

**FARMERS, FARMING & CHANGE:
A SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS**

Susan Guerrier

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Institute of Social Psychology
London School of Economics and Political Science
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DECLARATION

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Signed:..........

Susan Guerrier
18 September 2006

ABSTRACT

The UK farming industry is in the midst of rapid change: policy change, decoupling support payments from production; social change, affecting the food consumers buy and from where they buy it; greater awareness of issues of food safety and animal welfare; and greater concern about matters of environmental protection and countryside access. Farmers find such change problematic. To understand how change is being experienced and understood in the farming industry three empirical studies were undertaken: semi-structured interviews with farmers; narrative interviews with others in the agricultural public sphere; and a content analysis of *Farmers Weekly*, circulating in the agricultural industry, and *The Times*, circulating among the general public. Analysis was qualitative, using thematic and content analysis and incorporating the computer programmes ALCESTE and NVIVO. The results indicate that change is problematic for 3 reasons. Firstly, farmers' identity and self-esteem as producers are being challenged. Secondly, farmers are receiving contradictory messages as to what their role should be. Thirdly, government involvement in the farming industry has created a 'learned helplessness' which impedes farmers' agency to cope with change. The findings demonstrate the use of social representations theory in an applied social setting. They suggest that the structural approach places too much emphasis on the stability of the core of a representation. Observations made during the research are used to argue for a social psychology of change which will enable the discipline to become more adept at investigating and addressing the problems of contemporary society.

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Chapter 1

UK FARMERS, FARMING & CHANGE

“...farming is at the heart of our society, our economy and our cultural heritage. It’s about people, food, landscape and the environment. It touches every member of society every day...farming is important not just for the countryside but for the whole country...”

These are the words of the Rt.Hon David Miliband, MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, speaking at the Royal Agricultural Show, 03 July, 2006. He went on to note that “...many farmers feel undervalued and unappreciated by society – even victimised...”. This thesis seeks to understand why farmers feel like that.

When the project started, in April 2002, farming in the UK was just recovering from a serious epidemic of foot & mouth disease. 2026 premises were infected and, in the contiguous cull with which the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (defra) sought to control the infection, 6.5million animals were slaughtered at a cost to government estimated at £2.7billion. Foot & mouth disease was first diagnosed in February 2001 and followed another animal disease problem, Bovine Spongiform Encepholopathy (BSE, commonly known as ‘mad cow disease’) which, because of likely links to a fatal human condition, had resulted in a loss of confidence in home produced beef and a shutting off of export markets for it. With farmers giving up farming, farmworkers leaving the industry and very poor prices for livestock and cereals, there was a very real sense of crisis in the industry. By mid 2003 the situation had improved somewhat. Those whose farming business was tenuous had left the industry. Prices improved. The mid-term review of the common agricultural policy provided more certainty about the future of farming support. But that still left the farming industry in a state of change. How this change was affecting those still in farming, and how

change was influencing the way farmers' perceived themselves and their industry, provided a real opportunity to consider a very real feature of human life – change.

This introductory chapter provides the context of the study. There are six sections. The first looks at recent change in the UK farming industry. The second describes some of the problems for farmers resulting from that change. Section three details my research perspective and research objectives. Section four provides the historical background to current change. In section five the object of the study, UK farmers and farming, is conceptualised. The sixth and final section concludes with an overview of the remainder of the thesis.

1.1 The Scene of Change

Statistics from the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Scottish Executive show there to be a total of 247,000 holdings (farms in the UK). Together they account for more than 16 million hectares of farmed land. The way the statistics have been recorded from the annual agricultural and horticultural census has changed over time but the changing structure of agriculture in England can be seen when comparing the 167,000 holdings today with the 317,640 holdings in 1950. Similar changes can be seen in the number of people working on the land. Figures for England show there to have been 687,717 in 1950 compared to some 300,000 today. Table 1, overleaf, provides key statistics illustrating change, in particular a decline in the industry's contribution to the national economy, in the agricultural workforce and in the prices producers receive for their products, at the same time as the cost of agricultural inputs and the overall productivity of the industry increases.

Table 1: UK food & farming figures (source: defra)

	Average 1994-96	2005
Agriculture's contribution to total economy gva, (current prices, £m)	9,798	5,238
Workforce in agriculture (all paid labour full & part-time, thousand persons)	621	541
Producer prices for agricultural products (2000=100)	134	109
Prices of agricultural inputs (2000=100)	104	115
Productivity index (2000=100)	91	106

Today UK farming contributes £6.6 billion annually to the economy, uses some 75% of the land area and directly employs around half a million people. However it is estimated that 60,000 people have left the industry over the last three years and employment rates are falling at some 4% pa. (defra).

The government (defra) has initiated a number of investigations into the industry. In 2000, "Our Countryside: The Future – A Fair Deal for Rural England"; 2001, The Curry Report (The Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food); 2003, A Rural Delivery Review, which elicited views on rural delivery arrangements in England from stakeholder bodies, as well as individuals who are real or potential customers and beneficiaries of the government funded rural products and services. That farming was in crisis was well recognised in these government reviews: "...*Farming is in crisis, affecting many related businesses ...*", (Our Countryside Report); the "...*crisis in farming...*", (the Curry Report). In the wider community too a crisis in farming was recognised with press articles (e.g. "*Why the countryside is angry*", (Economist, 21.09.02); "*Selling the farm*", (Prospect, 03.02); "*No-one wants to be a farmer any more*", (Daily Telegraph, 18.02.03); "*Farming in crisis as thousands quit*", (Guardian, 25.03.03) and with books published such as "*The Death of British Agriculture*" (North, 2001) and "*The End of British Farming*" (O'Hagan, 2001).

The decline in farm incomes which resulted from farmers receiving less from their outputs whilst having to pay more for their inputs was a major contributory factor to the crisis in agriculture but the Curry report lists others: the strength of the pound which had the effect of reducing the value of the European subsidy payments which were calculated in euros (this has now somewhat reversed, but was an element of reduced farm incomes in 2000/2001); the fragmented nature of the farming industry which hindered its consolidation compared to those industries that supply it and those which it supplies; and the fall in world food prices which added further financial pressures. The problem is complex and embedded within the economic and trading situation in Europe and the wider world food market. The economics of the situation of course frame the problems that farmers are facing, but they are not the topic of this thesis. Behind the financial consequences lies change, particularly social change among the consumers who buy food. This has resulted in new shopping patterns, new dynamics in the marketplace, new expectations about the food consumers' buy and change in the legislative framework governing agricultural practice.

1.2 The Problems of Change for Farmers

Psychology teaches us of the human need to make sense of and understand our world. Change, in challenging stability, may threaten that understanding and thus resistance to change might be seen as a fundamental human condition. The pace of change is a factor here. Change in the physical world, as the universe ages, for example, may be extremely slow; environmental change in the biological world less slow, but still slow in human conceptual terms. Changes in society are superficial in time terms when compared to changes in the physical world, but they may be deep-seated in structural terms, and it is usually the change component that is of most interest when it comes to social matters, (Steuer, 2003). Giddens (1991) argues that change in this modern era

is intrinsically connected to globalising influences and that “...*the sheer sense of being caught up in massive waves of global transformation is perturbing.....it reaches through to the very grounds of individual activity and the constitution of the self.*” (pp 183/184). He points out that this “*juggernaught-like nature of modernity*” is one explanation why, today, crisis becomes normalised.

Change is not new for farmers. The Enclosures Acts and the introduction of rotation systems to improve soil fertility in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were the foundation of farming practice as we know it today, but the Swing Riots of 1830, where a number of farmworkers who smashed the newly introduced threshing machines were hung, is a good example of initial resistance to new technologies, eventually accommodated. The agricultural industry has experienced change as much as any other industry and there are many accounts of it from the perspectives of sociology, anthropology and geography (Benvenuti, 1962; Jervell, 1999; Johnsen, 2003, Potter, 1986; Robinson, 1990, Unwin, 1985). What is new today, and accords with Giddens (1991) account of change, is the speed of change. For UK farmers it has been described as a crisis because, whilst change is continuous, crisis occurs when the rate of change accelerates to the point where individuals or groups can no longer, routinely, absorb its effects. Change will thus become crisis at different points for different individuals, or groups, but at that critical point it poses a severe threat not only to the physical and economic aspects of day-to-day life, but also to individuals' sense of self.

Change in the UK farming industry today is indeed posing a threat for many farmers and, as the statistics show, many farmers and farm workers have and are leaving the industry. In the course of my research I have spoken to many farmers and those involved in the farming industry. I have attended conferences, agricultural shows, meetings of suppliers with supermarkets and farmers' discussion groups. From those I have spoken to at these events, and

from reading the press which serves the agricultural industry, the current of opinion among farmers is certainly one of feeling unappreciated and undervalued. This arises from two aspects of social change. The first is the increasing urbanisation of the population. The consequence is a feeling of exclusion from decision making processes which affect farmers' lifestyles and livelihoods. The second aspect of social change concerns consumers' shopping habits and expectations about food. This has led to farmers' feeling unfairly treated by the supermarkets who command the retail food market.

1.2.1 Exclusion from Decision Making & Centres of Power

Farmers believe that there is a lack of understanding about farmers and farming among those outside the industry. At the Royal Welsh Show in 2004, for example, a sheep farmer from Powys described how a defra employee, in response to the farmer's concern that movement restrictions meant that she could not move her ram to the ewes to get them in-lamb, had said, "*...well if you can't move the tup leave them out of lamb for a year or get rid of them and get more next year...*" It illustrates a complete lack of understanding by the administrator of the practicalities and economics of sheep production. Two other examples make the point. The first concerns pig farmers who produce weaners (young pigs) for selling on to the farmers to fatten for the production of pork and bacon. An official of the National Pig Association (NPA), the professional body representing pig farmers in the UK, explained that UK weaner producers must now ear tag every animal. This not only adds to the cost of production, but also the stress on the young animals renders them more liable to illness and infection which would lower the weaner producers' returns. The farmers who buy the weaners know the farms from which they buy them, and buy them in groups. For traceability then, individual tagging is unnecessary. The civil servants who set up and administer the regulations do not understand this, according to the NPA

source. The second example of the lack of understanding by those who frame the legislation for the practical farmer concerns the disposal of fallen (dead) stock. That animals occasionally die on farm is a fact of life and, for years, animal carcasses that need to be disposed of have, where other means of disposal such as incineration are impractical, either been collected by the local hunt to feed the hounds or buried. Although restricted hunting continues, there is the potential, under the hunting with dogs legislation, for the number of hounds requiring feed to decline sharply. At the same time there is new legislation which precludes farmers from burying fallen stock. For a hill sheep farmer, with a dead ewe some miles from the farmstead, the cost of retrieving the carcass and taking it to a central point for incineration will further reduce low returns.

These practical examples illustrate why farmers feel isolated from the urban majority and those who interpret directives from Brussels without, they believe, knowledge of farming practice. The feeling of exclusion has serious consequences for their social inclusion, fulfilment and for social cohesion. This was articulated when, in September 2002, more than 400,000 people, who felt that their way of life was under threat, demonstrated in London under the banner of the Countryside Alliance, a loose-knit grouping of those committed to fight the proposed Parliamentary abolition of fox-hunting and others who wished to draw attention to countryside concerns such as lack of services, employment, and the cost of housing. Their slogan "*listen to us*", reflected their feeling of exclusion and of frustration that their voice did not seem to be being heard by those in power. Those on the march were not all farmers but it was significant for UK farmers to demonstrate, something we have heard about in France, where farmers take to the streets with their tractors and farm-yard manure in order to make their voice heard – but which is a new phenomena here in the UK.

1.2.2 Change in the Structure of the Markets Farmers' Serve

The second issue at the heart of farmers' feeling of exclusion was summed up by a husband and wife team at the Royal Welsh Show in 2004, showing their pedigree Welsh Black cattle, "...change has decimated businesses and now it is decimating communities. It can all be traced back to the supermarkets. Big business is the problem..."

The perceived problem of big business, in particular the supermarkets, results from the concentration of power among the multiple retailers. With only four major multiples now accounting for more than 80% of consumer food purchases popular belief is that retailers exert undue pressure on a large number of small producers to push down farm-gate prices. At the same time these retailers are perceived as adding unacceptable mark-ups on products, or purchasing them from overseas suppliers who are not subject to the same welfare and food safety legislation with which UK producers have to comply. Despite the conclusion of a Competition Commission Report (Supermarkets: A report on the supply of groceries from multiple stores in the United Kingdom, 2000) that "...overall, excessive prices are not being charged, nor excessive profits earned...", the report noted "... a climate of apprehension among many suppliers in their (the multiples) relationship with the main parties..."

Drawing attention to this climate of apprehension among farm suppliers to the multiple retailers has been the strategy of FARM, a newly formed pro-farmer pressure group. In April 2003 FARM launched a campaign encouraging shoppers to lobby supermarket management about the alleged poor deal on offer to UK farmers with headlines such as: "*Slashed! Prices paid to farmers,*" and, "*Who's creaming it? Farmers paid 9p a pint. Shopper pays...?*" To overcome feelings of frustration about their falling income, and the perception that this is due to the power of the supermarkets some farmers have, and are threatening further, blockades of food distribution centres and other direct

action. A campaigning group, Farmers For Action, orchestrates these blockades.

1.2.3 The Contested Nature of Land

With change a permanent feature of modern life the question must be asked: why does change in the farming industry need to be considered? Many other industries like textiles, mining and shipbuilding have also gone through tremendous change in this modern era. What makes farming special? I believe that the factor which makes farming special is its relationship with the land. Social change has led to a mixed view of the land – who owns it, what it is for, who should have access to it and so on. This diversity brings a third problem for farmers in the face of change, how to resolve the issue of land as landscape and/or land as a resource for food production.

UK farming is physically widespread; it covers almost three-quarters of the land mass of the UK. The value of land, farming's asset base, is strong, even at this time of low farm incomes, driven by an overpopulated island and farmers themselves who continue to pay high prices for more land. 50% of farmland purchase is still by farmers. But many of the British public, despite being mainly urban-based, still seem to have an emotional tie to the land, albeit an idealised one. Land is the source of the landscape, which could be seen as belonging to everyone. Add to this the subsidised nature of the farming industry, recipient of £3billion of public funds annually, and one can see the basis of the contested nature of land.

The extent of the contestation of land use can be seen in Table 2, overleaf. This comprises a list of the main organisations and authorities with interests in the land. It was sourced from the list of consultation responses to The Curry Commission.

Table 2: The contested nature of land: some organisations & authorities with interests

Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
British Tourist Authority
Butterfly conservation
Council for the Protection of Rural England
Country Land & Business Association
Countryside Agency
Cycle Touring & Countryside
English Heritage
English Nature
Environment Agency
Family Farmers' Association
Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group
Forestry Commission
Friends of the Earth
Game Conservancy Trust
Greenpeace
National Parks Associations
National Trust
Ramblers' Association
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Rural & Regional Development Agencies
Rural District Councils
Woodland Trust
World Wildlife Fund

The use of land in the production of food charges it with basic emotions. We must eat to live. But since man moved from hunter gathering to living in settlements with a recognisable agriculture, food has gained an importance beyond homeostasis. It plays a special role in national cultures, is symbolic in certain religious ceremonial – Christianity's Last Supper or Judaism's Passover for example, and plays a central part in social intercourse in all societies.

Food has been considered in the social sciences at a number of different levels: systems, structures and culture (Goody, 1982). MacClancy (1992) recounts NASA's realisation that sucking tubes of pureed foods in orbit, whilst providing nutriment, neglected the human need to enjoy the taste, smell and mouthfeel of food as well as the symbolic experience of sharing food. I understand that today astronauts eat wholefood, sitting down at a table

together. We see here both the unconscious need for food as a source of nourishment and the emotional imperative of eating together. Jovchelovitch & Gervais (1999) illustrate this further with their observation of food rituals as a vehicle for representations of health and illness.

The land that is worked is a vital resource for farmers. The land, its location and the working of it, is an important part of farmers' identities. But land has an iconic status beyond that of a production resource or a basis for identity. It is permeated with social values – the landowner, the peasant, the yeoman farmer. Land has political and ideological resonance which, today, is fuelling the debate on what is wanted of the land. There is the power dimension of whose land it is. Land is the source of inspiration for artists and poets. Its appearance, the look of the countryside, not only gives pleasure but also has become symbolic of rural England. Tied to this is the notion of the family farm.

In its campaigning literature the lobbying group FARM states, “...*The closure of each ordinary family farm is a nail in the coffin of the British countryside.*” Thompson et al (1994) contend that the payments and subsidies to farmers that are part of farm policy are defended by some on the grounds that preserving the family farmer is a valid goal for public policy (p232). They cite the writings of Thomas Jefferson as, perhaps, the basis for what they term “*agrarian populism*”. For example, Jefferson writes:

“...Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens. They are the most vigorous, the most independent, the most virtuous, and they are tied to their country and wedded to its liberty and interests by the most lasting bonds.” (Jefferson, 1795, p818 quoted by Thompson et al, 1994, p245.)

Thompson et al argue that Jefferson's sentiments may have more to do with gaining support from the landowners who, at that time, were the farmers

themselves rather than aristocratic landlords. They point to more recent writings of Harold Breimyer, an agricultural economist, and Jim Hightower, a politician. Both suggest that small family farms provide an opportunity for everyone to work for themselves with little formal training, of offering rare entrepreneurial opportunities to all. According to this argument the emotion attached to the notion of the small family farm might be seen as being built on a moral and political legitimacy.

The emotive nature of representations of the family farm could be due to the rapid social changes which followed the Industrial Revolution, of the mass movement of people from the countryside to the town. According to Bonner (1997) this led to questions of what constituted a better way of life, rural or urban. Bonner (ibid) points to Weber's notion that the sociological significance of a rural society is not that it is a way of life distinct from city life, but rather that it has the ability to sustain a culture other than the capitalism that is a feature of city life (p32). But despite this lack of definable difference there is a generally accepted view that the rural setting is a better setting than the town to raise a family. Bonner cites research showing that 80.9% of rural respondents believed that a rural setting was a better place to raise a family (than the local city) compared to 20.4% of those in the city believing that to be a better place to raise a family than a smaller rural centre. But certainly there is a notion among the general public of a rural idyll (Halfacree, 1995; Houlton & Short, 1995; McLaughlin, 1986; Phillips, Fish & Agg, 2001).

Whatever the basis for an emotional view of the family farm and its link to the land, two recent surveys indicate the concern of the general public. A telephone survey in 2004 by the Institute of Grocery Distribution found that among 1,004 adults, representative of the population, 90% believed it to be important that Britain remain a farming nation. The findings were age related

however, with 23% of 18-24 year-olds thinking it very important that we retain our farming base rising to 69% of 65+ year-olds. And 2,400 of nearly 7,000 respondents in a survey conducted by the Campaign to Protect Rural England (2004) indicated that the future of working farms was their top rural concern. Hall et al (2004), however, in a meta-review of evidence and methods about what the public wants from agriculture and the countryside, conclude that *“Existing studies address public preferences in a very partial way and no statistically robust UK study has attempted to evaluate public preferences from scratch....(they) have typically evaluated a feature or several features of some form of countryside designation.”* But Hall et al (ibid) do point out that such evidence as there is suggests that, *“... the public see a definite role for farming as an intrinsically valued provider of rural environmental public goods.”* (p223).

A final point about the special nature of the land results from the economic aspects of food production. Behind the original subsidy system in the UK lay government concern for the security of food supply. This is true too for other nations, many of whom support their farmers with direct production and export subsidies and deter competitive trade with import tariffs. But subsidies and tariffs create a distortion in international trade. One effect is bad for consumers since the consequence of the protectionist system is to keep food costs (in the UK) higher than would be the case if trade were unencumbered. A second effect is bad for developing nations whose low cost food production is effectively barred from this country. These matters are the concern of the World Trade Organisation which deals with the global rules of trade between nations. The organisation came into being after the Uruguay Round of talks on the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (1986-1994). Agriculture was included in the talks from 2001, at the start of the Doha round of talks. Decisions on freeing the world food market stalled at Ministerial talks in Cancun, Mexico. They failed because developing countries were unhappy

about the protectionism for agricultural production which many of the developed countries would not relinquish. More recently, in Geneva, European countries have offered to end export subsidies to their farmers, raising the possibility that the Doha round can be revived. The point here is the importance of agriculture and food trade internationally: not only because of its revenue potential for UK agriculture; not only because of its income generating potential for developing countries, but also because of its potential to affect UK consumers. They may feel that they are being doubly penalised for supporting British farmers: firstly by funding the subsidy system through taxation and, secondly, by paying more for certain food products than might be the case were food trade free.

It is the balance of these conflicting elements, the emotion which accompanies attitudes to the land and those who work in it, which makes farming a somewhat different industry to others and contributes to farmers' problems in the face of change.

1.3 Research Perspective and Research Objectives

Farmers and the institutions of the agricultural industry are doing much to try and rectify the perceived problems. On-going research at many of the universities and colleges with agricultural studies as part of their curriculum, produce considerable data relating to farm economics, production costings, acreage returns and so forth. The studies initiated by government, mentioned above, do consider the farming industry as a whole, but within a rural development paradigm (Ploeg et al, 2000). So is there a need for yet more research? Not addressed to date are the social psychological consequences of change: how farmers themselves are experiencing change; how it is affecting their notions of identity and how change in farming is creating new representations of farmers and farming and new issues of debate about the

land that is farmed. This is the area on which my research will focus and which gives rise to my research question:

Why is change difficult for UK farmers?

The perspective from which I consider farmers, farming and change is that of social psychology. Social psychology as a discipline focuses on the tensions which arise between individuals and society, particularly with social forms and processes, with contexts and content and with meaning and behaviour, all of which are elements in the way farmers are experiencing change. Within the perspective of social psychology the conceptual tool I use is the theory of social representations (Moscovici, 1984).

Social representations theory is grounded in Moscovici's (1961) thesis which investigated how a novel concept (psychoanalysis) was disseminated among the general public by the media. The new concept was communicated in a different way by different media, resulting in different representations of the object in different sectors of the public. The theory proposed the constructive way in which society creates its broad belief systems, emerging from interaction between individual attitudes and the visual and textual images circulating in that particular society. The mix generates an image, or series of related images, which constitute a common sense theory of the world shared by the society in which it circulates. These images are used both as a basis for evaluation and to inform individual attitudes. Social representations have been described as "*...constellations of beliefs, social practices and shared knowledge that exist as much in the minds of individuals as in the fabric of society*", (Gervais et al, 1999), and as arising in "*...the spaces of inter-subjective reality (which are) not the products of purely individual minds, even though they find expression in individual minds*", (Jovchelovitch, 1996).

The theory of social representations is particularly relevant for an analysis of farmers, farming and change for three reasons. Firstly, because social representations arise, circulate and are transformed in the interactive space between individuals and others. It is in this space that the problems which UK farmers are facing arise; where individual farmers meet a society itself undergoing rapid change and so looking for different things from UK farmers and farming than has been the case hitherto. Farmers' are having to understand new market situations, new legislative frameworks and new concerns about food safety, animal welfare and care for the environment. In doing so their representations of themselves as farmers are being renegotiated. In familiarizing themselves with these new situations they are creating new social representations (Philogene, 2002). This illustrates the second reason why social representation theory is an ideal tool to investigate farmers, farming and change. It is a theory which enables us to both observe how representations are produced and how they function. It will enable me to both identify the representations of change in the farming community and to understand how those representations are enabling that group to adjust to change.

A third reason why the theory of social representations is relevant to farmers, farming and change is because the theory was an attempt to repatriate common sense – the view of the man in the street – as of equal validity to other forms of knowledge. The case of farmers at a time of change is an ideal example. On the one hand farmers feel themselves forced into difficult situations by factors outside their control. Their voice, the voice of 'ordinary' practising farmers who want to let people know their side of the story is, they claim, largely unheard, or heard only through the mouths of those prepared to take direction action such as Farmers for Action, or the single issue pressure groups like FARM, whose major concern is the demise of the "traditional" family farm and the power of the supermarkets.

My research is intended to have both practical and theoretical outcomes. At a practical level, by identifying and understanding how farmers represent change, I will better understand how they are experiencing it, how this maps on to their feelings of social exclusion, how it is challenging their identities as farmers and how this is informing their relationships and practices. It will provide an explanation of how a threatened group, farmers, can come to understand the challenges, constraints and opportunities facing its common project, farming. This, in turn, might help to provide information for policy makers, regionally, nationally and, potentially, at a European level, in their considerations about support for farmers at this time of change. Socially it will provide pointers which might reduce the feeling of exclusion felt by an important part of the rural community, thus promoting social cohesion. At a more detailed level those institutions which work within the agricultural sector – government, non-governmental organisations such as the Farmers' Unions and the levy boards, will be able to reconsider their approach to farmers and the efficacy of their existing communications with them.

At a theoretical level I hope my research will have two outcomes. The first relates to change. Change has been the focus of a considerable amount of investigation within the social sciences. Anthropologists record change looking at whole communities; economists consider change within markets and provide explanations and theories about such change; political science looks at government and democracy so change within political and law-making institutions and the changes that these groupings can bring about are the focus here; the structures and dynamics of societies are the domain of sociology and in this post modern era change is a major feature. But although it has been part of social psychological investigation, attitude change for example or the need to understand and explain a social phenomena like racism, the fifth social science (Steuer, 2003), social psychology, seems to have remained on the sidelines with respect to change. Moscovici did propose a theory of social change based on the notion that the resistance of an active

minority is the spur to conflict resolution and subsequent change. But within the domain of social psychology, the space of mediation which lies between individuals, other individuals or groups, and their context, society or environment, the phenomenon of change has been largely neglected. Social representations theory, because it sees the interaction between the individual and the other holistically, provides an ideal basis from which to consider a social psychology of change: how change is encountered, resisted, understood and experienced, how accommodation and assimilation adjust for change and its consequences, how change affects social identity, how social realities are renegotiated as a result of change and who wins or loses in the process. UK farmers, and the farming industry they comprise, are ideal objects for this research. Here we have farmers, individual yet part of a community, with a shared social identity, operating in a public sphere and in the midst of rapid economic, social and policy change. The first theoretical outcome of my research is therefore a contribution to a social psychology of change.

The second theoretical outcome of my research relates to social representations theory. I have explained why I see the theory as a relevant tool for investigating why farmers find change difficult. But the theory is not without critics. The empirical studies will, I hope, provide material to contribute to the debate, answer some of its critics and demonstrate the theory's applicability for studying social phenomena; its usefulness for explanation and its ability to capture meaning from dynamic situations.

1.4 From Hunter-Gatherers, Through the Golden Age of British Farming, to Farmers in Crisis: a Historical Précis

My research focuses on a current problem but the sequences that led up to this situation, the historical context, are of course a necessary guide to interpretation (Spink, 1993). Agriculture is one of the oldest occupations in history. Agricultural practices and structures have been central to human activity for most of man's recorded existence generally thought, because of

archaeological evidence of cultivation, to have started some 10,000 years ago in the Middle East. But it has been argued that a proclivity to manipulate the environment for their own advantage was evident in the early history of modern man, around 40,000 years ago (Tudge, 1998). In early forms of human civilization, the provision of food was a task that filled most daylight hours for most of the population. It is only in very recent centuries, in the industrialised West, that the combination of the industrial revolution and the advances of geneticists and agricultural engineers have led to large urban populations being fed by a minority of farmers, themselves remote from the towns and cities. Today, on a world view, agriculture is still the largest industry. In the developing world the practice of subsistence and near-subsistence agriculture still continues. For example, more than one third of the 1.5 billion population of China still work the land.

In Britain the Corn Laws, 1815, precluded the import of foreign corn until domestic corn reached a certain price (80 shillings per quarter). The laws were designed to preserve the abnormally high profits which farmers enjoyed during the Napoleonic war years, but they had the effect of raising food prices for the working classes in the towns. The repeal of these laws (1846), which allowed corn to be imported into the UK from anywhere at any price, saw farm prices in the United Kingdom fall dramatically. At the same time conquests of Empire and the British appetite for international trade in the nineteenth century opened up vast tracts of previously unfarmed land, from the pampas of South America to the grasslands of Australia and New Zealand. Successive UK governments took the opportunity to feed the industrial workers of Britain from these new cheap protein sources – and the UK urban population in the early years of the twentieth century flourished on this high quality and inexpensive diet. Wages remained competitive, industrial exports grew. A new and economically powerful virtuous circle was established. It was however a circle that excluded Britain's farmers.

Throughout the first thirty years of the twentieth century UK (and European) farm-prices fell to unprecedented lows. Government intervention to support agriculture was negligible, based on the principles of free trade that Britain had invented and espoused with great success in the world industrial sector. As farm prices fell, so too did farm incomes and the rent that farmers could afford. Large rural communities throughout the United Kingdom (and also throughout nearby Europe) fell into extreme poverty. Land was not worth tending and reverted to scrub. Rents were un-collectable on the sixty percent of farm land belonging to the Crown, the church and other major landowners. The preoccupation of the majority of tenant or working farmers owning their land became the provision of sufficient food to support their family.

Meanwhile, on an international level, farming technology was advancing apace. The invention of the modern tractor, plough, combine harvester and associated mechanical advances in the first half of the twentieth century made astonishing gains in efficiency possible. Agronomists developed chemical fertilisers and pesticides that revolutionised the hand-work in the fields that had been unchanged for centuries. The new grass ranchers of the Empire were quick to capitalize on these advances and force prices ever lower, leading to the long-term decline of domestic farming profitability. Unable to match low world prices and unable to maintain the minimum level of investment required to run farming businesses, wide tracts of fertile land in Britain returned to scrub – and many farms lay empty and unworked.

World War II changed the status of British farming. Cut off from the newly established food supply lines of the Empire and South America the UK faced the very real prospect of starvation. The UK government moved to encourage food production. Teams of local War Agricultural Committees (WarAgs) were set up and given legal powers to bring land back into cultivation. WarAgs determined what crops should be grown where. The government created statutory marketing boards for many commodities, especially milk and meat.

Minimum prices were legally fixed based on cost of production. National food security became a central tenet of UK national policy, and was to remain so for another fifty years. Successive UK governments gave UK food (and thus UK farmers) preference, and intervened in the market to ensure that this was so. British farmers metamorphosed from a marginal group with subsistence incomes and no national presence to a proud corps of yeoman farmers whose valiant efforts at the heart of British society brought us through our darkest hours and on to victory.

From a situation of little government intervention in farming practice, allowing imports to ensure that the urban work force enjoyed cheap food from world markets, UK government over-turned the free-market approach that had lasted for decades. Farmers were told what to produce and when to produce it, and were guaranteed prices that kept even the inefficient in business. For the efficient the government prices were highly rewarding. The Cold War ensured that food security remained high on the national agenda. Farmers became used to being valued by the State, being paid by the State, and being guaranteed a very satisfactory income. UK farming was experiencing its golden years.

The memory of war and its aftermath was beginning to fade when the UK acceded to the European Community in 1973. A new imperative began to drive regional policy to which the UK, by treaty, was bound to subscribe. With France in the lead, the more agrarian countries of Europe, the majority in the EU, established a public policy, a common agricultural policy, that set the conservation of their rural communities as a paramount public policy objective. To ensure this the French inspired system of minimum guaranteed payments for major agricultural commodities was established as central community policy, supported by the concept of the state intervening to maintain prices within the EU tariff walls.

Today, after fifty years of peace and prosperity, the launch of the European common market and the continual growth of global markets, the structure of market intervention and guaranteed prices has been dismantled. Urban suspicion about some farming practices is eroding the regard with which the yeoman farmers of Britain were held during the post Second World War years. Urban voters are questioning the level of support farmers receive, essentially from urban tax-payers. ("*Taxpayers are giving huge subsidies for a farming policy that is serving no one well....*", Guardian, 30.01.03; "*In return for the billions spent in farm subsidies, taxpayers are rewarded with a wrecked countryside...*", Times, 24.05.01). The protected and admired position of UK farmers is being diminished. The UK farmer although rewarded for public goods such as care for the environment is now in an un-supported marketplace. Prices have once more begun their drift down toward world-market levels.

For consumers increasing levels of income and education among urban populations in the developed nations have begun to generate a more widespread interest in how farmers treat the land and animals in their care. Standards of health and wholesomeness for agricultural products and processes are ratcheted ever higher and farmers must comply with increasing legislative requirements. Modern retailing and high-speed chilled distribution services make fresh, economic and high quality food from around the world available to urban populations where and wherever modern consumers would like them. Retail concentration has led to imbalances between the farmer and the trading power (in the UK) of just four multiple retailers. The habit of farmer commercial co-operation, deeply embedded in our European neighbours, has never attracted British farmers. Consequently trading structures that would better balance the current disproportion have been slow to develop.

The public policy maker, principally in Brussels, now looks to landscape and environmental conservation as the major public good to be obtained from the agricultural sector. Conservation will be funded by government, but many farmers will have difficulty adjusting to the concept of being "park-keepers" when only a few decades ago they were national heroes. But, at the same time as the amount of direct production subsidy coming from government is reducing, the legislative framework within which UK farmers must operate, constituted by the directives of the EU applied regionally, is ever more complex, whether in connection with agricultural production and its effect on the environment, animal welfare or food safety. Some farmers are facing change in a dynamic way, turning to organic farming and farmers markets as a way to meet consumer concerns and establish better contact with their consumer customers. But in this new and rapidly changing world many farmers feel insecure, neglected and excluded.

1.5 On Farmers, Farming & Being Rural: Conceptualising the Object of Study

During successive attendances at the Oxford Farming Conference, an annual forum for debate about the current and future status of the farming industry, it struck me that, other than political or corporate speakers, everyone called themselves a 'farmer'. Surely the disparate nature of their production stretched the use of this collective too far? Here was a small sheep producer from the hills of Wales; or the manager of an extensive cattle-breeding business in Argentina. Here was a malting barley grower from East Anglia or an organic salad crop producer from Sussex. True, they were all involved in the production of something which would eventually find its way into the food chain. But diversification has led to the development of crops being farmed that are not destined for food such as oils for fuel, cosmetics or pharmaceuticals, or fibres, such as hemp, which can be used for car door

linings. Food production can no longer be the criteria for qualification as a farmer.

Farmers are of either gender and of a wide age range (although the average age today is more than 50 years). They farm from Lands End to John o' Groats as well as on most of the outlying islands of the UK and farm size varies widely. Farming in the UK tends to reflect the country's geography and climate with the larger arable farms mainly in the east of the country and the smaller livestock farms in the hill areas with high rainfall to boost grass growth, such as Wales, the Lake District, Devon and Cornwall. But within these broad boundaries there is wide variety. Defra groups farmed land into crops, grass and rough grazing. Crops include cereals, vegetables, fruit and rotation grass. Pigs and poultry might be raised in all sorts of areas although, historically, the provision of grain for feed would have meant proximity to grain production or, in the case of pigs when swill was fed, to the conurbations whose waste provided the swill. The grass and rough grazing areas will be the home of beef and sheep production and dairy cows. Again, looking at defra statistics, farm types are categorized as cereals, general cropping, horticulture, pigs and poultry, dairy, cattle and sheep (Less Favoured Areas), cattle and sheep (lowland), mixed and other.

How then, with such individual variety, can one define a farmer or conceptualise farmers and farming as an object of study?

Although a contested term, one way would be to conceptualise farmers as a community. Two main axes of meaning can be identified, one being territory/location, the other social/network relationships (Puddifoot, 1995). Puddifoot sees the major elements of community identity as being locus, the perception of a boundary by those in the community dividing them from those outside it; the distinctiveness of the community from those not part of it; identification by the members of the community that they belong to it; orientation or the extent to which members of the community share feelings of

belonging to it as well as the sharing of broad belief systems; a shared evaluation of the quality of community life and, finally, a sharing of the evaluation of community functioning. At times of change, of boundary blurring, reassertion and reaffirmation of boundaries are likely to intensify (Cohen, 1985 p40).

All these elements can clearly be seen among farmers today. But community, although it recognises distinctiveness and a division from those on the other side of the boundary, seems to me to put more emphasis on commonality than on difference. Community is a referent to identity (Cohen, 1985), but judgement and evaluation seem only of minor importance in the notion of community whereas, for example in social identity theory, categorisation and in-group/out-group distinction is central. Such a distinction was evident as a second feature which united speakers at Oxford: their perception of themselves as rural, as different from or of other than, and outside of urban society. If being "rural" is a key feature of this shared social identity some clarification of what it means to be rural is required because, to an observer, someone growing vegetables on the outskirts of Birmingham or Newport appears as less rural than, for example, a small livestock producer in Orkney or Cornwall.

Marx saw rural life as nurturing a subservience to nature, a primitive mode of production by a primitive form of society but Tonnies, in *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1888), first implied the dichotomy and opposition between rural and urban (Bonner, 1997). In common usage today 'rural' is understood as in, or suggesting the country; pastoral or agricultural, (Oxford English Dictionary). The definition though is imprecise. It is a construction, although its use is widespread, even to the development of a branch of sociology, rural sociology, which studies the concept. For the purpose of my research though it will be necessary to acknowledge that, "...*The rural is a category of thought... Its subject may be defined as the set of processes through which agents*

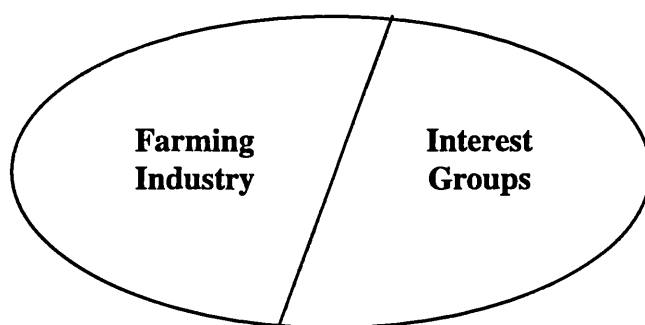
construct a vision of the rural suited to their circumstances, define themselves in relation to prevailing social cleavages, and thereby find identity, and through identity, make common cause." (Marsden et al., 1990, p41). This view of the rural accords with Howarth (2001) who reports her usage of the term 'community' as, "*..the way (they) are talked about, constructed, and defended by those who reside in them and come into contact with them..*". Similarly Hughes ([1971] 1984, pps153-54, cited in Becker, 1998, p2) speaking of an ethnic group states, "*..it is an ethnic group ...because the people in and the people out of it know that it is one; because both the ins and the outs talk, feel, and act as if it were a separate group...*" In considering farmers then, who are diverse in type and location, we can see a community with a shared social identity. But farmers do not operate in a vacuum. They are managers of the land; their produce is, in the main, destined for consumption by consumers; they husband livestock whose welfare is of concern to others outside farming. In other words they operate in a public arena where many viewpoints, legislation and practicalities meet. The object of study then needs to extend beyond that of a community with a shared social identity.

The notion of a 'public sphere', derived from ancient Greece, and reworked by Habermas (1989), to accommodate modern developments in the state/society relationship, new democratic processes and the increasing emergence of the media as the forum of public debate provides a way to conceptualise farmers and farming. The idea of "*...an arena where citizens seek political participation through the medium of rational talk...*" (Jovchelovitch, 1995) certainly reflects the object of my research and allows me to refer to it as an 'agricultural public sphere'. What is missing from this conceptualisation of an agricultural public sphere is the ability to use it as a rational way of approaching the social object. To do so I draw on Bauer & Gaskell's (2002) model of biotechnology.

Bauer & Gaskell (2002), in looking at biotechnology and its impact across a number of previously unrelated sectors, as well as concerns about the rights and wrongs of this new technology, proposed a framework which encompassed all the various actors, audiences and theatres of interest. I propose to adapt this model to farmers, farming and change, thereby creating an entity which becomes the object of study – a plan or representation of the actors in the scene of change and the public arenas in which they operate.

The first distinction, according to the Bauer & Gaskell model, is that of insiders and outsiders. In this scenario I class as outsiders anyone who has no views about farmers and farming, no commercial interest in the farming industry and whose life and work does not encounter UK agriculture. Such outsiders are, for this research project, excluded from the model. Insiders in the model of farmers, farming and change are further partitioned (Figure 1).

Figure 1: *Farmer and farming insiders (adapted from Bauer & Gaskell, 2002)*



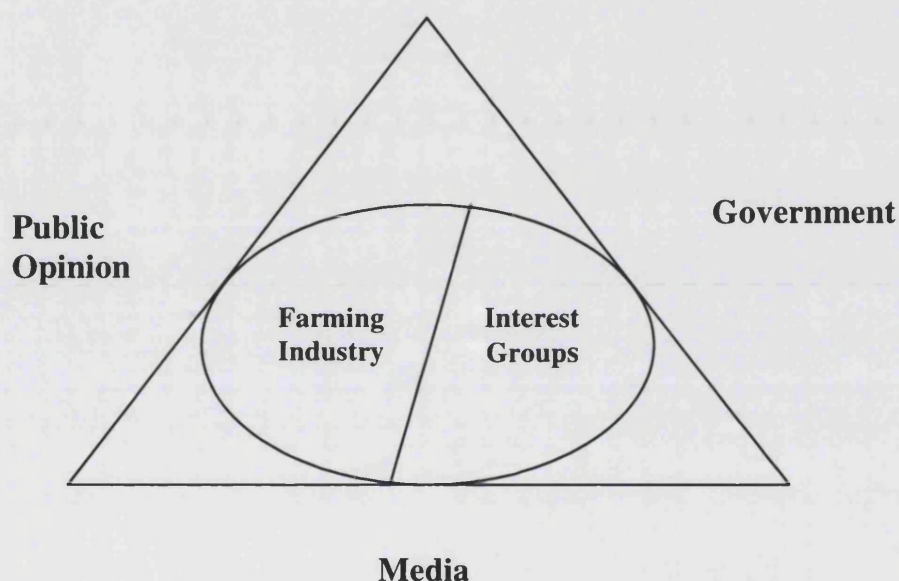
To the left of the model are those whose interest constitutes a primary objectification of the topic, the signified object (Barthes 1972). In this section are those concerned with the products and services of the farming industry. Farmers have the leading role in this cast but so to do farmworkers, suppliers of farm inputs, purchasers of farm outputs, vets, machinery dealers, farm management consultants and so on. Together I have grouped them as ‘the farming industry’.

