woods-bounded fields and extensive ancient woodland has survived more or less intact since the fourteenth century. This high value landscape has survived due to the area's harsh conditions and heavy, poorly drained soils that have inhibited agricultural intensification and ensured the marginality of the farming that originally created it (UK Countryside Agency, 1999).

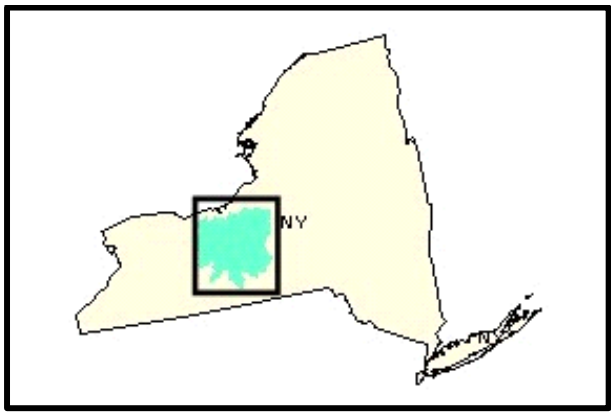
The dense forest that gave the Weald its name has largely vanished, but fine, ancient broadleaved woodland is still abundant. The Weald retains one of the highest levels of woodland cover in England at over 23 percent. Agriculture is central to the rural economy and includes dairying, mixed farming and horticulture. Forestry remains a traditional Wealden industry. Changes in agricultural practices have led to the drainage of river valley marshland and a decline in grazing of heathland, which in turn has led to scrub encroachment. There has been a serious decline in the management of ancient woodland. Neglect or the breaking up of historic parkland landscapes is a further cause for concern, as is the abandonment of land through the increase in nonfarm ownership.

Close to a number of major economic growth areas, the AONB is vulnerable to multiple development pressures. These include the threat of major road improvements on routes through the AONB between London and the coast, and existing and potential noise nuisance from the continued growth of nearby Gatwick Airport. Residential and associated commercial development pressure is particularly affecting villages in the north and west of the AONB. Its effects can be seen in residential conversion of traditional buildings and the increase of horse paddocks and swimming pools.

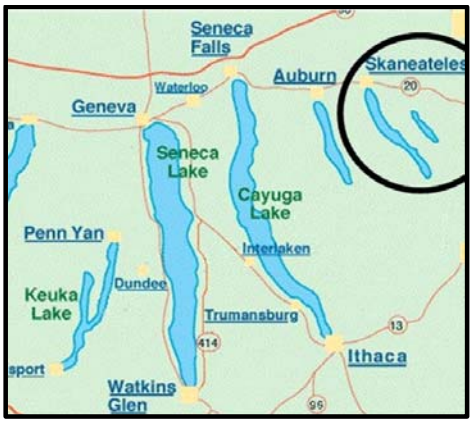
The Countryside Agency's Land Management Initiative (LMI) aims to test and demonstrate how England's land management and farming systems can respond to the changing demands on agriculture in ways that will maintain a healthy, attractive environment and contribute to thriving rural economies and communities. The High Weald LMI hosted by the Wealden District Council is centered on a pilot area of four parishes covering only a portion of the total AONB area (approximately 220 square kilometers). Several critical issues impacting the area include farming at the very margins; loss of farm viability leading to farm fragmentation; high land values; and lack of maintenance of key landscape features. Specific research and demonstration activity in the High Weald LMI include whole farm planning, farm diversification and business development, training and skills development, and inward investment (UK Countryside Agency, 1999).

2. The Skaneateles Lake Watershed Agricultural Program of New York

Skaneateles Lake, located in the Finger Lakes region of Central New York, is the primary source of unfiltered drinking water for the City of Syracuse and surrounding communities. Approximately 200,000 consumers purchase Skaneateles Lake water from the City of Syracuse (Staehr, 1999). The average daily flow is 42 million gallons per day. The watershed area measures 189 square kilometers with a drainage area (land only) of 153 square kilometers (City of Syracuse, 1996). Only 8% of the watershed is publicly owned. The ratio of land to lake surface area is 4.36 to 1. Land use in the watershed is 48% agricultural, 40.2% forest, 5.4% private/residential, and the rest is vacant or commercial. The lakeshore was largely developed prior to the 1980s. One growing trend is the conversion of seasonal homes to year-round residences and the development of lake-view homes on the watershed hillsides. Only 8% of the total land area in the watershed is publicly owned. Access on Skaneateles Lake is limited to private marinas or the two public boat launches on the west side of the lake. A total of 7,615 hectares of land was in agricultural use in 1996 with approximately 5,382 hectares in crop production. Dairy farming continues to be



New York State - Finger Lakes



Skaneateles Lake

the most common agricultural enterprise in the watershed. Approximately 2,500 animal units are in the watershed (City of Syracuse, 1998; City of Syracuse, 1996).

Skaneateles Lake watershed abounds in extraordinary scenic vistas as the narrow lake winds it way through the rolling landscape. With limited public access to the lake, scenic views offer visitors and residents without lake property the opportunity to enjoy and appreciate this unique resource. Views of the lake add to community character, the tourist economy and the desirability of living in the watershed and preserving lake water quality. The mercantile district of the Village of Skaneateles has interesting architecture with almost a seaside resort character. In the face of long-term development pressure, the importance of maintaining biodiversity and protecting a variety of wildlife habitats is also recognized (City of Syracuse, 1998; City of Syracuse, 1996).