Alongside the farming industry, to the right in the diagram, are those whose interest is based on a secondary objectification of the project, farming as signified in the ideas, symbols and cultural products which flow from the primary objectification. The sheer number of such 'interest groups' is a testament not only to the wide compass and complexity of the farming industry but also to its contested nature. On the one hand are those set up post the BSE and F&M crises, to provide financial aid and/or counselling to farmers in need. The Addington Fund and The Rural Stress Information Network, are examples here. On the other hand are groups like FARM, fighting for a viable future for independent and family farms, with an anti-GM and anti-supermarket message, or Living Countryside, a 'not for profit' company established to advance the education of the public in, and promote greater understanding of, all aspects of agriculture, the countryside and the rural economy. The welfare of farm animals is the concern of Compassion in World Farming and joining the list of interest groups are other organisations with a varied level of interest in the agricultural industry as a whole, but with interests in elements of it. In this category we see Oxfam, revealing "How rich landowners are making millions from a farm system that fails poor people"; Friends of the Earth, campaigning against the use of any genetically modified product by the UK farming industry and The Ramblers Association, concerned to maintain access to rights of way across farmed land.

Support and lobby institutions such as the National Farmers Union (NFU) and the Country Landowners Association (CLA), together with levy funded non-governmental organisations, like the Meat and Livestock Commission, with its research, promotion and education brief, are part of the farming industry. However, the interests of the permanent staff of those organisations do not entirely constitute a primary objectification of the topic so, for the purpose of the empirical studies, I have chosen to categorise them as interest groups.

The insiders, the farming industry and the interest groups, operate within a public sphere which comprises three theatres: public opinion, government and the media. (Figure 2).

Figure 2: *The public sphere for farmers and farming (adapted from Bauer & Gaskell, 2002)*



The left side of the representational triangle comprises public opinion. Within this theatre the general public experience farmers and farming in a number of ways. Firstly, via food purchasing. Secondly, through being in the countryside. Thirdly, through the symbolic, institutional and cultural myths which frame both food and the land.

The majority of the general public encounter farm produce in shops. The relationship between farmers and supermarkets in connection with produce prices has already been mentioned. Of relevance within the sphere of public perception is the use that supermarkets are making of farmers to underline the provenance of their food offer. As a means of emphasising traceability, freshness and wholesomeness, several of the major multiple retailers are now

featuring farmer suppliers either in shop décor or on packs. The concept of 'local' sourcing is also being taken up by both the multiples and the food service industry, increasing awareness of farmers and farming among the general public. Farmers themselves have taken the initiative of interacting with the general public by selling direct at farmers markets, as a means to improve their returns, and also to contribute to a wider promotion of UK farm produce.

Much of this activity serves to support and preserve a rural idyll (McLaughlin, 1986), arising from cultural reflections of history, rural roots and the notion of farmers and farming as being a 'national treasure'. It is illustrated by Elizabeth Hurley, model and socialite, commenting about her new home in Gloucestershire, "I hope the local farmers will come and attack the paparazzi *with their pitchforks*", (Times, 03.05.03, my emphasis). This image, the lovable local yokel, perhaps stemming from the war years and the regard in which farmers were held at that time, extends into the idea of countryside, its importance to the nation, and the need to save the family farm (Thompson et al, 1994), as discussed above. But concern is genuine, as noted earlier, with half the 7,000 responders to a recent CPRE survey indicating that the future of working farms was their top rural concern.

As well as a rural idyll there is today an opposing viewpoint which depicts farmers as desecrators of the countryside, rooting out hedges, polluting the soil and watercourses with chemicals. The term agri-business connotes prairie-style landscapes and intensive, factory livestock production. The issue of taxpayer funded subsidies to farmers also rankles with some. That farmers may be utilising genetically modified crops and the notion of 'frankensteins foods' emerges in this theatre of public opinion, not only because of food safety and health concerns but also because of the prime importance of food: its centrality to life, its special role in national cultures and its symbolism in certain religious ceremonial. As Douglas (1982, p117) says, "...*One reason*

why the anthropologists are interested in food is that it is such an apt medium for purely social symbolism, from private hospitality to great ceremonial dramas..."

A second theatre of the public sphere in which farmers and farming operate is that of government, the right side of the triangle in Figure 2. Since the Second World War intervention in the farming industry has been extensive and, although organisations like the Health and Safety Executive and the Food Standards Agency are actors here, since joining the European Union (EU) in 1973, when agricultural policy was ceded to the EU, that intervention has been orchestrated from Brussels. The EU conducts its affairs through three principal political organs. Prime mover in the affairs of the EU is the Council of Ministers, chaired by a rotating President drawn from the member states. The Council of Ministers meets regularly, considers proposals from the Commission and decides policy. The European Commission holds the EU permanent staff, and is split into directorates of which Agriculture is the largest, accounting for around 75% of all EU expenditure. The Commission is charged with proposing agricultural policy such as the form and size of farmer support, across the EU to the Council of Ministers. Once it is agreed the Commission is responsible for executing the policy using, as its agents, the agricultural ministries in each member state and region (defra for England). Decisions of the Council of Ministers and the activities of the Commission are held to account by the European Parliament, some 600 directly elected MEPs under a Parliamentary President. Recent discussions have given clearer rights to the Parliament to be consulted formally before major decisions are taken. The trend to strengthen the direct representation of European voters in decision-making is expected to continue with EU enlargement.

All of those in the inner core, the farming industry and the interest groups, attempt with lesser or greater degrees of success to introduce or manipulate representations in the public sphere in order to recruit support for their own

particular cause. Those representations will be accessed by modes through mediums (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999). Mediums refer to items from which representations might be accessed – language, images, sounds and movements. Modes refer to the methods by which representations might be accessed – habits, understandings, formal and informal conversations, reading and seeing. The third theatre of the agricultural public sphere is important here: the theatre of the media.

There are radio and TV programmes dedicated to farmers and farming such as Farming Today on BBC Radio 4, broadcast daily from 05.45-06.00 and Countryfile, screened on BBC 1, Sundays 11.30-12noon. Originally tailored for a farming audience both of these programmes have widened their remit in an attempt to capture a larger audience. They now include items of more general interest, covering the countryside and the environment rather than, as was previously the case, news items of particular relevance for farmers and those directly involved in the farming industry. During the BSE and F&M crises farming matters were aired as part of the national news but currently, representations of farmers and farming in the mass media are limited to the “soap” programmes such as “The Archers” on BBC Radio 4 or television programmes such as Heartbeat (Yorkshire and Tyne Tees Television), Peak Practice (Carlton Television) and Dangerfield (BBC).

The same is true for the national press. Whereas, at one time, each newspaper had its own farming or agricultural correspondent, with the contraction in the farming industry over the last decades there are now no dedicated farming correspondents on any English national newspaper. Their remit is now covered by the environmental correspondent. This is not the case in certain of the regional papers, particularly those published in areas where farming is still an important part of the local community. The Western Morning News and Eastern Daily Press are examples here. Scotland too has farming correspondents in the key dailies, The Scotsman, The Herald and The Press &

Journal. The importance of the regional press in documenting matters to do with farmers and farming can be seen from a recent (May 2004) survey of Lexis-Nexis Executive, a data source of the full texts of news and business sources from around the world. A search of UK newspapers with the terms farmers and farming and change for 2003 yielded 440 articles. Of these only 45 were published in national daily or Sunday newspapers. It seems that 'theatre' is a particularly appropriate metaphor for the media because, for most of the general public, their images of farming and rurality stem from radio and TV soap programmes rather than from news items or from the national press. This has consequences for their representations of farmers and farming. Phillips, Fish & Agg (2001), for example, in a textual analysis of the three TV soaps, Heartbeat, Peak Practice and Dangerfield, suggest that idyllic constructions of rurality are enacted, as are particular social identities conveying "middle-classness".

In addition to the main national and regional press there is a dedicated farming press. It is unlikely that this reaches the general public, but it is likely to be read by policy regulators. The farming press comprises small circulation publications for specific farming sectors such as Arable Farmer, Dairy Farmer or South West Farmer and larger circulation general farming publications: Farmers Weekly with a circulation of c77,000, Farmers Guardian with a circulation of c53,000 and Scottish Farmer with a circulation of c21,000 (figures from the Audit Bureau of Circulations). Farmers Weekly has moved into a new media format with a Farmers Weekly Interactive website but, although farmers are using computers as a business tool, the reach of Broadband access in rural areas is still a limiting factor.

I have spent some time elaborating this model because the farming industry is complex. It goes beyond the levels of analysis proposed by Doise (1984) and, as was seen when considering the public opinion theatre of the public sphere, there are a number of ways in which farmers and farming may be experienced:

in day to day domestics – buying and cooking food; within the countryside during travel or leisure activities; and through the symbolism and cultural myths which circulate in our society. Using this model has allowed me to capture the complexity of the industry as well as differentiating the ways in which each side of the triangle relates with farmers and farming. With this clarified I was better able to consider how to approach my empirical studies: which parts of the model to access in order to ensure that a complete picture was being seen.

1.6 Thesis Overview

This introductory chapter provides the context for my research. It has set out the nature of change in the industry, the problems which farmers face as a result of that change and the historical background to the current situation. I have modelled the agricultural public sphere to conceptualise a social object that can be accessed through empirical research. The findings of that research will answer the research question, why is change difficult for UK farmers? My research objectives are for both practical and theoretical outcomes: the former to propose ways that farmers might be better supported in accepting and accommodating change; the latter to contribute to a social psychology of change, and to demonstrate the strength of social representations theory as a tool to examine complex social phenomena.

I conclude this introductory chapter with a brief overview of the remainder of the thesis. Chapter 2 looks in more depth at the theory of social representations and, in particular, the elements of the theory which will be most relevant for this research. These include the centrality of the social in thought, knowledge, meaning and language; the role of the familiar, the unfamiliar and the making of concepts; the structure and function of social representations; and identities: making and defending them, exclusion and coping with threat.

Chapter 3 covers the epistemology and ontology which inform the empirical studies. It discusses the qualitative/quantitative debate and the use of triangulation as a means to approach the social object from a variety of directions. It also details the methodology of each of the three empirical studies, semi-structured interviews with farmers, narrative interviews with others in the agricultural public sphere and content analysis of the press.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 give the results of each of the empirical studies. In each case the findings of the study are used to propose conclusions to answer the research question.

Chapter 7 provides a resume of each of the study findings. It uses the evidence of the research findings to show how farmers themselves represent change, the effect of change on farmers' identities, and how change is resulting in new representations of farmers and farming. These are used to answer the research question, why is change difficult for UK farmers?

Finally, Chapter 8 demonstrates how social representations theory has been used, in this research, to investigate a practical social problem. In doing so it answers some of the criticism of the theory. But the findings of the research also indicate some areas of the theory which need further development. These are outlined. The chapter concludes with observations made during the research which will feed into a social psychology of change, and suggests some areas where this would be of value in an applied social setting.

Chapter 2

SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS THEORY IN THE ANALYSIS OF FARMERS, FARMING & CHANGE

In the introductory chapter I set out some of the problems facing farmers at this time of change, detailed the background to the change and proposed a model of the project undergoing change. A gap in current research, I argued, was to consider how this change was being experienced by farmers themselves, how it was affecting their notions of identity, in feelings of exclusion and how the wider effects of change had resulted in new issues in relation to the land that is farmed. I proposed social representations theory as a relevant tool to conduct this research because it has the ability to unpack complex social phenomenon and because change is central to the theory.

Social representations theory looks at how knowledge and meaning are shared, transformed and generated in social processes. It proposes how social knowledge arises, explains the process for forming representations and identifies the content of the representations. It seeks to show how shared representations can become taken-for-granted, a new reality. It both describes and explains. It deals with content - the ideas and representations circulating in the social object -and process - how those ideas and representations are formed. The theory is both broad and deep. It highlights the social nature of the process and the vital role of communication.

Social representations theory has gained wide acceptance and has informed studies of madness (Jodelet, 1989), childhood (Chombart-de-Lauwe, 1971), biotechnology (Durant et al, 1998) and nature (Eder, 1996; Gervais, 1997). But it is not without its detractors. Three broad sets of criticisms can be seen (Raty & Snellman, 1992). Firstly, the overall clarity of the theory and its relationship to other theories. Jahoda (1988), for example, points to the lack

of distinction between collective and social representations and the lack of positioning between it and other theories such as group mind. The lack of empirical clarity of the theory is noted by Potter & Litton (1985) citing the different terminology that is used from study to study. Raty & Snellmans' second set of criticisms relate to the concept of consensuality and the group among which the consensus is formed. How consensual is consensus, do not contrary rather than consensual themes provide the basis for discussion and debate and to what extent is a group a group rather than simply a taxonomic aggregate? (Billig, 1988, Potter & Litton, 1985). The third set of criticisms of social representations theory relates to the way they emerge and the psychological processes involved. Billig (1988) illustrates this set, with his distinction between universal processes, such as anchoring, where information is processed on the basis of existing schema, and particular processes, such as objectification, which gives form to the abstract. One of the objectives of this thesis is to use my empirical study findings to answer these criticisms.

In the 40+ years since Moscovici's (1961) thesis "La Psychanalyse, son image et son public," much has been written about the theory. A peer reviewed journal "Papers on Social Representations" is available and conferences devoted to the theory are held regularly, throughout the world. It is not my intention to duplicate this material or to go into detail about the general aspects of the theory which is well documented (Jodelet, 1989; Moscovici, 1984; Moscovici, 1988; Moscovici 1998; Moscovici, 2000; Moscovici & Markova, 1998). However, there are aspects of the theory which I see as particularly relevant for research into farmers, farming and change. The first four sections in this chapter considers those aspects:

- 1 The centrality of the social in thought, knowledge, meaning and language;
- 2 The role of the familiar, the unfamiliar and the making of concepts;

- 3 Identities: making and defending them, exclusion and coping with threat;
- 4 The accommodation of change in social representations.

The final section in this chapter looks at the overall capability of social representations theory to explore meaning in a complex social object.

2.1 The Role of the Social in Thought, Knowledge and Meaning

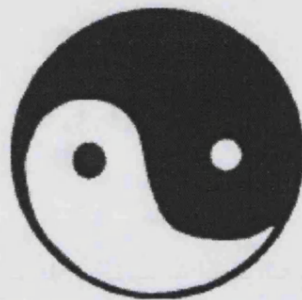
2.1.1 Dialogism

Marková (1996, 2000a) points to social representations theory as being based on a dialogical epistemology, an epistemology which sees understanding stemming from reflection. In contrast to the natural sciences the human and social sciences always involve “...*the study of one human cognitively interacting with another.*” (Marková, 2000a, p425). This requires an active understanding of the other, of their environment and language and is therefore historically, culturally and socially situated. Because such understanding, according to dialogical epistemology, requires reflection on and of the other, it cannot ever be entirely individual, but it does not suppose the relinquishing of individual cognitions or their fusion with those of the other. Rather, in the common pursuit of meaning, we see an interaction between two different viewpoints or ideas or evaluations. It is here that some of the misunderstandings about social representations theory have arisen.

In the West, possibly because our culture has origins in ancient Greece where thought tended to be in oppositions like good or bad, true or false, we tend to think in polarities, envisaging them as separate entities. We think of things in terms of what they are not. In other cultures oppositions are seen as linked rather than separate, as complementary, or part of a continuum. The diagram of the figure/ground is an example here, as is the sign of the Tao (Figure 3). Here the dark feminine yin exists with the light masculine yang. The symbol

does not exist without the two elements and in both are dots reflecting the adjacent swirl. The sign illustrates “...*the relationship that exists between opposing but interpenetrating forces that may complete one another, make each comprehensible, or create the conditions for altering one into the other,*” (Nisbett, 2003)

Figure 3: The Sign of the Tao



It is not surprising then that in our Western culture it is hard for some to accept the notion of the interdependence, the interaction, between the cognitions and understandings of one individual and another in the search for meaning. Our tradition of a natural science model makes it more comfortable to conceive of individuals as single and bounded, as is the case in, for example, social cognition. In dialogical understanding it takes two. It does not deny human agency. It is not necessarily a merging or a mingling. It does not mean that similar representations will be seen in different individuals. It does mean that representations arise socially because the other is a necessity in order that the one may use them as the reference point for their understanding. From this interaction between the two ideas meanings are made and understanding emerges. (de Rosa, 1992; Duveen & de Rosa, 1992; Marková 1996; Marková 2000a).

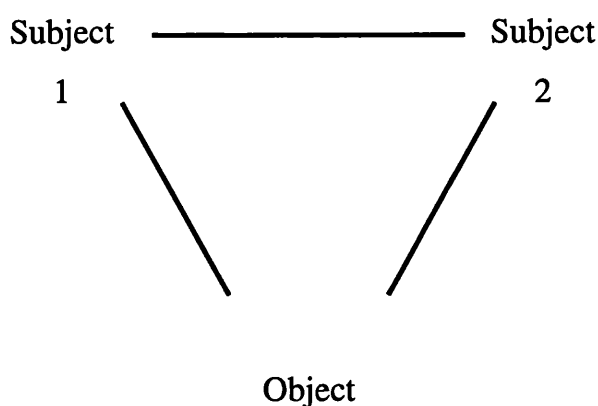
In the previous chapter I spent some time describing the social object of study – farmers and farming at a time of change. The point of the detail was to

cover the complexity of the project so that readers would know what and who were its constituents. That detail now allows me to demonstrate how the experience of change among farmers, its affect on farmers' social identity and their feelings of exclusion, together with the contested nature of the land, are dialogical in origin.

Farmers are individuals and being a farmer has been thought of as a lonely occupation. But they meet at markets, at Farmers Union and other meetings or when they visit sales or agricultural shows. At such events farmers interact with other farming "insiders" and those in various interest groups. Farmers meet other insiders when representatives of machinery manufactures, hauliers, veterinarians, feed and fertilizer salesmen come to their farms. Conversation flows. In the public sphere in which farmers operate policy legislators send out advisory documents, seek consultations with farmers groups or representatives or use the media to alert farmers of new policy and legislation. The media take information from press briefings and press releases. The media both gauge public opinion from researching it and influence public opinion by their articles on farmers and farming. The general public, the third element of the public sphere of this social object, both absorbs information from the media and takes information from their direct encounters with farmers and farm products. The point here is that every encounter within the social object consists of two subjects: one farmer with another; a newspaper and a member of the general public; a policy legislator and a member of an interest group. In each case this dyad of actors are observing, thinking about or creating a dialogue about the social object itself. Arendt (1958) comments, "...*thinking is a practice that takes place among men rather than as the performance of a single person*". It is at this point, at the dialogical encounter between two subjects where the interaction results in a representation of the social object.

This three-part encounter has led social representations to be depicted as a triangle – subject-subject-object. Bauer & Gaskell (1999) extend the triangle into three dimensional space (a “Toblerone” model) to account for the object in the past and in the future.

Figure 4: The triad of social representations



The dialogical epistemology of social representations theory is important in emphasising the social in social psychology, in contrast to social cognition where the societal condition is often irrelevant for the kinds of explanation used. But the emphasis on the social does move social representations theory beyond the notion of discreet levels of analysis (psychological or intra-individual; inter-individual or intra-institutional; situational interactions; general conceptions of social relations;) to span many different levels (Doise, 1984). The two-dimensional model of the social object under review (Figure 2, p40) illustrates the need for this research to span different levels, encompassing individual farmers, small and large groups, communities, institutions and the general public. Inserting the model into a three-dimensional “toblerone” continuum from the past to the future further increases its complexities.

2.1.2 Communication

It becomes evident, as one considers the complexities of the social object, that all the encounters centre on communication. Moscovici (1997) said “...*no representation without communication...*”. The representation is shared with others by means of signs (Berger & Luckman, 1966 p50). The signs both shape the representation and also enable it to be shared. One cannot access ideas, knowledge and understanding without some communicative activity largely, but not exclusively, enabled by the sign system we know as language. Marková (2000a, p426) points out that words are the bridge between the one and the other. One appropriates a word but uses it with respect to the other. The choice of the word itself depends on a representation being shared with the other. We share language with others, it is a social system, but our choice of words makes it personal to us. Language here has a dual role. It is both the mode by which representations, ideas and knowledge are created and medium in which representations are shared, transferred and transformed (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999).

Language determines our representations and embodies the meanings and contents of shared representations (Purkhardt, 1993). But language can constrain as well as create. The lexical meanings of the words, the syntax or grammar, and inflection and the linguistic context of the utterance combine to produce the semantics or meaning, but all are rule systems. So, whilst language is pliant, with the ability to be personal to individuals, it is “...*dominated by the pragmatic motive ...which I share with others in a taken-for-granted manner.*” (Berger & Luckman, 1966, p53).

Who speaks also influences how representations arise. Moscovici's (1961) thesis proposed three means by which the object – psychoanalysis – was circulated by the French press of the day. Psychoanalysis was, at that time, a relatively new concept outside of the specialists who practiced it. This

enabled Moscovici to examine how this new idea spread through the general public via the media. Readers of the intellectual liberal press absorbed the information available through the neutral process of diffusion. The press associated with the Catholic Church were active in propagating the concept of psychoanalysis in a way which resulted in parts of the notion being accepted and parts rejected, according to their conservative and ideological framework. French communist press circulated the concept of psychoanalysis by propaganda, rejecting the notion using negative stereotypes. In short “...*what is represented and how it is represented is given a meaning in terms of the position of the person who enunciates it,*” (Moscovici, 1988). In the case of farmers, farming and change who speaks, their position, and their status in the power dynamics of the social object can clearly be seen as moulding different representations in the public sphere. On the one hand are the whingeing farmers, living on subsidy. On the other are the traditional family farms which should be saved at all costs. On yet another level the power of the supermarkets in demanding efficiencies of scale from their farmer suppliers to cut costs can be contrasted with the action, by some, to force supermarkets to improve price levels paid to farmers. How and from where these contrasting views arise and are maintained is a focus for my empirical studies.

In this section I have examined the role of the social in the theory of social representation. I have argued, firstly, that ideas and representations emerge through dialogism: the sharing of, questioning of, and creation of signs through reflection with respect to another. This is because of an interdependence in the interaction between the two with respect to the object. Representations are not necessarily universal but their genesis is social. I have shown how and where this dialogism is evident in the social object under review. I have pointed, secondly, to the communicative nature of dialogism and its dependence on language, a symbolic system that is both pliant and individual yet at the same time constrained by rules operated by the society in

which the language is used. Both of these areas highlight the social nature of social representations theory.

2.2 The Role of the Familiar, the Unfamiliar and the Making of Concepts

In the introduction to this chapter I said that I do not intend to cover the detail of social representations theory, already extensively debated and written about. But my research objectives are to look more closely at change from a social psychological perspective and, through the empirical studies, to provide material to contribute to the debate about the suitability of social representations theory as a tool for investigating social phenomenon. For both of these reasons it is necessary to understand the basic concepts of how new knowledge is assessed and processed, new ideas are formed and new concepts emerge. This is particularly relevant in situations of change. Moscovici (2000) lists three functions for representations: firstly, they illuminate by giving sense to realities; secondly, they integrate by incorporating new ideas or facts into familiar frameworks; thirdly, they partition in order to allow for a common-sense view of the object that is represented. This section considers some of the theoretical proposals as to how that happens.

2.2.1 Making Familiar the Unfamiliar

Anchoring and objectification are the modes by which unfamiliar or new knowledge is understood; how new social representations arise. Anchoring names or ascribes characteristics to a novel notion by reference to schemas drawn from memory: 'mad cow Disease' for BSE or 'frankensteins foods' for products containing genetically modified ingredients, for example. Anchoring is an inwardly directed process calling on past experience in order to categorise. It "... *integrates the representation in a network of significance heavily marked by social values. It generates a system of interpretation, it*

offers a framework for the determination of behaviours in creating expectations, needs and anticipations.” (Abric, 1996, p78)

Objectification ascribes abstract concepts a form which then weaves into local common sense – ‘McDonaldisation’ for the globalisation of consumer products, for example (coined by George Ritzer in ‘The McDonaldisation of Society’). The form will thus depend on the icons or metaphors which circulate in the society from which they emerge. And they change over time as new images or information add to the reservoir from which the representation is constructed. Objectification is an outward looking process which categorises with reference to the present.

Although seen as separate processes with anchoring oriented towards stability in ‘*making the meaningless meaningful*’ by classifying and naming new information, and objectification oriented towards innovation in ‘*making something imagined something real*’, (Orfali, 2002, p400), both are dynamic processes. And there is a sense in which every act of anchoring involves objectification because new meaning is given to the new phenomenon (Marková, 2000a, p448). There is too a dialogism between anchoring and objectification in the sense of the interaction or opposition between stability and change.

The notions of anchoring and objectification have been the target of various critiques. Potter & Wetherell (1987, p145) posit them as “...*little more than an exercise in speculative cognitive psychology.*” Jahoda (1988) questions the need or motivation for anchoring the unfamiliar on the familiar. What about novelty and curiosity? Marková (2000a) refutes such claims on the basis that they are considering social representations from an individualist and static epistemology rather than the dialogical epistemology on which the theory is built.

2.2.2 *How Concepts Arise*

Whilst anchoring and objectification take new knowledge and re-present it on the basis of past knowledge or interpretation of current events, the question of the origin of the basic ways of thinking which guide the anchoring and objectification arises. Moscovici sees social representations as "...*always complex, and necessarily inscribed within the framework of pre-existing thought.*" (Moscovici & Vignaux, 2000, p157). But from where comes the pre-existing thought?

At the first international conference on social representations Moscovici (1993) draws on the notion of the canonic themata of science; the units or patterns which encourage scientists to look for special kinds of facts or explanations. Themata usually involve oppositions like analysis/synthesis or constancy/evolution/catastrophic change which lead to different schools of thought (Marková, 2000a, p442, citing Holton, 1978). Moscovici sees common sense or folk knowledge as themata which "*motivate or compel people in their cognitive search*" (p3). Themata here provide the source ideas which, through anchoring and objectification relevant to that society, absorb novelty and reformulate it into everyday knowledge. The concept accommodates the view that themes, "...*express a regularity of style, a selective repetition of contents which have been created by society and remain preserved by society. ...the notion of theme indicates that the effective availability of meaning always goes beyond what may have been actualised by individuals or realized by institution...*" (Moscovici & Vignaux, 2000, p163).

Themata can be said then to constitute the origin of representation, explain the basis of the stable element of social representations and, at the same time, propose why new knowledge, and new representations tend to be thought of, or spoken of, in a particular kind of way. Moscovici & Vignaux (2000) take food to illustrate the concept of themata. Food, as the output of farmers and

farming, is an apt example so I have here adapted their example to tailor it more specifically to the UK. The oppositions that might be at play when one thinks of food are likely to be biological/social (eating to live or eating as entertainment) or health/taste (“natural” food or processed). These oppositions suggest themata of the traditional and the natural or the sophisticated and the manufactured, anchored in corresponding images of a natural landscape or factory farming. The themata are governed by laws: healthy eating relating to tradition perhaps or fast food equating to industrialised farming. Rules of consumption follow – low fat or reduced salt or convenience. Here is the point at which new representations arise and where they can have direct change on eating practices. Fat is bad for you; salt is bad for you; to eat healthily you must choose food from a traditional production system (organic farming is a good example of this). Moscovici & Vignaux (2000) note that every social representation can be analysed in terms of an iconic and linguistic trajectory which runs back to the source idea and regulates downward in the form of semantic domains or communicative genres. But they also say that themata “...*never reveal themselves clearly; not even part of them is definitively attainable, so much are they intricately interwoven with a certain collective memory inscribed in language, and so much are they composites, like the representations they sustain, at one both cognitive.....and cultural...*” (p182).

Moloney et al (2005) have demonstrated the workings of themata in social representations. The results of their experiment demonstrated the dialectical concepts of life and death as the source of contradictory representations of organ donation and transplantation. This leads them to oppose the notion that social thinking is linear and rational. On the contrary, they argue, much social knowledge is non-linear and complex. This idea fits well with farmers seeking to understand new social realities and the diversity of viewpoints circulating in the agricultural public sphere both about their own roles and the

land which they farm. It accords with Marková's (2000a, p447) explanation that a crisis, such as the development of a new technology or, in this case, farmers facing rapid change, leads to the oppositional taxonomy that is the source of the themata, becoming the focus point for the generation of new social representations.

Despite the difficulty in accessing themata it seems this should to be done in order to uncover the origin of thought, ideas and ways of thinking. One way of doing so could be through the identification of communicative genres, the different sorts of speech that are adopted depending on different social situations (Marková, 2000a). The point here is that the origin of concepts can be traced back (or up to) source ideas which 'govern' the way we think. This is in contrast to discourse analysis which works in the reverse direction – a bottom-up approach focusing on the minutiae of discourse to uncover how representations are constructed through talk and texts.

2.3 Identities: Making and Defending Them, Exclusion and Coping with Threat

2.3.1 Making and Defending Identities

Central to my research is an investigation into identity and how change is affecting farmers' notions of identity. The link between social representations and social identity has attracted much theorising, from which two strands emerge: first, the sequence of the process or which comes first, the social representation or the identity; and, second, how are social representations and social identity linked?

Brewer (2001) sets out three options for the sequence of the process. Are social identity and social representations merged as the joint product of individual and social processes; is social identity derived from social

representations; or is it social identity which informs the social representations? Breakwell (2001) sees social identity as derived from the representations circulating in group membership. She proposes the idea of representations as function, that the sharing of representations can become “...*the badge of membership and the precursor of understanding the reason for sharing common goals,*” (p4). This notion resonates with farmers’ current perception of their supermarket customers as using their considerable power to the detriment of a fragmented UK farmer base. Duveen (2001) too, in the development of social gender identities, sees social representations preceding identity formation. Play is important in this aspect of development where, during their pretend play, children imitate the world and the activities they see around them. At the same time they internalise the values circulating among their families, siblings and peers as representations. For both Breakwell and Duveen then social representations are the foundation in which identity is constructed but, if social representations develop through consensus among social groups, might not the self-categorisation which delineates those groups be the more logical starting point?

A solution is suggested by Bauer & Gaskell (1999). Identities are themselves a form of representation, characterised by the specific function of group categorisation and cohesion. They note that attempts to delineate the distinctions between social identity and social representations have been largely inconclusive but that a consideration of social representations as function, different for different social groups, might be more fruitful. Howarth (2002) too, in her study of the social identities of the young people living in Brixton, South London, suggests that identification and re-presentation can be seen as different sides of the same coin, “...*they are delicately intertwined processes of one’s collaborative struggle to understand, and so construct, the world and one’s position within it.*” (p159).

One way to make a link between social representations and social identity has been suggested by Elejebarrieta (1994). The idea of social positioning comes from commercial marketing where a communications strategy is devised to best 'position' a product or service in front of its target audience. Elejebarrieta (ibid) extends this notion to the field of social identity noting that, in everyday life, the expression of identity involves three conditions: communication, negotiation and multiplicity. Each of these conditions is supported by social representations, themselves conditioned by contextual, historical and practical factors. In the same way that commercial marketers develop a communications strategy that positions their product or service in the best light for the customer, so too is social identity positioned in the most favourable and most relevant light, reflecting the social representations circulating in the society against which that identity is constructed.

Duveen & Lloyd (1986) investigate the development of gender identities in young children and the inter-relationship between the two. Children are born into a world where meanings already exist. A set of representations arise as soon as the parents know the child's gender. Characteristics are attributed to the baby which become internalised to develop its gender identity. Gender identity takes place by engagement with the world of representations.

Duveen & Lloyd see social identity as the area that social representations become psychologically active for individuals. They construct and re-construct representations in the course of ontogenesis, the process whereby individuals develop identity in relation to social representations. Duveen & Lloyd (1990) note different types of relationship between representations and identities. On the one hand social representations impose an imperative obligation, as is the case with gender identities. On the other hand social representations impose a contractual obligation, as in the case of the voluntary joining of a social group. This is an interesting distinction in the case of farmers. Their work and lifestyle inherently impose an imperative obligation

but how and when does this transfer or translate into a contractual obligation, as in the case of joining direct anti-supermarket action for example?

Identity is a way of organising meaning which allows an individual to locate themselves in the social world. In this way it functions as a way of making the uncertain certain. Change poses a threat to identity because it introduces uncertainty about place in the social world. For farmers facing rapid change identity is being threatened. Another theory within the perspective of social psychology, Social Identity Theory (SIT), sees the basis of social identity as self esteem. SIT has proposed ways of maintaining self esteem: individual mobility, social creativity and social competition (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). For farmers and farming in change examples of all these strategies are evident and thus appear to support the proposal that, despite their origin in different paradigms, social identity theory and social representations theory might benefit from integration. As Breakwell (1993) points out “...*The relationship between social identity and social representation is undoubtedly dialectical: their influences upon each other are reciprocal...*”

One way that social representations might protect identity is based in psychodynamic theory. It sees objects of anxiety or representations that concern, projected outward by the unconscious defence mechanism of splitting (Joffe, 2003). A second way in which social representations might protect identity is to manage the representations that give rise to the threat. Joffe (1996) for example describes this in relation to AIDS, where identity protection is achieved by objectifying AIDS as a ‘sin cocktail’ – practices with which the in-group do not associate and therefore can be used to make sense of the illness without compromising the in-group identity. Joffe (ibid) also suggests a third way that social representations can be used to protect identity – changing representations that give rise to threat. Breakwell (1993) describes an earlier study (Breakwell, 1986) showing how unemployed youth accepted

and reproduced aspects of very negative social representations about them circulating at the time and changed them by combining them with a strong fatalism, not part of the general representation.

Social representations can defend and protect identity by means of filtering. Philogene (2002) argues that new representations are mechanisms for the formation of beliefs. Whilst themselves a product of beliefs, because they are new, they question existing belief systems and so provide an opportunity to rethink a social object. In this way a threat to identity might stimulate a new belief system which would allow the negative representation to be filtered out.

A previous section described the concept of themata and how the oppositional taxonomy at their root accommodates contradictory thought and knowledge (Moloney et al, 2005). A similar idea is that of cognitive polyphasia, the coexistence of incompatible ways of thinking and representations. Cognitive polyphasia may stem from change (Wagner & Hayes, 2005, p232) as seen in India where traditional representations of madness circulate alongside those generated by more modern views of the treatment of the mentally ill (Wagner et al, 1999). Cognitive polyphasia also provides a means whereby identity can be sustained in the face of the challenge of change. Gervais & Jovchelovitch (1998), for example, report how the contradictory nature of the representations of health and illness circulating in a Chinese community living in England enabled the community to sustain and defend its cultural identity.

One of the criticisms of social representations theory is its generalised nature, appearing to be all things to all, with a lack of definition. Potter (1996) says, “...it deals neither with how representations are built and made factual nor with what is being done with representations.” (p211). Howarth (2002), in her analysis of young people from Brixton demonstrates that this critique is unfounded. At the same time she both illustrates the dynamic nature of the

relationship between representations and identity and shows how representations are used to protect identity. An initial history of Brixton shows how the representations of black youth circulating in society have arisen, how they are built. She describes how the identity of her respondents is challenged by the “*hazard of meeting stigma in the eye of the other,*” (p247). The respondents used hegemonic representations of the black youth of Brixton circulating in society in two ways. Firstly, by psychologically separating themselves from Brixton, disassociating themselves from it, they avoid a discreditable identity. Secondly, by challenging those representations and developing alternatives, they were able to take pride in their identity. This study had both a cultural and a psychological perspective and, in noting the interaction between the two, another criticism of social representations theory, that it is just a function of individual cognitivism (Potter & Edwards, 1999), is addressed.

2.3.2 Exclusion

Jovchelovitch’s (1997) research into the social representations of public life in Brazil details how peripheral groups take the social representations of others, like laziness, degeneration and impurity, appropriate them, internalise them, and experience themselves as such. But, crucially, she demonstrates the role of power in using representations to shape identities and frame a way of life. For farmers and farming in a time of change the balances and imbalances of power, farmers and decision makers, or farmers and supermarkets, for example, are key to the feeling of exclusion that farmers are feeling.

Exclusion, or rather social exclusion remains an ill-defined, contested concept (Witcher, 2003). The notion of social exclusion can be traced to Weber who considered it as a form of social closure, a way to bar opportunities, social or economic, from outsiders (Parkin, 1979). The idea of social exclusion as referring to the experience of an underclass whose access to, or share of,

resources was less than others, has had a long history but the phrase social exclusion emerged, during the latter decades of the twentieth century, as a descriptor for some the effects of the restructuring taking place in Europe at the time. The setting up, in the UK, of an interdepartmental Social Exclusion Unit in 1997 makes the concept part of official government policy (Burchardt et al, 2002). The accompanying emergence of an exclusion discourse by politicians and policy makers tends to focus on deprivation – those with very low incomes, those without access to the resources or services which should be available to them, those who live in an area which is perceived as particularly violent or threatening, those stigmatised by society for their disabilities or disfigurements. But there is another dimension to exclusion which is evident in the case of farmers, farming and change: the feeling of exclusion, or estrangement, being experienced by individual farmers from an urban society who, they feel, do not understand them and also from those in power who take decisions about their future.

Exclusion as a topic has been little considered by social representations theorists or even from the wider perspective of social psychology. But since exclusion is one of the main elements of the frustration that farmers feel, and a particular representation which, at this time of change, is one that is posing a threat to identity, some introductory remarks about it follow.

To feel excluded has consequent effects on self-esteem, a motivational factor in the formation of social identity. In the memory of the majority of those farming today, or certainly of those just one generation older, is the post-war period of farm prosperity and the valued position held of food producers by the nation. Food ‘mountains’, the cost to the taxpayer of the various farm support mechanisms, and the cost to the environment of some of the intensive methods of production that the subsidy system encouraged, have led to a questioning of the traditional view of farmers. Farmers today have had to

make sense of new attitudes about themselves and their farming practices and, in their forceful espousal of their identity as a farmer and their descriptor as rural, we see how these changes are impinging on their concept of their identity.

If poverty or deprivation is at the heart of social exclusion it is clear that certain farmers might be classified as socially excluded. But, as was seen in the brief historical review of the UK agricultural industry, low farm incomes were more the norm than was the period of prosperity following the Second World War – the golden age of farming. Poor financial rewards for farming are not a new phenomena whereas the feeling of exclusion is. For farmers it seems unlikely that poverty and lack of resources are the main cause of their feeling of social exclusion.

Littlewood & Herkommer (1999), point to the multi-dimensional and cumulative aspects of social exclusion and the effects of economic and social restructuring processes in its creation. For farmers the rapid economic and social changes seen in the UK since the end of the Second World War have clearly contributed to the problems which they now face. Since the 1950s there has been an increasing participation by married women in the workforce. In 1960 less than 8million women worked. Today that figure is more than 11million, some 50% of the total occupied population. The average household size in Great Britain had been 4.6 people for many years until the early twentieth century. That figure had halved to 2.4 people per household at the turn of this new century. The UK population during that period increased by over a half but trends towards smaller families and more people living alone have resulted in a doubling of the number of households. These social changes, together with technological innovations such as refrigerators, deep freezers and microwave ovens have altered food requirements. For their day-to-day eating consumers' look for food that is quick and easy to prepare and,

for many, price is a key factor in their food choice. The major multiple retailers have been quick to identify their customers' requirements allowing them to build their position of strength in the market place with consequent imbalances of power.

This then is the new phenomena, the economic and social restructuring which has constituted a process to make certain sections of society feel excluded. It has been described as the “...*making of superfluosity*...” (Littlewood & Herkommer, 1999, p14). Farmers in the UK do believe themselves to be being made superfluous in the face of rising food imports, and not only of items that cannot be produced because of our climate and seasons. In 2002, for example the UK imported 300,00 tonnes of processed meat, including bacon, at a value of £570 million. Over the past 10 years the import of processed poultry meat has grown from 5,000 tonnes to nearly 90,000 tonnes and, over the same period, there was a trebling in the import of sausages to 64,000 tonnes. (Source: MLC Meat Demand Trends). Overall the UK's self-sufficiency in indigenous produce has fallen from 85.8% in 1992 to 73.3% in 2005.

Adding to the feeling of being made superfluous is another notion which I have not found articulated formally as a dimension of social exclusion but which, I believe, is particularly pertinent to farmers. It has to do with their feeling that they are not being heard. As previously mentioned, this was summed up by the slogan of The Countryside March in 2002, “*listen to us*”. It was articulated again at the recent launch, in the Houses of Parliament, of a discussion paper produced by The Commercial Farmers Group (CFG, a group of 17 larger farmers). ‘The Case for a Sustainable UK Agricultural Industry and National Food Security’ aims to open a debate about the dangers of a further downsizing of the agricultural industry by highlighting the value of food and farming in the national economy, strategic food security, farming and

the environment and the double standards the group perceives in current practices of food importing. The extent to which these concerns will be debated is unclear but it was noteworthy that, at the launch, one of the members of the CFG, referring to the government said, "*They just don't want to know us. How can we make them see...how can we make them hear when they just don't want to do it?*"

This aspect of exclusion sees a community which is undergoing rapid structural change, in a society which is itself undergoing rapid change, feeling themselves to be outside of society, unheard, unlistened to and at odds with those in power who make decisions. With a high level of government imposition in their business, it is unsurprising that farmers are concerned by what they see as a lack of influence on those in society elected to formulate policy affecting the areas in which they live and conduct their farming business. In a way the nature of democracy exacerbates their problem as a simple analysis of the structure of our parliament demonstrates. The one-man (sic) one-vote principle of British democracy has, since the industrial revolution and the migration of the population from the countryside to the towns, inevitably resulted in the fact that, in simple numeric terms we see only some 80 of the total number of 529 members of parliament for English constituencies, as being from 'rural' areas. Furthermore the centring of politics in the UK, which blurs the distinction between the main political parties, has the effect of resulting in more attention being accorded to marginal constituencies, which tend to be urban. In the UK another important influence in politics are the powerful lobbying groups, new social movements such as The Consumers Association or GreenPeace. For farmers however the decline in their total number, as well as the decline in the profitability of farming, has had consequential effects on an effective lobbying organisation for farmers. The diminution of the farmers' voice will become even more apparent, UK farming will become even more peripheral to EU policy as EU enlargement

proceeds. Poland, for example, has more cows than the whole of the current EU.

This aspect of farmers, farming and change could be argued to be the one that falls within Littlewood & Herkommer's dimension of political exclusion. It is hinted at by Roche (1992) in his analysis of social citizenship when he suggests that capitalism and the market system (to which farming has been protected but is now facing) "*...generate high standards of welfare for the mass (but) also generate social inequalities Markets...may (need to) be managed so as to remain compatible with political (democratic) and social principles. But this requires close monitoring, regulation and where necessary 'fixing' by democratic political power to prevent the emergence and abuse of monopoly economic power...*" (p231). This brings us into the area of the public sphere, the basis of western democracy, where debate should be, and be seen to be, open and accessible to all (Habermas, 1989). It also raises again the question of power which, as Jovchelovitch (1997) points out, is unequally distributed in social life.

Another model of social exclusion, the integrated approach, (Burchard et al, 2002) depicts an 'onion skin' model, with an individual (farmer) at the centre influenced by family, community, local, national and, in the external ring, global forces. At any level, or skin within the onion, other levels can exert influence but none, alone, is the cause of outcome or behaviour. This is the model of exclusion that I see for farmers, a multi-dimensional one which maps on to the social model of farmers, farming and change depicted in Figure 2 (p40). Individuals working in an age-old industry operating in a government controlled framework; a government operating within the EU Common Agricultural Policy and World Trade Organisation agreements. Within this framework farmers are trying to come to terms with rapid economic and

political change, exacerbated by new social demands influenced by consumers and their shopping and eating patterns.

2.3.3 Coping with Threat

In the previous section I spoke of the ways social representations can be used to protect and defend identity. I highlighted identity because, in working in the agricultural industry for some years, the strength of farmers feelings about being farmers and being rural pointed, I felt, to identity being a key element of their experience of change. But there may be other elements, which my empirical studies will uncover, which might also be of concern, and so require strategies to cope. Wagner et al (2002) propose a theory of collective coping, in this case of a country's public towards biotechnology, perceived by some as potentially harmful. Four stages are envisaged: creating awareness; production of divergent images; convergence on selected dominant images in the public domain and, finally, normalisation. Whilst the theory is not seen as applying to all new phenomena Wagner et al (ibid) argue that there is similarity with social representations to the extent that both see everyday thinking as different from scientific reasoning, but as functionally equivalent to it, and that pre-existing knowledge is used to understand the new.

This theory was developed using a movement (biotechnology) in which the general public were not involved on a day-to-day basis. It was their opinion that was being researched rather than their lived experience. But symbolic coping can be seen in my social object. Here are farmers coping with change. They are creating awareness of their concerns about change through the media, through lobbying and, in some cases, through direct action. Divergent images of farming and change are produced; the need to save the family farm, or the benefit of sourcing food locally, for example. Dominant images in the public domain, like the power of the supermarkets and care for the

environment have been appropriated. But in the case of farmers, farming and change the fourth stage, normalisation, has not yet been reached as farming's future, the land and the landscape are still the subject of much debate.

Another way of coping, in this case with the uncertainty of the immediate future, is proposed by Valsiner (2003). He sees time as the constraint for meaning making. The present is only an "*infinitesimally small moment*" (p7.6) between past and future. He argues that semiotic tools (signs, social representations) are constructed in a way that stabilizes past –future uncertainty, because humans are psychologically adapted to do so. This idea goes some way to explaining how social representations work for individuals to make sense of the world around them (Nebe, 2003) but it is criticised for introducing a reductionist element to a theory (social representations theory) which has been developed specifically to overcome fragmentation in social psychology (Bertacco, 2003). Nevertheless, Valsiner's theory of enablement provides yet another explanation of the role of social representations in coping with threat.

2.4 The Accommodation of Change

In the introductory chapter I listed three reasons why I saw social representations theory as a relevant tool to investigate farmers, farming and change. The first was that social representations arise in the interactive space between individuals and others and the problems for farmers in the midst of change is exactly there, where individual farmers meet society. The second reason was because we can use the theory to both observe specific representations and understand how they are functioning in a change situation. The third reason why the theory is relevant for this study is because allows the 'voice' or ordinary farmers to be heard. This fourth section moves beyond the reasons why social representations theory is a useful tool for researching

change to consider the theoretical assumptions about the mechanisms whereby social representations accommodate change.

Social representations theory, because of its use of anchoring to understand novelty in terms of past experience, history and tradition, has been accused of hindering change (McKinlay & Potter, 1987). An answer to this can be found in the idea that social representations are a two-part structure – a central core surrounded by a flexible periphery (Abric, 1993). The idea is analogous to that proposed by Lakatos (1974, cited in Wagner & Hayes, 2005, p191) in relation to scientific theories. According to Lakatos, scientific theories have a hard core of general basic assumptions and stated views. The hard core is protected by a peripheral belt in which research which challenges the hard core is accommodated by means of additional assumptions which explain the anomalies.

The structural approach to social representations also sees a central core that is coherent and stable, determined by historical, sociological and ideological contexts. The periphery of the structure, however, is adaptive, allowing for history and experience to be accommodated. Two questions arise from this idea of social representations having a stable core and flexible periphery. The first is how stable is stable? And what are the circumstances in which the core permits access from the periphery? These questions are important in the investigation farmers' representations of change. If the central core of a representation is an essential part of a farmer's identity, what happens in the case of change when that identity is under threat? Another, similar, question follows. Representations are supposedly fluid rather than a "...*reflection or reproduction of some external reality...*" (Voelklein & Howarth, 2005). So how can representation be said to have a structure when they are perceived as being both stable and moving at the same time, allowing for innovation yet resisting change? The stability, or otherwise, of the central core of farmers'

representation of change will clearly be an important point to consider in my empirical studies.

Following the idea of a core/periphery structure, Abric (1996) went on to propose two processes at work: a cognitive one allowing for an active role in the re-presenting of reality, and a social one to account for the dialogical generation of representations. This proposition appears to rely on a traditional conception of social cognition which is at variance with the idea of the social being at the heart of the formation of social representations (Parales-Quenza, 2005) and raises another query about the validity of the structural approach.

What social representations theory does allow for, however, is the existence of contradictory representations, perhaps arising from oppositional taxonomies. This has been discussed above, as has the notion of cognitive polyphasia which, research has indicated, at times of change, does allow for the coexistence of incompatible ways of thinking and representations within an individual. Again, this seems to posit that the core of a representation is less stable than the structural approach would suggest. It certainly requires investigation.

2.5 Exploring Meaning in a Complex Social Object

In the preceding four sections I have spoken of the various elements of social representations theory that I see as relevant in the consideration of farmers, farming and change. In the course of those sections I have mentioned some criticisms of the theory. In this concluding section I consider the totality of the theory as a suitable tool for exploring meaning in a complex social object.

The purpose of my research is not just to **describe** how change is affecting farmers and farming, nor do I just want to **explain** behaviour that is resulting

from it. Indeed, Wagner (1993) argues that that is not possible. I do want to explore the common thinking, and communication in and about a complex social object which is facing rapid social change; a phenomenon which is moving, changing and turning farmers lives upside down (Marková, 2000a, p455). In order to clarify why I see social representations theory as valid for such a task I need to take a brief look back at the early history of social psychology, its 'long past' (Farr, 1996).

Between 1874 and 1920 Wilhelm Wundt published many volumes of psychological study. He distinguished between 'higher mental processes' and 'basic' phenomena. The former referred to social objectifications of the mind, such as art, morality and religion which could not be methodologically isolated from the society and culture in which the individual was situated. Wundt's *Volkerpsychologie*, for example, considered social rather than individual phenomena that "...cannot be explained by the characteristics of the individual mind alone, since they presuppose the interaction of the many..." To investigate these processes required the methods of 'natural history' rather than those of the laboratory. 'Basic' phenomena on the other hand, little more than physiology, could be observed experimentally. The origins of these two distinct psychologies can be seen even further back, from the time of the ancient Greek philosophers where the animus or immortal, intellectual soul might be contrasted with the anima or embodied soul. Later Descartes, moving on from the theocentricity of Mediaeval times, postulated an egocentric, post renaissance, unique individual whose world of consciousness was separate from the world in itself and whose knowledge was deduced from propositions or ideas based on intuition. Some two centuries later the zeitgeist of expressivism saw Hegel acknowledge the role of the senses in perceiving truth – but truth as it appears to be. Hegel saw sensory awareness as phenomenal knowledge, with the possibility of re-appreciation and interpretation.

It was, however, the experimental area of Wundt's work, in particular his psychological laboratory in Leipzig, which influenced social psychology in the early part of the 20th century. Allports (1924) textbook *Social Psychology* distanced itself from the Hegelian paradigm by aiming to rid psychology of reference to mind and consciousness. He saw scientific achievement in psychology as the result of pursuing the experimental method. This is regarded as the point at which social psychology moved away from the study of social processes towards the individual processes of a generalized other leading to "...the individualisation of the social..." (Graumann, 1986).

The sort of science which Allport, and the behaviourists who followed, promulgated, assumes a direct relationship between what we know and what actually exists, that there is an ontological reality which can be accessed, one truth, which holds good for all. Social representations theory draws on a fundamentally different epistemology, one which assumes that social phenomena cannot be easily boiled down to a proposition that can be verified or falsified (Moscovici, 1997). Social representations theory sees the central role of language and communication in making sense of reality. It sees the outcome of the interaction as dependent on its nature, conflict, co-operation or constraint, for example, as well as the symmetrical or asymmetrical character of the relationship. In this respect the role of power comes to the forefront of meaning making. The theory of social representations emphasizes the **social** nature of making meaning. It allows us to observe both the production and the function of representations and it allows the "voice" of those who feel excluded to be heard. This very broadness of the theory is the reason why it is difficult to define. It is why academics who find it difficult to move beyond individual cognition, question its authority. But this, I believe, is why social representations theory is the most appropriate tool with which to investigate a complex social object such as farmers and farming in change.

Chapter 3

STRATEGY & TACTICS TO ACCESS THE SOCIAL OBJECT

3.1 Research Strategy

Scientia is the Latin word for knowledge but in modern usage science tends to be seen as a certain kind of knowledge, one that emerges from, firstly, natural philosophers, then scientists, working with scientific methods. That sort of science assumes a direct relationship between what we know and what actually exists, an ontological reality which can be accessed. It generates theories based on hypotheses derived from facts which can be verified or falsified. Social representations theory is fundamentally different. It provides a conceptual framework enabling us to “...*discover a new, fruitful aspect of the facts, interpret them and discuss them...*” (Moscovici, 1988). It must not fall into the trap of a fundamentalist epistemology (Marková, 2000a). There is no “...*social or psychological reality ‘as such’, no transparent image of events or persons unconnected with the person who creates the image...*” (Moscovici, 1988, p230). We are not seeking an objective knowledge in the sense of a mirror of the external world, we are trying to understand, transmit and interpret discourse of others (Bakhtin, 1981, quoted in Marková, 2000a). What we need to research social representations is a conceptual analysis and systematic treatment of dialogism.

This dialogical nature of social representations as well as their duality, as both process and content, in both individual minds and circulating in society (Wagner, 1994), has consequences for the choice of research methodology and for the research outcome. On the one hand it allows a versatility of methodological approach. Indeed, Sotirakopoulou & Breakwell (1992) call for multi-methodological approaches when working in the theoretical framework of social representations because the construct of a social representation is too

complex to be approached via a single method, involving as it does, "...*ideas, beliefs, values, practices, feelings, images, attitudes, knowledge, understandings and explanations*". On the other hand, this very versatility could create the trap of concocting "...*some bland soup or, even, laying one (different data source) upon another in some rather more substantial lasagna...*" (Breakwell, 1993). Wagner (1994) proposes three distinct fields of social representations research: firstly, the folk-knowledge of popularised scientific ideas; secondly, culturally constructed objects with a long-term history; thirdly social and political conditions and events. Although UK agriculture could be construed as a culturally constructed object, and it certainly has a long-term history, the third of those fields is where my research lies. Di Giacomo (1980) describes it as "...*the result of a given group's confrontations of the objects in its environment with its social reference criteria...*".

Complex social relations require particular sensitivity to the study of the issues involved. Flick (2002a, p2) suggests that quantitative methods of research might be insufficiently subtle for complex situations because "...*rapid social change and the resulting diversification of life worlds (mean that) traditional deductive methodologies – deriving research questions and hypotheses from theoretical models and testing them against empirical evidence – are failing in the differentiation of objects.*" I am not, in this instance, attempting to test a hypothesis or elicit statistics from a sample which can be generalised to a wider population. I am seeking to understand the nature of the problem, how farmers' understand and assign meaning to change. That is more likely to be revealed in qualitative methods, with emphasis on holistic understanding and explanation to allow all the complexity, detail and context of the situation to be accounted for. My strategy for analysing farmers, farming and change is therefore one of qualitative research. This is not to denigrate quantitative research. I do not see quantitative and qualitative methods as opposing poles. They result in different things.

The objective of my research is to understand farmers' subjective meanings, how they make sense of change in their industry. The perspective within qualitative research which will be the empirical starting point is symbolic interactionism, Blumer's (1937) term for Mead's (1934) social theory of mind and self. For Mead, meaning emerges from social acts, so the centrality of language is important. Social representations theory too recognises the centrality of communication and language in the presentation and re-presentation of the ideas and knowledge for individuals and circulating in society. It is through communication and language that I will access the social object.

3.1.1 Interpretation, Reliability, Validity & Transparency

One dimension of a qualitative approach which must be considered is its interpretative nature, not only interpretation of the intersubjective meanings arising from within the object of study, first order interpretations, (Burton, 2000), but also the meanings made and taken by the social scientist herself, second order interpretations (ibid). We must recognise that we who enter a social sphere not only become part of it but, by the very act of investigating it, influence the nature of the data we take from it.

Rossetti-Ferreira et al (1999) sum up the interpretative possibilities available to a researcher as “...*a dynamic network of meanings which structures and canalises a complex set or repertoire of possible interpretations available...*”. They point out that these meanings may arise from personal experience or expectations flowing from experience, or they may come into play because of a long history. But, mainly, interpretations arise from the respective roles of researcher and researched in the “*here-and-now*” situation. Somewhat closer to the social object which is the subject of this thesis, Neal & Walters (2006), investigating the relationship between current ideas of English rurality and ideas of belonging and identity, reach similar conclusions. Reflecting on

whether their own experience, and connections to the rural, influenced the way they heard the various voices of their research they ask “... *did we hear this account ‘more’ because it is one that jars with our ‘knowledge’ and experiences of the rural?*”

Interpretation then raises questions about the reliability, objectivity and validity of the findings. Reliability means that repeated measures with the same material should yield similar results. But research for a PhD is necessarily an individual process and close contact with the material would make repeat analysis somewhat meaningless. Validity means the extent to which ‘measurements’ are measuring what is intended and that inferences and interpretations from the material can be made with confidence. By objectifying the social object in the way described in the introductory chapter, my methods of data collection ensure that the material used in the empirical research is representative so that conclusions drawn can be made with confidence.

One way of addressing this problem of objectivity and validity and, at the same time, of enhancing rigour and consistency in qualitative research, is triangulation (Flick, 1992). Essentially this means the consideration of the problem from a number of different vantage points be they use of different researchers, different theoretical backgrounds, or different methods of data collection. Triangulation can reveal very rich data for interpretation. Triangulation also recognises complexity and diversity and that multiple realities exist. (Banister et al, 1994). Flick (2002a) notes that triangulation allows one to take into account as many different aspects of a problem as possible. It is therefore an ideal tactic to use for a complex social object such as farmers, farming and change.

The use of different researchers is not a possibility here nor, since opting for social representations theory as my theoretical background, will I be approaching the problem from different theoretical backgrounds. However, four methodological principles have been formulated in the study of social representations (Moscovici, 1984 p52-9): firstly, obtaining material from samples of conversations normally exchanged in society; secondly, considering social representations as a means of recreating reality; thirdly, noting that the character of social representations is revealed in particular times of crisis and upheaval, when a group or its image are undergoing change; fourthly, that those who elaborate these representations, and the groups to which they belong, be regarded as amateur 'scholars'. I have used these principles to guide both the source of my data and the method for its collection, allowing for triangulation of both.

Three empirical studies have been undertaken, each accessing a different aspect of the social object, so allowing conclusions to be drawn from different data sources: individual farmers, others in the agricultural public sphere and published media circulating among farming insiders and the general public. Methodology of data collection is also triangulated, with a different tactic utilised for each different data source: semi-structured interviews, narrative interviews and content analysis. Research design is thus 2 x 2: interviews with insiders and outsiders; content analysis with insider and outsider publications. Finally, the three empirical studies are combined with participant observation of the farming industry, so providing another vantage point from which to access the social object.

To conclude these introductory remarks about my methodological approach to the object of study I note my aim of transparency to demonstrate that my research is both reliable and valid, with full and clear explanations of interpretation.

3.1.2 Data Analysis

The data to be analysed comprised the transcripts of the interviews, semi-structured and narrative, and the material used to construct the corpus for content analysis. Chapters 4, 5 and 6, following, detail methodology specific to the individual studies. There is, however, one analytical technique which is common to all: thematic analysis.

There were two options for analysis, textual or thematic. The difference between the two is essentially a matter of direction. The former, textual analysis, uses the detail of individual wording and punctuation to build a bottom-up interpretation of meaning. The latter, thematic analysis, is top-down, reducing the data into key themes or ideas and assigning them to categories which emerge as a constructive process by piloting and revision (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The objective is to uncover themes which are salient at different levels in the text so that issues can be understood by the way they are signified. The themes identified are then organised in a way which can provide a deeper understanding of a social phenomena being investigated.

Thematic analysis is based on grounded theory, the idea that theory is grounded in data which is systematically gathered and analysed (Flick, 2002b; Strauss & Corbin, 1994) and from which a set of relationships and concepts can be proposed. The disadvantage of the approach is that it is the interpretation of the researcher which builds the data into a plausible explanation. But, as discussed above, transparency allows research to be open to external examination. It is a prerequisite to validation (Arruda, 2003).

To aid the thematic analysis qualitative analysis computer programmes were used in the semi-structured and narrative interviews. ALCESTE, version 4.5, is a textual data analysis software tool, developed by Max Reinert and marketed by IMAGE, France. It determines word distribution patterns and

groupings in a text. It partitions the corpus into Elementary Contextual Units (ECUs) appropriate for the natural flow of the text by means of a hierarchy of punctuation, and it builds up a dictionary of the vocabulary used in the corpus of the texts being analysed. The most significant words and sentences are then identified by a correspondence analysis using chi-square calculations to measure the importance of the links. ALCESTE analysis is not based on meaning but, because a statement is considered an expression of a point of view, we can use these classes of words to uncover points of view, themes, frames of reference, or forms of discourse that are shared by the interviewees. The interpretative role of the researcher does come into play at this point, but the benefit of ALCESTE is that it provides an initial reduction of data which is free from researcher interpretation. Details of the preparation of the interview texts is shown at Appendix 1.

A second qualitative analysis computer programme was used to aid the thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews. NVIVO 2 is a qualitative analysis software tool, developed and marketed by QSR International, which helps researchers organise, code, retrieve and model their data. In contrast to ALCESTE, little text preparation is required and the analysis relies entirely on interpretation by the researcher. During initial and subsequent analyses passages of text are allocated to key “tree” nodes. The material can then be further partitioned and coded to primary, secondary, tertiary branches as required.

3.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

The first empirical study accessed the social object through semi-structured, one-to-one interviews with farmers to record their views, understanding and meaning of change in their own words. The interviews came close to being the conversations normally exchanged in society in accord with Moscovici’s (1984) methodological principles for studying social representations.

Certainly the interviews took place at a time of crisis and upheaval, when farmers and farming were undergoing rapid change. But, whilst being close to samples of conversations, it must be remembered that they are not. The interview is a complex social event (Alvesson, 2003). The presence of the researcher will have an effect on the responses and reflection on subsequent interpretation is vital.

The advantages of interviewing as a tool for data collection are that the respondent can talk at length and in their own terms, without the imposition of the researcher's reality. At the same time the researcher has the opportunity to ask the interviewees to clarify or amplify interesting points. In this way they give room to "...develop the image of the phenomenon that is studied..." (Flick, 1994, p189). Interviews allow for the collection of data from individuals from different statuses or roles. Here the use of interviews meant that I could collect data from farmers from different areas, with farmers farming different sorts of crops and on different sizes of farm.

3.2.1 Interviewees and Interview Locations

With some 150,000 people classified as farmers, with a wide variety of farm size and farm type, who to select as respondents needed some consideration. Should I be taking as broad a range as possible to construct some approximately representative span, or should I concentrate on those who appear to be most affected by change? Should I try to deal with a range of farming types and areas or should I compare and contrast different farming types and different areas? As my methodology was to be qualitative rather than quantitative I was not looking to test a hypothesis or create a random sample from which findings could be extrapolated to a wider population. I was looking for currents of opinion though which I could understand and explain a particular social phenomenon. My chosen tactic was to select

“farming” areas and, within these areas, to recruit interviewees, through existing contacts, to give a wide spread of farmer age, farm size and farm type.

20 interviews took place in 3 phases from May 2003 to February 2004.

Three initial interviews were used to test the topic guide. Of the initial interviewees one farmed in Gwent, one in Worcestershire and one in Norfolk. Of the other seventeen, 11 were from Scotland and 6 were from South West England. In both Scotland and the South West interviewees were recruited from two separate regions: the Scottish borders, flattish fertile land used for arable and cereal crops and livestock production. Further north, Morayshire, being close to the coast, enjoys a special micro-climate making it ideal for cereal production. The two areas of the South West were the Dorset/Devon borders and the Somerset Levels. The hilly terrain of the former features small fields, primarily grassland for livestock production. The wet plainlands of the latter are renowned for good grass production in the spring and summer months, well suited to dairy farming enterprises with the stock being housed during the winter to avoid poaching the land. Both Scotland and SW England have good and poor agricultural land and both suffered during the 2001 foot and mouth disease outbreak, with Dumfries and Galloway in Scotland and Devon in SW England accounting for 80% of all outbreaks. (Figure 5)

Farming is important in Scotland and the South West of England, with a contribution to the general economy (gross value added*) of 1.2% in both regions. This is 50% more than the national average contribution of 0.8% by agriculture to the UK economy as a whole. In value terms this equates to £848 million gva in Scotland and £753 million gva in SW England. (Overall UK gva figure of £6.5 billion.)

* Under the European System of Accounts gva denotes estimates previously known as gross domestic product (gdp) at basic prices (not including taxes). Regional accounts always use basic prices so gva is the term used.

Figure 5: Interview Locations



Morayshire

Large fields, coastal climate.
Cereals and beef and sheep production.



Berwickshire/Scottish Borders

Flattish fertile land.
Arable and cereal crops.
Beef and sheep production.



Dorset/Devon Borders

Hilly, small fields.
Grassland for livestock production.



Somerset

Wet plainland.
Grass production in spring and
summer. Dairy production.

70,000 people are employed in farming in Scotland, 80,000 in SW England. 80% of land in Scotland (5.5 million hectares) is farmed by 50,000 holdings. The comparative figure for SW England is 1.7 million hectares farmed by 41,000 holdings illustrating the farm size difference between the two areas: Scotland, with an average holding size of 173ha, and SW England where the average holding size is 43ha. **

Table 3: Interviewee overview

Ref	Farm Size *	Farmer Age**	Farming Type (main enterprises)
Init01	225	3	Beef & sheep
Init02	300	1	Organic vegetables & sheep. Farm shop
Init03	400	2	Ducks & sheep
Scot01	416	3	Cereals, peas & sheep
Scot02	660	3	Cereals, potatoes, swedes & sheep
Scot04	250	4	Cereals, potatoes & sheep
Scot05	450	3	Beef, forage crops
Scot06	2830	3	Beef & sheep, forage crops
Scot07	400	3	Pigs & cereals
Scot08	365	2	Potatoes & beetroot
Scot09	550	2	Beef, pedigree livestock & cereals
Scot10	550	1	Beef & cereals
Scot11	400	2	Cereals, beef & sheep
SW01	250	2	Beef & sheep. Direct meat sales
SW02	100	3	Dairy. Bed & Breakfast
SW03	1350	3	Dairy. Cheese
SW04	540	2	Dairy & arable
SW05	500	2	Dairy. Cheese
SW06	250	2	Dairy

* Acres farmed by interviewee – includes rented land.

** <35 =1, 36-50=2, 51-65=3, >65 =4

Interviewee Scot03 does not appear because, during the interview it became clear that, whilst he was still farming, this was in the nature of a hobby farm. He had retired from commercial full-time farming some months earlier. The interview was valuable because it helped to provide more evidence about the

** All figures quoted sourced from defra & SEERAD (Scottish Executive Environment & Rural Affairs Department) rounded, and for 2002

background to the general situation in the agricultural industry today. But my plan was to use interviewees who were currently farming and so were at the forefront of experiencing change. For this reason I did not include the Scot03 text as part of the interview analysis. 19 interview transcripts were analysed.

3.2.2 Interview Structure and Topics

In setting up the interviews I introduced my topic to the interviewees as being about change in agriculture, so the framing of the discussion was known in advance by my interviewees. All the interviews took place at the farm, in most cases in the farmhouse kitchen or sitting room but in 3 cases in the farm office. In 5 cases the farmer was joined by his wife and, since both took an active role in the running of the farm, I treated the comments as though from one respondent. And I treated the term farmer and farming as being one and the same because, to be a farmer is to farm the land, to be a farmer necessitates farming, the noun and the verb are intertwined. All the interviews were, with agreement, recorded for later transcription. The interviews broadly followed the pattern set out in the topic guide (Appendix 2). The introduction, during the interview, of a self-anchoring ladder scale, adapted from the “Self-Anchoring Striving Scale” of Cantril (1965), tended to informally structure the interview into sections related to past, present and future, emphasising the notion of change over time.

Cantril sought a technique for measuring individual concerns and aspirations which did not impose any pre-conceived ideas or patterns of values on the individual; which asked the individual to define, on the basis of their own perceptions, what would be seen as good, bad, high or low. I was looking for a series of measurements which would help me see how the interviewees felt that change was affecting their fortunes as farmers; the extent to which they felt that their fortunes, and the fortunes of the agricultural industry as a whole, were different today from the fortunes of the past; and the extent of their hopes

and expectations for the future. In defining “fortunes” I explained that I was looking for their own interpretation of what that comprised – profitability, a happy lifestyle, good crops – whatever was most pertinent to them. This method meant that what was important to the interviewees was used to make the measurement, not any category imposed by the researcher. The benefit of asking each individual to select their own time point in the past and the future was that it would be a time point that was meaningful for the interviewee, a time that they could remember clearly or, when thinking about future fortunes, was as far forward as they felt confident to predict. It removed the problem of selecting a particular year which might have been good for a dairy farmer but bad for a cereal grower, or a year which was good for farmers in the south of England but bad for farmers in the north of Scotland. Similarly, the benefit of asking each individual to select a rung of the ladder dispenses with the subjective viewpoint of, for example, the imposed valuations of a Lickert scale.

I used the same ladder (Figure 6) but, at appropriate times during the interviews, asked them to rate:

- (i) the fortunes of their farm at a point in the past;
- (ii) the fortunes of the agricultural industry as a whole at the same point in the past;
- (iii) the fortunes of their farm today;
- (iv) the fortunes of the agricultural industry as a whole today;
- (v) the expected fortunes of their farm at a point in the future;
- (vi) the expected fortunes of the agricultural industry as a whole at the same point in the future.

Figure 6: Self-anchoring ladder scale (adapted from Cantril, 1965)

10
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
1

In addition to analysis of the findings from the ladder scale, the interview transcripts were analysed using ALCESTE and with a thematic analysis aided by NVIVO. The results can be seen in Chapter 4.

3.3 Narrative Interviews

The public sphere for farmers and farming (Figure 2, p40) includes insiders - the farming industry and interest groups - operating within society at large, comprising the general public and public opinion, those who make policy, legislate and regulate society, broadly classified as government, and the media which circulates within society – print, broadcast and internet. The semi-structured interviews with working farmers provided data from insiders. Narrative interviews provided data from both insiders and other sectors of the agricultural public sphere, from different individuals with different perspectives. The interviewers influence was minimal and removed any

imposed structure. Events were recounted from the perspective of the respondent and in his or her own style (Bauer, 1996).

3.3.1 *Narrative and the Narrative Interview*

Stories or narratives are understood universally. We are so adept at narrative that, “*it seems almost as natural as life itself*” (Bruner, 2002), and it is through narrative that “*we construct, reconstruct and in some ways reinvent yesterday and tomorrow*”. Narrative arises between our experience of the world and our efforts to describe that experience in language. It is fundamental to culture. Indeed it is “... *present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there is nowhere nor has there been a people without narrative.....narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural; it is simply there, like life itself*” (Barthes, 1993, p251).

The meaning that emerges from narrative is not the isolated perception of that one individual, nor is it necessarily equated with that person’s intention. Flick (2002a) warns against assuming that narrative and experience are analogous. The meaning conveyed by the narrative emerges through social processes - communicative or social acts – whereby the gesture of the one and the response of the other completes the act initiated by the first. Following Mead (1934) it is this triadic relationship which creates meaning. Narrative, although the story of one, is created through social processes; it is objectively there and it participates in the construction of new realities.

Analysis of narrative is a technique for studying personal experience and meaning and how events are construed by active participants (Reissman,1993). Such analysis provides an opportunity to identify knowledge, and to uncover the social representations which an individual is using as a resource to make sense of the world, neither of which are necessarily accessible to the interviewee (Bauer, 1996). This is possible by a

structural analysis which interprets a “second-order” sign system connoted by a first-order, or denoted, sign system (Barthes, 1993). Active interpretation is involved here. Metaphor is also useful in that the transfer over of meaning from one notion to another to aid understanding can uncover implicit meaning from the explicit.

3.3.2 *Features of Narrative*

Narrative includes many of the constraints which can be found in storytelling: constraints like too much detail in order that the listener will understand; like the need for an end, in a situation which may be ongoing; and like condensing, in order that the story can reach its conclusion in the time available. So active construction is a feature of narrative. This construction can be seen in factual “*indifference*” (Bruner, 1990): not that the narrative is untrue, merely that, in navigating the constraints outlined, certain elements of the story may be emphasised over another or certain timings repositioned in order to conserve the plot line.

Ricouer (1981, p165) refers to the “*illusion of sequence*” indicating an artificiality in squeezing different aspects of events or happenings into one plot-line perhaps because, as Scholes (1981, p205) points out, narrative is “... *a sequencing of something for somebody*”. It may be because we experience the world “.. *as events over time, like a story...*” (Rappaport, 2000) and this helps us see meaning in our lives. It may be because we prefer to present events as coherent, with a beginning, a middle and an end (White, 1981, p23). Or it may be that narratives are told as a sequence to reflect the flow of time experienced in life. Whichever the reason it is also the case that events of a sequence assume their importance by being part of the whole. They do not “...*have a life or meaning of their own. Their meaning is given by their place in the overall configuration of the sequence as a whole – its plot or fibula.*” (Bruner, 1990, p43). From this need for sequentiality we see that narrative has

both chronological and non-chronological aspects (Ricoeur, 1981). The former sequences the events. The latter deals with the plot line – who did what to whom?

Allied to sequentiality is historicity which Ricoeur (ibid) defines as “...*the priority given to the past in the structure...*”. He sees this as understandable because of the importance of memory, the need to borrow from experiences of the past in order to understand the present and imagine the future.

In society we assume norms, in our daily lives as well as in the grammatical constructions for describing them. Bruner (1990) points to the unique way in which narrative manages departures from the norm. Narrative and narrative interpretation, he points out, allow for departures from the norm to be made meaningful “*in terms of established patterns of belief*” (p47). (I am reminded here of Moscovici’s notion of anchoring and objectification as a way of rendering the unknown, or novel, knowable – of understanding its meaning.)

3.3.3 Narrative as Data

The constructive nature of narrative qualifies interpretation. In a sense we are interpreting an interpretation. Reissman (1993) lists 5 levels where, during the narrative interview process, interpretations or representations (re-presentations) may be made during the research process: attending to experience; telling about experience; transcribing experience; analysing experience; and reading about experience. A point of interest here, if one takes this list out of the context of the writing, is that these levels might apply equally to the narrator and the researcher.

Narrative can be epic but it can also be quest and the notion of quest illuminates two other aspects relevant to its use as data. The first relates to value and the second to morality.

Rappaport (2000) highlights the empowering nature of narratives and their function as resources for personal and social change. But their use as resource means that their availability depends on status, whether that be social class, race or ethnicity. They assume a point of view (Reissman, 1993), because the same events can be narrated in very different ways reflecting the values, interests and access to power of the narrator. Kling (1995), talking about the role of narrative in developing social movements (in this case evangelical feminism), agrees that the narratives selected or appropriated are those by which we feel most empowered. Narrative then confers a **value**. This accords with Moscovici's (1988, p230) point that "*..what is represented and how it is represented is given a meaning in terms of the position of the person who enunciates it...*"

One reason for representing the real world in the form of a story, White (1981) suggests, comes from the need to establish moral authority. Were this not the case, he argues, real life events would be reported more as the annals and chronicles of ancient times which were presented as sequences only, without beginnings or endings. He asks, "*...Could we ever narrativize **without** moralizing?*". Does narrative not have a **moral** dimension?

These various aspects of narrative might suggest limitation as research data. But there are cases where narrative is particularly useful. Among these are projects where different perspectives are involved; where there are "hot" issues such as here, the debate about funding farmers and farming from the public purse; and where, such as this time of change in the agricultural industry, life histories and socio-historical contexts combine (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000).

3.3.4 Data Collection

Participants were a purposive sample of 13 individuals who had been in the farming industry for some years, with experience of change. They were in senior positions in large commercial companies, advisors to government, top-flight journalists and leaders of non-governmental and non-profit making organisations operating in the farming industry. In particular they had the potential to influence change. Together they represented experience and viewpoints from each of the different sectors in the agricultural public sphere.

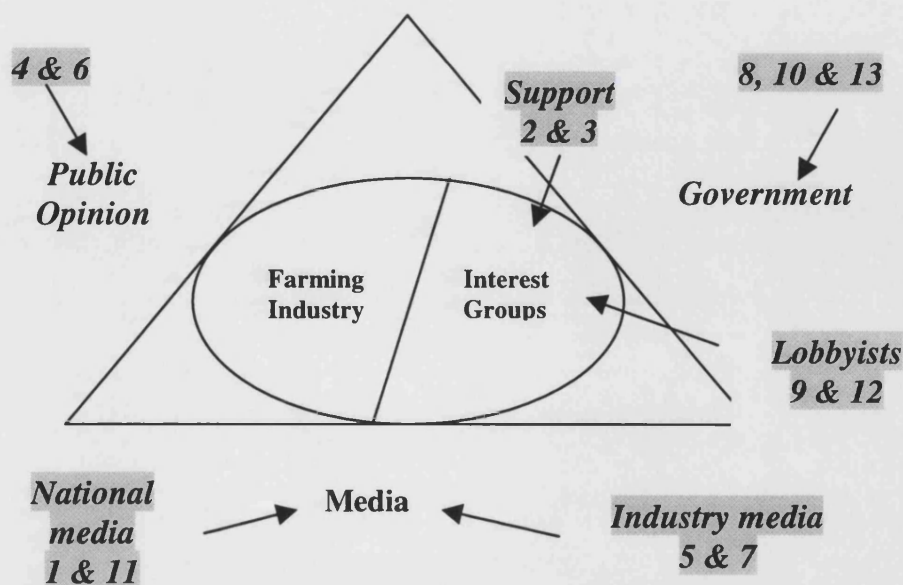
Four of the interviewees were farming insiders, from farming interest groups: two lobbyists and two industry support workers. Three interviewees represent the policy makers: legislators and regulators of the industry, categorised as government in the object of study. I did not attempt to recruit interviewees from the general public. For the purpose of this PhD I felt it would not have been possible to select, say, two or three people who might represent the diversity of the general public as a whole and although, through their shopping choices, there is an opportunity to influence change, as individuals this would be limited. Instead I have taken a supermarket buyer and a food processor as the two interviewees representing public opinion. They provide the goods and the shops in which the majority of the general public encounter the products of farmers and farming. The general public also access representations of farmers and farming by reading about and seeing them in the media. Two of the “media” interviewees were from broadcast media serving the general public. Two further media interviewees write for the journals serving the farming industry itself, both insiders and those who legislate for and regulate the farming industry. Five of the interviewees also farm themselves.

Table 4 lists the participants and Figure 7, following, shows where each interviewee fits within the object of study.

Table 4: Narrative interview participants

Int No	Participant	Representing	Public sphere code
1	Journalist writing for a popular radio programme	Media reaching the general public	mpub
2	Chief executive of an agricultural aid organisation	Insider interest group	intsup
3	Chief executive of a rural support organisation	Insider interest group	intsup
4	Produce buyer of major food retailer	Public opinion	pub
5	Journalist writing for a farming industry magazine	Media reaching the industry	medind
6	Chief executive of large processing company	Public opinion	pub
7	Journalist writing for a farming industry magazine	Media reaching the industry	medind
8	Senior advisor to defra	Government	gov
9	Director of farming organisation	Insider interest group	intlob
10	Senior adviser to government	Government	gov
11	Correspondent for television news programmes	Media reaching the general public	mpub
12	Chief executive of special farming interest group	Insider interest group	intlob
13	Politician with special interest and experience of agriculture	Government	gov

Figure 7: Interviewees “place” in the agricultural public sphere



13 interviews took place between 05.10.04 and 26.05.05. All those approached agreed to see me but the interviews had to be planned some time in advance, hence the time spread. These were people to whom access was not easy and their time was limited. I had therefore suggested a 45 minute slot with them. As can be seen from Table 5 some went well beyond that. Bauer (1996) proposes a quality indicator for narrative interviews, based on their timings. The length of uninterrupted narrative for these 13 interviews varied from 05 to 55 minutes with an average of 24. Although 2 of these were short (<10 minutes), all did produce a narrative and make statements or raise issues for coding. Table 5 also indicates the number of codes utilised during each interview. Details of the coding for the narrative interviews follows in Chapter 5, but they are shown here to reflect the range of issues raised during the interviews. (Code book for the thematic coding of the narratives can be seen at Appendix 3). These varied from only 5 codes utilised in interview 3 to 17 in interview 13, with an average of 11.

Table 5: Narrative interview timings

	Date	Public sphere code	Uninterrupted Narrative (mins)	Narrative questions (mins)	Further Q&A (mins)	Statements or issues raised	Codes utilised	Total interview duration (mins)
1	05.10.04	mpub	20	15	25	25	10	60
2	01.11.04	intsup	15	10	35	24	13	60
3	01.11.04	intsup	05	15	20	13	05	40
4	10.11.04	pub	15	23	12	11	06	50
5	12.11.04	medind	25	25	10	20	13	60
6	03.02.05	pub	07	28	10	13	11	45
7	12.02.05	medind	50	15	10	29	13	75
8	10.03.05	gov	15	15	15	18	12	45
9	29.03.05	intlob	10	25	10	24	13	45
10	05.04.05	gov	20	15	15	24	11	50
11	12.04.05	mpub	25	20	30	15	07	75
12	15.05.05	intlob	55	30	15	28	12	100
13	26.05.05	gov	50	20	20	29	17	90

Interviews followed the pattern set out by Jovchelovitch & Bauer (2000). Preparation required exploring the field of study and planning the opening topic, which would be the generator of the narrative and my only imposition during the narrative part of the interview. The initiation phase involved a brief re-telling of the context of the research, ensuring confidentiality and obtaining permission to record the interview and transcribe verbatim. I used the role of the participant within the industry as the opening topic, asking each to go through their experience of change in the industry from that point of view. The main narrative was uninterrupted. Any clarifications required were made after its natural break point.

During the preparation I had produced a list of the questions and issues I hoped the interview would cover – questions relevant to the sector of the industry in which the interviewee operated. Any not covered during the narration phase were raised in a following question and answer, but formulated as immanent questions, as though from the standpoint of the interviewee, rather than in my own words. The interview concluded, as per the Jovchelovitch & Bauer scheme, with concluding talk during which, in some cases, additional points relevant to farmers and farming in change arose. Where they did these were discussed further. Jovchelovitch & Bauer (2000) suggest that recording stops at the end of the questioning phase and that a “*memory protocol*” of any concluding talk be written up later. My interviewees were all, particularly by this point, comfortable with being recorded. I felt that to stop the recorder at the point suggested would signal the end of the interview and curtail any concluding talk, and so continued recording until the end.

As with the semi-structured interviews with farmers, my initial analysis of the narratives was by the computer programme ALCESTE, version 4.5, a textual data analysis software tool. This was followed by thematic analysis. The results are shown in Chapter 5.

3.4 Content Analysis

Bauer & Gaskell (1999) recognise two sorts of communication: informal communication comprising the encounters and conversations of everyday living; and formal communications – standardised and formalised – such as are seen in the mass circulation media. These two forms of communication, together with habitual behaviour and individual cognition, are the modes by which social representations are shared, transferred and transformed. In the first two empirical studies – semi-structured interviews with farmers and narrative interviews with others from the agricultural public sphere – the data for analysis was drawn from informal communication. The third empirical study draws its data from formal communication. To introduce the study a small diversion about communication allows me to illustrate why the media play a central role in social representations theory.

3.4.1 Communication, the Media and Social Representations

Although the first known printed document dates from AD 750 – a sutra printed on a single sheet of paper in Korea – by the 17th and 18th century presses developed in Europe allowing rapid printing. The media, particularly newspapers, became an important means of communicating new ideas. Notions of communication, as an integrating factor of human societies, emerged in the 19th century. By the end of that century these notions encompassed the management of the masses (Mattelart & Mattelart, 1998), because the assumed potential for such mass communication to have negative effects, such as inciting “uneducated” masses to violence, was a cause for concern.

Early theories saw communication as linear with meaning embedded in a text which could be “injected” into the reader (or listener, or viewer). Schramm (1954) described how communication works in “The Process and Effects of Mass Communication” (1954) and Janis & Hovland, in the Yale

Communication Research Programme (1959), investigated how the independent variables of source, message and audience involved in communication affected attitude and behavioural change. In the UK the arrival of television in family homes during the 1950s was a catalyst for effects research. For example, Himmelweit et al (1958), was commissioned by a joint British Broadcasting and Independent Television Authority committee to see whether action needed to be taken to safeguard children from the effects of television. Himmelweit rejected the hypodermic needle theory of communication and pointed to an active role for the child, with children choosing (to an extent) what to view, how much to view and how to perceive what they view.

An active role for the receiver was also proposed by Hall (1980) in his encoder/decoder model of communication. The encoder creates a message for a reason, but the process is not entirely linear. The process includes societal context, experience and understanding as components in the reading of the message and the decoder is not necessarily obliged to accept the message in the way the encoder intended. But the model does not see encoding/decoding as symmetrical. It postulates a preferred reading, in relation to power, which fits in with the expectations of the receiver. Hall was concerned about how the process of communication perpetuates dominant ideologies and what frameworks of knowledge are circulating in society to make the process work.