The objective of the Skaneateles Lake Watershed Agricultural Program (SLWAP) is to carry out a voluntary, cost-effective Whole Farm Planning Program for the watershed's farming community that will reduce the risk of contamination of the lake from agricultural nonpoint sources. To be successfully implemented, Whole Farm Plans are developed by a multi-agency team that includes the farm's manager. The Whole Farm Plan must not only meet the environmental objectives of the watershed program, it must meet the business objectives of the farming enterprise. The guiding principle for the program is that as long as land remains in the farming community and a whole farm plan is being followed, the risk of serious nonpoint source pollution is limited. Once a farm passes out of farming and is turned into residential or commercial development, the only land protection afforded is local land-use law or voluntary participation in conservation programs and stewardship activities. For example, the recently launched Skaneateles Lake Watershed Land Protection Program provides for the purchase of voluntary conservation easements (City of Syracuse, 1998; City of Syracuse, 1996).

The Focus Group Events

On September 13, 2001, a group of stakeholders met at the Sherwood Inn in the Village of Skaneateles to discuss "The Impacts of Changing Agri-Environmental Policy on Countryside Conservation" in the Skaneateles Lake watershed. Convened as the first focus group for this research project, participants spent five hours exploring various topics related to their shared interest in the future of the Skaneateles Lake watershed area. Tragic events in New York City, Washington D.C., and Shanksville, PA just 48 hours prior to the meeting influenced the discussion, prompting participants to express concerns about the long-term availability and security of a food supply system dependent on global production.

Similarly, on May 9, 2002, a group of stakeholders met at the Star and Eagle Inn in the Village of Goudhurst, Kent, England to also discuss "The Impacts of Changing Agri-Environmental Policy on Countryside Conservation" in the High Weald. As at the first focus group, participants spent five hours exploring various topics related to their shared interest in the future of the High Weald area.

1. The Players

Working closely with our local hosts, organizers carefully selected the individuals invited to participate in each focus group. A good balance of stakeholder interests participated, including farmers, agri-environmental technical/financial providers, environmental and community enhancement interests (NGOs), and local elected officials. In both settings, the researchers conducted additional interviews with other stakeholders unable to attend the focus groups and incorporated their input into the findings.

2. The British Connection

A number of British colleagues have collaborated with us throughout the project. Bryn Green, Professor Emeritus, University of London's Imperial College at Wye, has made a major contribution in shaping this project and its predecessors. He assisted in the early development of the project and arranged a number of consultations with key private and public countryside interests in England during initial visits. He also made a presentation to the Skaneateles Lake Focus Group, introducing them to agri-environmental issues in England and the links to their broader interest in "countryside management". Two other colleagues at Imperial College also provided invaluable assistance. Clive Potter, Senior Lecturer, provided important insights and helped establish early contacts in the High Weald. Eunice Simmons, Senior Lecturer, introduced us to High Weald LMI leadership and helped organize and conduct the High Weald focus group.

3. Discussion Guide

The following table provides an outline of the focus group discussion, topic to topic. The facilitator for both focus groups used this to guide the discussion although the group had opportunities to raise additional topics.

THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN COUNTRYSIDE MANAGEMENT

- ❑ Methods and programs you are primarily involved with
- ❑ What role do you play in countryside management?
- ❑ Innovative techniques and strategies you have initiated
- ❑ Please share a success story

II. WHAT IS THE ROLE OF AGRICULTURE IN LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION?

- ❑ Relation to community values
- ❑ Impact of differential patterns of land ownership
- ❑ Importance of public supported incentive payments
- ❑ Promise of coordinated public policy

III. WHAT ARE THE INFORMATION AND MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE NEEDS?

- ❑ Sources of assistance on public policy and land management
- ❑ Information and assistance gaps
- ❑ Role of public and private organizations
- ❑ Appropriate role for stimulating countryside management

IV. HOW DO WE HELP CREATE A VISION FOR THE KIND OF COUNTRYSIDE THAT WE WANT IN THE FUTURE?

- ❑ That respects the economic realities that farmers face
- ❑ That fosters land stewardship responsive to nature conservation
- ❑ That's attentive to aesthetics, scenic quality, and cultural heritage protection
- ❑ That strengthens the capacity for all public and private interests to protect the countryside
- ❑ That coordinates public policy on countryside management issues
- ❑ That promotes an inclusive public process

Results

The methods outlined in the previous section generated considerable insight on land and water management issues. Key results assembled and interpreted in this section take into account policy avenues available and strategies that both agencies and landowners might follow to forge better working relationships within the study areas.

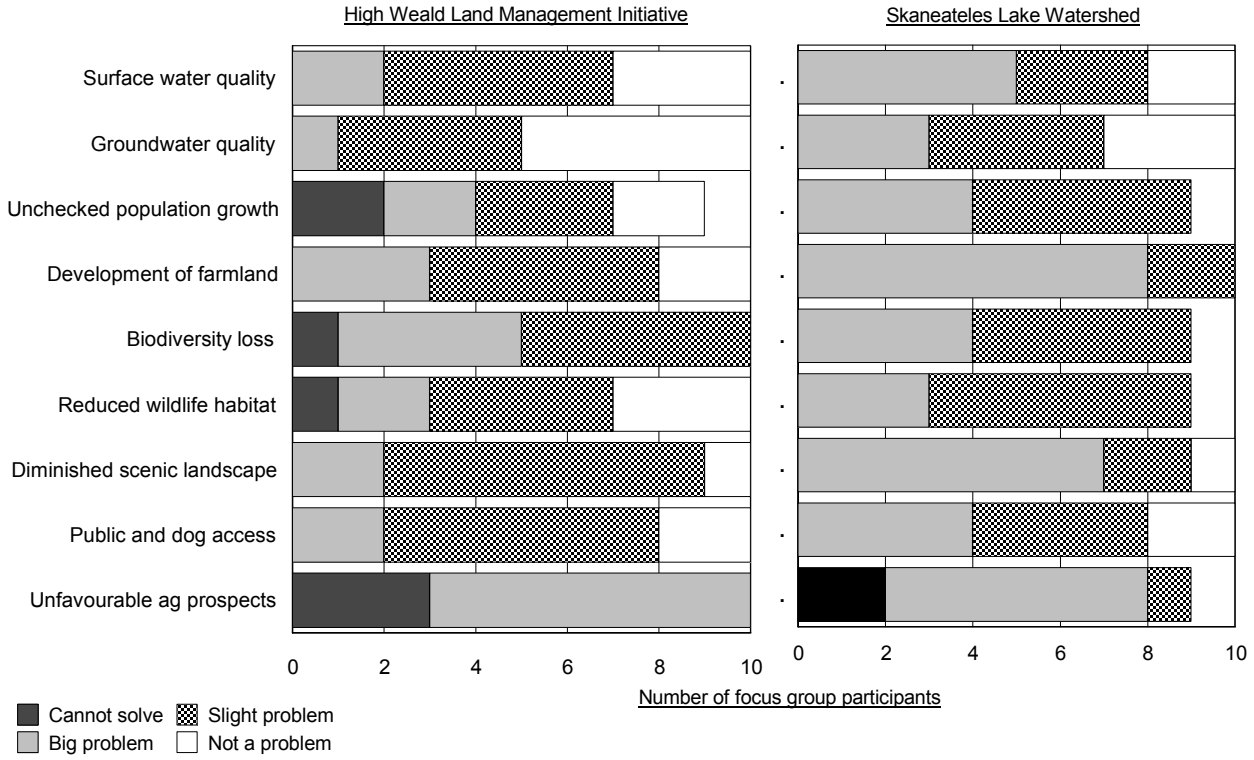
As a prelude to convening the focus groups, we asked each participant a line of questioning on agricultural and environmental issues. They were asked to describe their experience with accessing and using information on related issues. Their responses were recorded on a Pre-Focus Group Questionnaire (see Appendix A for the U.K. version). We wanted a response on these issues that was both considered and unaffected by the dynamics of the focus group discussion. Results from that query helped set the stage for more detailed assessment of study area concerns and possible solutions.

1. Survey Outcomes

Sustaining Environmental Quality and the Working Landscape: Challenges and Opportunities

At the outset, a list of environmental quality problems was assembled, compiled from the literature on this topic based on our experience with conservation management in rural settings. Nine environmental problems, as shown in Figure 1, were identified. Language was adjusted slightly in each country setting to account for different issue emphases. For the most part, the questions were applicable to each study area in a remarkably similar way. For example, a question related to public and dog access to open space and farmland in the English case morphs into a concern about "public access" in the Upstate New York case, taking into account the lesser concern with companion animals in the American scene. Similarly, the words around farmland or greenfields conversion vary materially between the two countries, with the practiced terminology of "farmland protection" in

Figure 1. To what extent are the following issues a problem for protecting the countryside?



Upstate New York giving way to "farmland conversion" in Southern England.

All focus group participants were asked to assign these issues, each deemed to be problematic for each study area, into one of four categories, thereby indicating their judgment of the severity of the problem. By design, the problems mentioned span a wide range of water quality and farmland protection/conversion issues. In addition, we included concerns integral to understanding relationships at the wider landscape scale, which necessitated asking participants to evaluate concerns with biodiversity, reduced wildlife habitat, and diminished quality of scenic vistas and viewsheds.

On the water quality side for the Skaneateles Lake watershed, not unexpectedly, a majority of all focus group participants rated both surface and groundwater quality as a problem of some importance (Figure 1). Of these issues, surface water quality for Skaneateles Lake was of higher concern than issues related to groundwater quality. This is not unexpected, considering the Lake's high profile as a water source for the City of Syracuse, one of New York's larger urban cores. Eight out of 10 focus group participants indicated that surface water quality was at least a slight problem for the community and for the watershed. Seven in 10 participants judged groundwater to be at least a slight problem for the watershed as well.

Somewhat surprisingly, perhaps, based upon the literature on British agriculture and the organizing principles for the High Weald LMI, was the emphasis placed on water quality issues in the British case. Of 10 participants, two indicated that surface water quality was a big problem in the region; another 5 participants indicated that surface water quality was at least a slight problem (Figure 1). Concerns were also registered for groundwater quality, with 5 British respondents indicating concerns over the status of this resource in the High Weald.

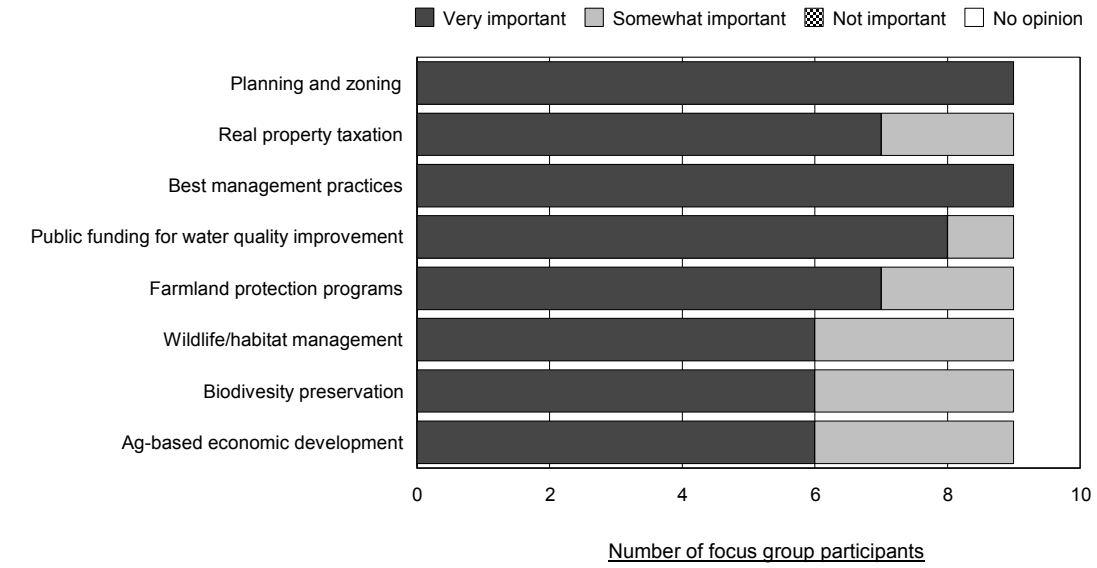
Interestingly, compared to water quality concerns, issues related to land conversion and patterns of land use in both the High Weald (HW) and the Skaneateles Lake watershed (SLW) received even higher scores. All participants in the Skaneateles focus group rated untimely or unplanned land conversions as at least a slight problem, with a majority indicating that these conversions were a sizable problem for the community. In the SLW, these concerns over the timing and location of residential and commercial land conversions appeared to exceed concerns about absolute rates of population growth. Recall that decisions over land conversions reside in the hands of local officials and property owners in the Skaneateles example. The opposite perspective was obtained for the HW, with respondents in Britain evidencing relatively more concern over greenfields conversion than over unchecked population growth.