Communication, in social representations theory, moves beyond what is still, in Hall's model, essentially two-dimensional, albeit with acknowledgement of input other than that of the encoder and the decoder, to a process that is three-dimensional. In fact communication here is a living, dynamic system, a complex whole of connected parts rather than a process with a series of stages. This is because social representations theory sees communication not only as the pictures or texts which comprise the communication, but also as including

the representational thought which is the basis from which communication arises and, in turn, is received. This is why different knowledge frameworks influence the representations circulating among different social groups in slightly different ways, as Moscovici (1961) identified in his thesis on the representation of psychoanalysis in France.

With communication as one of the key modes by which representations are shared, transferred and transformed it follows that the media, particularly the mass media, given their reach, are an important means of the “*spread and settlement*” of social representations (Rouquette, 1996). In fact in our contemporary and multi-mediated society the media may have replaced informal communication and taken on the major role in macro-social discourse (Wagner & Hayes, 2005, p.237). Sommer (1998) notes how media communication and social representation are “*dialectically interwoven*” (p.194), both elaborating social representations and being “*captives*” of representations circulating among the society they serve. The media are not merely distributors of representations, the representations carried by them both frame and are framed by the social milieus in which they operate: the media both construct and transform social representations, on the one hand, and circulate them, on the other.

Because the media are so significant in the information that circulates in society about a social object Farr (1993) points out that an analysis of the contents of the media that relate to the object of study are important in any study of a social phenomena. Not only are the media constructive of a social object, they also act as “*an external memory for society or group specific knowledge*” (Sommer, 1998, p187), as well as providing information on “*the culture-specific core and the sub-cultural variations*” of a social representation. This makes the media invaluable as a source of data, especially when change in a social object is of interest. Change can be seen through the

media via concrete evidence, rather than through individual memory or anecdote. Sommer also relates how knowledge frameworks tend to emerge in a chronological and functional order, starting from scientific publications to more popular writing to everyday written or oral utterings. Conclusions can be drawn about the formation of the representations from this flow.

There is one final point which make the media a necessary source of data for my research. Giddens (1991, p4) notes “...*Mediated experience, since the first experience of writing, has long influenced both self-identity and the basic organisation of social relations...*” Since the media inform social representations and, in turn, are influenced by them, since they form an external memory, and since they influence identity and social relations, it is to be expected that they will reflect or respond to change in the social object. The agricultural public sphere is as much subject to this influence as any other area of public life. The symbolic goods which the media produce are constitutive of the representations that circulate about farmers, farming and change and are therefore important as a data source.

3.4.2 Researching the Media

One way of studying the media is content analysis, a systematic and empirical method for analysis of documentary data which can identify and order topics. Eco (1994) is somewhat dismissive of content analysis, accepting that it has a “...*useful educational role...*” in revealing what the message wanted to say but concluding, “...*as a record of mass communications’ effects on people’s minds it is totally irrelevant. It tells us what effects were intended, not the ones actually produced.*” I would argue that this viewpoint is seeing the message as producing “effects” in the same way as did early theories of communication described above. It misses the point that social representations theory highlights: that communication is a dynamic system rather than a two-way process resulting in “effects”. My use of content analysis is based on the

belief that “..*valid inferences can be made between content and intended effect, that the study of manifest content is meaningful to communication, audience and analyst and that the frequency of occurrence of various content characteristics is in and of itself meaningful...*” (Ferguson, 1983).

The content analysis which is the basis of this report is used in the ways outlined by Krippendorff (1980): it notes trends; it reveals difference; it construct indices and it constructs maps of knowledge. In doing so content analysis reduces data thus necessitating interpretation. As Lewis (1997), although talking about television viewing, has pointed out “...*the act of counting is not theoretically innocent – we must categorize before we can count...*”. I have already commented on the interpretative nature of qualitative research and, in this third empirical study, again opt for transparency as a way of demonstrating objectivity.

In content analysis reliability and validity depend on whether the categories were adequate for the purpose of the study and whether the coding was reliably followed. An early text on content analysis for the social sciences and humanities (Holsti, 1969), points to the need for rules in the coding process to ensure the process is valid. Such rules would include: how the research question will be defined in terms of categories; what unit of content is to be classified and what system of enumeration will be used. In particular, categories should “*reflect the purposes of the research, be exhaustive, be mutually exclusive, independent and be derived from a single classification principle*” (ibid, p95).

3.4.3 Corpus Construction

The broadcast media have had programmes, both on national radio and television, which have been targeted towards a farming audience. Although there are still some programmes for farmers on certain local radio stations this

is no longer the case nationally. The programmes on national radio and television which include farming matters are now aimed at a wider audience – one with interests in broader rural matters, rather than the farming industry alone. This was confirmed to me during the narrative interview with a correspondent for radio and television programmes. This difference of focus would have made it difficult to make comparisons over time, had I used the broadcast media. With electronic media, although access is becoming more widely available in rural areas and computers and the internet more widely used, this was not the case when my research started. The way the printed media has been used by farmers and the farming industry, and its messages received, remains relatively unchanged. It was my choice for the content analysis.

Two publications were used in the analysis. The Times, a national newspaper, published daily, circulates widely both in the agricultural public sphere and beyond this, among the general public. Farmers Weekly, published weekly, has a circulation among farming insiders although is available to those in government and the media with an interest in farming matters.

The Times has been published since 1785. The first issue cost 2½d. Cover price by the 1950s was 6d, representing a real reduction when taking the figure as a percentage of average income. The 1950s saw a newspaper with some 200 articles per issue on 14 pages. The paper had doubled in size to 28 pages by the 1980s with a cover price of 20p. Format was broadsheet until 2004 when it changed to tabloid. At that point the paper cost 50p and page numbers had increased significantly, segmented into different supplements covering lifestyle, travel, money and so on. Circulation too increased. Audit Bureau of Circulation figures cite annual circulations in the UK as 440,898 in 1954, 837,632 in 1984 and 1,315,406 in 2004, illustrating the increasing reach of the mass media over time.

Farmers Weekly has been published since 1934. Cover price in 1954 was 8d/issue for some 120 pages. The writer of the weekly opinion piece was AG Street, himself a farmer and authority on the agricultural industry. By 1984 cover price had increased to 45p/issue for some 100 pages. Circulation was c108,000 per issue. The weekly opinion piece was authored by invited writers, each well known in the industry. Cover price in 2004 was £1.75/issue still for an average of 100 pages per issue. Circulation had fallen to c74,000. Writer of the weekly opinion piece was David Richardson, well known farmer, writer and broadcaster.

In the case of The Times and Farmers Weekly archives are available for longitudinal comparison. For The Times a digital archive is available on-line from 1785 until 1985. Thereafter searches can be made through Lexis-Nexis, an on-line search programme. Hard copy of Farmers Weekly magazines from the time of first publication are available from the Reading Room of the Museum of English Rural Life, based at the University of Reading.

Farming in the UK is seasonal, following an annual cycle. My corpus reflected this and was based on full years. The three years selected - 1954, 1984 and 2004 - span half a century of farming. Each of those three years also represent a point of change for the farming industry. 1954 was the year that food rationing, put in place during the Second World War, came to an end. It was the first year of new support arrangements for farmers from controlled purchase by regional agricultural committees in the war years to national deficiency payments and guaranteed prices. National marketing initiatives for meat and milk came into force. In 1984 Britain had been a member of the Common Market for 11 years. The period is viewed as a “golden” era for British farmers with the EU orchestrated support mechanisms providing a good income. It is also the year that the problem of food surpluses, which the support mechanisms of the common agricultural policy stimulated, began to

be addressed, with milk production becoming subject to a quota arrangement. 2004 was the last year of national support being tied to production. In choosing 1954, 1984 and 2004 for the content analysis I also avoided two landmark events in the industry, BSE (1986) and Foot-and-Mouth disease (2001). Both of these were of course of great significance in the industry but disease was the focus here and media coverage of both was heavy which, I felt, would skew the results.

The corpus was constructed differently for the two publications. The Times archives were searched electronically for the keywords “farmer” and/or “farming” in the headline, in the indexing or as a major mention. Subsequently they were searched again with the keywords food and production. Articles focusing on agriculture overseas were discarded. In Farmers Weekly I used the leader article and the opinion piece of each issue for the main analysis. All Letters to the Editor in each issue were used to identify the topics of concern to the readers. The total corpus for analysis is shown Table 1, 168 articles from The Times, 307 from Farmers Weekly and 1,884 Letters to the Editor of Farmers Weekly.

Table 6: Text corpus for analysis

Year	The Times		Farmers Weekly	
	<i>No. of articles</i>	<i>No. of articles</i>	<i>Letters to Editor</i>	
1954	41	104	438	
1984	82	99	805	
2004	45	104	641	
Total	168	307	1,884	

3.4.4 Corpus Analysis

Articles from both publications were coded in three categories: **what** the article was about, its main focus, issue or topic; **who** were the main actors (other than the generality of farmers); **which** were the underlying causes or explanations connoted. In each case - issue, actors and cause - one code only was assigned per article and all articles were assigned a code. At this point in the analysis the codes could have been collapsed into broader themes.

However, in the narrative interview study I found there to be a multiplicity of themes circulating in the agricultural public sphere, resulting in a plurality of representations of farming. To see whether I would find similar diversity in the media all codes into which 10% or more of the articles coded were allocated were retained. This was the basis for the cross-sectional analysis of the two publications in each of the three years 1954, 1984 and 2004.

Four further measures were taken to illuminate change over time. First, in *Farmers Weekly*, all the letters to the editor were coded to reflect what the letter was about, in order to identify change in matters of concern to farmers. Second, in *Farmers Weekly*, the leader article and the opinion piece were coded according to whether it was broadly optimistic about the industry or broadly pessimistic. Third, in *The Times*, each article was coded according to whether it presented a broadly sympathetic view of farmers or farming, or not. Fourth, from *The Times*, the key word associated with the mention of farmers and farming, for example, 'protest', 'demands' or 'safeguards', either from the headline or from the main body of the text was recorded. At the same time the way farmers themselves were depicted or connoted by the article, for example, as dissatisfied producers, helped by grants, or needing legal safeguards was also recorded. These records were subjected to a further thematic analysis to gauge the connotation about farmers which readers would draw from the article. They provided a longitudinal measure of the way farmers and farming

was being seen by others, so affecting farmers self-esteem and their sense of identity.

The total content analysis consisted of three sets of measures:

- 1 Cross-sectional results from the two publications for each of the years 1954, 1984 and 2004;
- 2 Longitudinal results of each of the two publications:
 - (i) individually;
 - (ii) comparing issues, actors and causes in each publication;
- 3 Longitudinal results of four other measures:
 - (i) topics of concern to farmers as seen in Letters to the Editor in Farmers Weekly;
 - (ii) optimism/pessimism ratings from Farmers Weekly;
 - (iii) 'sympathy' measures from The Times;
 - (vi) connotations about farmers suggested by key words from the headlines and introductory paragraphs in the text of articles from The Times.

Details of the coding for the content analysis follows in Chapter 6. The code books for each of the issues, actors and causes categories can be seen at Appendix 4 and the code book for the words associated with farmers and farming, taken from The Times, can be seen at Appendix 5.

3.5 Participant Observation

I have worked in the farming and agri-food industry all my working life and use my experience, conversations and understanding to include participant observation as a source of data collection. Moscovici (1988, p240) believes that observation retains a privileged position in the study of the phenomena of thinking and communication because “...it frees us from premature

qualification and experimentation, which chop up facts into tiny pieces and lead to meaningless findings...”.

Table 7: Meetings, conferences and events attended, 2002-2006

06-08.01.03	57 th Oxford Farming Conference, including debate: <i>This house believes that British agriculture would benefit from being in the Euro Zone</i>
25.03.03	Launch of Commercial Farmers Group, House of Lords
24.04.03	ASDA Suppliers Conference, Leeds
29.06-	
02.07.03	Royal Agricultural Show, Warwickshire
01.07.03	Cross-sector Listening Group for suppliers to M&S
21-24.07.03	Royal Welsh Agricultural Show, Builth Wells
02.09.03	Cornerstone Group, Durham (discussion group of young farmers from Durham, Northumberland & Yorkshire)
06.11.03	Red Meat Industry Forum Conference, London
01.12.03	Bidwells Debate: <i>This house believes that the reform of the CAP will revitalise the rural economy</i> , London
05-07.01.04	58 th Oxford Farming Conference, including debate: <i>This house believes that supermarkets do everything that can be reasonably be expected to support British agriculture</i>
12.03.04	Consumer Focus Group with M&S food purchasers discussing provenance
04-07.07.04	Royal Agricultural Show, Warwickshire
19-22.07.04	Royal Welsh Agricultural Show, Builth Wells
04-06.01.05	59 th Oxford Farming Conference, including debate: <i>This house believes that British farming is good for the environment</i>
03-06.07.05	Royal Agricultural Show, Warwickshire
04.07.05	Farming for the Future (Conference during the Royal Show)
18-21.07.05	Royal Welsh Show, Builth Wells
03-05.01.06	60 th Oxford Farming Conference, including debate: <i>This house believes that politicians are neglecting the Rural Economy</i>
15.02.06	Sentry Farming Conference, Cambridgeshire
02-05.07.06	Royal Agricultural Show, Warwickshire
04.07.06	<i>Whose Countryside is it Anyway? (Special debate during the Royal Show)</i>
24-27.07.06	Royal Welsh Agricultural Show, Builth Wells

I have not used my observations to produce a “*thick*” ethnographic description (Geertz, 1993) but, in taking part in a number of meetings, conferences and agricultural events, (Table 7), I have had the opportunity to discuss some of

my research findings with others in the industry and some of their points and thoughts contribute to my interpretation of the findings of the empirical studies.

Chapter 4

“IT’S A GOOD LIFE WITHOUT A DOUBT”: FARMERS’ EXPERIENCE OF CHANGE

The previous chapters have set out the problems of change for farmers and provided some of the background to those changes (Chapter 1); proposed the theoretical perspective from which the research will be conducted (Chapter 2), indicating the areas of social representations theory which are particularly relevant for an understanding of farmers, farming and change; described the methodological strategy and tactics for accessing the social object (Chapter 3). This chapter, and the two which follow, report the findings of the three empirical studies, and my interpretation of those results. The first study, the focus of this chapter, comprised semi-structured interviews with individual farmers. Chapter 3, Section 2, detailed the interviewees and interview locations. In this chapter the results of the ladder-scale, ALCESTE and NVIVO analyses are given in section 1. Section 2 sets out my interpretation of the results, with some proposals as to how these results might provide an answer to the research question, why is change difficult for UK farmers, given in Section 3.

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Self-Anchoring Ladder Scale

The objective of using the self-anchoring ladder scale (adapted from Cantril, 1965) was to obtain a broad assessment of the interviewees experience of change and how they saw it affecting both their own fortunes and those of the agricultural industry as a whole. The results are shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Self-anchoring ladder scale measurement of own farm and all agriculture fortunes

	Own Farm Fortunes			All Agriculture Fortunes		
	<i>Past</i>	<i>Present</i>	<i>Future</i>	<i>Past</i>	<i>Present</i>	<i>Future</i>
Init01	8	5	7	8	3	6
Init02	6	4	7	7	5	6
Init03	7.5	5	6	7	3	4
Scot01	8	4	6	8	3.5	7.5
Scot02	8	4	7	8.5	3	8
Scot04	7.5	3	5	7.5	3	5
Scot05	10	3	5	7.5	3	5
Scot06	8.5	7	5.5	7	6	7
Scot07	6	4.5	7	5	3.5	5.5
Scot08	9	5	3	9	6	4
Scot09	8	5	6	6	4	5
Scot10	7.5	3	4	7.5	3	5
Scot11	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5	7	7.5
SW01	2.5	7	8.5	6	7	5
SW02	5	1	6	5	1	6
SW03	8	0	7	8	3	5
SW04	8.5	4.5	7.5	8.5	2.5	5.5
SW05	7.5	2.5	6.5	7.5	2.5	4
SW06	7	4	5	7	3	4
<i>mean</i>	7.3	4.1	6.0	7.1	3.8	5.5

There is variety in the range, from a high of 10 to a low of 2.5 in own farm fortunes in the past, and comparative figures of 9 to 5 in the fortunes of all agriculture in general in the past. Similar ranges are evident in the figures for the present and the future, the general trend amongst these interviewees being that the fortunes of their own farm were better in the past than they are today and, although they will improve in the future, they are unlikely to reach past levels. Interviewee SW01 was an exception in that his farm fortune was at a lower level in the past than it is today. One thing to note is that, at the time of the interviews in Scotland, grain farmers were receiving a higher price for their grain than had been the case for the previous two years. Measurements of current fortunes on their own farm were thus likely to have been higher than

would have been the case had the interviews taken place one or two years previously. The other point of note is that the mean figures indicate that for past, present and future measurements, own farm fortunes were higher than those for the whole of agriculture at the same time point. On the face of it this does not square with the generally held position that farmers whinge and claim to be worse off than they are! But it does indicate comparison between self and other, with the latter being seen in a less favourable light.

4.1.2 ALCESTE Analysis

ALCESTE identified 5 classes of words from the corpus of 19 semi-structured, one-to-one interviews. Total word count was 84,194 with 5,398 words counting as meaningful. Stability of partitioning was 70.06%. The order of the classes represents the sequence of partitioning during the analysis. Key words for each class are as follows, with the number following the word, or its root form, indicating the number of occurrences of the word in the ECUs which comprise that class:

Class 1, accounting for 18.1% of ECUs in the corpus

cost(27), sell(39), barley(18), malt+(19), price+(47), supermarket+(44), wheat+(19), butcher+(12), potato+(16), get(30), bread(10), buyer+(8), crop+(16), market+(35), produc+(49), quality+(17), consumer+(12), meat+(11), paper+(12), subsid+(20)

Class 2, accounting for 20.9% of ECUs in the corpus

understand+(22), countr+(47), lif+(66), people(100), rural+(51), town+(27), urban(39), village+(14), area+(38), communit+(15), divide+(13), local+(25), public+(18), enjoy+(12), work+(42)

Class 3, accounting for 36.3% of ECUs in the corpus

food+(51), continue(14), environment+(29), farm+204), future(23), happen+(37), hope+(19), money(53), pay+(54), better(36), cheap+(30), import+(21), polic+(15), profit+(26), business(37), interest+(20)

Class 4, accounting for 13.91% of ECUs in the corpus

breed(11), grow+(27), acre+(46), arable(20), cow+(21), father+(18), gras+(15), land(37), sheep(45), cereal+(13), winter+(10), year+(55), milk+(17)

Class 5, accounting for 10.72% of ECUs in the corpus

action+(14), government+(24), nfu+(16), politic+(14), together(11), meetings(8), change+(21), concern+(10), direct+(10), influence+(9), take(28),cap(8)

The dictionary for each class forms the basis for my classification of them.

Class 1 indicates a theme of the marketing of farm produce, of the stage just beyond the farm gate, at the point where outputs move on to the consumer.

Price is a heavily used word in this class as are *sell* and *get*. The destination of the crop is covered in *buyer, butcher, maltster, market, supermarket* and *consumer*. The burden of *paperwork* also appears as part of the process and *subsidies* are part of this class – **farm marketing**.

The theme of Class 2 words is **country life**. *People* are a strong element of this class as is the *rural, country* and *lifestyle*. The notion of the ‘other’ is evident in the usage of *town, urban, divide* and *public* (as in general public). *Understanding* features strongly as does *work* which is part of these interviewees experience of their country life.

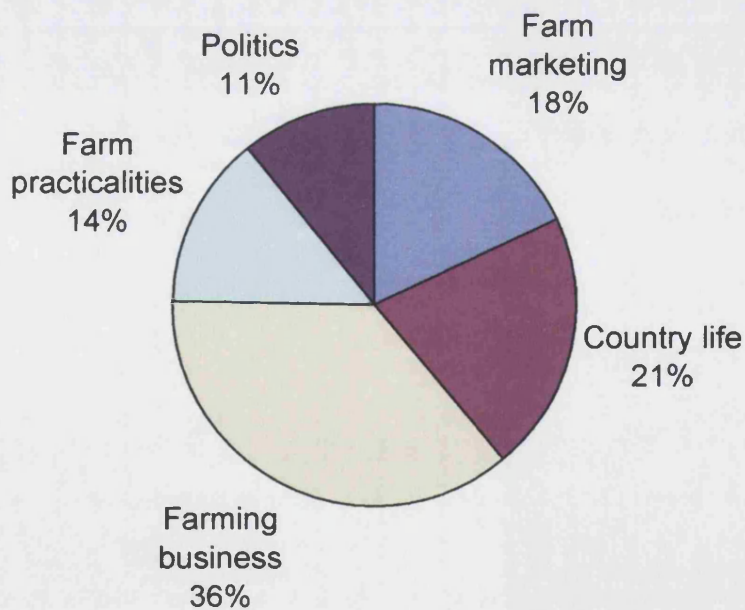
Class 3 words relate to the *business* aspects of farming – the production of *food, money* matters such as *payments, interest* and *profit*. There is *hope* for a *better future* but concern about the desire for *cheap* food and *imports* meeting that need. *Policy* and *environment* matters are part of this class, **farming business**.

Farm practicalities are the theme for Class 4 words. The *land, breeding, growing, acreage* are keywords, as are *arable, cow, grass, sheep, cereals* and *milk*. The cyclical nature of farming is seen with usage of the word *year*. The family nature of farming also features, with the appearance of *father*.

Class 5 words theme indicates agricultural **politics**. The *government, politics, meetings, cap* (common agricultural policy) and *influence* appear in this word class. The word *change* is part of this group. *Action* and *together* suggest notions of co-operation.

Following Lahlou (2001), I have taken these classes to be a lexical projection of the elements which make up the representation of change that farmers see in their farming lives. These are the aspects of their life where they are experiencing change and where change is affecting their lives as farmers. (Figure 8).

**Figure 8: The elements of the representation of change:
% contribution of each class**

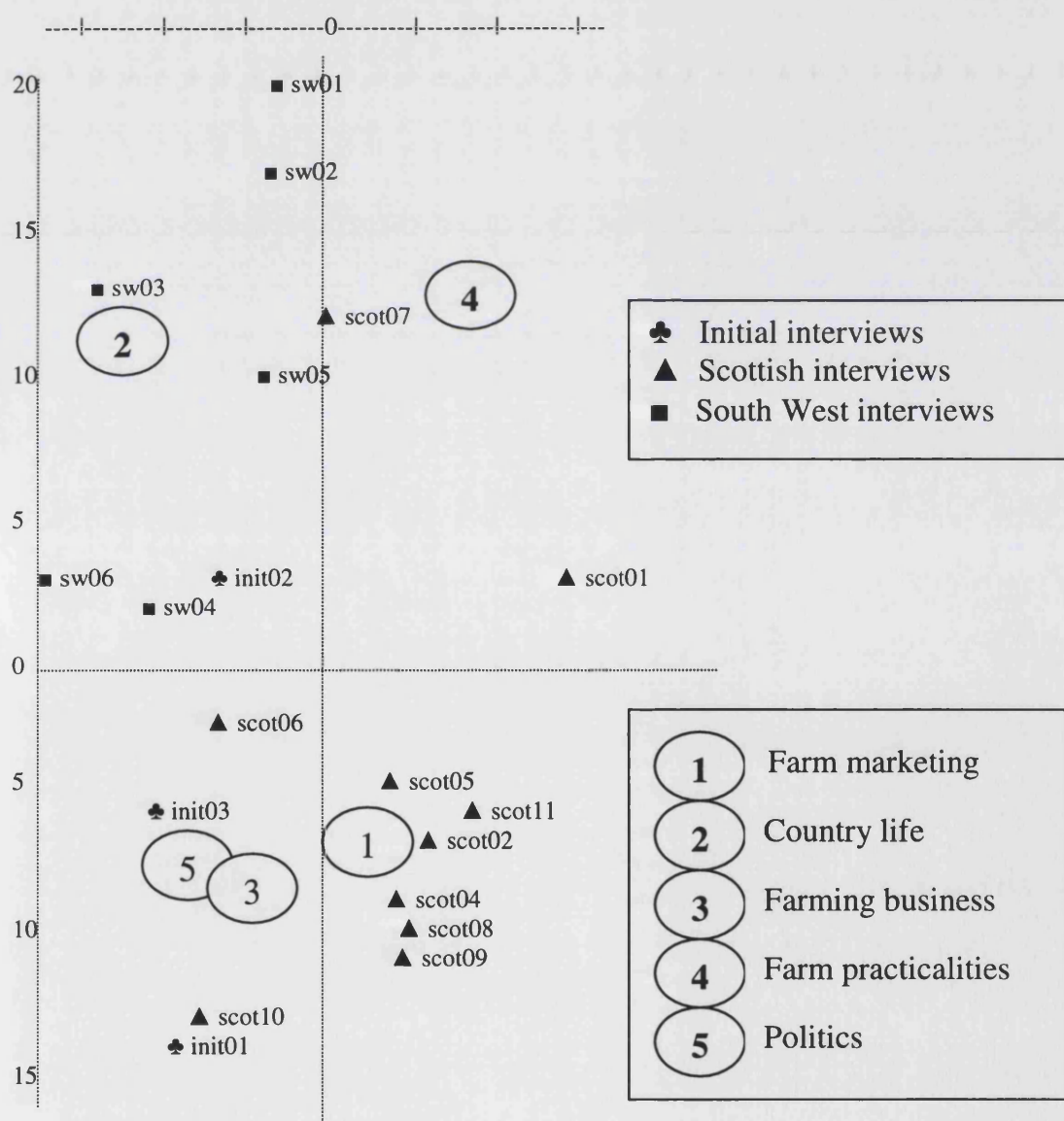


For these interviewees change is a very evident feature of their everyday farming activities – farming business (36% of ECUs) farm marketing (18%) and farm practicalities (14%) together totalling 68% of their experience of change. Change is also being experienced in their country life as seen in the 21% of ECUs accounting for this class. Somewhat surprising in this analysis

is the fact that only 11% of ECUs relate to what I have interpreted as being about the politics of agriculture. This appears to indicate that how change is affecting their everyday lived experience is of more concern to these farmers than reflection on the ‘politics’ that lie behind the change.

ALCESTE also allows us to shows the distribution of word class usage among the interviewees (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Word class distribution for semi-structured interviews



The figure demonstrates different clustering around different word classes. This might be expected, given that the farmers from the South West were predominantly dairy farmers (although SW01 produced beef and sheep), and the farmers from Scotland were primarily arable farmers. But the word classes do not break down by production method – the practicalities of farming, for example, or country life, would be common to all. It may be that the dairy farmers in the upper left quadrant, more closely aligned to the country life word class, reflect the fact that, despite the demise of the Milk Marketing Board, there are fewer selling options for their product than for the Scottish farmers in the bottom right quadrant who cluster more closely to the farm marketing word class. Certainly in the South West in the recent past there was protection for dairy farmers and this will have maintained a way of life denied to other sectors. Conversely, beef and sheep farmers are more accustomed to the vagaries of the market place and, in Scotland, to marketing opportunities such as their tradition of ‘exporting’ beef and sheep to England. In a similar vein this might explain why word classes covering farming business and politics appear to be more closely associated with Scottish farmers and the initial interviewees. The interviewees in the bottom half of the figure do farm larger areas, so business matters and policy issues might be of more concern to them.

4.1.3 NVIVO Analysis

Having identified the key elements of change, or the areas of their lives as farmers in which change was being experienced from the ALCESTE analysis, I used these themes as tree nodes for the NVIVO analysis. Passage counts at each of those nodes reflected a similar order of weighting as that which was seen in the ALCESTE analysis. But, during the first NVIVO coding, it became clear that there were sections of text which did not really fit into these nodes.

Two further nodes were added to accommodate this material:

- Being a farmer
- Farming's future

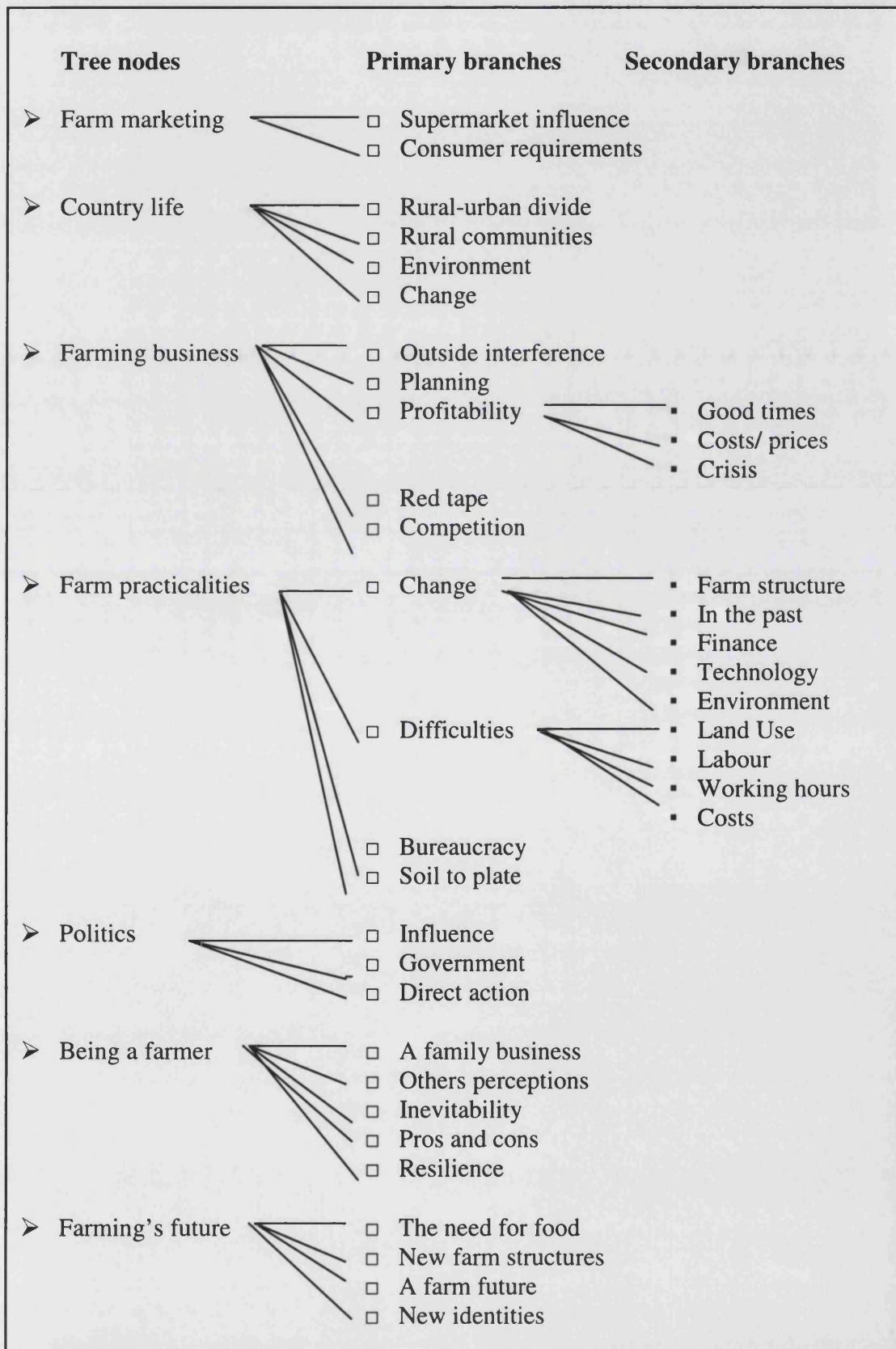
Table 9 summarises % of ECUs and passage counts seen at the initial coding and the change after the second NVIVO coding with the two additional nodes.

Table 9: % ECUs and passage counts, first and second codings

Key elements/tree nodes	ALCESTE coding		NVIVO coding	
	% ECUs	% passage counts	passage counts	% passage counts
Farm marketing	18	19	83	12
Country life	21	14	61	9
Farming business	36	27	117	17
Farm practicalities	14	25	111	16
Politics	11	15	68	10
Being a farmer	-	-	161	24
Farmings future	-	-	71	11
	100	100	672	c100

Second and third codings further partitioned the material at each of the tree nodes, so building up trees and branches to represent the ideas arising from the text. In all 672 passages were coded. The overall tree and branch scheme is set out overleaf in Figure 10. Evident though from the passage counts is the importance of change in respect to these farmers' notions of identity (being a farmer), 24% of all passage counts.

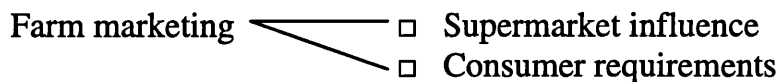
Figure 10: NVIVO analysis tree and branch plan



4.2 Interpreting the Findings

4.2.1 Farm Marketing

From the NVIVO analysis we see the farm marketing node being split into two separate ideas, two primary branches – the power and influence of the supermarkets and the requirements of consumers.



Most comments about supermarkets reflected the viewpoint that they had too much power and were responsible for poor prices to the farmer.

“I mean I have dealt with supermarkets. I have dealt with Safeways, Tesco, Sainsburys right at the sharp end. I would never, ever go back to doing that again. They are just a bunch of out and out crooks.” (Scot08)

“The buyers are all challenged to make more profits for the company. The company are answerable to the shareholders and it’s a vicious circle and if we were all given a bit more money companies might not make quite so much profit but does that really matter? But if they gave us more money they can still make the same margin so they wouldn’t necessarily be any worse off. So I would say that the supermarkets are a problem in this country.” (SW04)

Not all interviewees condemned the supermarkets though. One positive comment related to improvements in product quality and innovation that have been driven by the supermarkets.

“I think probably that supermarkets have been a force for a fantastic amount of good. I think that they have improved the quality of product...the style of supermarkets in the UK and the level of competition between them has driven the quality of product presented to the consumer to amazing levels really.” (Init03)

The underlying theme of the second primary branch of the farm marketing node, consumer requirements, was the desire for cheap food and the contradiction between that and producing to high standards.

“Everybody likes to see animals running about the field on a nice day but we can’t just produce everything like that nowadays. The economics of it...we

have to produce enough food for our countrythere must be some degree of intensity in a lot of these animal production systems.” (Scot07)

“I think people really want to have a long hard look at it. They want cheap food and yet we have all these rules and regulations. We want cheap food but we want you to do these extra 20 steps with all the costs attached to them.” (Scot08)

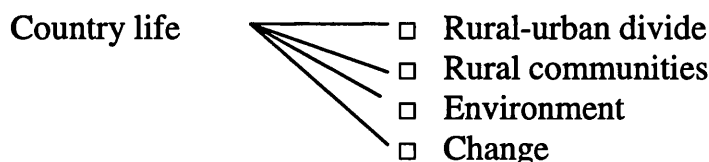
This view was predominately the farmers from Scotland. Some of the South West farmers who had more experience of dealing direct with consumers, either at Farmers Markets or through their own added-value businesses, believed consumers to be more discerning.

“If the quality is there they don’t mind paying for it. There are certain markets they don’t even ask the prices. They wouldn’t bat an eyelid.” (SW01)

“...I think people are taking more of an interest in food, partly because they are better informed. There is more information about. They are interested in whether its British or Danish bacon. Not as much as I would like them to be but they are more informed than perhaps they would have been 10 years ago.” (SW05)

4.2.2 Country Life

Several concepts ran through the passages coded at the country life node. Four primary branches related to rural-urban division; rural communities; the environment and change.



There was not wholehearted consensus for the notion of a rural urban divide, although there was consensus on the lack of understanding by townsfolk for a country way of life.

“If I was to say that there was a division between people who live in rural areas and people who live in urban areas I think it is lack of appreciation of each other, or lack of understanding of each other.” (Init03)

Understanding was also a feature of the community nature of rural life.

“Its quite difficult when you have got newcomers coming into an area that don’t respect and have a poor understanding of the locality, how community life works. If you are sat in the city and you don’t want to talk to your neighbour that’s fair enough. But if you move down here there is always a time when you are going to need a neighbour or depend on a neighbour.” (SW01)

“I think its just an appreciation but from my perspective I would put it as an appreciation for others as well. The more urban way of thinking about it is me. The more rural way of thinking about it is us and everyone else – we. A little bit of a community thing.” (SW05)

Appreciation for nature and living in rural areas was evident among all interviewees but so were comments about the contradiction between the economic need to intensify farming in order to survive and the pressure this put on the environment. This contradiction, the comments implied, did not help the lack of understanding between practical farmers and those moving into a rural area or the national concerns about protecting and enhancing the environment.

“Some of the things they say don’t square. If they want you to conserve the countryside and yet to stay in farming it seems that you have to get bigger and bigger to survive or amalgamate with others, which doesn’t add up in looking after the countryside and your way of life.” (Scot01)

“...if (consumers say) I want more and more time off or if I want better food, that’s the mood and so, as we have got richer, been successful as a nation and as a society so therefore we have got richer, I want to enjoy more...oh gosh I would like more birds. I yearn back, because I like the arts, to seeing views of Constable. Why can’t my countryside be like that?.” (SW03)

Change was recognised as a fact of life in this country life section; change in the fact that fewer of the people who live in the countryside are connected to the land and change in the way farms are being broken up. The underlying thread was of “other” - incomers and newcomers - in the sense of an out-

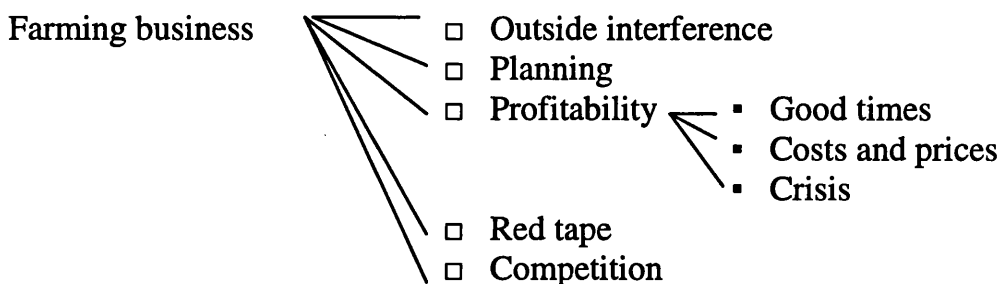
group coming in rather than the in-group of those who lived and farmed in the area.

“There is such a few people in the countryside now that realise what good country food is. They don’t want this and they don’t want that and they have got them all convinced that its far better coming from abroad. The housewife seems to take it all in hook, line and sinker. She doesn’t seem to think, the modern housewife. Most of them are from the towns. They seem to be a lot further removed from farming, from the basics than what their parents were.” (Scot04)

“There is still a substantial amount of outworkers, or people moving out to work elsewhere and as a result they are not as connected with agriculture as they once were. There is still the countryman within the area but he is very much a rump core whereas 20 years ago you found that everybody had some sort of connection.” (SW06)

4.2.3 Farming Business

The passages coded at the farm business tree node in this NVIVO analysis related to some of the factors affecting decision making and investment on the farm. As can be seen from the following examples this node incorporated points, set out as primary branches, about outside interference (from the general public and from officials), planning, red tape and competition.



“This is not helped by the fact that we are still in a protectionist form of agriculture where we have a subsidy system still in position which actually controls the level or degree of profitability of producing a particular product.” (Init01)

“All the red tape that has come in from Brussels that has burdened the things. You’ve as much forms to fill in, tagging to do for sheep and cattle,

keep records. They don't use them. The work that we are doing for traceability in stock its not used." (Scot01)

"My neighbour is wavering as to whether it is worth the hassle. That is economic circumstances but it is also to do with the complexity of the legislative process that he has to go through. It is the truth that some of these things are enormously complicated....If I had to go and milk 200 cows there is no way that I would be able to keep on top of what goes on." (SW06)

"I'm not frightened of competition provided we are on a level playing field. But for the government to bring all this food across the water from Europe.... The French, the Spanish, the Germans are all subsidised and they can put beef... Argentine beef can come here cheaper than we can produce it which is very sad I think. Its just the same with vegetables. Vegetables can come across the water. They are even bringing milk across I heard. Its bad." (Scot02)

"We are finding in this country that we actually impose on our farmers a code of practice that no other nation does. I'm not saying whether its right or wrong but our animal welfare codes are much, much tougher. Its true. If you went to France and watched geese being fed for foie gras...well you wouldn't do it in this country. Even our farm manager from here who went there saw it and came back and said I wouldn't do that." (SW03)

The major element of the node concerning the business of farming however related to change in the profitability of farming. This primary branch was further partitioned into secondary branches. The first secondary branch covered comments about how it had been in the good times:

"Up to 1992/3 when the £ crashed we made some reasonable money, farming made a lot of money because it was cheap to export and imports weren't coming in so wheat prices went from £100/ton to £140/ton almost overnight." (Scot11)

"10 years ago we were flying. There was good money in farming. I was just looking the other day, I think it was 1994/5, our profits were £100,000. The year after they dropped to £30,000 and they have been bouncing along the bottom ever since." (SW04)

The next secondary branch related to the influence of costs and prices on profitability and, in particular, that costs seem always to be increasing

compared to prices which are either static or falling was universally commented on.

“All your other costs like fuel, like diesel and implement spares, feedstuffs all seems to have gone up quite a bit. Last year we were getting sugar beet pulp for £79/ton. Its still last years sugar beet thats available because this years isn't lifted yet, but the merchant tells me its now £104/ton.” (Scot04)

“The price on barley, malting barley and wheat is more than half what it would have been 15 years ago. Our costs, our insurance costs have gone up hugely. My insurance cost has probably trebled in the last few years, same as accountancy. Fuel has probably doubled, labour has trebled.” (Scot08)

It was noted though, in the Scottish interviews, that cereal prices had improved, as in this example:

“This year the wheat price has been far better. You have picked a good year to come and talk about this. Sunshine makes you feel better. 18 months ago you would have seen a very different impression, genuine depression. It hasn't changed ALL that much. Its not MUCH better, but its moving in the right direction and its pleasant to do it.” (Scot09)

The third secondary branch of profitability at this farming business node is crisis. The inference here is that, for these interviewees crisis was a function of financial profitability but there is a sense that crisis is, and has been, an ongoing feature of the farming industry rather than a one-off recent event.