Significantly, although a majority of participants registered major concerns about conversion timing and location, of the nine participants who responded to the question, only four individuals indicated that unchecked population growth itself constituted a major problem for the watershed. Very similar attitudes were registered in the HW, with four of ten respondents indicating that unchecked population growth constitutes a big problem for land resource management.

Similarly, focus group participants in both study areas indicated that wider conservation issues are an important problem for the local community. These include loss of biodiversity and the prospects of reduced wildlife habitat. Relatively heavier emphasis was placed on the prospects for and likelihood of diminished quality of scenic views in the SLW, with seven of the nine individuals responding to this question indicating that sustaining scenic views was a big problem. Concern for the viewsheds prevailed in the British example as well, with nine of 10 respondents indicating at least a slight concern about the appearance of the working landscape. In the HW, we saw relatively less concern about reduced wildlife habitat than for the SLW. Concerns over public access and loss of biodiversity were registered in remarkably similar degrees in both study areas (Figure 1).

Further and very noteworthy congruence was obtained for concerns about the economic prospects for the farm community. In both study areas,

Figure 2. Subjects that can be viewed as information opportunities for reaching landowners and policymakers in the Skaneateles Lake Watershed



a core collection of participants indicated that unfavorable economic circumstances for farm and food producers were not only a problem but was probably a problem that is unsolvable.

Informing Choices on Watershed Management

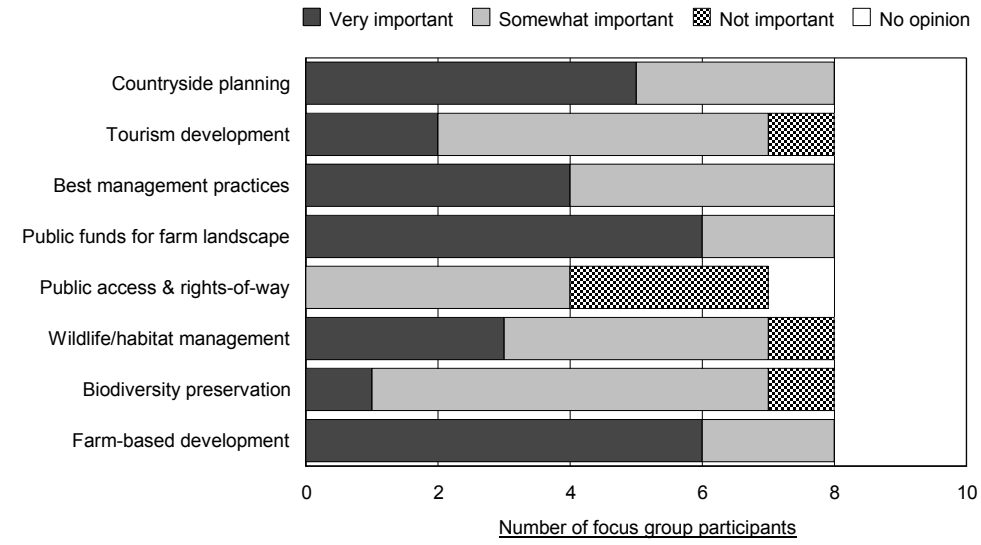
We asked the focus group participants about sources of information they use and to give their sense of persistent or emergent information needs. In the New York case, participants held strong opinions regarding the importance of information types. In particular, much emphasis was placed upon information opportunities surrounding local planning and zoning (Figure 2). All New York participants rated this area as very important. Similarly, best management practices for water quality management in the watershed rated highly as information opportunities. Wider landscape concerns for the watershed were also endorsed as information opportunities. These extended to farmland protection programs, wildlife and habitat management, and biodiversity preservation. Issues related to agriculturally based economic development received approximately equal rating as an information opportunity.

In the High Weald, participants were more guarded in their assessment of information needs (Figure 3). Nonetheless, three subjects considered to be relatively important were the need for countryside planning, the pocketbook issues associated with farming, and informing residents of any choices local landowners might have to acquire public funds to support their business and, by extension, the rural working landscape. Similarly, an informational need of some importance was farm-based development options for landholders in the High Weald.

2. Focus Group Findings

Interpreting the focus group data depends on one's judgments on which topics should receive the most emphasis in the final report. For the purposes of this study, special attention was given to whether topics were discussed in both groups, how many interests within each group mentioned the topic, and the amount of agreement or disagreement about the topic between the two groups or among interests within groups (Morgan, 1997).

Figure 3. Subjects that can be viewed as information opportunities for reaching landowners and policymakers in the High Weald



The focus groups discussions centered around two main themes that are the organizing framework for the analysis. These were: (1) What are the current countryside issues and what do we know (or need to know) about them? In addition, (2) How do we create a vision for the kind of countryside we want in the future? Both topics were broken down further into key discussion topics. What follows is a summary of findings for both Focus Groups.

Major Discussion Themes

Discussion Theme #1: What are the Current Countryside Issues and What Do We Know (or need to know) About Them?

• Land Ownership and Landscape Management

Most focus group interests in both settings recognized the importance of farm stewardship and that achieving/maintaining landscape diversity requires the continued presence of crop and livestock agriculture as a key element of the working landscape. HW farmers spoke emphatically about their roles in managing the landscape and the need for their neighbors, policymakers, and the wider society to recognize that heritage. Such recognition was deemed necessary if the farm community is to have sustainable business models that are adapted to the realities of modern European agriculture and ever emerging settlement patterns in the countryside. Nonfarm interests in the SLW registered similar concern about a viable business model but also exhibited a sharper set of concerns around the issue of sustaining proper farm management. HW farmers, as well as local officials on the other hand, were less concerned about current farm management than they were about high property values encouraging sales to newcomers. New in-migration by nonfarm interests was thought to be having a dramatic effect on local real estate values. These appreciated land values, in turn, accrue to landowners but may or may not be sufficient to insure the continuation of a farm busi-

"Two questions: The viability of agriculture as a business, and the second is the condition of the land management in the area."
HW Technical Provider

"God made those 15 degree slopes."
SLW Farmer

ness. Focus group participants generally agreed that farm sales and subdivisions were having a significant impact on agricultural sustainability and biodiversity protection. In the SLW, NGO representatives and local officials viewed changed management of the landscape as a major factor leading to conflicts among community interests and negative impacts on the quality of life in the area. This finding in the British case seems to be significant because it contradicts the common perception that British land planning authorities have the statutory authority and the political clout required to keep a tight rein on subdivisions and subsequent land speculation and greenfields land conversion.

> **"Woods are ok - but fields are important. Who is going to mow these fields?"**
> SLW Local Official

An even more targeted concern in the HW was a subpopulation of tenant farmers and the probability that continual increases in property values will decrease the likelihood that tenant farmers will be able to sustain themselves. Not surprisingly, and regardless of context, farm tenancy received no real mention in the SLW. This is due to the structure of land ownership in England, which is much different compared to the U.S. Rates of farm tenancy, situations where the farmer does not own any of the real estate he/she operates, are very low compared to the English situation.

- **Diversification and Agri-sustainability**

Local officials in both settings saw the need to help farmers sustain and grow their farm businesses. A clear understanding exists of the relationship between socially desirable landscape management and the profitably of local farm businesses in both the U.K. and in the U.S. The rules of engagement for farmers in both countries revolve around a satisfactory and sustainable relationship between business receipts and business expenditures. Conversely, unfavorable mixes of receipts and expenditures lead to the termination of the enterprises that give the landscape its visual and biological vibrancy.

> **"Economic conditions do not favor the farm community; it is death by 1000 cuts."**
> SLW NGO Member

The HW focus group provided very dramatic contrasts with the upstate New York focus group on subjects related to farm business growth and the impacts of such growth on the rural landscape. The British focus group was prepared to discuss strategies for growing farm businesses in a highly nuanced fashion. Over the course of the focus group discussions, a multi-pronged strategy for business diversification emerged. The first and most prominent diversification strategy mentioned was a series of steps landowners might take to increase the business revenues gathered from converting farm buildings and structures to a nonfarm, commercial use. In England, local planning authorities have sufficient control over the timing and location of commercial property development to create a market for leasing existing farm buildings for new commercial, nonfarm uses; this development strategy is aided and abetted by the physical properties and condition of farm structures. These structures, while often dated (often in centuries) usually lend themselves to conversion to a new commercial use. In this way, a vision emerges which clearly foresees farming operations coexisting in the countryside with any number of nonfarm commercial activities.

> **"You cannot maintain the landscapes that people value so in the HW without sustainable agriculture, which means profitable agriculture."**
> HW Local Official

Beyond conversion of farm buildings to new commercial use, the HW focus group stressed that farm businesses in the region must be revisited with a fully operational farm business plan and that this plan must be vigorously adopted to have any assurance of future economic vibrancy. Included in this new planning regime, along with farm building conversions where feasible, are very specific strategies to generate off-farm income for farm families. Inside the farm gate, meanwhile, significant emphasis was placed upon the development of new farm enterprises and services. Included in the new enterprise mix discussed by the HW focus group was increased emphasis upon the direct

marketing of farm and food commodities and opportunities to capitalize on Britain's high profile farm tourism market. The latter includes fee arrangements for accelerated access to British farms for such recreational pursuits as walking, hiking, and bird watching, along with more aggressive use of bed and breakfasts and forms of marketing where the customer views the farm as a recreational destination.

> **"What we are doing, it seems, is to convert the farmers to be entrepreneurs so they earn a living and at the same time look after the countryside."**
>
> HW Landowner

In sharp contrast, the SLW group did not specifically address diversification issues for farm businesses other than to recognize the importance of tourism to the area. This could be consistent with a less emergent interest in farm diversification. Extension education interests in the focus group did note, however, that the farm community needed to be increasingly aware of any opportunities to fashion closer contacts with local consumers. Growing interest in a local farmers market, which provides a ready cash market for local produce during the growing season, was explicitly mentioned.

Yet, interestingly, farmers and local officials in both the HW and the SLW were only cautiously optimistic about the role farm diversification will ultimately play in increasing farm profitability and its role as a strategy to more closely connect farmers with their consumers using the food and the nonfood values they produce. Also needed, according to participants in both groups, is a far more aggressive stance with public programs designed to assure the availability of rural landscape benefits while compensating landowners and farmers at tolerable levels.