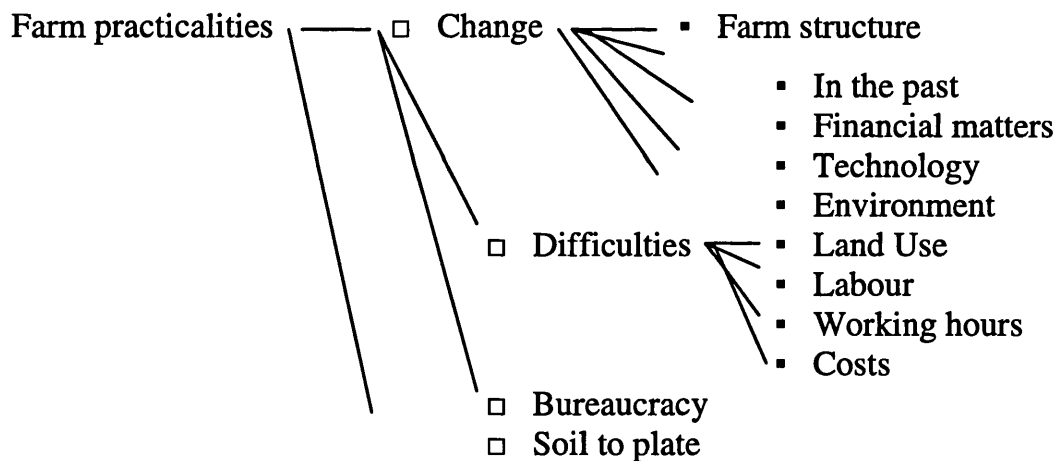
“How do you define a crisis? I mean every sector for the last couple of years has been beaten down. It depends from whose eyes you are looking. From the farmers' eyes it was undoubtedly a crisis and is a crisis.” (SW03)

“We have been lurching from one crisis to another for ages haven't we? I think we have lunched from one near crisis to another near crisis. It depends what you describe as crisis really. I think there has been a lot of pressure in agriculture. There are a lot of agricultural businesses in the last 5 or 10 years that have barely made any money at all. Now whether or not you describe that as a crisis or not depends on where you are standing....F&M came along...BSE was there. We have had pig diseases. Some branch of farming has been in crisis at some point for seemingly the last 15 years.” (SW05)

“I don’t think the crisis is there. I think the crisis was there when everybody thought oh this is awful, we are really going to have to change or we are going to loose a whole load of things.....Its not going to be as comfortable as it was for probably 25 years and that’s probably all it was.” (Init03)

4.2.4 Farm Practicalities

Passages coded at the farm practicalities node during NVIVO analysis echoed the farm practicalities class of words in the ALCESTE analysis in covering the day-to-day elements of farming. Bureaucracy and what I have called “soil to plate” – narrative descriptions of interviewees particular farming practice – are two primary branches.



A main element of the farming practicalities section relates to change in practical farming. Passages coded in this primary branch are partitioned further into secondary branches covering farm-structure (particularly about changes in farm size), memories of what it was like in the past, and change that relates to financial matters, technology and the environment. One example from each of these is set out below.

“There will always be a few of the yeoman British farmer with no borrowings and no employed labour apart from unpaid family labour will always exist. But they won’t make up the backbone of British farming in quite the same way as perhaps they have done in the past. The commercial reality is that, in order to survive in todays environment, farmers have got to get more efficient

and they will get bigger and they will take out one or two of the smaller guys which may not be what the British public wants to see. But there is the reality and the dreaminess and the two don't necessarily meet." (SW05)

"Mechanisation was one big change. By the time the beet was finishing there were beet lifting machines on some of the bigger farms. Everything got more mechanised and there were fewer people on the land." (Scot04)

"I don't think there are many farmers now whose wives don't do something extra. I think that is a big change. You are not just a farmers wife any more. Not that it was ever JUST a farmers wife. Farmers wives do an awful lot of work. But a lot of them have had to get extra income." (SW01)

"You couldn't begin to do the sort of work we do now, the speed of work we do now, the use of email, the use of mobile phones. The mobile phone was voted the farmers best modern invention about 3 years ago. And why? Because it enables the farmer to communicate and he can be driving his tractor and he can still buy his corn or whatever." (SW03)

"In the 50s we were told to feed the nation. The countryside was in absolute ruin in terms of traditional good farming practice. It was bog, rubbish, brambles, rabbits. By the time the mid 60s came along all the hedges had been laid traditionally, they were all cut square like a garden hedge and they were all cut down tight. Every acre that could be used for growing grass was used for growing grass. There was no concern for the environment. My father must have filled in 30 ponds. He must have burnt 3 or 4 wooden cider presses. All the things that you think now God how awful But you can't. You have to think about what was right at the time." (SW03)

A large secondary branch of this change section concerns the practical difficulties of day-to-day farming. Here I have selected labour, working hours and costs as being the key difficulties facing farmers today:

"The amount of work you have to do to get an even smaller return with fewer men on the ground doing the work within the farm. We do take contractors in now, more than we ever did. At the same time the family members are working longer and longer hours." (Scot06)

"If you want fertilizer from abroad they put a tax on it coming in here. We could get fertiliser much cheaper from Poland or Lithuania but they put a tax on it to protect the home produced fertilizer." (Scot04)

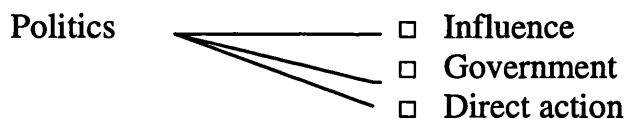
The practicalities of the paper-work/bureaucracy and how the soil to plate aspects of farming are being influenced by change is illustrated in these extracts:

“Bureaucracy. That is number one. There is more and more paperwork. We are just loaded down with paperwork and legislation. You can’t do this and you have got to do that. It really is getting to the stage that you are beginning to think it is horrendous. Nothing seems to be simple now. There has got to be a bit of paper attached to nearly everything you do.” (Scot04)

“The ideas of the Curry report are right but being a milk producer it has to be dealt with on a large scale. We can’t suddenly get into bottled milk and sell it locally.” (SW02)

4.2.5 Politics

Passages coded at the politics tree node of the NVIVO analysis fall into 3 categories, primary branches covering: influence, government and direct action.



Two opposing viewpoints emerge about influence. Some interviewees feel they are too small as individuals or as an industry sector to have any influence on what is happening in the agricultural industry. This group also felt that the Scottish or English National Farmers Unions were either not doing a very good job at representing farmers or lobbying on their behalf, or that the Unions were concerned only with large farmers and not interested in them.

“I go along to some of the meetings but they seem to be for the big farmers that are in the committee and higher up.” (Scot01)

The opposing viewpoint was either that the Unions were OK in providing information but not much else, or that the Unions were doing their best and that individuals who moaned about their achievements should take a more active role in the organisations to try and improve things.

“We are members of the NFU. We receive information and so forth but basically we paddle our own canoe. We get bombarded with information from all over the place so you know what is going on. To an extent I think you would say that we are a little bit like a lot of farmers. We are probably a little bit insular in the sense that we keep our head down and try to sort out our own problems.” (SW05)

“Well I strongly believe in the fact that if you are taking an active part in the political arena you may not have a big influence but at least you can be in there trying.” (Scot06)

Turning to references about the primary branch ‘government’ in the politics node almost all passages reflected the notion that farming was an “excluded” section of industry, disregarded by government.

“The government is not interested in farming. I don’t think Tony Blair is the slightest interested in what happens in the countryside.” (Scot02)

“Environmentally it just is not viable to continue trailing food halfway round the world. I think ethically that that is wrong. You shouldn’t be doing that but at the end of the day its big business that’s encouraging that and government appears to be, in spite of all they say about environment, quite happy to bring food from halfway round the world rather than produce it ourselves.” (Scot06)

This universal feeling of being ignored has led to some direct action by the farming community. The third primary branch of the politics node includes passages referring to direct action by farmers, either against government in order to influence legislative change, or to the blockading of supermarket depots by Farmers For Action to persuade supermarkets to improve prices for primary products (like milk). This action grew from a loose organisation set up by farmers and others originally to campaign against fuel price rises. There are divided views on direct action being a useful means of negotiation.

“It was total frustration with the normal communication channels not functioning, not working, government not being prepared to listen to all reasonable, logical argument. We were all very concerned that there were sectors in the livestock community who were very vulnerable. There were people committing suicide and we felt that if they didn’t let up...this wasn’t just an economic thing, this was about human lives and terrible trauma and stress that was going to be imposed on a group of people that didn’t deserve it. It was the frustration of government not listening to that element that drove me to set up a direct action approach.” (Init03)

“...certainly the fuel crisis snowballed into something that took the government really by surprise. Afterwards they sat down with Tesco and Sainsbury and they said look two days and we have no more food and I think Gordon Brown realised then that we have got a problem here. So they did back down. It can work. Its not good PR. A lot of the public wouldn’t like it. If Joe Bloggs wanted petrol for his car and farmers were stopping him doing it that creates a bit of bad blood so it works both ways.” (Scot11)

“I’m not a great believer in it. I think it just caused antagonism. You still need those customers and if you get their backs up...I do have difficulty with direction action. Someone the other day said you will only get a better milk price through direct action and I thought no. That’s only temporary. It doesn’t solve the problem. It just puts it off for another day.” (SW04)

4.2.6 Being a Farmer

- Being a farmer
- A family business
 - Others perceptions
 - Inevitability
 - Pros and cons
 - Resilience

Although there was a small amount of text overlap between passages coded at this node and passages coded at the nodes already discussed, “being a farmer” had more passages coded at it (161) than any other. For these interviewees their identity as a farmer, their lives as a farmer and their daily living as a farmer is of tremendous importance. The passages at this node were further partitioned into five primary branches covering the family nature of being a farmer, others perceptions of farmers and farming, the inevitability of their

becoming a farmer, the pros and cons of being a farmer and the resilience of farmers.

That farming is a family business emerged from a number of passages. Not only that the interviewees current farming enterprise involved other members of the family but also, for most of them, the fact that the farm had been farmed by their family for some generations.

“My family have been tenants of the (name) estate for at least 150 years.” (Scot09)

“There is a bit nagging at me and saying that the farm has been in the family for hundreds of years and I wouldn’t like to be the person to say right that’s it, had enough, stop.” (Scot10)

“We are farming 540 acres of which we own about 360 between us as a family. I am the 4th generation here now.” (SW04)

46 passages concerned other peoples’ perceptions about farmers and farming. Most of the interviewees felt that farmers were regarded in a negative way by others: as “whingers”, that they lived off subsidies, that they had large cars and large houses and that they, the farmers, were no longer regarded with the respect with which they had once been regarded.

“We were respected during the war but less and less so now and animal rights people and others seem to think that farmers in general seem to ill treat their stock.” (Scot04)

“I think there has always been a certain amount of jealousy because a lot of us live in big houses but that goes with the job. Would you want a house like this if you had a job like this? It’s a tricky one. We are asset rich and cash poor. Its perceived that we are rich but we are only really rich if we cash the whole lot in.” (SW04)

In comparison a few of the interviewees felt that there was sympathy for farmers; that the problems of BSE and F&M which were portrayed in the media had elicited a sympathy vote.

“I think it has changed in the last 20 years. I think there was a time with the barley barons that made lots of money in the late 70s/80s but I think we have got the sympathy vote now since foot and mouth and BSE. And there has been some hardship so I think that probably overall we have got a sympathy vote.” (Scot11)

There was a general feeling that the media was an important influencer of others' perceptions of farmers and farming.

“The media is so damaging to the food industry.” (SW01)

“At their most informed the broadsheets can be quite good but sloppy journalism has a role to play in creating the wrong...poor agricultural PR is the primary reason...like lets have another story about Diana because that's always going to sell pictures and second behind that is lets bash the farmers because that has got to be a good one as well.” (SW06)

Many interviewees commented about the need to improve the public relations image of farmers and farmers and how this might be achieved. In particular those who sold their produce at farmers markets felt that this face-to-face opportunity to meet consumers was a good way to inform the public about farming and food production. There was also general comment and some concern about how little the general public knew about farming and how their food was produced.

“How do you get that across to them? It is quite difficult to educate them. They are down here for 2 or 3 days and they think oh this is a wonderful place. They don't see the farmer on the land working it all winter and probably during the summer probably everything is all up together. They might just so happen to come across a farmer out in his field making some hay or something like that and they think WOW!” (SW01)

“I have been on a retail meet the farmer day. They are all a bit surprised to meet you. Oh you actually do it!! I don't think they have a clue about what we actually do until you actually start explaining to them in words of one syllable.” (SW05)

The third primary branch dealt with the inevitability of becoming farmers for these interviewees. It was a feeling shared by all.

“Yes I chose to come into farming because I was brought up with it and know nothing else and when I came into it it was a lot better than it is now. Looking back on it I don’t know what else I would have done.” (Scot10)

“...as a generality I would be much more reticent about allowing them (his children) to take the same approach as I did at that time, which was taking it for granted that that was the right thing to do because it was going to provide a reasonable standard of living.” (SW06)

The main primary branch of this tree node covered the pros and cons of being a farmer. There were a few negative comments about the hard work, long hours and isolation:

“Its really difficult to give it up. I still want to be involved with it. But to be honest I’m just a bit cheesed off with it at the moment and before I get too old I want to try and get something else. I’m here myself. I’m here doing things outside all day every day and you just don’t have the companionship of other people to work with.” (Scot10)

“You can’t get away from it. We have got 18 people who work here full time plus the family. There is someone here all the time and I like the job. So I know every lorry sound that goes in and out of here, every dog bark, absolutely everything. But in that sense there is quite a lot of pressure there. I am on parade the whole time.” (SW05)

Overwhelmingly though comments here about being a farmer were positive: there was pride in being ones own boss, living close to nature, and enjoyment in the variety of the job. It was accepted as a lifestyle, but interviewees found it difficult to put that notion into words.

“The awful old cliché about being a farmer: it’s a way of life and it really is. Its ingrained in the men. They cannot help themselves. And the women too that are involved. You can take them out of it, put them away somewhere else. I have a son offshore but all his ambition in life is to set aside enough money to come home and farm. You just cannot take it out of them. I suppose in a way for some it’s the heritage. Its been in their family history as far back as they can go. They can trace their history back 300 years some of us and all their forbears have been farmers. But then there are others who

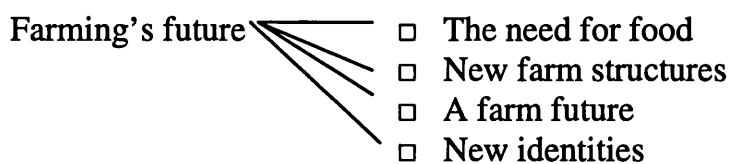
come into farming, first generation, and they seem to develop it very, very quickly. I don't know what it is. I think there is nothing artificial about the land. You are there with nature and the land and if you transfer these people into cities and concrete jungles and they can't see a blade of grass, never mind a patch of earth, they are in a totally alien environment which is manmade and which really shows up the very worst of what man can do. They want to be no part of that." (Scot06)

"I am a person who is a custodian of the agricultural land which I have and own and I use that land to produce food for the good of the nation. I see my role in life to produce that food for the nation. In addition to that it is nice to think that I am a self-employed person and I have my future controlled by my own abilities." (Init01)

The final branch of the tree node being a farmer covered resilience, both resilience in individual farmers and how it is a feature of the farming industry as a whole.

"Well I'm damned if I am going to go under. I'm damned if I am going to loose money on everything I sell. And that was when really I suppose I actually stopped trying to blame other people for the bad lamb prices and I thought well I'm going to do something about it." (SW01)

4.2.7 Farming's Future



During the interviews there was comment about the future, the interviewees own farming future and that of the industry as a whole. I added a 'farming's future' tree node for these passages, with primary branches relating to the need for food, new farm structures, the future for individual farms and the speculation about how the new structures might impose new roles or identities on farmers.

A consistent view among interviewees was the need for food for the nation. All felt that there was a future in farming because of this and even though it was recognised that certain foods could be imported more cheaply than could be produced here it was felt unlikely that a situation where all food was imported would or could ever arise.

“We are an island. Should we feed ourselves or should we get food in from elsewhere? Food is a perishable product. Cotton shirts aren’t. So if we run out of cotton shirts...most manufactured stuff is not perishable. So if you go without for 2 or 3 weeks its not the end of the world. You make your whatever last a bit longer. But if you run out of bread and its all coming in from eastern Europe you would look pretty sick.” (SW04)

There were contrasting views about the effect change would have on farm structure, particularly in the balance between large and small farms and in the way the land was farmed. But there was consistency in the view that farming, as an industry, would continue.

“One of my main thoughts as to the future of farming is that where people have said that all farms are going to get bigger and become big business, I think it is now obvious that’s not going to happen. The farms are going to be the same size or in fact smaller and the arable side will be farmed as big business but not as one big farm. You may well find that the people that have stopped farming are the people who cultivate on a contract basis the arable farms and feed their stock at night or when they are not busy working huge machinery on the arable farms.” (Scot05)

“I think it will be as diverse as it ever was. It will be different. Things will be different. 20 years ago if we had the same conversation I would have said the same thing really. ...I do believe that the midterm review is a watershed, is a clear change and it will effect a lot of people. But you won’t get farmers walking off the land like the 1930s. You will get land farmed in one form or another. Farming land will have a value £200/hectare (the subsidy proposed by the midterm review) is what the value will be. People will still look after the countryside.” (SW03)

“I don’t see much large scale farming...well there would be large scale farming in the UK but it is going to be almost all business run. You are going to see a total split between land ownership and the actual farming operation. It will all be farm business run because the margins involved in farming don’t reflect the cost of owning the land so what will happen is you are going to have very specialised operators emerge who can work at very small margins

and who can move quickly with world markets, so if soya is up one year they can go in and plant soya or wheat and are totally divorced from whats involved with living somewhere and owning the land and running the environment as well.” (Init02)

These thoughts about how farming might be shaped in the future are echoed by individual interviewees reflections on the direction their own farms might take.

“I can see that there is a future here but how it will work I don’t know. Maybe we will do things on a lesser scale.” (Scot10)

“But the long-term future, I feel, is in pushing local people buying local foods. If you want to appreciate the view you support that view by supporting those farmers who look after that view.” (SW01)

“It may be over the top but my own view is thatthere is quite a nice future for us as a niche retailer, but there is no room for the middle man.” (Init02)

The final primary branch of farming’s future node covered passages which reflected on new roles and new identities which might result from the changes in the farm structures which were likely to emerge.

“I mean I am being offered bits of land to farm where people buying it don’t know what to do with the land and say well can you keep it tidy. The actual rent is almost irrelevant. Its not a case of having to make any money off that land, some of them just want to grow wild flowers....Yes it sort of goes a bit against the grain to be paid to be a park-keeper. That’s not sustainable.” (SW01)

4.3 Why is Change Difficult for UK Farmers?

A lot of rich and fascinating data was collected from the interviews and I have quoted it extensively to illustrate my interpretation of the ALCESTE and NVIVO analysis. But this **description** of the elements of farmers’ representations of change does not provide an **explanation** of why change is difficult for UK farmers. To do that one must look further at the content of the

representations and identify their function. I see three ways that representations are functioning in farmers' experience of change. Firstly, they are indicating how farmers themselves are experiencing change. Secondly, they are affecting farmers' understanding of self, of identity. Thirdly they are showing how change is resulting in new representations of farmers and farming.

4.3.1 Farmers' Experience of Change

For these farmers change is represented in three ways: through the new situations they face in their day-to-day farming lives; through the way their community and rural life is different; and in the exclusion they feel from decision making and centres of power.

The interviews were introduced as being about change and the interviewees thoughts about change in farm structures, change in financial matters, change in technology, change in views of the environment and change in country life were evident in their responses. Being a farmer is necessarily a lived, day-to-day experience so it is unsurprising that their representations of change focussed, as we have seen in the ALCESTE and NVIVO analyses, on those day-to-day elements of their farming lives. With farm marketing, for example, change is represented through the lower prices achieved: *"Probably 10 years ago milling wheat would be around £140/ton. Its about £90 today so its still not £140 so why are they putting the price of bread up?"* (Scot01). With farming business we see representations of change related to the choices that farmers are having to make in the new situation: *"We have opted for both of our children to go to private school and I have every intention of continuing that as long as I can even if it means not reinvesting in the farm."* (SW06). With the practicalities of farming the representations of change centre on the new management and labour systems that are having to be put into place to accommodate change: *"We have cut down on the sheep and cut down on the labour. I'm down to one man now on 400 acres. I can manage that myself to*

be a viable unit...” (Init03). All of these examples illustrate the dynamic nature of farmers’ representations of change.

Representations of change also arise in farmers thoughts about their life in the country and in this context the notion of a rural/urban divide is common: *“I don’t think we have much of a rural/urban divide although there is more of it with people that have moved into the area. We notice that people coming from the south into our area don’t seem to fit in terribly well. They complain about the smells. They complain about the noise from the tractors...”* (Scot02).

Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) might see this viewpoint as stemming from the social categorisation and social comparison that results from in-group/out-group membership and the motivational processes associated. But although it may make use of context in allowing flexibility in the meaning and use of categories (Brown & Lunt, 2002), social identity theory does not stem from the dialogism that is at the heart of social representations theory. I prefer to think of the rural/urban divide notion as an example of community as formulated by Puddifoot (1995) where there is a perception of a boundary, by those in the community, dividing them from those outside it; as distinct from those not part of it. It would certainly accord with Cohen’s (1985 p40) view that at times of change reaffirmation of boundaries is likely to intensify. There is also an element of irrationality here, and example of cognitive polyphasia. The speaker in the example given above doesn’t think there is much of a rural/urban divide yet, at the same time, notes that people coming in from the outside complain about the smells and noise which arise from the practical aspects of farming.

Included in the politics ALCESTE word class and NVIVO tree node is all the text relating to the public sphere of policy and legislation regulators (Figure 2, p40), the EU commission, defra and other government based bodies such as the Health & Safety Executive, Food Standards Agency etc. It also covered what I see as agricultural “politics” – matters concerning the National Farmers

Unions for example. I have noted my surprise that this 'politics' section accounted for the smallest % of coded text since much of the change that farmers are facing could be seen as originating from these institutions and organisations, like food safety and animal welfare legislation. Another reason for surprise at this result is that, at the time of the interviews, the agricultural industry was awaiting news of the decisions from the midterm review of the Common Agricultural Policy. Such a decision was likely to have a considerable effect on the nature of farming and its returns. I would have expected a far larger percentage of the corpus to relate to the new change that would result. The lived, day-to-day nature of farming might account for this result. It involves, mostly, living on the farm, so farmers are necessarily embedded in their farming enterprise constantly. Their routines revolve around cycles of growth and are often weather dependent. Much of the work is outside and physical. This leaves little time for reflection about the basis of change since the very essence of being a farmer is the farming activity and, as such, constant and continuous.

Examples of the text coded at the politics node do however illustrate how ideas arise through representations, in this case how these farmers represent exclusion:

"Tony Blair doesn't lean towards helping the farmer. We are not getting help from the government the same as what other countries get. Like the continent." (Scot01)

"So you can influence business and future business structures and ways in which industry operates. The direct action that I was involved with was brought about by total frustration with the normal communication channels not functioning, not working; government not being prepared to listen at all to reasonable, logical argument." (Init03)

"I think now, myself, and a lot of other farmers have probably decided well no-one else is going to help you out there, you have just got to do it yourself. You know no government is going to help you." (SW01)

“The agricultural budget is large but in terms of the voting situation it makes no discernable difference. It is not where the heartland of the labour vote comes from and they couldn’t give a stuff ” (SW06)

From these quotes it seems that exclusion here is related to lack of government support; to not being ‘listened’ to. It is very much the Littlewood & Herkommer (1999) model of exclusion, resulting from economic and social restructuring. But the role of power here, the representations of a government not caring because there are no votes in it, accord with Jovchelovitch’s (1997) research into the social representations of public life. Here these farmers see government power as rendering them a peripheral group because their numbers are few, compared to the urban majority.

Tracing back the notion of exclusion among these interviewees might also suggest a thematic source. For most of the 50 + years since the Second World War farmers were seen as vital to the country because of their food production and their central place in countryside communities. They had a place, a role, stature. They were listened to. Is there not a source concept here that this is their right? Such a themata would also explain these farmers view of the land, that the farmed land is theirs – theirs by right and they resent that right being questioned – they resent ‘interference’ in their business. Some examples:

“I would say there is more outside pressure come into agriculture than there was before. It has affected us by making us tighten up on our management and practices of handling stock or handling grain.” (Scot07)

“They are not going to give us something for nothing. There is going to be someone coming around and telling us what trees we should be planting and all this sort of thing.” (SW02)

“But farmers are there trying to produce a food product to the best of their ability for a market and that is very different to keeping a few sheep for nothing effectively but then getting paid to keep the land. Yes, the essence of farming is production from your resource which is your land.” (SW05)

“...environmental issues and the huge amount of rules and regulations and bureaucracy that this government seems to want to place upon us, even over and above the EU, there has to be allowances for that, otherwise producers will find it increasingly difficult to produce the right sort of product, re-invest and maintain a countryside that everybody seems to wish to have.” (Init03)

For these farmers to make meaning from the rapid change situation in which they find themselves their representations focussed on the key elements of their lives – their role as farmers, their community and environmental context and their notions of identity. We can see how they are using the representations in the ways that Moscovici (2000) explained: firstly, to make sense of new realities: *“Prices are going down because the supermarkets have got a stranglehold on the whole job and the NFUs have made the big mistake of telling everybody to go along with the supermarkets...” (Scot05)*; secondly, to integrate new ideas into familiar frameworks: *“...but then an awful lot of things happened at the same time. We had a government who didn’t listen to us and seemed to be very aggressive; huge numbers of changes and the agenda...I suppose its like the coalminers and the conservatives and the farmers and this government...” (Init03)*; and, thirdly, to partition in order to allow for a common-sense view of change to be formed: *“...When I am ready to sell some animals I ring them up and am told what the price is and I have to accept it or I go to the market which I won’t do anyway because if I go to market the price will be roughly the same. They are all interlinked...” (Init01).*

There is, too, another way that these farmers are using representations: as a way of coping with change. Important in this respect is how farmers are using representations as a way of protecting and defending their identities as farmers, the topic of the next section. But from the interviews we can also see how representations are performing a coping function. In considering how the general public is developing an understanding of new technology, Wagner et al (2002) propose four steps in collective symbolic coping: creating

awareness, producing divergent images, convergence on dominant images in the public sphere and normalisation. All these steps can be identified in the interview texts. We see respondents talking about the need for the general public to be made more aware of farmers and farming:

“Ignorance is not a good word and its not meant to be rude but I don’t think the shopper is as interested as the supermarkets would have us believe in where their food comes from. We have an information centre at the Royal Highland Show and we give out these questionnaires asking where things come from and they don’t know. Now they SHOULD know. We should be going to them and make it interesting. On-farm visits became a no-no but we should be going to inner city areas and making it interesting for schoolchildren.” (Scot09)

Divergent images are built via the representations of the supermarkets as exercising their power in their dealings with farmers. The setting up of lobbying groups like FARM, Farmers for Action and Breaking the Armlock is a testament to the effectiveness of these images and the way they have been converged on and become normalised.

“I feel that loyalty just goes out of the window with the supermarkets and big processors in this country buying wherever its cheapest.” (Scot10)

“You go to the shop and buy on price. Its to do with the middle man isn’t it? We all buy it for as least as we can and that’s what the supermarkets are doing with us. A few of them to many of us. It’s a question of power.” (SW02)

4.3.2 Farmers’ Understanding of Self

Representations of change are affecting these farmers’ notion of identity in three ways: firstly they are emphasising the stable elements of identity; secondly they highlight change, in particular in the ways that others see them; and thirdly representations are protecting and defending identities.

For these interviewees there was a stability about being a farmer and change did not seem to have affected certain elements of it. We see that there is the

view that they are still part of a family farming business: “...I’m the 3rd generation and (my son) is the 4th generation at (name) farm and I would hope that it would carry on further down the line...” (SW02); that there was an inevitability of their becoming a farmer: “...At the back of my mind always I assumed that the farm was there and I would probably just fall into farming when I left school and that is the way it turned out to be...” (Scot07); and that they and the farming industry as a whole were resilient to change: “...There are amazing people in agriculture. They are extremely innovative. They are wonderfully stubborn and they are wonderfully resistant and persistent and they will make it work. Innovation is just incredible...” (Init03).

The relationship between the land and nature as an important element of farmers identity was another area which change does not seem to have affected even though the working of the land results in long working hours:

“Well I’m quite happy. I enjoy doing what I’m doing. You look out there and that’s yours. You go out in the summertime and walk round the fields and there’s ewes and lambs in the fields and you bought them into the world and you have seen them grow up. I suppose you see them down the road too.....It’s a good life without a doubt.” (Scot01)

“I was born to be a farmer and always wanted to be and still do want to be. But I do get a little bit despondent at times with the hours I am now working and for less and less reward each year.” (SW02)

Seemingly not affected by change is farmers identity as their own boss. Most interviewees spoke of it as the most valued aspect of their being a farmer:

“I mean its important to be able to make enough money so that you are comfortable. But if you can achieve that without earning squillions of pounds it is a good way of life....A good place to bring up a family. A nice place to stay in the country. You are your own boss. You can work 90 hours one week and then take a day off the next. That is worth a lot.” (Scot11)

“Farming is different every day. I don’t have far to go to work. The only disadvantage to that is that I am always on the job. Its always a challenge. It has its ups and downs totally controlled by the weather and so you always have to take that into account. No two days are ever the same in this job.

But I am my own boss. If I choose to take a day off, a week off or a month off I can decide to do it. I'm not answerable to anyone apart from myself really. OK we have got all these various things that try to tie us down but really I am my own boss and choose to steer the business in the way I choose to do it. Its not a bad life really. Not a bad life. Live in the countryside. Don't have this having to get on the train every morning at 6.30 or whatever." (SW04)

Change though is affecting them in both their country life and in the practicalities of being a farmer:

"Certainly the landscape is starting to change...desirable places like West Dorset are being snapped up and most of the farmhouses are being bought by outsiders...its starting to loose the farming community spirit." (SW01)

"...it's a lot of work and they are bringing in staff from abroad to handle it all because you can't get workers from around here to do it. ...for example we have 2 Czech Republic lads that are picking potatoes. They hardly speak English. An agent supplies them." (Scot02)

Change is also affecting farmers' identities in the way others see them.

"People's perception of farmers when I started farming was probably much the same as it is now. I would say we have always been seen as being a whinging lot, never happy, driving around in big cars...." (Scot08)

"I don't very often tell people I meet that I am a farmer because I think a lot of them sort of look upon farmers as a little bit of a joke because the publicity sometimes we get is oh we are always moaning and perhaps that is what you think about me. They don't really take us seriously." (SW02)

Such viewpoints demonstrate identity under threat and here we see the role of representations in defending and protecting identity. In the previous chapter I spoke of the ways that social representations theory explains how identities can be protected. Among these was managing the representations which give rise to threat by emphasising positive attributes and transferring negative attributes onto an out group. We have seen in the self-anchoring ladder scale and in the notion of the lack of understanding by 'incomers' that in group/out group comparison is evident in these discourses. In the self-anchoring ladder scale analysis the fact that fortunes of one's own farm is seen as being better

than the fortunes of agriculture as a whole in the past, currently and in the future, further illustrating a positive comparison between self and other. This is similar to Wagner et al's (2002) idea of producing and converging on divergent images, and can be demonstrated in farmers' emphasis on the power and unfair practices of the supermarkets.

Another way that identity can be protected is to change negative social representations by combining them with more positive attributes (Breakwell, 1993). Examples of this are the way farmers, sometimes seen as desecrating the land with sprays and chemicals, are using organic farming or farmers markets to persuade the general public of the naturalness and wholesomeness of their production methods.

Cognitive polyphasia is also proposed as a way of protecting identity in allowing the coexistence of incompatible ways of thinking (Gervais & Jovchelovitch, 1998). There are a number of examples of this. One is the widespread belief of big changes to come in the structure of the farming industry held alongside reluctance to accept such changes, "*...people say oh there will be huge changes, but there will always be farmers I think or people looking after the land...*" (Scot11) and "*...I do believe that the midterm review is a watershed, is a clear change and it will affect a lot of people. But you won't get farmers walking off the land like 1930s. You will get land farmed in one form or another...*" (SW03). This polyphasia is protecting farming identity by proclaiming its permanence and importance to the care of the countryside. Another example of polyphasia is the point that many farming enterprises are being kept alive by subsidy from the public purse, yet there is concern among farmers about 'interference' from others in the management of the land. "*...I just find it quite sad that we are actually being dictated to..*" (SW01).

4.3.3 *New Representations of Farmers & Farming*

There are two ways which, for these interviewees, change is resulting in new representations of farmers and farming. The first relates to a new representation which farmers are creating for themselves and, in this respect it illustrates another way in which identity can be protected. It concerns the future need for food and therefore the important role for farmers in producing it. Although imports of food, even food which can be produced here, are increasing, farmers refuse to accept that this is a viable policy. Food security in the face of unstable world conditions, concern about oil supplies and terrorism should, farmers' claim, be part of a government strategy for the farming industry in this country. Were this to be the case it would allow the 'old' representation of farmers providing food for the nation in the face of war to become a 'new' representation of farmers providing food for the nation in the face of the perceived threat. There is now a lobby group – the Commercial Farmers Group – who are championing this cause and it is illustrated in the following extracts:

“They will discover too late that they need more food. Because if they stop producing food in this country they think people abroad are going to export it here at a cheap rate. But they will put up their prices. They will know that Britain can't produce enough food to support themselves so they will have to pay for it.” (Scot01)

“At the end of the day you and every other living creature has to have food on their plate. And if they keep screwing us...the number of cows that have gone from this area...and if the cows have gone there are no calves either. One day the worm will turn. People have to have food on the table.” (SW02)

A second way that change is resulting in new representations of farmers and farming concerns the CAP changes arising from the midterm review. Farm subsidy is now decoupled from production and will be tied to care for the countryside and the farming environment. This is resulting in representations among farmers of their being seen as 'park-keepers'. There seems to be

resentment of this possibility. It is as though a park-keeper is belittling to someone who once had the responsibility for feeding the nation.

“The problem is are we going to be food producers or are we going to be environment managers and that’s one of the questions that I don’t think anyone in the European Community has decided whether we are one or the other yet.” (SW04)

“If they are going to decide that most of our food is going to come from Asia and the east then fine, we are environmental managers, but we don’t just want to be environmental managers. We want to run businesses that earn money.” (SW06)

The influence of the media in creating new representations of farmers, farming and change was recognised, but most interviewees felt that these new representations presented them in a negative light.

“...the Archers particularly perpetuates this nice idea of bucolic...it does bring to the attention of the public the issues. I think the Archers do a very good job in that area but despite all those pressures and problems you still get them going down to the Bull for a pint, and at lunch time too. So they are perpetuating lots of wonderful myths....” (SW03)

Overall we see the importance for farmers of their representations of themselves as food producers, associated with all the stable and enduring aspects of being farmers: as part of a community, as part of a family business, being close to nature and being their own boss. Change is affecting these representations of identity with the possibility of farmers becoming seen as ‘park-keepers’, a role they see as of less value in their own and others eyes and less rewarding than the challenge of food production. Change is also resulting in farmers feeling excluded from seats of power and decision making. But the social representations we can identify among these farmers are protecting and defending their identity. They are doing so by highlighting negative aspects of other compared to self and by emphasising the positive elements of identity.

Chapter 5

STORIES OF CHANGE FROM THE WIDER AGRICULTURAL PUBLIC SPHERE

The research question asks why UK farmers find change difficult. The research study described in Chapter 4 sought to answer that question from the perspective of working farmers themselves. But farmers operate within an agricultural public sphere which includes public opinion, government and the media. (Figure 2, p40). The study reported in this chapter moves into those sectors. The research methodology is narrative interviews. The reason for selecting narrative as a source for data and details of the participants and the interviews were given in Chapter 3. Narratives were elicited from different individuals with different perspectives on the social object but a unifying factor was that the interviewees selected were in a position both to have experienced change in the agricultural industry and to influence it. The chapter is in four sections. Section 1 summarises the narratives. Section 2 details the results of the analyses. Section 3 provides my interpretation of the results. Section 4 considers how that interpretation might provide an answer to the research question.

5.1 The Narratives

A synopsis of each narrative follows showing the themes emerging, the metaphors used and the implicit meaning I draw from them.

5.1.1 Narrative 1

The interview with this journalist, writing for a popular radio programme, lasted one hour with the uninterrupted narration phase 20 minutes. It yielded 25 statements utilising 10 codes. The narrative centred around the public perception of farmers and farming, based on the interviewees contacts with his audience. The general public, he proposed, like a “traditional” view of

farming, don't like "whingeing" farmers, are interested in food and health and feel a sense of loss from the land. The programme he wrote for had to reflect this and be tailored to the listeners. He was concerned about the disconnection of farmers from the public and believed there to be powerful interests blocking this reconnection. Change was being constrained by such farmer traits as resistance and secrecy but the countryside should be about food production and food production by natural means – modern farming depleting food of its nutrients.

Metaphors included: "...we are all refugees from the land..."; "...there is a sense of loss – a lost Eden..."; "...I have just got to keep inventing things..."; "...we are all outsiders..."; "...the props are being taken away..."; "...food as industrial fixes..."; "...a siege mentality – they are enclosed in a bubble...".

Implicit meanings were anti-big business, that the media construct an image of farmers and farming for the general public and that things, food particularly, were better in the old days because they were more "natural".

5.1.2 Narrative 2

The interview with this chief executive of an agricultural aid organisation lasted one hour with the uninterrupted narration phase of 15 minutes. 24 statements coded utilised 13 codes. The story centred on survival, hardship and the need for support. Farmers had to look outside farming for income to keep the farm going. The government had encouraged farmers to produce but now supermarket power was creating unfair returns. It was also unfair that others did not have to farm to the standards that were imposed on UK farmer. Farmers felt devalued and the link was being lost between food and farming: town people didn't understand. This was causing health and emotional problems for farmers, leading to them feeling they were letting people down.

Metaphors included: “...*these people cannot survive...*”; “...*these people are very fragile...*”; “...*we are there acting as a safety net...*”; “...*the thread’s gone a little bit too far...*” (speaking of the disconnection of young urban dwellers from the countryside).

The implicit meaning here is the unfairness of everything in the current situation and that farmers should not have to face this unfairness.

5.1.3 Narrative 3

The interview with the chief executive of a rural support organisation lasted 40 minutes with the uninterrupted narration phase of 5 minutes. It resulted in 13 statements being coded utilising 5 codes. As those numbers reveal the range of topics raised was narrow, focussing on the crisis in the industry leading to farmers being at risk, suffering from stress leading to health and relationship problems. Farmers’ way of life was being threatened but since they lived in remote rural areas the problem tended to be invisible. Farmers work very long hours for very little income. Financial problems and bureaucracy are the last straw but nobody seems to care. This organisation does care.

Metaphors included: “...*if you open the Guardian or the Daily Star the problems of farming don’t tend to be in those papers...*”; “...*unless people care Tesco will carry on taking over the world and paying peanuts for whatever they buy...*”.

The implicit meaning of this story is that farmers are victims and need special support therefore the interviewees’ organisation should be supported to be able to do so.

5.1.4 Narrative 4

The interview with this produce buyer for a major food retailer lasted for 50 minutes with the uninterrupted narration phase of 15 minutes. 11 statements were coded utilising 6 codes. Again, those numbers reveal a somewhat focussed narrative, based on farmers aversion to change, the traits which make this so and the belief of farmers that the nation will always require farmers. This interviewee blames the subsidy system for this, resulting in a production rather than a marketing ethos. The disconnection he saw was between the farmer and his customer rather than the farmer and the general public. But some farmers had developed the skills to meet the changing situation and these farmers were doing well.

Metaphors include: “...farmers blame everyone else for their failings and their view of the world is that the glass is always half empty rather than half full...”; “...I think there is certainly a collective blinker...”.

Implicitly the story implies that the subsidy system militated against farmers being able to accept and deal with change.

5.1.5 Narrative 5

The interview with this journalist, writing for a farming industry magazine, lasted one hour with an uninterrupted narration phase of 25 minutes. 20 statements were coded utilising 13 codes. Farming lifestyle, the perception of the farmers by the public and the economic pressures that the industry is facing were the key themes. Farming was special. Its special nature was both good and bad – long hours and the benefits of living in a rural environment in big houses. Farming features both change and stability and these features are reflected in the ancillary industries serving agriculture. These dichotomies in the nature of farming are also seen among the general public who see farmers as either in smocks or in pin-stripe suits leaning up against a Range Rover.

A metaphor in this narrative: “...you can say all businesses are unique but farming is a bit different because it has this wonderful rural canvas...”.

This interviewee noted the good and bad, change yet stability which contributes to balance in the farming industry.

5.1.6 Narrative 6

The interview with this chief executive of a large processing company lasted for 45 minutes, with an uninterrupted narration phase of 7 minutes. It yielded 13 statements coded utilising 11 different codes. Main theme in the narrative was the ability of farmers in adapting, or not adapting to change. Many younger and progressive farmers were embracing change and making a good living but many others did not have the marketing skills. Change had brought about an improvement in food quality because, previously, emphasis was on producing volume and quality was not an issue. Farmers still wanted to farm but felt they were not being listened to and marginalized as decision making moved from Whitehall to Brussels. This interviewee believed that the good of the countryside depended on the good of farming but that outsiders were moving into the countryside who didn't understand country ways.

Metaphors included: “...farmers have been slow to grapple with change...”;
“...young farmers are actually grasping it (change) with both hands...”;
“...farmers still want to farm – they know how to pull in their belts...”.

The implicit meaning in this narrative was that farmers should do more to learn about the market and marketing in order to cope with change. There was also an undercurrent of resentment at “outsiders” coming into the countryside.

5.1.7 Narrative 7

The interview with this journalist writing for a farming industry magazine lasted for one hour and 15 minutes with an uninterrupted narration phase of 50 minutes. 29 statements were coded utilising 13 different codes. Focus here was on the special nature of farmers and the farming industry. Farmers tended to be a certain sort of personality. They were motivated to produce and indeed that was what the government had required of them since the war. Farming was an old man's industry and is seasonal, annual and weather dependent. In planning cropping farmers looked back to the previous crop rather than to the future. All these factors contributed to the difficulty of facing change.

Nor was it possible to compete in world markets when climate and labour costs favour other nations, especially when the major outlet for food (the supermarkets) buy and sell on price. Free trade is too blunt an instrument to control an industry like agriculture. Countries like Brazil, who are decimating the rain forest and using what is effectively slave labour, are the ones who will benefit from that. The government is very short-sighted in not having a food policy because the security of supply of food is an issue in these days of terrorist threats, population increase, and climate change with its consequent effect on water resources.