Local officials in both settings saw the need to accommodate equine as an integral part of local agriculture. In England, the growing presence of horses and related landscape interests—such as training facilities and bridle paths—were clearly recognized and integrated into the wider discussion about shifts in landownership, in-migration of new residents and attendant impacts landscape and landscape biodiversity. The symbiotic relationship between horse owners and farm commodity producers appears to be clearly understood. However, the standing of horse owners in preserving the agricultural legacy in rural England, according to the focus group participants, is not completely worked out. This is reflected, perhaps, in the frequent use of the slightly pejorative term "horseyculture" to distinguish farm commodity production from horse farm operations in the vicinity of London. Further economic differentials were also noted, with farm holdings identified as equine receiving adverse property tax treatment compared to farm holdings identified with commodity production. This contrast provides a fascinating comparison with the New York scene, where horse boarding and riding operations also receive differential and less favorable property tax treatment compared to the treatment received by landowners with property used for commodity production. Namely, horse operations can receive a preferential agricultural assessment on their land for property tax purposes only with the approval of the local legislative body; in comparison, landowners whose operations involve commodity production are automatically eligible for property tax relief under New York's Agricultural District Law.

Another indication of a more integrated discussion of diversification opportunities in the British focus group dealt with the role of woodland products in a farm diversification strategy. Landowners in the High Weald are inclined to see forestry as a diversification opportunity. Local officials in the High Weald also recognize the economic value of forest resources and have established a "Woodland Enterprise Center" to promote and develop local wood products. The forestry topic received no discussion in the SLW Focus Group.

- **Farmer's Role and Standing**

All SLW participant groups except the NGOs commented that farmers are often singled out as an environmental threat and often get mixed messages. At the same time, sharp divisions of opinion were evident around the roles farmers and farm-

> **"If it were left to farmers' own resources, they would be driven to do that which is most likely to turn a profit, which is not necessarily what the community wants us to do with the land."**
> HW Agribusiness

land owners play in the watershed. The overriding tension between the farm and nonfarm constituencies deals with the perceived deleterious impact of livestock and crop operations on water quality. Exactly how are members in the farm community portrayed in the media and in local conversation? What labeling is used explicitly and implicitly to characterize connections between food, agriculture and the overall well-being of the watershed? In stark terms, is the farmer a water polluter? Or, is the farmer principally a benign feature or even an enhancer of the working landscape, exerting influence principally through crop and livestock practices that reflect the communities' long-term concern about natural resource stewardship?

> **"Farmers are contributing a number of values to the community."**
> SLW Technical Provider

In the HW, farmers, private organizations, and local officials expressed quite divergent views about the status of farming. A shared view held by both farmers and local officials is that farmers lack adequate public support, particularly in terms of their contribution to landscape management. A recurring theme was that, if the public wishes to realize these contributions, mechanisms must be in place for compensating the farmers and landowners who produce them.

> **"Farming is about thousands of individuals with brute determination to be there at the end of the day."**
> HW Local Official

• Public Policy and Programs

As noted above, both focus groups expressed the view that farmers need more help and in greater access to direct support. However, an unsettled issue in the SLW is the role of local government in providing such support. All SLW focus group participants evidently realize that multiple layers of government focus on issues related to landscape, farming, and water quality. Similarly, the level of appreciation for the central role of local government is recognized as paramount in a home rule state like New York. What is less certain is a shared perception about local farmers' and community members' capacity to affect change in an orderly and equitable way by manipulating the levers of local government. The alliances and partnerships required among state and federal agencies, while not in disrepair, require scrutiny if dialogue on watershed management is to proceed in an orderly fashion.

> **"Best farm support is the property tax relief."**
> SLW Local Official

HW focus group discussions about policy centered on the need for clearly articulated "national policy." It was stressed that because of the size and scale of England and English agriculture virtually all programs were national in scope. The promulgation of these programs has featured a top down approach, where a program is devised at the national level and implemented on an area basis to achieve a targeted group of environmental issues. In this policy milieu, there is little scope for local government intervention, or certainly less intervention compared to the New York scene. Because of these institutional arrangements, the British focus group centered their discretion of policy on a relatively new Land Management Initiative (LMI) for the study area, including use of the Integrated Farm Assessment (IFA) planning tool. The integrated farm assessment translates into a focused effort to craft and implement comprehensive business plans for local farm operations. This technique has direct application in New York since, based on anecdotal or case study information, only a small fraction of New York farmers are engaged in comprehensive business planning.

> **"What does the community want farming to deliver? That is what the LMI has been attempting to find out. And how much they are willing to pay."**
> HW Technical Provider

> **"We have huge public support for incentive payments for farmers and landowners to produce a biologically diverse landscape, or things that are precious to people."**
> HW Local Official

The LMI as a new program prompted little discussion other than from agency and local officials who commented about its limited scale and that uncoupling of grants was still a hope for the effort. Nonetheless, the IFA was viewed positively as a step to help attract public investment as well as inform farmers of their management options. An agency representative as well as local official expressed concern that IFAs would have more value if they combined the interests across landownership including addressing larger countryside management objectives.

Parallel discussion about policy in the SLW focused largely on the efficacy of current watershed management programs in controlling nutrient delivery to the lake and ultimately to the city of Syracuse water supply. The important roles that several layers of government play were acknowledged and that nongovernmental organizations were also at the table for an implementation phase.

• Information and Community Involvement

In the SLW, two tracks developed around the theme of information and the strategies that should be followed to assure that land managers make fact-based decisions about land use. All but the farmers spoke of the need to seek information from outside sources. Outside sources include obtaining a clear understanding of companion and management efforts elsewhere in the state and beyond. In sharp contrast, however, farmers seemed comfortable relying on internal sources of knowledge. In fact, they stressed that, in their view, the best learning is direct, local, and conditioned by personal experience. Similarly, agency representatives and NGOs in the HW recognized the importance of seeking answers to key questions about land management; but farmers and local officials declined comment, signaling that they, too, are perhaps comfortable acting on what we already know. Indeed, some farms, if only relying on internal sources of knowledge, may miss the very learning needed to move forward.

"Perhaps the biodiversity is here because farming has been marginal."
HW Technical Provider

"Local residents have a lot of questions about the practices farmers are using; ignorance is our enemy."
SLW Farmer

All SLW interests recognized that a crucial, persistent, and possibly worsening disconnect exists between farming, farmers, and the wider community. While the connection between farming and community was not an issue in the HW, farmers and agency participants sought a better understanding about what communities want in the way of landscape management and what they are willing to pay for. In the HW, all but farmers spoke about the importance placed on better informing the public as they seek more awareness of what they are buying as both a food consumer and countryside user, illustrated by the new Countryside Agency agricultural marketing initiative called "Eat the View."

"We neeed to know what we have first."
NW NGO Member

Discussion Theme #2: How Do We Create a Vision for the Kind of Countryside We Want in the Future?

• Land Ownership and Landscape Management

In both areas, farmers spoke of the significance of farm ownership and stewardship when considering the future of the area. In the SLW, farmers spoke of uncertainty and loss as they sought to sustain their farms into the future. Similarly, HW farmers expressed concerns about their special survival challenges such as high land values, changing landownership, and limitations of government support. A cross-section of participants in both areas spoke about the importance of sustaining agriculture into the future to protect the area's landscape qualities. However, all expressed concerns about how to do that

"I want to leave something; it's almost a spiritual impulse."
SLW Farmer

"To preserve the countryside as we all want to do, you need the cattle, the sheep, the corn, the fruit -- or otherwise it is not going to be there at all."
HW Agribusiness

given on-going economic and public policy challenges.

• Integration Across Countryside Management Interests

Perhaps surprisingly in the SLW, we saw a lack of unanimity on several of the processes and organizing principles often advanced as pivotal requirements for community progress and community policy resolution. Growers and producers, in particular, were hesitant to hold out hope for vision sharing. A level of ambivalence was clearly evident on matters related to achieving workable linkages between subcommunities and the watershed. It was clear that additional discussion was needed regarding communication channels, what they ought to look like, who should participate, and the expectations the community should have on expected outcomes. However, to the contrary in the HW, both farmers and private organizational representatives stressed that a shared vision was not only achievable but was undoubtedly central to integration of land management interests.

"We have these pockets -- I am not sure why we have equine, woodland, food. We really ought to integrate."
HW Landowners

• Public Policy and Programs

All SLW and HW focus group representatives expressed views regarding the public policy context of agricultural interests and landscape management. The discussion in both settings called for the formulation of improved policies as well as expanded programs that enhance incentives for farm-based landscape management that the public supports. Focus group participants evidently realize that multiple layers of government focus on issues related to landscape, farming, and environmental quality. In the SLW, the level of appreciation for the central role of local government is recognized as paramount in a home rule state like New York. What is less certain in the SLW is a shared perception about local farmers' and community members' capacity to affect change in an orderly and equitable way by manipulating the levers of local government. The alliances and partnerships required with state and federal agencies, while not in disrepair, require closer scrutiny if dialogue on countryside management is to proceed in an orderly fashion.

"Nobody is suggesting withdrawing public support from land management because that land management is vital to social, economic,cultural, biodiversity as well as food production."
HW Local Official

"We are agonizing over how to get people to pay for the landscape they enjoy. There must be a way that premium which is paid for the landscape is going to benefit the landscape."
HW Landowner

• Information and Community Involvement

All SLW focus group representatives with the exception of the farmers spoke of the need for solid action, improved dialogue, and better linkages as the way to create a new vision for the area. Similarly in the HW, most groups represented, with the exception of local officials, spoke directly about the need to align agri-environmental management to community (public) preferences. In the SLW, collateral issues related to farming and perceptions of farmers trace, in part, to deeper concerns about levels of literacy in the wider community on matters related to food and agriculture. From the farm perspective, a common lament, in effect, is: "what is wrong with these people — they just don't get it!" Nonfarm members of the SLW focus group, on the other hand, seemed more optimistic on matters related to the promise education holds for resolving differences. Regardless, we see only relatively weak convergence portrayed through the media and techniques likely to maximize educational impact around food, farming, and natural resources issues. The farm community also tends to place a great deal of emphasis upon experiential learning: One must come to the farm and look to understand.

"Must get to those who don't listen."
SLW Local Official

"We are trying to develop policy guidance to better connect agri-environmental schemes to community needs."
HW Technical Provider

Discussion

The focus group discussions enriched and deepened understanding of farming and its position in the community in several different ways. During this directed discussion and in the preparation of discussion summaries, we looked very carefully for patterns of convergence in both settings around community issues. The importance of identifying themes that build cohesion around diverse interests in a small community became evident. One significant question that emerged from the discussion was "What elements are involved in engaging this diverse set of interests in a wider landscape discussion about not only achieving countryside management milestones but also encouraging the very continuation of agriculture?"

Several unifying themes evolved out of the discussions. In fact, the focus group discussions are replete with converging ideas and concerns about the countryside and how agricultural pursuits influence the working landscape. The overriding consideration in both focus groups dealt very directly with the economic circumstances confronting the farm community. Economic pressures, both in the Northeast U.S. and in England, are increasingly putting farming and farm businesses at risk. These economic pressures appear to be keenly felt in the nonfarm community as well. In both countries, well-defined lines of communications are being used to inform the wider public of the economic footing for food production. This means that considerable information is shared on the cost and return relationships confronting the industry and the families involved with it.