Metaphors include: "*...Its an old man's industry and old men don't change as much as young men...*"; "*...We get the rough end of the stick every single time...*"; "*...the latest form of child abuse is to leave your farm to your son...*"; "*...farmers are supposed to produce more environment...*"; "*...they haven't done it for logical reasons, (produce food) they have done it out of habit...*"; "*...we are heading down the road of more and more reliance on imported food...*".

Two implicit meanings emerge from this narrative. Firstly that farmers and farming is special so therefore should not have to change and compete on a world market. Secondly, that the government should have a food policy because, if they had, it would ensure that farmers were supported.

5.1.8 Narrative 8

The interview with a senior advisor to defra lasted for 45 minutes with an uninterrupted narration phase of 15 minutes. It yielded 13 statements coded utilising 11 different codes. Government had encouraged production, he said, but now no longer need it. It is taking farmers a long time to understand that. Farmers had learnt how to manipulate the support systems and they will now no longer be able to do so. But they should now learn to take pride in their care of the environment as well as, where viable, food production. The maintenance of the countryside needs people and diversification of the countryside is good for the environment so farmers need to be supported to maintain it. The depopulation of rural areas is of concern, especially for younger people, so although very small farms are not viable they are needed to maintain the social infrastructure in the remoter rural areas.

Metaphors include: “...many farmers are still digging for victory because that is the culture they grew up in...”; “...it’s a pendulum shift...”; “...it’s the safety net – it has been taken away and farmers feel extremely vulnerable...”; “...family farms have been the backbone of the countryside...”.

The implication of this narrative is that government intervention had caused overproduction in the past but now its interest is in maintaining the environment and this provides a way that the government can still support agriculture without encouraging production.

5.1.9 Narrative 9

The interview with this director of a farming organisation lasted for 45 minutes with an uninterrupted narration phase of 10 minutes. It yielded 24 statements accounting for 13 different codes. The main focus of this narrative was how international developments, such as the World Trade Organisation, had been the catalyst for change but farmers didn't believe it was coming. Agricultural support was not popular with society, it is costly and resulted in higher prices but consumers are becoming wealthier and maybe this will be an opportunity for a new perception of farmers as they produce high quality and added value foodstuffs. Farming must be a profitable industry. That is more important than actual numbers. But public money is legitimate for the environment and landscape. There is a rural-urban divide based on mutual non-understanding.

Metaphors include: *"...they didn't really believe that there was going to be big changes coming and they thought it was just an intellectual exercise...";* *"...they regarded themselves as performing a vital national function...";* *"...it (foot & mouth disease) was the first time that people understood that agriculture impacted on some big aspects of rural society which was valued...";* *"...the cleavage between the two (agricultural and non-agricultural) has increased..."*.

This narrative implied that the new situation was a chance for farming to become more positively regarded again, as it had been in the past, and that public finance was legitimate to provide things like the landscape and the environment that the market could not support.

5.1.10 Narrative 10

The interview with this senior adviser to government lasted for 50 minutes with an uninterrupted narration phase of 20 minutes. It yielded 24 statements

accounting for 11 different codes. Technology was a key driver of change according to this interviewee. He also stressed the special nature of farming and being a farmer. There was a continuity in farming he felt and the family farm was really the best model for efficiency. He felt that the subsidy system had distorted the market with the consequence of a dependency culture in farming so that farmers have not faced the market. But the relationships in farming were complicated: farmers had a passion to farm and farming was a privilege. A British countryside without food production wouldn't be a countryside. There was a lot of hidden goodwill towards farming and, he felt, support for it for the foreseeable future. The rural population was increasing but not necessarily living in harmony.

Metaphors here include: “...*there is still the sense that the world owes farming a living and farming has always had remarkable political clout...*”; “...*being prepared to accept the rough with the smooth,; the slings and arrows of uncertainty...*”; “...*you can never leave a livestock farm. It's like joining a hospital – open 24 hours 7 days a week...*”; “...*the countryside is full of tension, full of different interests. It's a landscape of warring factions...*”.

Implicitly this interviewee felt that there needed to be more business efficiency in farming but, for those who do face the marketplace, there were good opportunities and a privileged, although hard, lifestyle.

5.1.11 *Narrative 11*

The interview with this correspondent for TV and radio news programmes lasted for 75 minutes with an uninterrupted narration phase of 25 minutes. It yielded 15 statements accounting for 7 different codes. This low number of codes utilised illustrates that the narrative was focussed rather than wide ranging. The focus was on the nature of farmers and farming in connection with their potential to make news. He acknowledged that it was difficult to

present complex stories, like changes in the subsidy system, in a news media format. Such stories had to be framed in a way which the news editor would accept as being potentially interesting and relevant to the audience. It led to the use of clichés and, in this connection, the “cutesy” image of rural Britain was a media asset. There was no story without a victim. So media framing may overemphasise certain points at the expense of others, but they still must be accurate. He felt that farmers seem fatalistic as a group and could do more to promote British food and the countryside as the countries exercise yard.

Metaphors in this narrative include: “...Its got to work within the mix – the cocktail of news that is put out...”; “...it’s a bit like holding up a mirror to someone who is not particularly pleased with the way they look that day; we don’t always necessarily want to face it...”. “...the idea of the nobility of farmers still exists – not just with farmers...”; “...sometimes in order to get into an issue you have to write it up pretty hard...”.

The implicit message of this narrative was that the media do position farming in a certain way but without doing so it would get little media coverage.

5.1.12 Narrative 12

The interview with this chief executive of a special farming interest group and lobby organisation lasted for 1 hour and 40 minutes. The uninterrupted narration phase was 55 minutes. It yielded 28 statements utilising 12 different codes. Main focus of the narrative was the government lack of support and vision for UK farming. This is resulting in the pursuit of cheap food at the expense of the loss of the countryside. Farmers and consumers are being forced apart by supermarkets which are profiting from others endeavours. They overcharge the consumer and then consumers are asked to support the rural economy through their taxes. A local food economy would support the local economy and prevent the loss of rural services. This in turn would

provide the diversity which enhances the environment. In such a scenario there would be no need for production subsidies but there would be a need for regulation of the industry to ensure a sufficient proportion of the retail price was going back to the producer.

Metaphors include: “...*this patchwork is the bit that makes the British countryside very attractive...*”; “...*we are told that they (consumers) think we are subsidy junkies and power round in Range Rovers...*”; “...*there is not sufficient of the profit that’s already within the retail price getting back down to the producer because others in the chain are so powerful they can just grab hold of more than their fair share...*”.

Implicit in this narrative is the power imbalance in the food chain with the producer not getting what he deserves. If producers were to get what they consider a fair price subsidies would not be required, the countryside would be cared for and the environment enhanced.

5.1.13 *Narrative 13*

The interview with this politician with a special interest in, and experience of, government lasted for 90 minutes with an uninterrupted narration phase of 50 minutes. 29 statements were coded accounting for 17 different codes – the widest ranging of all the narratives. The main focus was the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the case for its reform. The CAP was designed for a problem which is no longer there (food shortages), but there are powerful vested interests in retaining it. It distorts the market and is unfair to third world countries. At the same time it creates extra cost at the levels of both consumption and taxation and taxpayers and consumers are going to question whether the CAP is value for money. There was no case any longer for subsidising production but, this interviewee believed, there is a case for other forms of rural support, animal welfare for example. Agriculture was

important historically and is still so in other parts of the EU and accession countries. The rose tinted view of farming doesn't help in dealing with some of the economic problems but worldwide market forces militate against the small and medium sized farmer.

Metaphors include: “...people end up farming the CAP rather than farming the crops...”; “...the system has perverse effects...”; “...there will never be enough money to buy out the effects of changing world markets...”; “...its not nostalgia, it's the impetus of history...”; “...its not economic reality but you grow up with it in the childrens' stories and nursery rhymes...”.

The implicit message in this narration is that agriculture is not an industry that can stand alone. It still needs support but the current system is not helping farmers, consumers or taxpayers.

5.2 Results

5.2.1 ALCESTE Analysis

The corpus of 13 narrative interviews comprised a total word count of 81,973. Of these 5,835 unique or meaningful words were analysed and distributed among 5 word classes. Stability of partitioning = 64.7%. As explained in the ALCESTE analysis of the semi-structured interviews, the number following the word, or its reduced form, indicates the number of occurrences of the word in the ECUs which comprise that class.

Class 1, accounting for 28.4% of ECUs in the corpus

farm+9 (199), famil+(31), land(33), lifestyle (11), people+(105), son+(10), father+(9)

Class 2, accounting for 18.5% of ECUs in the corpus

common agricultural policy (33), Europe+ (37), politic+ (29), reform+ (18), support+(38), union(34), government+(34), barriers(10), tariff+(11), subsid+(15)

Class 3, accounting for 32.5% of ECUs in the corpus

Food+ (100), price+(55), produc+ (99), supermarket+(39). chain+(21), consum+(43), retail+(27), market+(67), environment+(21)

Class 4, accounting for 12.3% of ECUs in the corpus

write (10), audience+(17), interest+ (26), paper+(7), programme+(12), story+(38)

Class 5, accounting for 8.3% of ECUs of the corpus

area+(19), city (10), communit+ (17), depopulat+(6), live+(17), remote (5), rural+(52), town+(28), urban(16), village+(19), countryside(24)

The unique words specific to Class 1 focused on **the generalities of farming**, particularly descriptions of how it is for small and medium sized businesses. Usage of this word class featured heavily in Narratives 2 and 6, interviewees from an agricultural aid organisation and a processing company. Sample ECUs from this class include “...*the average age of farmers is, and has been for years, 58...*”; “...*there is something different about a family business...*”; “...*very small farmers are working very long hours...*”. *Farm, family, land, and people* were key words in this class. The sample ECUs give a hint of the representations circulating here: **family farms**, which perhaps have been in that same family for generations; **farmers who work very hard for very long hours and for little financial reward**. This is a **traditional** representation of farming. Lifestyle is another key word here and indicates that the aid organisation is trying to support a lifestyle, and a way of life, that is passing so that traditions can be preserved. It might seem surprising to see a food processor using this linguistic repertoire, but he himself farms and enjoys a country lifestyle. It could also be the case that, as a purchaser of raw material from farmers, this might be his ideal view of them: as **producing traditional, natural food** which provide the perfect raw materials for his products.

I interpret the focus of key words in Class 2 as **the legislative environment in which farming operates**, specifically the common agricultural policy and support systems. Unique words specific to this class appear most frequently in

Narratives 9 and 13, an interviewee working with a lobbying and representational agricultural organisation and a politician with special interest in, and experience of, agriculture. Sample ECUs include “...*effectively it is a protectionist (policy)...*”; “...*we have largely gone down the direction of markets...*”; “...*bioterrorism is a different thing (to conventional warfare) which would not require a domestic (food production policy)...*”. The *common agricultural policy* and *Europe* were key concepts and the words *politics* and *reform* were used widely. The representations circulating here seem to move the farmer away from the farm and into the legislative environment in which the farmer operates. Farming, in this representation, is not so much a traditional, national lifestyle or way of life, but rather a **European industry** which must be regulated as such. But the word **support** appears frequently in this class reflecting both **the amount of support the industry receives** from the taxpayer and the on-going need for that support.

Class 3 words deal with **the marketing aspects of farming** – the price farmers receive and the power of the supermarkets. It also shows concern about the security of UK food supplies. Words specific to this class are *food*, *price*, *product* and *supermarket*, strongly represented in Narratives 5, 7 and 12, two journalists writing for the media serving the industry and a lobbyist for small and medium sized farmers. Sample ECUs include: “...*there are threats to our food supply...*”; “...*when ASDA chose to go with Arla they displaced 2 major milk supply companies...*”; “...*the price the consumer is paying has very little (to do with the price farmers are receiving)...*”. The representation of farmers here is as **food producers**, vital for the health and well-being of the nation. But they are alone in this quest because they are **marginalized by a government** no longer concerned about food security of supply and they are suffering poor prices because they are **at the mercy of the power of the supermarkets**.

Class 4 words are very specific to **the way the media talk about, and the way the general public perceive, farmers and farming**. Key words *audience, paper* and *programme* identify word class 4 as a repertoire operating among the media, specifically the media by which matters agricultural are conveyed to the general public. Two interviewees, narratives 1 and 11, operate in this sector of the public sphere. The third, narrative 4, a retailer, serves the general public. It was less easy to see the representations of farmers and farming at work from the unique words used or the sample ECUs. “...*We know those kinds of thing (traditional viewpoints) bring a good response...*”; “...*if I trawled, I probably could have found (a victim)..*”; “...*news has a broad audience...*”. To uncover them I looked back at the statements and themes used by this group. The representations circulating among the general public seem contradictory. **Farmers are yokels producing wholesome food or farmers are businessmen spoiling the countryside**. The retailer sees farmers as **averse to change, with poor business or marketing skills** and with little knowledge of the consumer they are supplying. But one representation common within this group was notion of a perceived **rural idyll** surrounding farming.

Class 5 words focus on **rurality and rural communities** with unique words such as *community, depopulation* and *remote*. They are most frequently used in Narratives 3, 8 and 15, two of whom are advisors to government. It is apparent that representations at work here are of farmers not as part of an isolated industry, but as part of a **rural community**. The third interviewee in this group, from a rural support organisation, also saw farming as part of that rural community. All saw **remoteness** as problematic, in the way it accounted for the **decline in rural services** like transport, schooling and so on and consequent **exclusion**. Depopulation was seen as a problem, exacerbating this decline, but this notion is at odds with current figures which show the rural population rising. ECU examples include: “...*a traditional role in village*”

life...”; “...they do their shop at Tesco on the way home rather than in the village...”; “...stresses are often the same (as in town) but it’s the different twist of remoteness...”.

Looking at these word classes, and at which narratives most frequently use the words in a particular class, we see that unique word usage tends to reflect specific areas of the public sphere in which the interviewees operate. (Table 10 & Figure 11.)

Table 10: ALCESTE word classes by public sphere code

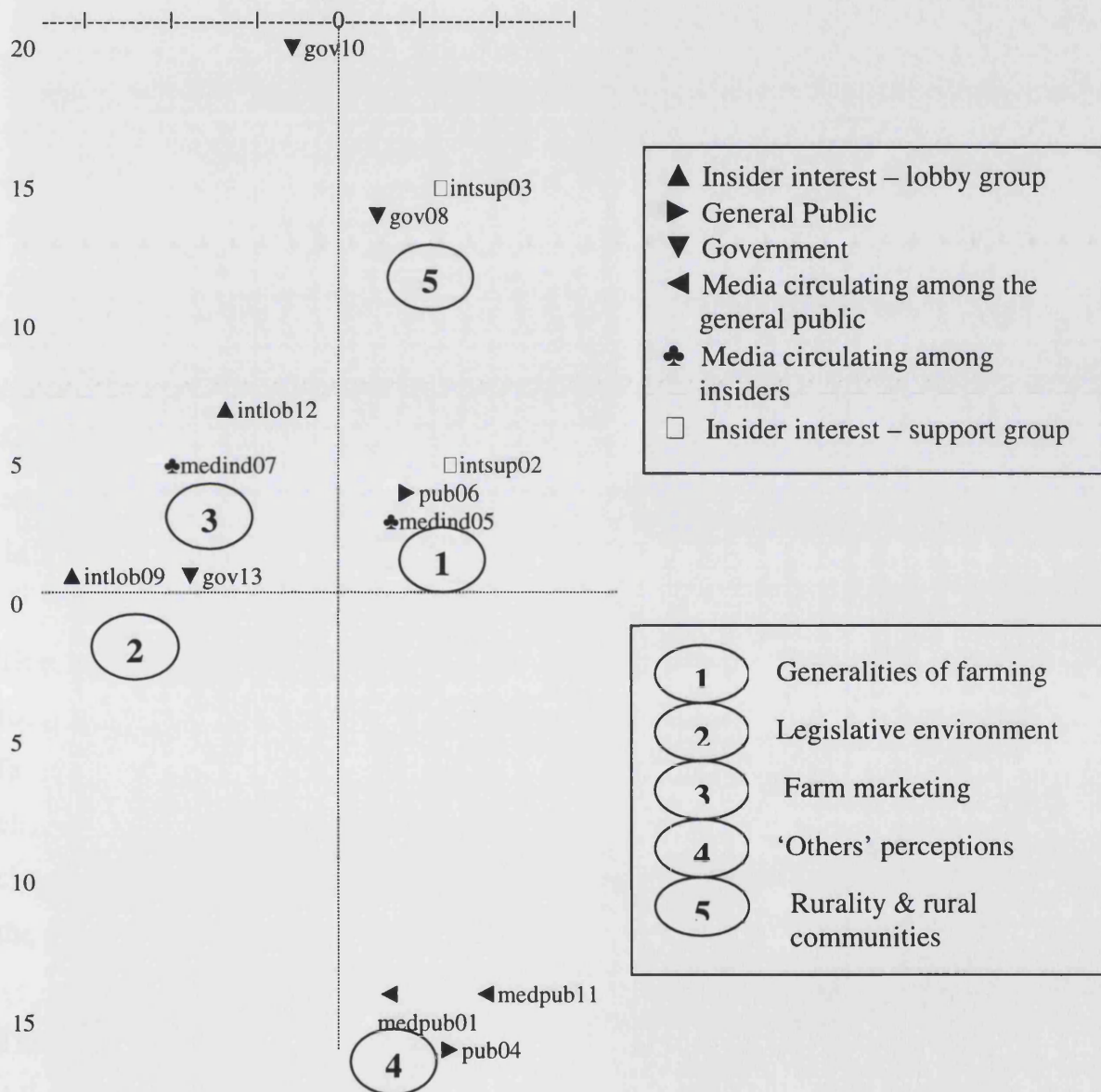
Word Class	Narrative No	Public Sphere Code	Word Class Focus
Class 1	2	intsup	The generalities of farming
	6	pub	
Class 2	9	intlob	Legislative environment in which farmers operate
	13	gov	
Class 3	5	medind	Marketing aspects of farming
	7	medind	
	12	intlob	
Class 4	1	medpub	Media talk and public perception
	4	pub	
	11	medpub	
Class 5	3	intsup	Rurality and rural communities
	8	gov	
	10	gov	

gov = government; intlob = insider interest – lobby group; intsup = insider interest – support group; medind = media circulating among insiders; medpub = media circulating among the general public; pub = general public

We see, in word class 2, for example, the interviewees are the director of a farming organisation and a politician with special interest in, and experience of, agriculture. Both their roles in the agricultural public sphere are dependent on a detailed knowledge of UK and EU legislation relating to agriculture. Two interviewees whose narratives fall mainly into word class 3 are journalists writing for media targeted at the agricultural industry. It would be expected that they tailor their output to their customers – writing what they want to hear – that the market is hard. (This will develop with the content analysis of media study). The third interviewee here is the chief executive of a special

farming industry group. He lobbies for the industry, particularly for the small and medium sized farmer, whose exposure to the market is of most concern.

Figure 11: Word class distribution for narrative interviews



gov = government; intlob = insider interest – lobby group; intsup = insider interest – support group; medind = media circulating among insiders; medpub = media circulating among the general public; pub = general public

All the interviewees whose narratives fall into word class 4 work with the general public, either in media reaching the general public or serving them

through a retail outlet. Finally, the interviewees whose narratives fall into word class 1 come from an agricultural aid organisation and a processing company respectively. This group is less homogenous than the others but their narratives represent a more widely based viewpoint on farmers, farming and change.

In addition to determining the main word distribution patterns in the narrative interviews, ALCESTE analysis utilises correspondence analysis to represent the results graphically in two dimensions. Figure 11 shows the distribution of the word classes, together with the narratives most frequently using them.

As can be seen, the 5 word classes appear as 3 main conglomerations. Separating these along the vertical axis the top third, word class 5, focuses on rurality and rural communities. The interviewees were speaking about farmers, farming and change not in isolation, but as part of the rural community. Narratives here were those of the advisors to government and defra and the representative of a rural support organisation.

The middle third of the vertical axis relates to word classes 1, 2 and 3. These focus on the generalities of farming, the legislative environment in which farmers operate and the market aspect of farming. Although 3 different word classes all of these interviewees are speaking about farmers, farming and change from the perspective of farming as it relates to the market and within the world market.

The final third of the vertical axis, the bottom third, comprises word class 4. All the interviewees here were talking about farmers, farming and change as it pertains to the general public and in relation to the way the general public perceive the agricultural industry.

The positions of the points on the graph are not dependent on numerical coordinates but on correlations and, for ALCESTE, the more distant the points are from each other the less likely they are to be co-occurrent. Here the co-occurrence between class 4, in the bottom third and class 5 in the top third indicate a wide distance between these discourses of the rural community and the general public. The discourses of the generality of farming, legislative environment and the market aspects of farming are, as might be expected, much more closely related.

What the ALCESTE analysis reveals is a diverse range of discourses, communicative genres or repertoires circulating within the agricultural public sphere which reflect the interviewees roles. Taking the symbolism of the study object one can imagine those representations crowding in on the farming industry from all sides. This is a point I will return to later.

5.2.2 *Thematic Network Analysis*

My initial reading of the narratives revealed four main elements to the stories – the background to and causes of change, the actors in the change scenario, the components affected by change and the consequences of change. These became the basis of the coding frame for the thematic network analysis, with each of these main elements being further sub-divided to form the basic codes for analysing the narratives. Table 11 shows the topic themes and basic codes and the full coding book is shown at Appendix 3). The text corpus was coded using this schedule, with codes applied to each statement or issue raised.

Table 11: Coding Schedule for Narrative Interviews

Topic Areas	Basic Codes	Sub-Codes
1. Background to Change/ Causes of Change	1 Technology	
	2 Government intervention	
	3 Exposure to world markets	
	4 Currency arrangements	
	5 Social change	
	6 Attitudes to agriculture	
2. Actors in the Change Scenario	1 Policy makers	(i) EU/CAP
		(ii) UK Government
	2 Farmers	(i) Traits
		(ii) Feelings
		(iii) Farming lifestyle
		(iv) Reaction to change
		(v) Business capabilities
	3 General public/consumers	(i) Image of British food
		(ii) Image of British farming
		(iii) Concerns about food safety and animal welfare
		(iv) Taxpayers money
	4 Media	
	5 Retailers	
3. Components affected by change	1 Food production	(i) Food security
		(ii) Domestic production
		(iii) Food safety and animal welfare
	2 Countryside	(i) Farmed landscape
		(ii) Environment
		(iii) Rural communities
4. Consequences of change	1 Farm incomes	
	2 Sustainability of rural communities	
	3 Exposure to world markets	
	4 Power of supermarkets	
	5 Other	

47 basic themes emerging from the narratives were clustered into 13 organising themes relating to similar issues, clusters of signification that summarise the principal assumptions of that group of basic themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001). These were themselves further grouped into 3 global themes which summarised the positions seen from the narratives. (Table 12).

Table 12: Global theme identification

Basic themes	Organising Themes	Global theme
Food safety & animal welfare	Food	FARMING IS SPECIAL (So it should be treated in a special way)
Food quality		
Food security		
Landscape & environment	The countryside	
Food production		
Sustainability		
Rural communities	The farming lifestyle	
Production motivation		
Privilege		
Loneliness & long hours		
Tradition	Perception of farmers and farming	
Low importance of money		
Public perception		
Taxpayers money	Historical importance	
Rural Idyll		
Media	Legislation	
Food shortages		
Political clout	Technology	
Govt/EU & associated bureaucracy		
CAP/Subsidy system	Economic pressure	FORCES AFFECTING CHANGE (Change is outside farmers' control)
Effect of technology		
Farm incomes		
Unfair returns		
Family & small farms		
World Trade		
Unfair competition	Constraints on change	
Age & young people		
Marketing ability & other skills		
Ability to invest		
Habit		
Long-term nature & weather dependency of farming	Power	
Farmers traits		
Supermarkets & large corporations		
Farmers as victims	Resistance	
Disconnection		
Blame		
Defensiveness		
Disbelief	Adaptation	RESPONSES TO CHANGE (Outcomes of change)
Withdraw to inside		
Flexibility & diversification		
Cope/learn new skills	Emotion	
Compete		
Marginalisation		
Guilt		
Relationship problems	Stress	
Stress		
Vulnerability		

As with the ALCESTE analysis a pattern can be seen in the way interviewees from different parts of the agricultural public sphere tend to locate their representations around different organising themes (Table13).

Table 13: Organising themes by public sphere code (%)

Organising Theme	pub		medpub		gov			intlob		medind		intsup	
	4	6	1	11	8	10	13	9	12	5	7	2	3
Food			12.0			4.2	6.9	8.3	3.6	10.0	13.8		
The countryside		15.4	8.0	6.7	16.7	12.5	10.3	12.5	42.8	10.0		8.3	7.7
Farming lifestyle	18.2	7.7	4.0		11.1	20.8	3.4	4.2	3.6	20.0	10.3	8.3	15.4
Perception of farmers			20.0	60.0	11.1	8.3	20.7	16.7	3.6	20.0	3.4	12.5	
Historical importance		7.7	4.0			8.3	3.4	4.2			3.4	4.2	
Legislation	9.1	7.7	4.0	6.7	22.2	4.2	24.1	8.3	10.7	5.0	6.9		7.7
Technology						8.3				5.0			
Economic pressure		7.7			16.7	8.3	10.3	12.5	10.7	20.0	20.7	16.7	23.1
Change constraints	36.4	7.7	12.0	20.0	11.1	25.0	10.3	8.3	3.6	10.0	34.5	12.5	
Power		7.7	24.0	6.7			3.4	12.5	21.4		3.4	12.5	
Resistance	36.4		4.0		5.6		3.4	4.2			3.4		
Adaptation		30.7	8.0				3.4	8.3					
Emotion		7.7			5.6							25.0	46.1

gov = government; intlob = insider interest – lobby group; intsup = insider interest – support group; medind = media circulating among insiders; medpub = media circulating among the general public; pub = general public

I have taken an arbitrary measure of percentages > 10% for each of the interviewees in that sector as indicating high importance. This level can be seen by both the narrators from the sector of the media serving the general public in the global theme that farmers are special, specifically about the perception of farmers. In the same way the countryside and the constraints on change are important elements of the stories of the three interviewees from the government sector. The countryside, economic pressure and the power imbalances in the agricultural industry feature strongly in the lobbying interest groups. Food, the farming lifestyle, economic pressure and change constraints are the main issues for the media serving the farming industry. And whilst economic pressure is an issue for the interest groups supporting the agricultural industry, their narratives concentrate on the emotion resulting from change.

None of these findings are surprising. One would expect the mainstream media to think of farmers and farming in the context of the way the general

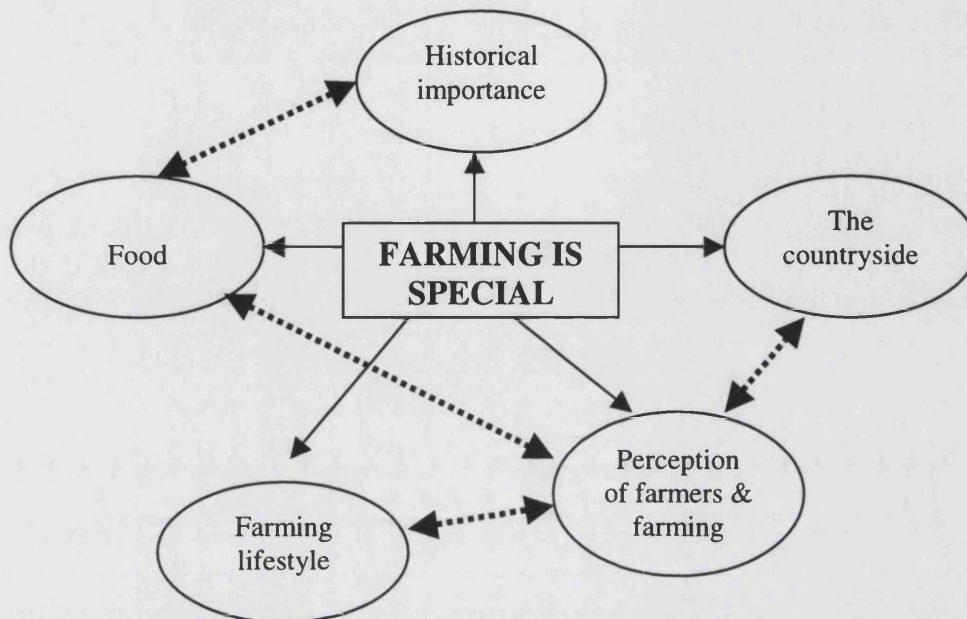
public perceive them. One would expect the balance of power to be an important part of the narrative of industry lobbyists. One would expect emotion to feature highly in the narrations of industry support groups. What is more surprising is what does **not** feature in the narratives of some of these agricultural public sphere groups. For example why does not the perception of farmers appear in the narratives of the two interviewees representing the general public or, even more strange given that both of these interviewees were from companies involved in the production or retailing of food, did the food theme not appear in their narratives? Why did not the national media talk about economic pressure? Above all, why did not one theme, which I expected to emerge, that of social change as a one of the major forces affecting change in the farming industry, not appear in any of the narratives? The interviewees were primed that I was looking for their experiences of change in the farming industry but the fact that the wider social world was not considered as an issue would suggest to me that the narratives of this sample from the agricultural public sphere indicate an inward rather than an outward looking industry.

Each global theme, farming is special, the forces affecting change and responses to change, is the core of a thematic network and these are explained in the following three parts of this section.

5.2.3 Farming is Special

18 basic themes were clustered into 5 organising themes, themselves grouped into this global theme – farming is special. 119 statements were recorded, 43.6% of coded text. This global theme is comprised of the historical importance of farming, the two outputs of farming – food and the countryside, the farming lifestyle and the public perception of farmers and farming. The thematic network for this theme is shown at Figure 12.

Figure 12: Thematic network for farming is special



Historically the importance of farmers and farming was based on the food shortages associated with the Second World War. The policy that stemmed from it, and the ideology of food from our own resources, gave farmers considerable political clout and this still colours the viewpoint that food security of supply should be of concern. The issue of food security of supply is part of the food organising theme in this network. It is enhanced by concerns about bio-terrorism as well as climate change, which may affect water resources and crop yields. But there is an alternative view - that, in this day of easy communication and speedy sea and air freight, the likelihood that our island will be besieged is remote and therefore food security of supply is not an issue. Food safety and animal welfare are also part of the organising theme related to food, with the implication that intensive farming systems developed to increase production have compromised both.

Another organising theme – the countryside – is an important part of the idea that farming is special. Food production, its sustainability, the landscape and the environment are part of this organising theme, as are the rural communities

based in the countryside. Concepts of the countryside, the landscape and the environment were used interchangeably by these interviewees. There was agreement that farming had created the landscape which is valued today but, linking to the theme of sustainability, the policy of food from our own resources had not been of benefit to the environment. This echoes the concerns about food safety and animal welfare seen also in the food organising theme. The economic problems in the farming industry had knock on effects in the industries supplying them and this had put pressure on rural communities. Yet the rural population was increasing as outsiders moved into the countryside to what was perceived as a better way of life. This perception of the rural idyll was perhaps overemphasised by the media and a dichotomy of farmers as yokels in smocks or in pin-stripe suits leaning against their Range Rovers emerged in several of the narratives. Farming required long hours and was often lonely but all narrators referred to the privilege of farming. Also referred to was production motivation, the low importance of money and the traditions of farming.

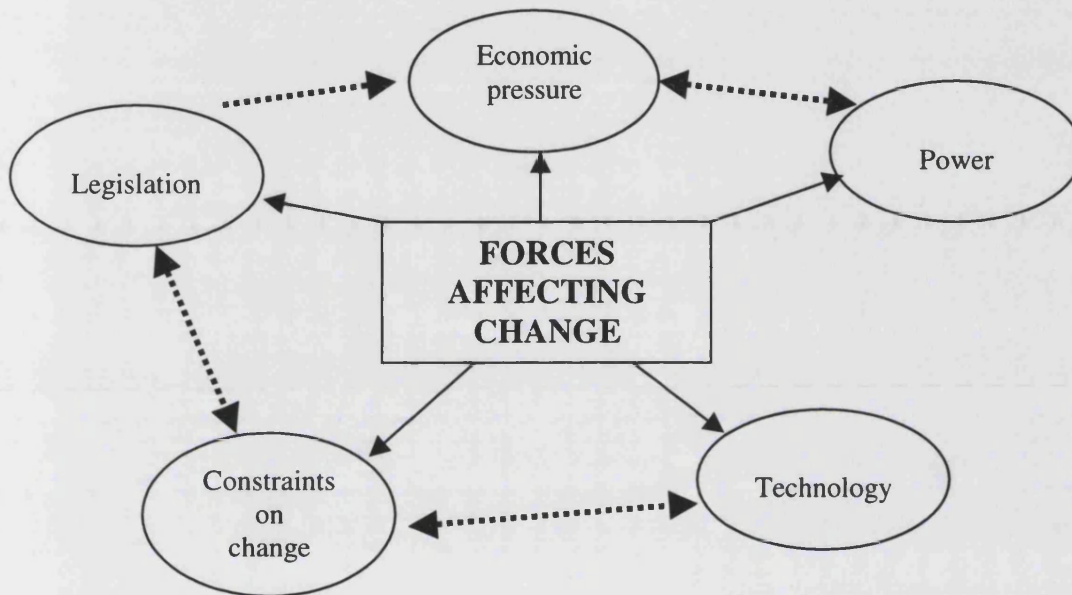
The network that this creates shows the historical importance of agriculture based on food and the public perception of farmers and farming that arises from and, in turn influences, conceptualisations of food, the countryside and the farming lifestyle. The network sums up the way farming is seen to be special and the implicit message it conveys is that, since farming is special it should be treated in a special way.

5.2.4 Forces Affecting Change

17 basic themes were clustered into 5 organising themes, themselves grouped into this global theme – forces affecting change. 122 statements were recorded, 44.7% of coded text. This global theme is comprised of the elements which have impacted on change in farming – legislation, technology, economic pressures and the power exerted on the industry by others. A large

theme concerns particulars of what, in the various narrators views, has constrained change and the acceptance of change in agriculture. The thematic network for this theme is shown at Figure 13.

Figure 13: Thematic network for forces affecting change



At the heart of this theme is economic pressure leading to low farm income, unfair returns and difficulties for small and family farms. World trade was leading to unfair competition. Legislation arising from government, the European Union and the common agricultural policy, together with the associated bureaucracy, created more economic pressures, as did the power of large corporations, particularly supermarkets, as they pursued lower cost inputs. Several narrators commented on the unfairness of this imbalance of power and the need for farmers to be paid “fairly”. The imbalance of power was also perceived to have caused a disconnection between individual farmers and their customers as well as farmers and consumers. In both cases this disconnection itself enhanced the imbalance of power in the food industry. The lack of “fairness” meant that, for some, farmers were seen as victims.

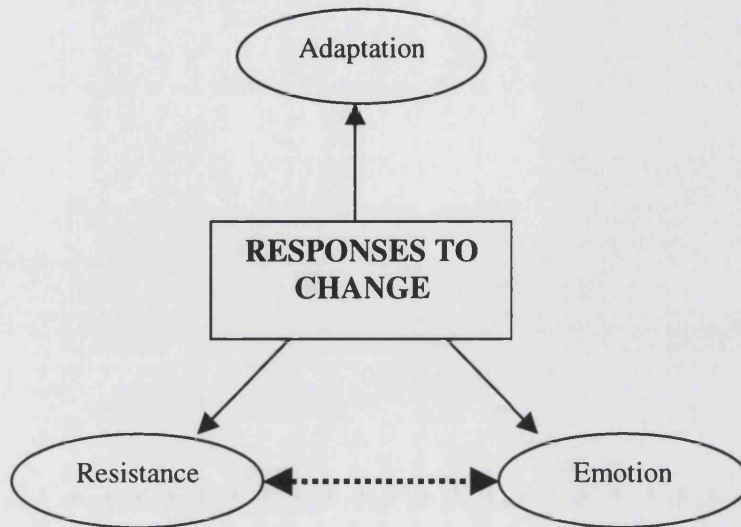
The age of most farmers, their marketing ability and other skills, habit, the long-term nature of farming and its weather dependency, as well as specific traits needed to be able to farm, were all seen as constraints on the ability to change or to accept the concept of change. This meant that farmers found it difficult to respond to legislative change. And response to new technologies, one of the elements impacting on change, was constrained both by the lack of ability to invest in them and lack of skills to operate them.

The network that this creates shows how new technology and new legislation have created economic pressure on farmers and the farming industry. The imbalance of power has added to this economic pressure and created a situation where farmers have been disconnected from consumers, their customers. It provides a list of reasons why change is difficult for farmers and the farming industry. Overall this network can be seen as providing an explanation of some of the forces that have, and are, affecting change. But all of these explanations seem to imply that these are forces which are outside farmers' control; they are forces which are not of their making. Farmers cannot face up to these forces and are unable to change in the light of them. It is not their fault.

5.2.5 *Responses to Change*

12 basic themes were clustered into 3 organising themes, themselves grouped into this global theme – responses to change. 32 statements were recorded, 11.7% of coded text. This global theme covers how farmers have resisted change, how they have adapted to it, and the perceived emotional response to change. The thematic network for this theme is shown at Figure 14.

Figure 14: Thematic network for responses to change



This network shows that some farmers are flexible and have diversified. They have learnt to cope by learning new skills or they have found ways to compete in the market. These farmers have been able to adapt to change. Others have resisted change by blaming others, withdrawing to their own inner circles, being defensive in the face of change and of incomers to their communities. Some refuse to believe there is any need for change, believing that farmers will always be needed because of the food they produce. Those that resist and find change hard or unfair exhibit feelings of marginalisation from society and from the government to whom they were once important. There are expressions of guilt that they cannot continue to farm the land in the way that have previous generations. All this results in stress, relationship and health problems and feelings of vulnerability to what they perceive as forces outside their control.

5.3 Interpreting the Results

Both the ALCESTE and the thematic network analyses have provided ways of looking at the narratives and uncovering implicit meaning. ALCESTE identified word classes indicating representations of change which centred around the generalities of farming, the legislative environment in which the

farming industry operates, the way 'others', and those in the media, perceive farmers and farming and, finally, rurality and rural communities. The thematic analysis clustered the basic themes identified in the narrations into organising themes and grouped them into three global themes: that farming is special, the forces affecting change and the responses to change. But looking back on the organising themes that fed into them, the networks surrounding them, we see how both ALCESTE and NVIVO analyses demonstrate very similar elements in the representations of change they identify circulating in the wider agricultural public sphere. Food, farming lifestyle and others perception of farmers and farming organising themes accord well with ALCESTE word classes 3, 4 and 5, the marketing aspects of farming, the way others perceive farmers and farming and rurality and rural communities. Economic pressure and power can be seen in ALCESTE word class 3, the marketing aspects of farming. The resistance, adaptation and emotional response to change, prominent in the narratives of the insider support group interviewees, map on to ALCESTE word classes 1 & 5 – the generalities of farming and rurality and the rural community.

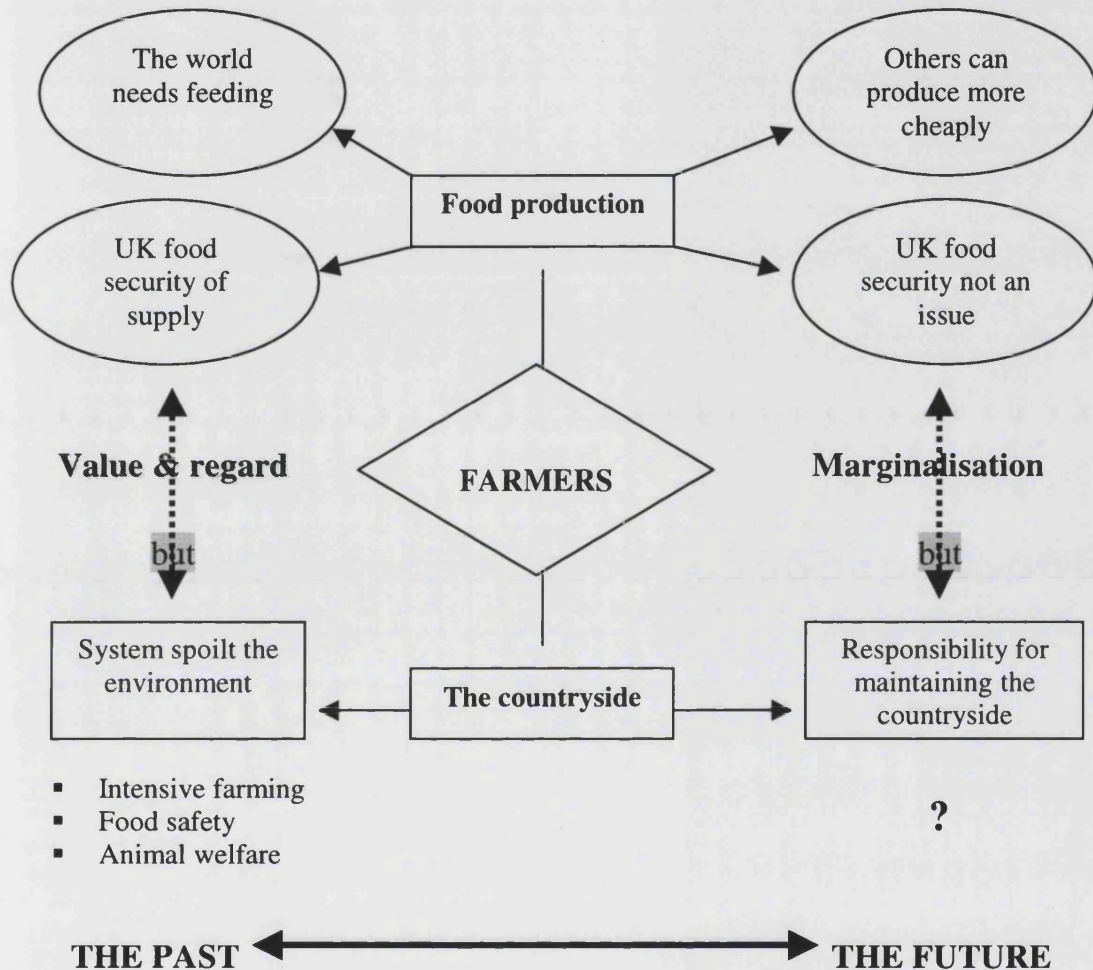
These similar elements of the representations of change circulating in the agricultural public sphere identified in the separate analyses can now be integrated to allow me to propose an interpretation of the findings which can be used to answer the research question. The interpretation draws on a feature of narrative mentioned in Chapter 3, its sequentiality, coupled with Ricouers (1981) notion of historicity, where the past is prioritised in the sequence. The global themes have been depicted graphically in Figures 12, 13 and 14, above. But this graphic depiction in 2-D, suggests an isolation between them. On paper it is difficult to illustrate them as the layered, 3-D entity which constitutes the representational field of change circulating in the real world of the agricultural public sphere. But the historicity of the narratives that informed the global themes provides a way of creating these graphically

separate thematic networks into a symbolic whole. And historicity is a particularly apt way of looking at the farming industry which, as was pointed out by one interviewee, because of the nature of crop production, tends to look naturally to the past, to previous harvests, in planning its future.

Looking back to my initial text coding, I had based the codes around the topic areas presented in the narratives; the background to and causes of change; the actors in the change scenario; the components of the farming industry affected by change and, finally, the consequences of change. Reading through the narrative transcripts again one can see how these occur sequentially. The background considers the past – how it was in the industry. The actors and the components affected by change are considered as they are currently. The consequences of change might be seen as the foundation stone for the future.

In the past farmers were valued and regarded because food was short and the world needed feeding. **But**, in encouraging production, the government/EU system which developed from food shortage, the subsidy system and the common agricultural policy, has compromised the environment. It has also resulted in consumer concerns about intensive farming, food safety and animal welfare. The current scenario, the stepping-stone to the future, reverses this. UK food security of supply is a contested issue. Practising farmers and groups lobbying for and supporting the industry still believe this to be a concern. Others in the agricultural public sphere do not. They see the likelihood of food shortage because of war as remote and the opening of the food market to world trade as providing food at cheaper prices. Farmers, as food producers, feel marginalized in this scenario **but**, at the same time, are seen as having responsibility for maintenance and care of the countryside. This scenario is depicted in Figure 15.

Figure 15: Sequentiality of change thematic network



The global themes are still part of this model. Farming is still seen as special because of its historical importance in the past when food supply was short and its importance in the future in the care and maintenance of the countryside. This past and future dichotomy also reflects the contradictory public vision of farmers as greedy, subsidy junkies or as being part of a wholesome, rural idyll. The organising themes which were grouped into the forces affecting change global theme are also spread throughout this model. New legislation, with its associated bureaucracy, technology, economic pressure and power imbalances have come about **as a result of** what happened

in the past and with a view to changing that for the future. The long-term nature and weather dependency of farming span time, but personality traits, skills, habits and investment ability sit firmly in the present as constraints to change. The third global theme, the response to change, be that resistance, adaptation or emotion are all part of the feeling of marginalisation that emerges in some of the narratives.

5.4 Why is Change Difficult for UK Farmers?

Looking at the narratives according to their historicality and taking the representations circulating among others in the agricultural public sphere provides pointers as to why change is problematic for UK farmers.

The narrative interviews show clearly how those in different sectors of the industry speak with different voices. This results in farmers receiving mixed messages from the agricultural public sphere about their farming life and the farming industry: food is needed to prevent shortage/there is less need for UK produced food; the countryside is a resource for food production/the countryside, the look of the farmed landscape, is more important than food production; farmers were valued for their production of food/farmers will be valued for their maintenance of the countryside. Farmers are not just facing economic pressure, as has been the case in other industries facing decline such as the coal and steel- making industries. They are receiving mixed and contradictory messages about what their farming role should be. And this does not only concern the working, farming aspect of their lives because, as was seen in the semi-structured interviews, to farm is to be a farmer, so these mixed messages also impinge on the entirety of farmers lives, on their very identity.

One of the contradictions farmers are facing is that land, and its uses, is a more contested concept than was the case when food production was the prime

objective of farming. What emerges from the narrative interviews is the notion of land as landscape. But, despite references to nature, and to the countryside as a place to live, landscape as a concept did not appear in the semi-structured interviews. It would appear that this is not an idea which is part of farmers' representations or change, whereas it is for others in the agricultural public sphere. For working farmers change that centres on a notion which does not appear to be part of their representational field must be particularly difficult to accommodate.

Self-esteem is an important aspect of identity and one theme emerging from the narrative interviews is the importance and 'political clout' which resulted from farmers' production of food during and after the Second World War. This gave farmers a sense of pride. But, although as the interviewee of Narrative 8 says, "*...the production motivation is still there and its still the thing that farmers enjoy...*", there is less apparent need for food production today. Indeed, payment for it from the public purse has now ceased. This has implications for farmers' self-esteem and, consequently, their identity.

The regard of others is another important contributor to one's concept of self. The global theme that farming is special included the perceptions of farmers and farming by others – the general public, the taxpayer, the media. But there is a diversity of images here. These contribute to the mixed messages which farmers receive from the wider public sphere and result in mixed implications about their role, so adding to their problems in understanding the nature of change as it applies to them, and thus affecting their response to it.

One of the global themes which the narrative interviews identified was that of the forces which are affecting change. Economic pressure, of course, features as a force affecting change, as do a number of constraints on change including reasons such as the age of farmers, lack of young people in the industry, the

weather, and so on. The implication here is that the forces affecting change in the farming industry are largely outside farmers' control. This point, and the threats to identity which make change difficult for UK farmers, will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

One final point which should be made. In objectifying the agricultural public sphere I distinguished between insiders and outsiders. Some of the narratives were given by interviewees who farm, but their farming businesses are ancillary to the roles for which I selected them for this study. They were not working farmers in the sense of those who participated in the semi-structured interviews. Also, some of the narratives were given by representatives of the interest groups seen in the right side of the ovoid of farming insiders, rather than the farming industry itself, which was the left hand side of the ovoid (Figure 2, p40). This does mean, however, that the representations of change identified in this second empirical study are both those of insiders and outsiders. I mention this distinction because it has some implications for the overall assessment of the representational field of change circulating within the social object. They are both the representations circulating in society and the representations held by individuals. This distinction will be developed further in Chapter 8.

Chapter 6

WHAT THE PAPERS SAID: REPRESENTATIONS IN THE PUBLISHED MEDIA

This chapter reports the third empirical study. It takes the search for representations of change about farmers and farming into the third theatre of the agricultural public sphere – that of the media. Representations arising here are the result of formal communication, as distinct from the informal communications of interviews. The importance of the media, of their input to meaning and understanding, was set out in Chapter 3, together with reasons for my choice of media to analyse and details of the content analysis methodology. In accessing representations circulating in *The Times* and *Farmers Weekly*, both widely available in the agricultural public sphere, I was not only seeking current representations of change in the industry, but also how those representations had changed over time. This chapter is in five sections. Sections 1-3 provide the results of the study. Section 1 covers the results of the cross-sectional analysis of the two publications at the three time points selected: 1954, 1984 & 2004. Section 2 deals with the longitudinal analysis of each publication in two ways: firstly, as separate publications; secondly comparing the issues, actors and causes which are important for each publication over time. In Section 3 four other longitudinal comparisons are made: key topics of Letters to the Editor in *Farmers Weekly*; optimism/pessimism ratings in *Farmers Weekly*; sympathy measures from *The Times*; connotations about farmers which might be drawn from the headlines and introductory words of the articles analysed from the *The Times*. Section 4 draws these results together to propose the key elements of the representational field of change arising from the published media. Section 5 uses the findings to answer the research question, why is change difficult for UK farmers?

6.1 Cross-Sectional Analysis

In the comparison tables which follow in this section on the cross-sectional analysis of the two publications codes accounting for 10% or more of the articles coded are shown. That no figure is shown does not mean that no articles were assigned to that code, simply that they were less than 10% of frequency. In the column for *The Times* articles are shown in order of frequency, the code with the greatest percentage of articles heading the list. In the column for *Farmers Weekly* the numbers in brackets show the order of frequency of codes for that publication. The quotations selected illustrate how issues, actors and causes were coded.

6.1.1 1954

In 1954 food rationing ended. The Government White Paper of November 1953 had set up a deficiency payments systems to guarantee minimum prices to farmers when the controlled market which had operated in the war and post-war years ended. But the guaranteed prices did not necessarily mean guaranteed markets, as had been the case in the war years. In the new free marketing conditions the Milk Marketing Board took over the marketing of milk as a legal monopoly. To market meat a national co-operative was formed by farmers, the Fatstock Marketing Corporation (FMC). Almost immediately that organisation ran into difficulties as it found that it could not cope with all the stock coming forward. Concerns were noted about the new support system – for example, that the high prices resulting might cause products, like eggs, to be boycotted, leading to cheap Danish imports. Other concerns were whether the general public would accept the justice of guaranteed fixed prices for farmers or that, with prices being fixed at a level to keep inefficient farmers in business, efficient ones would profit at taxpayers expense. Some 27,000 workers had left farming the previous year, partly to pursue the better wages being offered in other industries and partly because mechanical power on farm was increasing. The weather that year was particularly bad for a long time.

The comparison of issues in The Times and Farmers Weekly is shown in Table 14.

Table 14: 1954 comparison of issues (% of articles coded)

	The Times	Farmers Weekly
Policy	44	17 (3)
Countryside matters	19	-
Farming practicalities	17	39 (1)
Ancillary farming	15	-
Future of farming	-	20 (2)
Consumer matters	-	13 (4)

() = rank ordering of categories

Government policies affecting farmers and the farming industry accounted for the highest percentage of articles in The Times in 1954. *“...The Government’s policy in the price review was to discourage increase of milk output, partly by a small price reduction, which reduced cost of feedingstuffs should offset, and by giving a guaranteed price only for the amount of milk produced in 1953-54.”* (Times, 18.08.54). Such matters of policy ranked third highest in FW.

Farmers and farming as part of the wider countryside and other ancillary farming matters, like the control of rabbits, each received attention in The Times but not in Farmers Weekly. Here it was the practical aspects of farming which formed the majority of articles coded in that year. *“...Caught in the rain again and of course AG Street, who finds that he was not alone in his plight and having cut ten acres of ryegrass and red clover in anticipation of sunshine, made the best of his luck and buck-raked the swathes into the silage pit.”* (FW, 18.08.54). The Times too recorded the practicalities of farming as an issue, but far less than did Farmers Weekly. The future of farming and matters to do with consumers of farm products were issues for Farmers Weekly. Following a period when there was a market for everything that could be produced by farmers, how consumers would react to a surmised abundance of food on the marketplace, was the focus of 13% of articles.

Table 15: 1954 comparison of actors (% of articles coded)

	The Times	Farmers Weekly
Government	43	27 (2)
Farmers organisations	16	31 (1)
Consumers	12	21 (3)
Farm workers	-	12 (4)

() = rank ordering of categories

The political sector and those responsible for the policies directing farming were the actors (Table 15) that rated the highest percentage of articles in The Times, by a large margin. “...Mr Heathcoat Amory, the Minister of Agriculture, advised agriculturists to improve the quality of their products and reduce their costs when he addressed members of the Farmers’ Club in London yesterday.” (Times, 02.11.54). They were important too in Farmers Weekly but not quite so important as the farmers own organisations, responsible in farmers’ eyes for lobbying on their behalf to obtain more beneficial policy change. “...The Milk Marketing Board is now a marketing authority. Their statement of policy is courageous and stimulating. Its outstanding feature is an approach to the problem of marketing differing radically from that of the Government.” (FW, 02.04.54). In 1954 farm workers were still seen as a separate entity to farmers. Their decline in numbers was noted and there was concern as to how they could be paid at levels which would match wages then being seen in industry. But, as was noted in the issues raised in the articles coded, consumers were being seen as actors who would have influence on farming activity.

Table 16: 1954 comparison of causes (% of articles coded)

	The Times	Farmers Weekly
Subsidy cost concern	27	17 (2)
Policy	17	10 (5)
Countryside	12	-
Improvements needed	10	18 (1)
Need safeguarding	10	-
Weather	-	16 (3)
Tradition	-	12 (4)

() = rank ordering of categories

1954 was a year when subsidies to farmers, in the form of guaranteed payments, were introduced. The majority of articles in *The Times* cited concerns about how such subsidies would be received in the wider community as cause or explanation (Table 16). “...*the vast majority of our people are town-dwellers, and while they are genuinely anxious that agriculture should have a fair deal they would not be human if they did not equally ensure that their cost of living should not be unduly affected by extravagant demands for the protection of home food production.*” (*Times*, 11.01.54). *Farmers Weekly* too regarded this as an explanation in its articles although the need for the industry to improve itself was marginally more widely cited. “...*more spirit and drive is needed to write the next chapter in the great story..*”. (*FW*, 29.10.54). The weather, policy and traditional ways of doing things also appeared as causes.

Practicalities of farming were the main focus of the letters to the editor of *Farmers Weekly* in 1954. Of the 438 letters published 62% related to practical farming matters. 11% of letters were about farming organisations. Three other issues were of concern in 1954: government and policy, the prices received by farmers for their products and the relationship between rural and urban dwellers. Each of these accounted for 7% of the letters. Thoughts and concerns about the future of farming were the focus of 5% of the letters.

Summarising the 1954 cross-sectional analysis the main emphasis in *The Times* concerned matters of policy and government involvement, both connected to the subsidy payments to farmers and the cost to the nation. The priority for *Farmers Weekly* was farming itself, particularly the practicalities and the organisations that represented farmers. But the publication recognised that improvements were needed in the industry. *Farmers Weekly*, like *The Times*, had concerns about the cost of subsidies, although the frequency of this concern was not so great as seen in *The Times*.

6.1.2 1984

By 1984, the UK had been a member of the European Common Market for 11 years. Agriculture was directed by a Europe-wide Common Agricultural Policy which had been set up in 1957 to increase agricultural production, ensure a proper standard of living for farmers, stabilize agricultural markets, ensure the maintenance of reasonable consumer prices for agricultural products, as well as continuity of supply, and ensure free movement of agricultural goods within the European Community. But problems of butter mountains, wine lakes and milk overproduction resulted.

It was against this background that, as seen in Table 17, the majority of articles in both *The Times* and *Farmers Weekly* saw policy as the most important issue of the day. *“...Europe’s eight million farmers have been awarded pay cuts by the European Commission. In its price proposals adopted yesterday evening the Commission emphasized the fact that the EEC is facing bankruptcy by freezing increases on all but a handful of products.”* (*Times*, 13.01.84). *“...businesses have been built up soundly and with official assistance and approval. Those who egged us on to produce ever-increasing yield must now bend their minds to fashioning policies and plans which maintain acceptable incomes which in their turn can support an economically viable rural Britain...”* (*FW*, 06.04.84).

Similarly, there was unanimity between the two publications that, firstly, the government and, secondly, farmers organisations dealing with the government and Brussels, were the main actors (Table 18). *“... Mr John MacGregor, Minister of State for Agriculture, warned farmers last night that they faced “a period of adjustment and difficulty.”* (*Times*, 25.02.84). *“...Britain is now paying the penalty for the head-in-the-sand attitude of its farmers’ leaders during the period running up to quota imposition...”* (*FW*, 04.05.84)

The Times still featured articles about the practicalities of farming in 1984 but this was not a major topic for the articles coded for Farmers Weekly that year. The environment, particularly how the intensive farming which the Common Agricultural Policy encouraged was affecting the farmed landscape, appears as an issue in The Times, but not in Farmers Weekly.

Table 17: 1984 comparison of issues (% of articles coded)

	The Times	Farmers Weekly
Policy	65	54 (1)
Environment	11	-
Farming practicalities	10	-
Farmers organisations	-	23 (2)

() = rank ordering of categories

Table 18: 1984 comparison of actors (% of articles coded)

	The Times	Farmers Weekly
Government	58	42
Farmers organisations	24	28

Table 19: 1984 comparison of causes (% of articles coded)

	The Times	Farmers Weekly
Policy	35	24 (2)
Environment	13	-
Need safeguarding	12	39 (1)
Featherbedded	10	-
Farmers organisations	-	18 (3)
Improvements needed	-	16 (4)
Subsidy cost concern	-	13 (5)
Other (r/u relationships)	-	10 (6)

() = rank ordering of categories

Whilst both The Times and Farmers Weekly focus on government and the organisations lobbying government on farmers' behalf as the key actors in 1984 the causes and explanations given (Table 19) vary between the two

publications. Policy is the most important in *The Times* and second most important in *Farmers Weekly*. "...*The present imbalance between arable crops and livestock was bad for farming and, if there was a villain, it was Mr Michael Jopling, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who was pursuing policies which actively promoted conflict.*" (*Times*, 12.03.84).

Effects of farming on the environment rate 13% of articles coded as causes or explanations for *The Times* but, like 1954, the environment does not feature in *Farmers Weekly*. However, two new causes appear. As the general public become more aware of the levels of subsidies being paid to farmers, and the effect on the environment of the farming systems being utilised to take advantage of these subsidies, two somewhat opposing notions can be seen side-by-side in *The Times*. The first is of farmers as 'featherbedded'. The second is the viewpoint that farmers need 'safeguarding'. This need for safeguarding is the largest explanation in *Farmers Weekly*, in the wake of the introduction of quotas for milk production which could result in smaller dairy farmers going out of business. "...*few would argue the need to give extra quota to the small dairy farmer. A man on a marginal grassland farm with 40 cows and 100 acres has no option but to produce milk. His future must be assured and the Minister must act to help him...*" (*FW*, 25.05.84).

Farmers Weekly sees that improvements are needed in its industry and also that subsidies are having a negative effect on the way farmers are perceived. Miscellaneous other causes are cited, the majority of which related to the possibility of introducing rates for agricultural buildings.

The practicalities of farming were again the main focus of the letters to the editor of *Farmers Weekly* – 50% of the 805 letters published in 1984.

Rural/urban relationships were the subject of 16%. Government policy and farming organisations each accounted for 9% and thoughts about the future of farming 6%. The environment was the focus of 3% of letters with only 1% relating to the prices farmers received for their products.

Similar levels of emphasis in matters of policy and government involvement can be seen between the two publications in 1984. There was a marked difference, however, in the way that Farmers Weekly perceived farmers and the farming industry as in need of safeguarding. This was not a strong concern in The Times. Indeed the notion of farmers being featherbedded appears in that publication but not in Farmers Weekly.

6.1.3 2004

2004 marked the end of the farm support system that had been in operation since the UK joined the European Economic Community in 1973. The principal of the change was clear, to decouple payment from production by introducing a single farm payment rewarding the provision of “environmental goods”. Much of the year was spent in discussion and speculation about how the new system would operate. The campaign to fight the proposed ban of hunting with dogs was important in some sections of the farming community and the prices paid to farmers, particularly for milk, led to some dairy farmers blockading supermarket depots.

Table 20: 2004 comparison of issues (% of total coded)

	The Times	Farmers Weekly
Individual farmers	36	-
Environment	16	-
Policy	13	45 (1)
Consumer matters	13	12 (3)
Countryside matters	11	-
Farming practicalities	-	15 (2)
Future of farming	-	10 (4)

() = rank ordering of categories

2004 sees a major change in how articles in The Times portray farmers and farming. The topic or issue for the majority of articles in The Times which had farmers or farming as a major mention feature the activities of individuals who happen to be farmers. (Table 20). Most of these stories talk of farmers

who have broken the law in some way, like shooting a burglar or assaulting a vet who was on official inspection business. The connotation here is that farmers are odd, eccentric or feel themselves beyond the law. “... *A farmer tried to drown a government vet in a slurry pit when she went to inspect his animals, a court was told yesterday.*” (Times, 27.09.04). But farmers or farming are also seen as part of the wider countryside or in relation to consumers. The environment too is an issue in The Times for 2004 while policy relating to farming as an industry has fallen to 13% of articles.

Practicalities, the future of farming and consumer matters are issues in Farmers Weekly but less important than policy, accounting for 45% of articles. “...*British farming businesses are more vulnerable now than at any time since the 1930s. The reasons should be obvious: support payments will be cut significantly; farmers are already struggling under a heavy burden of red tape; and complying with a plethora of farm assurance schemes adds cost unknown to most overseas producers.*” (FW, 25.06.04).

Table 21: 2004 comparison of actors (% of articles coded)

	The Times	Farmers Weekly
Individual farmers	27	0
Lawyers/police	17	0
Government	15	52 (1)
Farmers organisations	0	16 (2)

() = rank ordering of categories

The individual farmers who comprise the greater percentage of topics and issues also feature as the largest frequency of actors in The Times (Table 21), together with the lawyers or police involved in their story. “...*Tony Martin, who was jailed for shooting dead a teenage burglar at his remote farmhouse, was arrested on suspicion of stealing number-plates.*” (Times, 13.02.04).

Government features but, at 15% of the articles coded, rates far less than in Farmers Weekly where the percentage rises to 52%. “...*The government is*

planning to launch a consultation on changes to the rigidly-worded Agricultural Holdings Act 1986 and Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995..." (FW 10.09.04). Farmers organisations are the key actor in 16% of Farmers Weekly articles coded.

Table 22: 2004 comparison of causes (% of articles coded)

	The Times	Farmers Weekly
Individual action	31	0
Environment	22	0
Policy	0	42 (1)
Consumer/food	0	11 (2)

() = rank ordering of categories

Individual action is the major cause or explanation for The Times, "...*The tenant farmer, a non-smoker and non-drinker, told the court that he had been suffering from severe headaches and depression for years.*" (Times, 27.09.04). The environment accounts for 22% of Times articles coded. (Table 22). For Farmers Weekly policy is the largest proportion of articles coded as a cause or explanation, "...*is the department truly determined to condemn producers to attempt the near impossible – constructing a 21cm margin around the edges of small fields? Please, defra, see sense and put an end to this 21cm margin madness...*" (FW, 08.10.04), but consumers and food matters do feature.

In 2004 the practicalities of farming were still the main focus of the letters to the editor of Farmers Weekly – 38% of the 641 letters published. Rural/urban relationships were of second most concern – 21% with issues of government policy accounting for 17%. The environment and the prices received by farmers for their products were each the key topic of 7%, with matters to do with farming organisation 4% and the future of farming 3%.

The 2004 cross-sectional analysis shows a great divergence between the two publications. Matters of policy and representations of farming as an industry are of little concern in The Times. They have been overtaken by stories of

individuals and interest in the environment. In contrast, levels of interest/coverage of matters of policy and government involvement are very high in Farmers Weekly. Consumers appear in Farmers Weekly, but at a low level.

6.2 Longitudinal Analysis

6.2.1 *The Times*

To introduce this longitudinal comparison of The Times Table 23 provides basic information about the articles selected for analysis, the type of article and articles in a prominent location in the paper (pages 1-4).

Table 23: Articles in The Times

	1954	1984	2004
Number of articles selected	41	82	45
Total Words	26,805	32,700	20,413
No. articles pps 1-4	19	62	7
Av.no.words arts pps 1-4	589	385	507
Section: Editorial/leader	2	1	-
News	26	65	32
Letters to Ed	8	3	2
Politics & Parl	2	9	-
Business	2	2	4
Law	1	2	-
Magazine/supps	-	-	7

In this initial comparison of articles changes can be seen in the way The Times regards farmers and farming. For example, in 1954, 19 of the 41 articles analysed (46%) were on pages 1-4. The topic warranted 2 leader articles and

8 letters to the editor. Farmers and farming appeared to be of even more interest in 1984 when 75% of the 82 articles selected appeared on pages 1-4. There was one leader article that year and 3 letters to the editor. Only 15% of articles about farmers and farming were featured on pages 1-4 in 2004, there was no leader article on the subject and only 2 letters to the editor. Table 24, following, compares the longitudinal changes in the main issues, actors and causes in the years under review.

Table 24: *The Times: longitudinal comparison of issues, actors & causes (% of articles coded)*

		1954	1984	2004
I S S U E S	Policy	44	65	13
	Countryside matters	19	-	11
	Farming practicalities	17	10	-
	Ancillary farming	15	-	-
	Environment	-	11	16
	Individual farmers	-	-	36
	Consumer matters	-	-	13
A C T O R S	Government	43	58	15
	Farmers organisations	16	24	-
	Consumers	12	-	-
	Individual farmers	-	-	27
	Lawyers/police	-	-	17
C A U S E S	Subsidy cost concern	27	-	-
	Policy	17	35	-
	Countryside matters	12	-	-
	Improvements needed	10	-	-
	Need safeguarding	10	12	-
	Environment	-	13	22
	Featherbedded	-	10	-
	Individual action	-	-	31

The change over time that is evident is considerable. If one looks at the topics or issues coded, policy matters were the key issue in the paper in 1954 . 44% of articles related to policy that year and it became even more important as an

issue in 1984 with 65% of articles. By 2004 however the issue of policy only accounted for 13% of the articles. By then all policy decisions affecting farming had moved from the UK government to Brussels so it could be argued that it is no longer part of home news. However, the decline is sharp. In 2004, the single biggest topic or issue among all the articles coded was stories about individual farmers (36%). The environment rated the second largest number of articles – 16%, up from 11% in 1984, although it had not featured in the articles coded for 1954.

Change is clear over time in the actors, those who play a part in the issue, other than farmers themselves. As might be expected from the importance that policy matters had in 1954 and 1984, the government (encompassing UK & EU policy regulators and administrators) was highest mentioned actor in those years (43% in 1954 and 58% in 1984). This had reduced to 15% in 2004 but that year the main actors were individual farmers (27%) and the lawyers and police involved in the events in which those individual farmers played a part (17%). Farmers' organisations were notable actors in 1954 (16%) and 1984 (24%) but were not evident at all in 2004.

When one looks at the causes or explanations for a topic or issue, concern about subsidies and the effect this might have on the perception of farmers and farming was the largest cause coded for 1954 (27%). It was not seen again in 1984 or 2004. Policy matters were important as causes in 1954 and 1984, (17% and 35% respectively) but did not feature at all in 2004. That year the action of some individuals was the most important cause coded (31%) and the only other cause noted in more than 10% of articles coded was that of the environment, at 22% up from 13% in 1984, with no mention in 1954.

6.2.2 *Farmers Weekly*

The longitudinal comparison of issues, actors and causes in *Farmers Weekly* also shows considerable change over time (Table 25). In 1954 practical matters of farming rank highest as an issue, farmers' organisations as the most important actor and that improvements in the industry are needed leads the causes. But each category list is diverse, with all the elements of a broadly similar magnitude. 1984 shows a very different list. It has polarised, with policy and government the leading and largest proportion of each category. This emphasis on policy and government is maintained for 2004, again being the leading and largest proportion of each category. The polarity too remains for the actors and causes categories, but farming practicalities appear again as an important cause in 2004, together with matters relating to consumers. The future of farming again appears, not having featured in 1984.

Table 25: *Farmers Weekly: longitudinal comparison of issues, actors & causes (% of articles coded)*

		1954	1984	2004
ISSUES	Farming practicalities	39	-	15
	Future of farming	20	-	10
	Policy	17	54	45
	Consumer matters	13	-	12
	Farmers organisations	-	23	-
ACTORS	Farmers organisations	31	28	16
	Government	27	42	52
	Consumers	21	-	-
	Farm workers	12	-	-
CAUSES	Improvements needed	18	16	-
	Subsidy cost concern	17	13	-
	Weather etc	16	-	-
	Tradition	12	-	-
	Policy	10	24	42
	Farmers organisations	-	18	-
	R/U relationships	-	10	-
	Consumer/food	-	-	11

6.2.3 Comparison of Issues, Actors & Causes

Having demonstrated longitudinal change in the frequency of issues, actors and causes within the separate publications, this section provides the results of a comparison of the way the two publications covered issues, actors and causes over time. To highlight the differences between the two publications over time the codes used for the analyses reported above were grouped into broader themes. Appendix 4, provides the original coding definition. Tables 26-28, following, compare the thematic groupings for each of the issues, actors and causes and figures 16 –18, following, illustrate the comparative measurements of each theme in the two publications.

Issues:

Table 26: Thematic grouping of issues content analysis codes

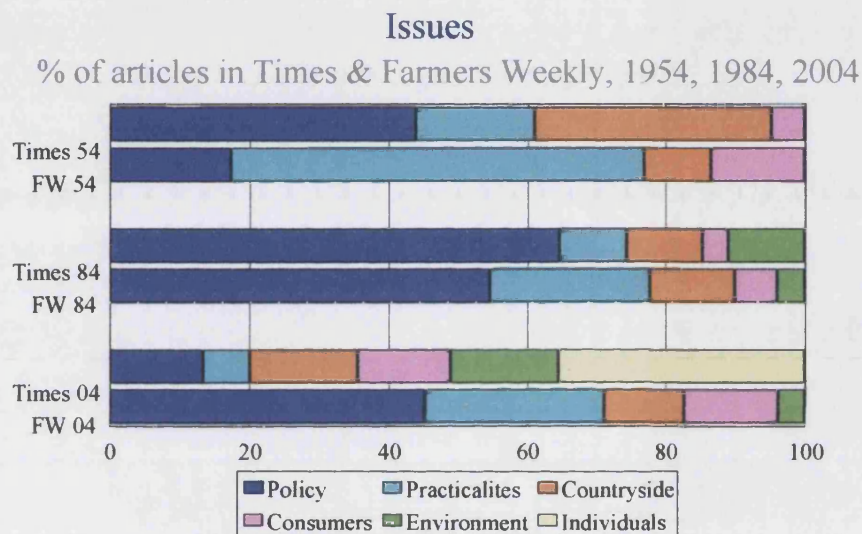
Initial Codes *	Themes
Policy	Policy
Practicalities	Practicalities
Future of farming	
Countryside matters	Countryside
Ancillary farming matters	
Consumers/food	Consumers
Supermarket power	
Environment	Environment
Individual action	Individuals

* See Code Book, Appendix 4, for detail

The main point which emerges here is the way matters of policy and the practicalities of farming alter in the two publications over time. In The Times the percentage of articles whose main focus is to do with policy increases from 1954 to 1984, falling away to a level lower than that of 1954 in 2004. But in both 1954 and 1984 The Times has a larger amount of articles whose focus is policy than Farmers Weekly. For that publication policy is not a large percentage of articles in 1954 but it increases for 1984, whilst decreasing somewhat for 2004. Taking 1954 against 2004, however, policy, as a

percentage of articles coded in the issues category, has an inverse relationship between the two publications: a larger percentage in The Times in 1954 than Farmers Weekly but a smaller percentage in the Times in 2004 than Farmers Weekly.

Figure 16:



Farming practicalities show a smaller percentage of articles coded in The Times compared to Farmers Weekly in all years and a decreasing one over the period. The importance of practicalities in Farmers Weekly declines from its high in 1954 to a similar percentage for 1984 and 2004. The Times in 1954 has farmers and farming as part of the broader countryside in a reasonably large percentage of articles but for the other years, and for Farmers Weekly in all years, the percentage is small. Consumers are more important in Farmers Weekly in 1954 than The Times. In 1984 they have very little importance in either publication, resuming a reasonable percentage of articles coded in 2004. The environment appears as an issue in 1984, both that year and in 2004 having a greater percentage of articles coded in The Times compared to Farmers Weekly. Finally, for 2004, a large proportion of articles coded in The Times related to farmers as individuals, compared to farmers as a group.

Actors:

Figures 16 & 17 show a very similar pattern for policy as an issue and government as an actor: 1984 showed the highest percentage of articles coded in both publications but being higher for The Times in 1954 than 2004 compared to Farmers Weekly which has a far higher percentage of articles relating to government than The Times. Farmers' organisations feature in both publications, more strongly in Farmers Weekly than The Times in all years and declining over time in each.

Table 27: Thematic grouping of actors content analysis codes

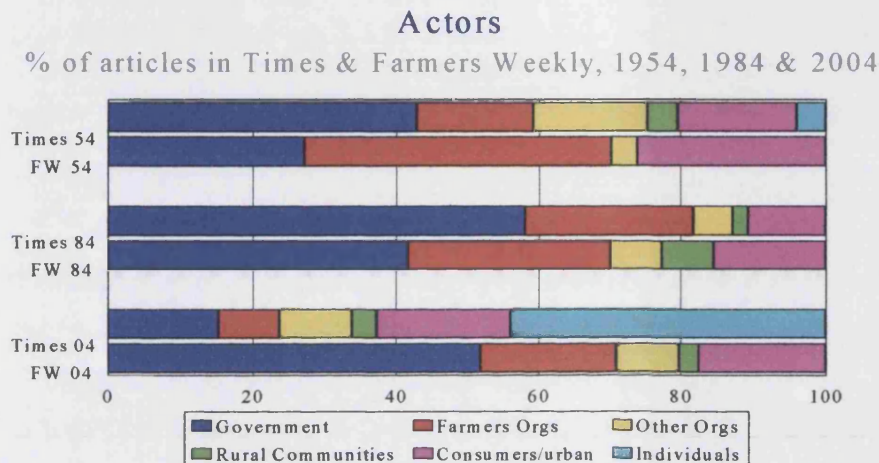
Initial Codes *	Themes
Government	Government
Farmers organisations	Farmers organisations
Young people	
Farm workers	
Companies/businesses	Other organisations
Industries related to agriculture	
Other organisations	
Media	
Local communities	Rural communities
Consumers	Consumers/urban
Town dwellers	
Supermarkets	
Conservationists	
Single issue organisations	
Lawyers & police	Individuals
Individuals	

* See Code Book, Appendix 4, for detail

Other organisations associated with farmers and farming appear in both publications in each year but with no clear pattern. Consumers too appear in both publications in each year, interestingly with a somewhat higher percentage in Farmers Weekly than in The Times in 1954 and 1984. Rural

communities, as actor, do not appear in Farmers Weekly in 1954 but do in The Times and have a small percentage of articles coded in both publications for all other years.

Figure 17:



Finally, in this actors category, individual farmers feature to a small extent in The Times in 1954 but to a much greater extent in 2004.

Causes:

Of the six themes identified as causes, three stand out in the coding analysis: that farmers and farming are at the mercy of others; that farming is special and that farming is difficult. Taking all these together accounts for more than 80% of articles coded in The Times in 1954 and 1984 and in Farmers Weekly for all three years. (Table 28, overleaf) Only in The Times in 2004 is this not the case, when individual farmer action accounted for more than 25% of articles coded. Rural community matters appear in both publications in every year to a small extent but the notion that farmers are privileged or featherbedded appears only in The Times in 1984 and 2004.

Table 28: Thematic grouping of causes content analysis codes

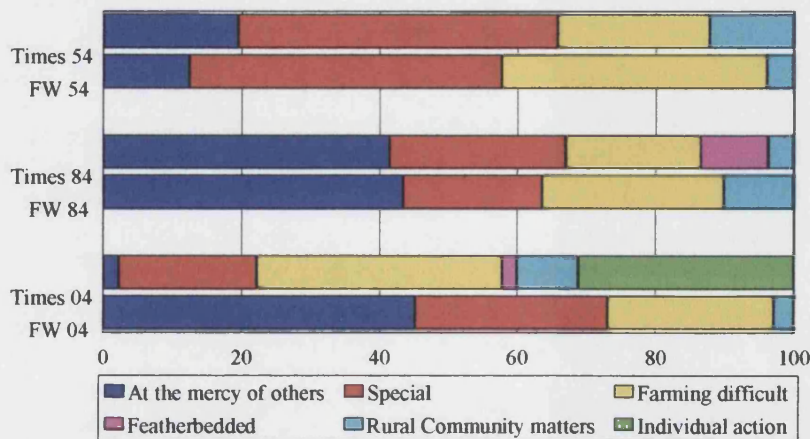
Initial Codes *	Themes
Policies unfair	At the mercy of others
Farmers orgs not helping	
Press (& other) unfair	
Subsidy cost concerns	Farmers & farming are special (+ve connotation)
Old fashioned values	
More should be done to help	
Farmers are efficient	
Farmers need safeguarding	
New policies are working	
Farming is a good way of life	
Opportunities in farming	Featherbedded (-ve connotation)
Farmers are featherbedded	
Production effects	Farming is very difficult
Poor returns	
Weather etc	
Supermarket domination	
Imports undermine UK farming	
Need for improvement	
Change prevented	
Individuals	Individuals
Other rural matters	Rural community matters
Hunting & country sports	

* see code book, Appendix 4, for detail

Figure 18:

Causes

% of articles in Times & Farmers Weekly 1954, 1984 & 2004



Two of the three major causes identified echo those seen in the narrative interview analysis. Here the theme is that farmers and farming are at the mercy of others; in the narrative interviews the theme identified was that change is outside farmers' control. Here the theme is that farming is special; in the narrative interviews the theme was the same, with the connotation that, because that was the case, farming deserved to continue to be treated in a special way.

What this content analysis demonstrates is how those themes have changed over time in different publications circulating in the agricultural public sphere. For *The Times* the notion that farmers are at the mercy of others has a greater percentage of articles coded in 1954 than does *Farmers Weekly*. That percentage doubles in 1984 but in *Farmers Weekly* the increase is greater. The marked difference can be seen in 2004 when the percentage of articles assigned to that theme increases even further for *Farmers Weekly* but declines to a very small amount in *The Times*. That farming is special accounts for a similar percentage of articles coded in both publications in 1954. It reduces for both in 1984. It reduces still further in *The Times* in 2004 but increases in *Farmers Weekly* that year. That farming is difficult has a larger percentage of articles coded in *Farmers Weekly* in 1954 than does *The Times*. For both publications the percentage falls in 1984 although the weighting is the same. By 2004 however *The Times* has more articles coded under the 'farming is difficult' theme than does *Farmers Weekly*.

6.3 Other Longitudinal Comparisons

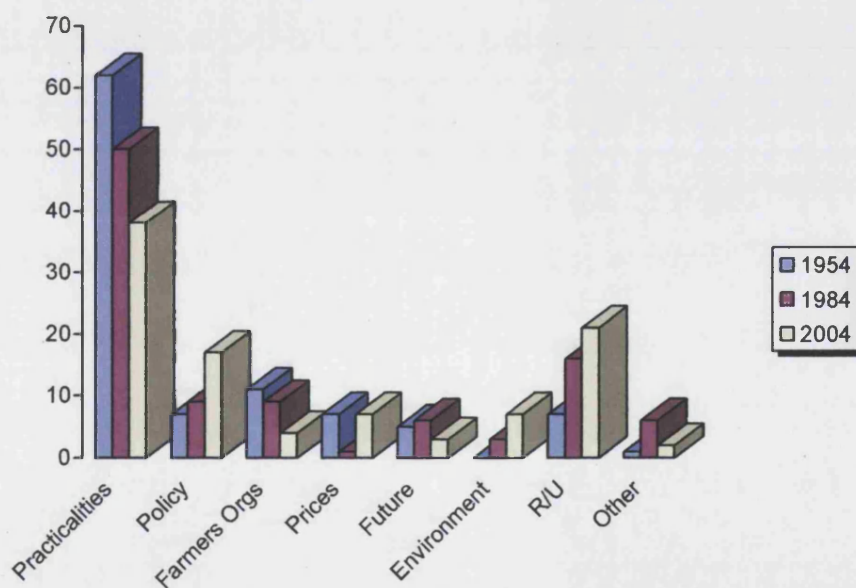
Four other elements were analysed to illuminate change over time: first, in *Farmers Weekly*, an analysis of all the letters to the editor in each of the years under review, coded to identify the topic, or event which had stimulated the writer to send a letter to the editor; second, in *Farmers Weekly*, a broad view of the optimism or pessimism of the articles coded; third, in *The Times*, a

broad view of the way farmers and farming were regarded, measured by the tone of the article; fourth, a thematic analysis of the key words from the headlines and main body of the articles from *The Times* to identify connotations about farmers which readers might draw from the article. Results from each of these measures follow.

6.3.1 Topics, Letters to the Editor, *Farmers Weekly*

Figure 19 compares the issues which were the subject of letters to the editor of *Farmers Weekly* over time.

Figure 19: *Farmers Weekly* Letters to the Editor: Comparison of topics (% of letters)



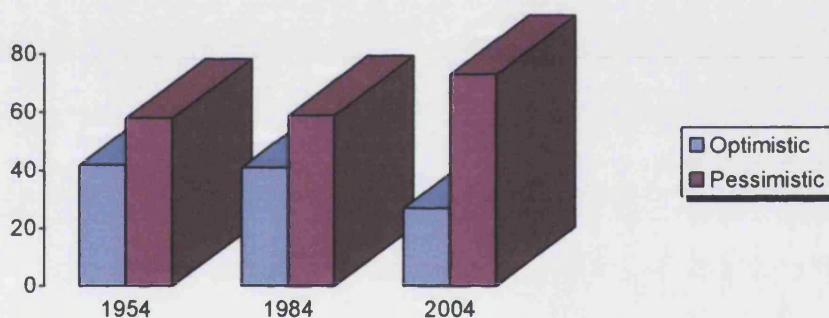
Farming is a practical, hands-on industry so, as might be expected, it is the practicalities of the industry which are most written about. However, over the 50 years in question this percentage falls from 62% in 1954, to 50% in 1984 and to 38% in 2004. Letters about the organisations of the industry, mainly the National Farmers Union, decrease from 11% to 9% and finally, in 2004, to 4%. Topics and issues which increase in importance are matters of policy either government or EU, matters about the environment and matters about rural/urban relationships. The prices which farmers receive for their products

and the future of farming feature in all three years but without a clear direction over the period.

6.3.2 *Optimism/Pessimism in Farmers Weekly*

To gauge optimism and pessimism each of the leaders and each of the opinion pieces in *Farmers Weekly* were coded according to whether it displayed an overall feeling of optimism about the farming industry or an overall feeling of pessimism. (Figure 20)

Figure 20: *Farmers Weekly optimism/pessimism comparisons (% of articles)*

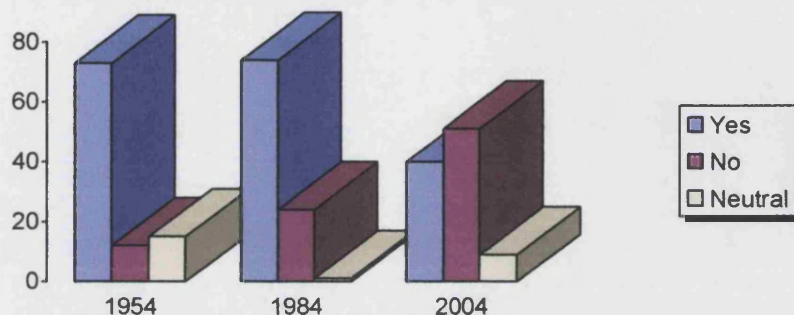


The percentages for 1954 and 1984 are similar. 42% broadly optimistic and 58% broadly pessimistic in 1954, with the corresponding figures for 1984 being 41% and 59%. By 2004, however, optimism has declined sharply to 27% while pessimism has increased to 73%.

6.3.3 *“Sympathy” Shown in The Times*

To gauge sympathy each article from *The Times* was judged as to whether it was broadly sympathetic to farmers and the farming industry – yes or no. In a small number of cases the article was neither sympathetic or not sympathetic. These were coded as neutral. (Figure 21).