To a degree, the relationship between farm economic decline and the appearance and vibrancy of the rural landscape is reasonably well understood. Focus group participants clearly spelled out the necessity of maintaining a working landscape where active crop and pasture use blends with other, more passive, open space uses. Although rural land exchanges are occurring on entirely different scales in New York and the Northeast compared to England, both focus groups were very attentive to a series of landscape vibrancy issues. Not the least of these is the visual dimension. In New York and elsewhere very substantial acreages once used for crop or pasture purposes have been removed from active farm use. This land has reverted to natural forest cover, often erasing the footprint of early European immigration and settlement for farming pursuits. European rural farming landscapes, of course, are hundreds of years older, but the core theme remains--both focus groups agreed that landscape changes entail movements in social and economic values surrounding farming and farm businesses that cannot be monetized. Consequently, local officials in both settings saw the need to help farmers sustain their landscape management profitably.

In both settings, farmers seemed comfortable relying on internal sources of knowledge while nonfarm groups spoke of the importance of seeking answers to key questions. A cross-section of participants in both areas spoke about the importance of sustaining agriculture into the future to protect the area's landscape qualities. However, all expressed concerns about how to do that given on-going economic and public policy challenges. All agreed that individual landowners were unlikely candidates for marshaling the economic resources needed for sustaining a farming landscape. On the other hand, both focus groups expressed equally incisive reservations about the size and accessibility of the public purse for maintaining farming landscapes. It was pointed out that, in both the U.K. and the U.S., an increasing share of public support for active agriculture is turning to environmental concerns and away from direct supply control/income maintenance programs. However, these increases remain only a tiny fraction of all farm program efforts. All focus group participants were ambivalent about the likelihood of substantive future public support to ameliorate the impact of structural change in agriculture on the rural landscape.

Both focus groups were asked to suggest a way forward on landscape issues in a world of less than adequate funding and, consequently, too few resources to induce new or maintain desirable old behaviors by private land managers/owners on

a large scale. Here, important distinctions were also noted between the two discussions ranging from divergent views held by certain interests to different alignments among stakeholders about countryside management issues. In the HW, a much wider set of community interests understand and discuss the land management challenges farmers face. In the HW, farmers are also out front articulating the role they play in managing the countryside and the need for the community to recognize that heritage. Contrary to SLW, High Weald nonfarming interests were the strongest advocates for better informing the public about food consumer and countryside issues. In fact, all SLW interests recognized that a worsening disconnect exists between farming, farmers, and the wider community. HW interests did not mention this as a concern though farmers and agency participants sought better understanding about what communities want. All SLW focus group representatives with the exception of the farmers spoke of the need for solid action, improved dialogue, and better linkages as the way to create a new vision for the area. In the HW, most groups represented spoke directly about the need to align agri-environmental management to community (public) preferences.

> **"I think we are confusing two visions. One to sustain farmers; the other to sustain the landscape and countryside."**
> HW Landowner

> **"Start the discussion small and let it grow out."**
> SLW NGO Member

For educators and the research community, we infer from this study that efforts to engage organizational leaders, farmers, and elected officials must somehow be redoubled. The dialogue over farming and its presence in the rural landscape must be more extensive and more textured to shed more light on all the benefits that might come from forums which enrich the dialogue about the future of the areas. Linkages between the farm community and other countryside interests must be strengthened. Communities must be encouraged to look for ways to develop an integrated, shared vision for the future of the rural landscape. Interest in the countryside must be parsed out among multiple organizations, units of government, and several categories of landowners to assist in realizing the promise of a vibrant, commercial agriculture as a key constituent part of countryside management.

> **"We need to target problems and marshall the resources we already have."**
> SLW NGO Member

For agricultural technical providers, we encourage a full examination of the Integrated Farm Assessment (HWLMI) and Whole Farm Planning (SLWAP) program tools utilized in these two area-based programs and discussed by focus group participants. Each has their distinct features and strengths and may have application across the two case situations. In addition, we propose that agri-environmental program managers in each of the areas explore implementing landowner practices so as to deliver wider landscape benefits as discussed in the Curry Report (U.K. Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food, 2002).

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Appendix A

IMPACTS OF CHANGING AGRI-ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ON COUNTRYSIDE CONSERVATION

High Weald Focus Group
The Star and Eagle Pub,
Goudhurst, E. Sussex
May 9, 2002

♣Please take a few minutes to complete this brief questionnaire. Bring it along to our Focus Group session on the 9th. Thank you!♣

1. You are *(please circle ALL that apply):*

1	**Government employee**	**4**	**Non-governmental organization staff**
2	**Educator**	**5**	**Elected/appointed public official**
3	**Farmer/producer**	**6**	**Other *(Please specify.)***

_____

2. In your opinion, to what extent are the following a problem for protecting the countryside in the High Weald *(please circle ONE response for each type of challenge)?*

	A problem no one can solve	A big problem	A slight problem	Not a problem
Surface water quality	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Groundwater quality	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Unchecked population growth	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Untimely and/or unplanned conversions of farmland to developed uses	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Loss of biodiversity	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Reduced wildlife habitat	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Diminished quality of scenic viewsheds	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Limited public access	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Unfavorable economic prospects for commodity agriculture	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**

3. How could countryside agencies and local government play a more proactive role in developing/ distributing information and assistance for areas you have identified as ***"A big problem"*** (question 2 above)?

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4. Please indicate how important each of the following sources of information are for informing your concerns about agriculture and the countryside *(circle one number per source):*

	Very Important	Somewhat important	Not at all important	No opinion
CA/DEFRA	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
NYS-DAM	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
County/city/town govt.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
University/academia	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Countryside Programs (e.g. AONB, LMI, FWAG)	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Non-profit organizations	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Trade journals/publications	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Producers/growers	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**

5. Which, if any, of the following subjects can be viewed as information opportunities for reaching landowners and policymakers in the High Weald?

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not at all important	No opinion
Countryside planning	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Tourism development	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Best management practices.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Public funding for landscape management on farms	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Public access and rights-of-ways	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Wildlife/habitat management	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Biodivesity preservation	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Farm-based economic development	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**