Figure 21: Times “sympathy” comparisons (% of articles which are broadly sympathetic to farmers and the farming industry – Yes/No)



In 1954 and 1984 the percentage of articles which were broadly sympathetic to farmers and the farming industry were 73 and 74% respectively. By 2004 this figure had declined to 41%. Over the three years analysed the number of articles which were not sympathetic increased from 12% to 24% and finally, in 2004 to 51%, a greater proportion in that year than the number of articles which were broadly sympathetic.

6.3.4 Key Phrase Connotation from The Times

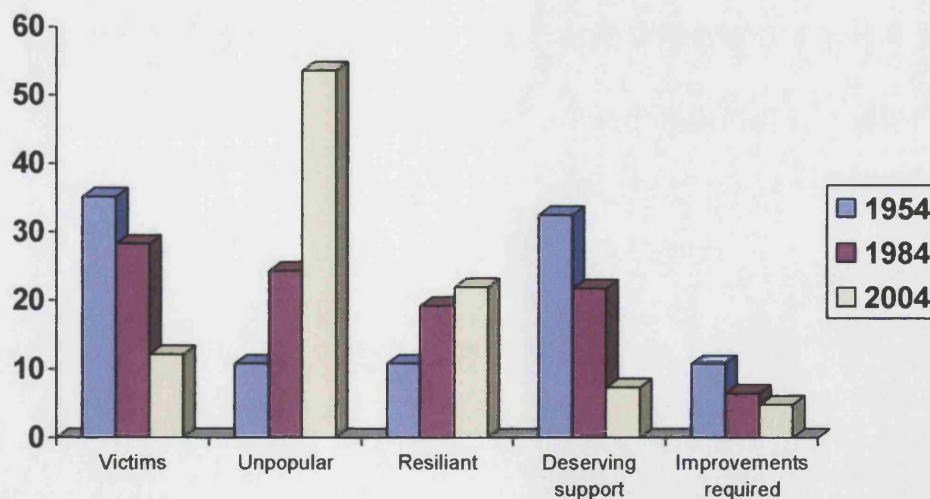
To gauge the connotations about farmers which readers would draw from articles in the Times the key phrases were coded. One phrase or word was taken from the headline or early part of the body of the text of each article, where words such as ‘vulnerable’, ‘struggling’ or ‘complain’ for example, were prominent. In a very small number of articles in each year the text did not provide a clear connotation, reports about the outcome of GM trials, for example, or of the outcome of a Land Tribunal hearing. These articles were not coded. Code book for the thematic analysis of the phrases can be seen at Appendix 5. Five categories were identified. Farmers were seen as:

- **Victims:** dissatisfied, powerless, let down by government & their organisations.
- **Unpopular:** getting unjust support, greedy & privileged
- **Resilient:** improving & fighting back

- **Deserving support:** not their fault, role in the rural community
- **Improvement required:** in environmental protection

Figure 22 shows that there is a reverse trend for farmers being seen as victims and farmers being seen as unpopular, the former declining and the latter increasing markedly. But whilst farmers are noted as resilient, and this has increased over time, the implication that they deserve support has declined. Also declining is the implication that improvements are required in the industry. It seems, when looking at 2004 overall, that decline has come at the expense of the idea that farmers are unpopular. It almost seems that The Times no longer thinks of farmers as part of an industry and, in establishing a viewpoint that farmers are greedy and privileged, neglects any improvements that may have taken place.

Figure 22: Times connotations of farmers (% of articles coded)



I have spoken in previous chapters about the effect of the regard of others on identity. The results of this analysis, which indicate that The Times offers increasingly negative connotations about farmers to its readers, will certainly have influenced the self-esteem of farmers as they try to accommodate and adapt to change.

6.4 Constructing the Representational Field

The media contain representations. Those representations both inform, transform and are transformed by the representations circulating in society. The objective of this content analysis of the media is to identify how my object of study is represented in the media in order that the results can be triangulated with those of the two other empirical studies. I have also used this thematic analysis of content to track change in the way the social object has been depicted over time in three respects: the main issues of concern – what the articles selected were about; the main actors – who were the key players in addition to or alongside the generality of farmers; and which causes or explanations were connoted. Taking the standpoint that valid inferences can be made between content and intended effect (Ferguson, 1983), the results of the analysis can now be used to construct a map of the representational fields, or organised networks of meaning, that emerge.

Taking all the results of the content analysis, the *what*, *who* and *which* aspects of the coding, Table 29 shows how the themes which arose from the issues, actors and causes thematic analysis of the two publications feed into four broad representations groupings.

Table 29: Representational grouping of content analysis data

	Content Analysis Themes		
	Issues	Actors	Causes
Policy	Policy	Government	At the mercy of others
Project of farming	Practicalities	Farmers' orgs Other orgs	Farming is difficult
Wider rural community	Countryside Environment	Rural communities	Rural community matters
Others	Consumers Individuals	Consumers/urban dwellers	Farming is special Featherbedded Individuals

- (i) **Policy** whether UK or EU based; those responsible for the making of policy whether regional, national or EU, the regulation of the industry and the financial arrangements that are part of the policy package. Included here are all the codes which comprise the “policy” theme in the issues category; all the codes making up the “government” theme in the actors category and the code to which all the articles connoting that policies are unfair and that farmers are being let down by the government and the EU in the “at the mercy of others” theme in the causes category. The notion of farmers as “featherbedded” by the government also joins this grouping from the causes category.
- (ii) **The industry or project of farming**; the farmers who farm it; the organisations who lobby on behalf of farmers or work in other ways as part of the industry or in support of it. In this grouping are included all the codes grouped as a “practicalities” theme in the issues category; the articles which together make up the “farmers organisations” theme in the actors category; and the codes in the “at the mercy of others” theme which see the farmers organisations as letting farmers down, not doing what might be expected of them, as explanations in the causes category, as well as the themes “farming is difficult” and “farming is special”.
- (iii) Farmers and farming as part of **the wider rural community**. This grouping comprises all the codes allocated to the “countryside” theme in the issues category; the “rural communities” of the actors category and the “rural community matters” theme of the causes category.
- (iv) **Others** who regard the social object but are not “of” it; in this grouping are those referred to as consumers or town-dwellers; also included are conservationists or environmentalists as well as supermarket buyers; Overall this group of “others” have views which impact on the way

farmers farm, the way they are regarded and the future of farming. From the issues category both the “environment” and “consumer” themes are included. I have also included the “individuals” theme in this others grouping because, although farmers, the farmer subjects of these articles are news because of their non-farming rather than farming activities. “Other organisations” whose activities impinge on farmers and farming and “consumer/urban dwellers” are the themes included in this grouping from the ‘actors’ category. “Individual action” also joins this grouping from the causes and explanations category.

These groupings can be seen in both *The Times* and in *Farmers Weekly*, regardless of the fact that each is aimed at a different audience and will be “captives” of the specific representations of those audiences (Sommer, 1998). The next section considers each of these groupings, in particular how they ebb and flow for the two publications over time. The results of the other longitudinal measures, *Farmers Weekly* letters to the editor and optimism/pessimism scores, *The Times* sympathetic/not sympathetic ratings and the *Times* key phrase connotations are also included in the explanations.

6.4.1 Policy

This grouping I have loosely referred to as government or politics but with the intention that the “g” and the “p” are lower-case. Its importance in the representational field operating in the agricultural public sphere can be seen in Figures 16-18 and the percentage of articles allocated to the “policy” coding in the issues category, the “government” coding in the actors category and the “at the mercy of others” coding in the causes category – the major portion of which is “government”. The core of this representational group is the relation and dynamics between farmers and farming, on the one hand, and policy makers, whether UK or EU based, on the other.

The Times portrayal relates to farmers and farming's perceived position as in receipt of public funds to maintain farm incomes in order that farmers be kept in business to continue production. It was important news in 1954 when a new food policy was devised to enhance self-sufficiency. By 1984, however, this policy had become the catalyst for the food surpluses and food mountains which, having been paid for by the public purse, needed further public funds for storage or distribution. With articles in The Times having been largely sympathetic to farmers and farming in 1954, that sympathy begins to reduce in 1984 and the percentage of articles which are not sympathetic increases. The big change in representations of farmers and farming in relation to politics and government in The Times takes place between the years of 1984 and 2004. Not only have sympathetic articles reduced to 40% but also farmers are seen far less, in 2004, in terms of policy or government. For the general public audience the presence of farmers and farming close to what might be seen as the seat of power, has disappeared.

In the farmers' own trade press, Farmers Weekly, the industry association with government and matters of policy was less important in 1954 than 1984. In the early 80s, support for the farming industry was considerable (8 cabinet members were themselves farmers) yet it was also the time at which farmers were considered to be "feather-bedded" and an inquiry was instigated into farmers' privileges. What is particularly noticeable in the Farmers Weekly, compared to The Times, is how, in 2004, the journal of the farming industry was still writing about the industry as though it were close to government, blaming its problems on official policy and bewailing the lack of action by its own organisations to challenge policy.

Somewhat surprisingly, in percentage terms, concern with policy and government and EU action, as seen from the letters to the editor of Farmers Weekly, is low, although the figures do reflect some increasing interest. From 7% of letters coded in 1954, policy was the main issue of concern of 9% of

letters in 1984 and 17% of letters in 2004. The optimism ratings declined in converse fashion. 42% of the articles coded were broadly optimistic at the start of the new support arrangements for agriculture. By 2004 this figure had fallen to 27% of articles coded with 73% broadly pessimistic.

Broad differences in the policy making representations of the two publications can be seen particularly in the *what* (issues) and *which* (causes) of the representational field. Government and EU policy is seen from the perspective of The Times as supporting farmers and farming. “... *said that heavy subsidies to agriculture has inflated land values and diverted huge investment funds away from industry and into farmland...*” (The Times, 31.05.84). From the perspective of Farmers Weekly it was seen as constraining it. “...*Defra’s plans for support payments in severely disadvantaged areas threaten to accomplish what BSE, bovine TB and foot-and-mouth could not: the eradications of a suckler beef unit that has operated profitably since 1921...*” (FW, 05.03.04). For The Times the cause or explanation of the policy making representation is that government and EU policy were doing a lot the help the farming industry and the notion of farmers as “featherbedded”. “...*Farmers know that there is no moral basis for the feather-bedding they have enjoyed for so long...*” (Times, 15.02.84”). Farmers Weekly, on the other hand felt that not enough was being done to help its industry. “..*lack of sufficient funding for effective (food) promotions, lack of leadership and Brussels bureaucracy restricting national food promotions are all responsible.*” (FW, 04.06.04).

Similarities in the policy making representations of the two publications can be seen in the *who* (actors) of the representational field, both of which see the government, politicians and officials setting policy in the UK and EU as the main actors.

6.4.2 The Project of Farming

The core of this group is the representations of the practicalities of farming, or farmers' organisations, that farming is difficult and that farming is special. This grouping has a lower frequency in *The Times* compared to *Farmers Weekly* across all three categories of issues, actors and causes in 1954 and 1984, but is marginally larger as a cause in 2004. There is a contradiction here, with *The Times* representation of farming as difficult and special increasing in frequency at the same time as its articles become broadly less sympathetic than they were in earlier years. A possible explanation lies in the code of individual farmers and their actions, found only in *The Times* in 2004. Most of these articles related to anti-social action, which would account for loss of sympathy, but it does not necessarily follow that this would decrease the general public's perception of the overall industry as difficult and special.

A surprise in this grouping is its decline in *Farmers Weekly* over time. One would expect, as the industry faced more challenging times, that its own media would strengthen its representations of itself as being special in order to gain sympathy and greater support from others. That this representational grouping is falling, whilst that which sees farmers and farming in association with policy makers is increasing, does suggest a disengagement from the problems of change and an assumption that someone else, in this case those who make policy, should find a solution. A high percentage of Letters to the Editor in *Farmers Weekly* are about the practicalities of farming – 62% in 1954 – but this declines over time – 50% in 1984 and 38% in 2004. The percentage of letters about farmers' organisations, such as the National Farmers' Union, also declines over time: 11% in 1954, 9% in 1984 to 4% in 2004. But although dropping to just 1% in 1984, when prices were guaranteed, letters about the prices obtained for agricultural products in both 1954 and 2004 were constant at 7%. In both years the purchasers were considered unfair to the farmer producer although in 1954 the ogres were the butchers whereas in 2004 they

were the supermarkets. “..the farmers gets a guaranteed price of £14.10s for a pig which has cost £13.15s excluding labour. The butcher sells at more than 100% margin...” (FW Letters, 15.10.54). “The price differential between chicken off the farm and on the shelf, is about five times.... We receive about 50p/kg for chicken, but it sells in the supermarket at between £2.20 and £3/kg...” (FW Letters, 25.06.04). Finally, a small percentage of letters to the editor in Farmers Weekly, focussed on the future, the effects of change, imports and the need for protection: 5% in 1954; 6% in 1984 and 3% in 2004.

In the *what* of the representational grouping of the project of farming there is more emphasis on its practical aspects in Farmers Weekly than in The Times, as might be expected. Similarly, in the *who* aspect of the representational field there is more interest in the organisations working for farmers in Farmers Weekly than in The Times. What is less expected is that both publications see the fact that farming is difficult and farming is special as a cause or explanation. “Without a dry spell in the next seven days, many crops will be destroyed and farmers will have to write off their investment.” (Times, 27.09.04). “Despite the difficulties, the challenges and the heartache of farming, agriculture remains not just a business but a way of life.” (FW, 02.01.04). In this category, however, a strong element of the representational field surrounding the project of agriculture for Farmers Weekly is that farmers are at the mercy of others, suggesting that, in a similar way, any solution to farming’s problems should come from “outside” forces – a *deus ex machina*.

6.4.3 The Wider Rural Community

Representations of farmers and farming as part of a wider rural community and matters of the countryside appear in both publications to a small extent in each of the years analysed. However there is no clear pattern to report other than the fact that this representational group was somewhat stronger in The Times in 1954 and 2004 than Farmers Weekly but that the reverse was true in

1984. Whilst the frequencies of the themes were small, I have included it as a separate representational grouping in order to distinguish it from the following section concerning “others”.

Issues such as rural planning, building on agricultural land, national parks, the loss of farm tenancies and land tribunals feature in the Times, compared to rabbit and rook control and the loss of common grazing in Farmers Weekly. Both publications cover hunting and country sports matters and concern about growing genetically modified crops. For both publications the actors in this representational grouping are the wider rural community, in addition to those involved in the project of farming.

6.4.4 Others

This representational grouping includes all those who appear in the articles coded as part of the content analysis, who are associated with farmers or farming, or have views about it or impact on it, but are not directly involved in the project of agriculture. They are important because they may influence the way agriculture is perceived. In this field are the media who report on agriculture, consumers or the customers of agricultural produce, those who are seen or defined as “town-dwellers” as opposed to the rural community, and the individuals who appear in The Times as farmers but who are the focus of an article not because of their farming activities but because of some other activity seen as news. I have also included in this group environmentalists, conservationists and single issue organisations such as Friends of the Earth. This is not because farmers are not environmentalists or conservationists. Rather it is because they usually appear in published articles as different or opposed. *“A seminar organised by Birdlife International, which has 25 European organisations, including the Royal Society for the protection of Birds, focused on the threatened species and urged governments of new*

member states to put the environment and wildlife at the heart of farming policy.” (Times, 20.01.04).

There are similarities in both publications in the issues which comprise this grouping “consumer matters”, such as shopping habits and diet. The environment features more as an issue in The Times than Farmers Weekly but, for both publications, as an issue it first appeared in 1984. Consumers, urban-dwellers and other organisations are the actors in this group for both publications but a key difference here is the 2004 addition of the individual farmer as an actor in The Times. This is also the main difference seen as causes or explanations between the two publications in 2004, when individual action features strongly in The Times but not at all in Farmers Weekly.

These “others” are of growing importance to the writers of the letters to the editor in Farmers Weekly. From 7% of letters in 1954 the percentage increases to 16% in 1984 and 21% in 2004. Their perception is of rural as separate from others, but the topics of the letters were of a rural/urban divide so are included in this grouping as are matters of consumers and food issues. *“Most consumers are not concerned where food is produced, all they care about is the price. If they did, imports would be drastically reduced.” (FW Letters, 17.12.04).*

The regard of others can also be inferred from the coding of key phrases of The Times articles. Over time connotations about farmers become increasingly negative which will have consequent effects on farmers’ self-esteem. This topic will be returned to in Chapter 7.

6.5 Why do UK Farmers Find Change Difficult?

The results of this content analysis suggest that change is seen, in Farmers Weekly, as something orchestrated or imposed by others, something outside

farmers control. The strength of the “policy” representational field implies that farmers see government, whether UK or EU, as to blame for change and problems in the industry – too much bureaucracy and not enough being done to support farmers. The farmers’ organisations themselves are seen as not doing enough to lobby on the farmers’ behalf and in need of revision. Indeed, over time, Farmers Weekly sees these organisations as declining in importance as actors in the change scenario. There is consensus between the two publications that farmers are part of a difficult and special industry but the published voice of that industry, Farmers Weekly, shows a strengthening over time in its depiction of farmers as being at the mercy of others. Letters to the editor in Farmers Weekly where policy matters, as an issue, increase over time confirm this notion. Those letters also demonstrate a decreasing interest in the practicalities of farming being a way to overcome the challenges of change. Overall, as seen in the declining optimism scores of the Farmers Weekly articles coded over time, it seems that change is represented by farmers as negative and troublesome, as something which is the fault of others and of which they are passive victims. “*..despite low (milk) prices, red tape and hard work for meagre returns, our adopted farming families remain committed to agriculture. Hopeful that their offspring can join them in farming, none under-estimate the challenge.*” (FW 02.01.04).

In 1954 the main issues for farmers, seen in Farmers Weekly, were to do with the practicalities of farming – their day to day farming activities. The representations of farmers seen in the content analysis are as tillers of the soil, farmers of the land, producers of food for the nation. There would have been pride in this and, although there were some concerns about the new, post-war, free market for food, the overriding feeling was of getting out and doing the job of producing, although with very little concept of what was being produced and for whom. All this is clear from the articles coded as issues, actors and causes. This production imperative endured until the 1980s but, as can be seen in the results of the 1984 coding, there was an increasing sense

that farmers were producing for the government. It was the policy makers who set the amounts which would be realised for products and, in a sense, took away from farmers key decisions such as what to grow: that was determined to a large extent by production quotas and by subsidy payments.

Whilst practical farming and production was still, of course, a part of farmers' identities, by 2004 and the move to decouple payments to farmers from the production of food to the management of the farmed environment and landscape, a new representation of farmers emerged. For the moment, for farmers themselves, this identity has a negative connotation and the term "park-keeper" has emerged, at odds, it seems, with the growing of crops or livestock for food. The geographical distancing of decision making from London to Brussels has increased the sense of isolation from decision making among farmers and their feeling of helplessness in the face of change. This dents self esteem and sense of self. But as the representational grouping of "others" highlights, we see the beginnings of an increasing perception among farmers' own media that they are part of a wider world than that of the agricultural public sphere alone. Consumers, environmentalists and conservationists must be engaged with if the notion of farming as special, and therefore needing protection, is to be communicated. This is particularly necessary to overcome the perception that farmers are featherbedded. *"This precious annual marketing campaign (British Food Fortnight), which unites uniquely the three key sectors of education, retail and catering, could be left to whither for lack of investment."* (FW, 15.10.04).

The Times and Farmers Weekly are consistent in their portrayal of farming as being difficult and special but change has definitely resulted in new representations of farmers and farming and these can be readily seen in The Times in 2004. One reason for this is the diversifications farmers are adopting in order to increase returns. Farmers markets, for example, allow consumers to see farmers as producers of food rather than tillers of the soil alone.

Conversion to organic production not only attempts to address the concerns of some consumers about the provenance of their food, it also attempts to overcome the negative representation of farmers as despoilers of the land in their use of chemical pesticides and herbicides. *“When the organic movement began it was about committed farmers adopting a radical, sustainable approach that was at the same time as old as farming itself. I look after the soil, focus on animal welfare, use crop rotations, avoid chemicals and intensive production.” (Times, 12.10.04).*

These new representations are broadly positive, but there are negative representations too. Some articles in the Times in 2004 portray farmers as irresponsible or anti-social, although there is an underlying connotation here that farmers act in such ways because of frustration with the system. *“She (Margaret Beckett) has been worried that some (farmers) could take the law into their own hands after it became clear that they may no longer co-operate with government tests to prove a link between badgers and the disease (TB) in cattle.” (Times, 17.02.04).*

In 1954 and 1984 the government and policy matters were important in the issues and actors categories for The Times. Readers of that publication would see farmers and farming as being close to government, to the seat of power. As a cause or explanation the link with government declines considerably by 2004 at the same time as sympathy for the industry in The Times falls. There does seem to be a link here between sympathy for the industry, optimism within it and the perceived association of agriculture to government and policy. Such a link certainly accords with feelings in the industry that it is no longer of importance to government, that it no longer has the government ear and that those in government or responsible for policy relating to agriculture have little feeling or concern for it. That transfer of real government power over farming from the UK to Europe has accelerated this feeling of neglect. *“British farming businesses are more vulnerable now than at any time since*

the 1930s. The reasons should be obvious: support payments will be cut significantly; farmers are already struggling under a heavy burden of red tape; and complying with a plethora of farm assurance schemes adds costs unknown to most overseas producers.” (FW, 25.06.04).

Sommer (1998) referred to the media as being “an external memory for group specific knowledge”. The failure of the farming industry to accept and accommodate change suggests a harking back to earlier and seemingly better times. In this respect Farmers Weekly representation of change is one that looks to the past with nostalgia because the solutions it proposes for the problems of change are ones that look to the past and the greater protection provided to farmers then. Many of the solutions proposed to improve returns in the industry are also based on nostalgic images of the past – farmers markets and local food supply. To this extent some of the new representations of farmers and farming are re-presentations of those of the past.

This content analysis of The Times and Farmers Weekly for the years 1954, 1984 and 2004 identifies policy and policy makers, the project of agriculture itself, the wider rural community and others as the components of the representational field which can be seen in those publications. The detailed elements which comprise these components ebb and flow over time. The patterns reproduce the meanings circulating in the agricultural public sphere and both diffuse and distort them. Here it seems that the strongest system of meaning relates to the association between farmers and farming and government and policy makers. It suggests that farmers see themselves, and have been seen by the general public, as part of the establishment – an institution. Certainly farming does bear some resemblance to the total institutions of Goffman (1963) which are “*a place of residence and work where a large number of like-minded individuals, cut off from the wider*

society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life”.

For readers of *Farmers Weekly*, mainly working farmers and other farming insiders, that link between farming and government is diffused more widely and becomes more established over time. It distorts fact by implying that policy is the only cause of change and the challenges which change brings. By proposing policy as the prime cause of the problems of change, farmers are attributing ‘blame’ for the cause of the problems on others. And by emphasising policy as the problem it ignores other causes of change – complex social factors like food choice, convenience, world trade, women working, retailers needs. One might suggest that these matters are so complex that *Farmers Weekly* is reflecting the understanding of the bulk of its farmer readership in opting for the nearest and most easily understandable target at hand by concentrating on policy as the key problem and driver of change. For readers of *The Times* that meaning, the association between farmers and farming and government and policy makers, disappears. It diffuses new representations of farmers, not all of which are positive and its new portrayal of farmers as eccentric or irresponsible distorts the fact that most farmers are law-abiding citizens trying to make sense of their lives.

Some of these findings have to do with the commercial aspects of the media. The need to interest their particular audience, the need to make news from conflict, the seeking out of people with opposing viewpoints in order to suggest balance, and an apparent need to create interest with sensation, all this can be seen in both *The Times* and *Farmers Weekly*. What is not seen is the sort of chronological flow Sommer (1998) proposes. Sommer was referring to the flow from scientific publication to more popular writing to everyday written or oral utterings. *Farmers Weekly* is not a scientific publication in the sense assumed by Sommer, but it is noteworthy that the representations of farming which can be seen in that publication in 2004 is not reflected in *The*

Times in 2004. *Farmers Weekly* still supposes a strong link between farming and government. *The Times* clearly does not.

This content analysis of the media has also not uncovered the diversity of discourses that was evident from the narrative interviews. It may be that this top-down, thematic analysis makes diversity harder to uncover – a methodological limitation in that, in order to emphasise difference and change, detailed individual codes are coalesced into broader themes. I would argue however that this has less to do with the methodology and more to do with the nature of the media itself. As has already been recognised, it writes for an audience. That audience needs mass to attract advertising revenue. Such mass means that broad interests and matters of concern will be pursued at the expense of diversity. This would have the effect of suggesting that sociogenesis, the social representations that exist and arise at a collective level, in the formal communication of the media, will necessarily be less diverse than the ontogenesis of the social representations existing at an individual level which are revealed through informal conversation.

Chapter 7

UK FARMERS & CHANGE: ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTION

My starting point for this thesis was the observation that farmers, in the agricultural industry in which I have spent my working life, found it difficult to accept and accommodate change. My objective was to understand why this might be the case and whether, in identifying the causes, I might be able to contribute to social psychology's knowledge about change. This chapter focuses on the first part of that objective – an understanding of why UK farmers find change problematic. It is in four parts. The first summarises the findings of the three empirical studies. The second part focuses on the social representations of change which were identified from the research findings. The third part of the chapter integrates the research findings, and the social representations identified, to answer the research question: “why is change difficult for UK farmers?” The chapter concludes, in part four, by using the answers to the research question to make some predictions about the way change is likely to be resisted or accepted.

7.1 Research Findings Summarised

Three empirical studies were undertaken. Each study was designed to address different parts of the social object, to uncover meaning of change from all areas of the agricultural public sphere, individuals with different status and roles, representing both consensus and diversity (Breakwell, 1993). The methodologies of the three studies were distinct so that data could be triangulated. Both formal and informal communication was used to elicit the data. Study 1 comprised 19 semi-structured interviews with “insiders”, in this case working farmers. In the second study 13 “movers and shakers” in the industry gave narrative interviews. These participants included farming “insiders”, from interest groups working in the agricultural public sphere as

well as individuals representing public opinion, government and the media. In studies 1 and 2 communication was informal, between myself and the interviewee. Study 3 was a content analysis of two sorts of published media circulating in the agricultural public sphere - The Times and Farmers Weekly - at three different time points, 1954, 1984 and 2004. Communication through the media is seen as formal, in contrast to that used in studies 1 and 2. Table 30 summarises the studies.

Table 30: Empirical studies into farmers, farming and change

		Study 1	Study 2	Study 3
Method		Semi-structured interviews	Narrative interviews	Content Analysis
Mode		Informal communication	Informal communication	Formal communication
Agricultural public sphere represented	Insiders	Farming industry (farmers)	Interest groups	
	Others		Public opinion Government Media	Media
Level of social representation		Ontogenesis	Sociogenesis	Sociogenesis

7.1.1 Semi-structured Interviews

To gauge how the interviewees felt that change was affecting their fortunes as farmers, as well as the fortunes of the farming industry as a whole, I adapted Cantril's (1965) 'self-anchoring striving scale' into a 'self-anchoring ladder scale'. This provided context for the study, a climate of opinion to frame the more detailed results.

The mean measurements of the self-anchoring ladder scale show a general trend among the interviewees to perceive that the fortunes of their own farms were better in the past than was currently the case and, although the interviewees anticipated improvement in the future, they did not expect their fortunes to reach past levels. Although at a somewhat lower level than for own farm fortunes, a similar trend was noted for all agriculture fortunes: the fortune of the agricultural industry was less good at the time of the interviews than it had been (although improved from the preceding years at which time the industry was believed to be ‘in crisis’) and, although such fortune would improve, the perception was that the general level of fortune in the farming industry would never return to the level it had reached in the past. The general climate of opinion about farming among these interviewees seemed thus to be equable, neither overly pessimistic nor overly optimistic.

The transcripts of the semi-structured interviews with working farmers were analysed using two qualitative computer programmes – ALCESTE and NVIVO.

I followed the reasoning of Lahlou (2001), and systematised the way change was spoken about into the elements or “anatomy” of the social representation of change for these interviewees. Parales Quenza (2000, p264) points out that such lexical analysis, as “anatomy”, neglects the dynamic nature of a social representation: a “physiology” too is needed. Parales Quenza (*ibid*) goes on to note that the theory of social representations emphasises communicative processes. I contend that the communicative processes, the interaction between the participants of the interview – researcher and interviewee – provides the “physiology” that he refers to and justifies the use of the linguistic corpora of the interviews as the basis for mapping the structure of participants’ representations of change.

ALCESTE analysis of the linguistic corpora demonstrated that the representation of change among these interviewees consisted of five elements:

- **Farm marketing** included viewpoints about the influence of supermarkets on the farming industry, or whether price was a key requirement for consumers at the expense of quality.
- **Country life** was appreciated by all interviewees; they were pleased to be living close to nature. They were consistent in their views about the lack of understanding by townfolk for the country way of life.
- **Farming business** was an important element of interviewees' representation of change. Profitability was a key concern but outside interference, red tape, planning matters and, as they saw it, unfair competition, also featured.
- **Farm practicalities** included such topics as change in farm and farming structures, technology, the environment and the difficulties of farming, the long hours and the costs.
- (Agricultural) **politics** included UK and EU governments and public body influence, the policy regulators and the possibility, and consequences, of direct action.

Two further elements making up farmers' representation of change emerged from the NVIVO analysis of these interviews:

- **Being a farmer** was a positive notion for all.
- **Farming's future**, would be for new farm structures to emerge in the industry as a result of change. But a consistent feeling was that the farming industry would continue because of the need to feed the nation. However, there was the likelihood of identity change as new ways of supporting farmers for the provision of public goods, like care for the environment, rather than the production of food, were set in place.

7.1.2 *Narrative Interviews*

The study using narrative interviews as method included individuals operating in all areas of the agricultural public sphere. Both ALCESTE and thematic network analysis were used to interpret the data – the transcripts of the 13 interviews.

ALCESTE identified five word classes:

- the generalities of farming;
- the legislative environment in which farming operates;
- the market aspects of farming;
- the way the media talk about and the way the general public perceive farmers and farming;
- rurality and rural communities.

Two points arose from the ALCESTE analysis. Firstly, that a range of discourses are evident when farmers, farming and change are spoken of. Secondly, that range reflects the area of the agricultural public sphere in which the interviewee operates. For example, for both an interviewee from an insider interest group and an interviewee operating in “government”, the word focus was on the legislative environment in which farmers operate. Two journalists from the public media and the produce buyer of a major supermarket supplying the general public demonstrated a word class focus on the media and public perception of farmers and farming. And the word focus of an industry support group and two senior advisors to government saw farmers and farming as part of the wider context of rural communities.

The thematic network analysis reduced the data into three global themes. The first proposed that **farming is special**. The inference from this theme is that, since farming is special, it should be treated in a special way. The second global theme focussed on the **forces affecting change**. But looking at the

basic and organising themes from which this global theme emerged, the inference here is that those forces were outside farmers' control. Focus of the third global theme was the **responses to change**. It emerged from basic and organising themes dealing with the outcome of change for farmers and the farming industry.

The correspondence between the range of discourses in the narratives and the area of the agricultural public sphere in which the interviewee operates was as evident in the thematic network analysis as it was in the ALCESTE analysis. The perception of farmers and the constraints on their adaptation to, or coping with, change were important organising themes for the two interviewees writing for the media circulating among the general public; the three narrators operating in the "government" theatre of the agricultural public sphere also focussed on change constraints but, as noted in the ALCESTE analysis, also see farmers and farming in the wider community of the countryside. This rural, or countryside, community is important for the narrators who operate in industry lobby groups whereas, for journalists writing for industry media, the production of food and the farming lifestyle are major themes, along with economic pressure and constraints on change. A final example relates to the interviewees operating in farming industry support groups. Here economic pressure on farming is a key theme, together with the emotions engendered in the face of change.

The narrative interviews identified a multiplicity of themes and a plurality of representations of farmers, farming and change circulating among key actors in the agricultural public sphere. This multiplicity, I proposed, exacerbates a difficult scenario for farmers in the face of change. Mixed messages circulate which, when added to farmers' own experiences and the historical perspective of the industry as a whole, make it hard for farmers to know where to position themselves or how best to accommodate and adapt to change.

7.1.3 Content Analysis

The content analysis used two publications: *The Times*, circulating among the general public as well as throughout the entire agricultural public sphere, and *Farmers Weekly*, circulating mainly among the insiders of the industry. The corpus for analysis was drawn from each of these publications at three time points – 1954, 1984 and 2004. My research was designed to understand the meaning of change as it is understood and experienced in the agricultural public sphere over time. I was not trying to compare and contrast specific time points in order to illustrate change. In this respect the years were selected to illustrate the flow of change over a 50-year period. Cross-sectional analysis uncovered differences between the publications at each of those points. But the longitudinal analysis over the half-century sees change as a continuous process rather than a one-off act or instance.

The corpus for analysis comprised 168 articles from *The Times*, 307 articles from *Farmers Weekly* and 1,884 published letters to the editor of *Farmers Weekly*. The main part of the analysis was thematic, identifying key themes or ideas and assigning them to categories which emerged through piloting and revision. The articles from each publication were coded in three categories:

- **what** the article was about, its main focus, issue or topic;
- **who** were the main actors (other than the generality of farmers);
- **which** were the underlying causes or explanations connoted.

A secondary analysis of the themes seen in the longitudinal analysis of both publications identified four broad representational groups:

- **policy**;
- the industry or **project** of farming;
- the **wider rural community**;
- **others** – those who regard the social object but are not of it.

The first representational group comprised **policy**, whether UK or EU based; those responsible for the making of policy whether regional, national or EU; and the regulation of the industry and the financial arrangements that are part of the policy package. The association between policy makers, on the one hand, and farmers and farming, on the other, features strongly in all three categories - *issues*, *actors* and *causes* - throughout the period. Similar frequency patterns can be seen for both *issues* related to policy and *actors* involved in government: in 1954 and 1984 there is a greater frequency in The Times than in Farmers Weekly. This pattern reversed in 2004 where, for both *issues* and *actors*, the frequency in Farmers Weekly was greater than that in The Times. Looking at *causes*, in this case being at the mercy of others, particularly policy makers, we see in 1954 a larger percentage of articles in The Times than in Farmers Weekly. By 1984 both publications have an increased percentage of articles in this section, marginally more in Farmers Weekly than The Times. The pattern changes in 2004, with Farmers Weekly retaining a high percentage of articles implying the *cause* as being at the mercy of others, while the percentage in The Times has reduced considerably.

The second representational group was the **industry or project of farming**: the farmers who farm, the organisations who lobby on behalf of it or support it in other ways. The practicalities of farming are important in this representational grouping, encompassing representations that farming is difficult and that farming is special. In both 1954 and 1984 The Times has fewer articles in this representational group than Farmers Weekly across all three categories of *issues*, *actors* and *causes*. Somewhat surprisingly, in 2004, the frequency of articles in this representational group is marginally larger in The Times than in Farmers Weekly. It is also noteworthy that, over the 50-year period, the frequency of articles relating to the industry or project of farming decreases in Farmers Weekly in all three categories. This might be seen, however, as reflecting the viewpoint that policy and its hold over the

project of farming is of even more concern to the readership of Farmers Weekly than the practicalities of the project.

The **wider rural community** made up the third representational group. Representations of farmers and farming as part of that wider rural community as well as more general matters of the countryside, such as rabbit control or country sports, appear in both publications to a small extent in each of the years analysed. There is no clear longitudinal pattern in this representational field, nor is there distinction in frequency between the two publications.

Others were the focus of the fourth representational grouping. There are similarities in frequency and pattern over time in both publications. *Issues* making up this representational field include consumer matters such as habits and diet. The environment features more as an *issue* in The Times than in Farmers Weekly but for both only appearing from 1984. The key point of difference in this representational grouping is the addition of the individual farmer as an *actor* in The Times. These individuals are cited not because of their farming activities but because of some other activity, often anti-social, which is seen as news. This is also the main difference seen as a *cause* or explanation for the issue on which the article focuses between the two publications in 2004: individual action featuring strongly in The Times but not at all in Farmers Weekly.

Four other measures illuminated change over time. First, all the published letters to the editor of Farmers Weekly were coded according to content. Noticeable here was how practical matters reduce over time, matters of policy increase over time and matters to do with rural/urban relationships also increase over time. Second, the articles of Farmers Weekly were coded according to whether they were broadly optimistic about the industry or broadly pessimistic. In all years there were more articles which were broadly

pessimistic than optimistic but while the figures for 1954 and 1984 were similar the pessimism percentage has increased sharply by 2004. Third, the articles of The Times were coded according to whether they presented a broadly sympathetic view of farmers and farming, or not. The frequency for 'broadly sympathetic' was high for both 1954 and 1984. However, from 1984, this sympathy reduced sharply. The percentage of articles which were 'not broadly sympathetic' to farmers and farmers had the highest measure in 2004. The way readers of The Times might connote farmers from the key phrases of the headline and early parts of the text indicated a declining perception of farmers as victims, and increasing perception of farmers as unpopular and a declining perception of farmers as deserving support.

Against this background of declining optimism in Farmers Weekly, declining sympathy for farmers and farming and a declining perception of farmers as deserving support in The Times over the 50 year period from 1954 to 2004, the key difference between the two publications relates to the matter of policy. In the case of both *issue* and *actor*, policy and government are more important in the Times than in Farmers Weekly for 1954 and 1984. By 2004, however, policy and government, as *issue* and *actor*, are far less important in The Times, but become important in Farmers Weekly. Similarly, by 2004, that farmers are 'at the mercy of others' is seen far less as a *cause* in The Times than in Farmers Weekly. It seems that the media writing for a farming audience attribute change, and the problems of change, to others.

7.2 Social Representations of Change

The research was conducted using, as its tool, social representations theory. Chapter 2 outlines the theory and explains why it is particularly relevant for examining change scenarios. Identifying the social representations of change, circulating in the agricultural public sphere, which have a "*daily reality that weighs on ... minds and relationships*", (Moscovici, 1985), provided evidence

from which conclusions could be drawn as to why UK farmers find change problematic.

The representations of change identified from the data fell into three broad groupings. Firstly, farmers' own representations of the change they are experiencing. Secondly, representations which reveal how change is affecting farmers' identities. Thirdly, new representations of farmers and farming which are emerging from changing circumstance.

7.2.1 Farmers' Representations of Change

My interpretation of the results is that farmers' representation of change is that it is negative and troublesome. The declining optimism scores of Farmers Weekly coded articles accord with this view. In both the informal communication of the semi-structured and narrative interviews and the formal communication of Farmers Weekly articles farmers themselves, and other actors in the agricultural domain, imply that farmers see change as something that is orchestrated or imposed by others and of which farmers are passive victims. The journalists writing for agricultural insiders, and some of the 'others' in the industry who gave narratives, see government involvement in the industry as one of the main reasons for this. Others also perceive farmers as representing change as outside their control, because it includes such elements as world trade and the weather.

Farmers themselves represent change in three main ways. Firstly, in the way it impinges on their everyday farming lives; secondly, in the way their community and rural life are different from what they had been; and thirdly, in the exclusion they feel from decision-making and centres of power. Additionally, individual farmers' representations of change include their thoughts about how change is affecting their notions of being a farmer and how that might further alter as the farming industry faces the future. Their

identities as farmers was the focus here and I will develop this in the next section.

Elements of farmers' representations of change include the new situations they face in their day-to-day farming lives. Things like the practicalities of farming, the development of new technology and new farming structures, changes in the market place that influence farm-gate prices and, consequently, their farming business, are all part of this representation of change. So too are the influence of supermarkets in driving down prices, the increasing costs incurred in farming, and the difficulties of working for such long hours.

Others in the agricultural public sphere also see farmers' representations of change emerging from generalities of their practical farming lives. In addition they see technological improvement and matters of economics, like farm incomes, unfair returns and unfair competition as elements of farmers' representations of change. Some of these elements are the cause of stress for working farmers, resulting in the relationship and health problems cited by narrators working in agricultural support organisations and concurring with the notion of a social origin for certain forms of depression.

Both the semi-structured and the narrative interviews reveal how farmers represent change through the way their community and rural life are different from what they had been. The underlying thread was of 'incomers' and 'newcomers' and the lack of understanding that farmers perceive that townsfolk have for the country way of life. I concluded that it had less to do with the social categorisation and social comparison of the in-group/out-group of social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and more to do with the idea of boundary and distinction (Puddifoot, 1995) and Cohen's (1985) point about boundary reaffirmation at times of change.

"...we notice it quite noticeably that people coming from the south into our area don't seem to fit in terribly well. They complain about the smells. They complain about the noise from the tractors...mud on the

road. There are not a lot because it is a fairly rural area but you do notice people moving into the houses and farm cottages from further afield than the locals...” (Scot02)

Both the semi-structured and narrative interviews illustrated that one way farmers’ represent change is in the way they feel excluded from decision making and centres of power. Farmers feel they are not being listened to; they have become peripheral because their numbers are few compared to the urban majority.

“...We British farmers are really too small. When you think of the French. They have got clout. It’s not the size of the farmer. In France maybe 30-40% of people are in agriculture or horticulture and their votes count as far as government is concerned. Here it is probably about 2/2.5%. So we’ve got quite a small voice and we feel that we are being ignored...” (Scot04)

From all three studies the government, policy regulators and the legislative environment in which farmers operate are major elements of representations of change. Letters to the editor of *Farmers Weekly* about policy matters increase over time, confirming farmers’ notion of the problems of change being due to government involvement. Farmers themselves, in the semi-structured interviews, count among the problems that change has brought outside interference, too much red tape and difficulties with planning matters. *Farmers Weekly* too represents the challenges of change as being the fault of government, whether UK or EU. A very strong “policy” representational field emerged from the content analysis, implying that farmers see government as to blame for the problems of change. Farmers feel themselves misunderstood, excluded, and this attribution strategy, that others are to blame, could be seen as a form of collective ‘coping’. It is summed up in the following quote from a *Farmers Weekly* leader:

“...seldom does good news for British farmers come from Brussels. Too often they are on the receiving end of meddling bureaucrats and biased policies...” (FW, 01.01.04)

That this representation of the government (in this case in Brussels) as being the cause of all farming ills now appears to be the accepted viewpoint in farming circles can be seen in the way it is being used as an advertising hook. Figure 23 (below) shows an advertisement seen recently in *Farmers Guardian*, another publication circulating among farming insiders.

Figure 23: Advertisement from Farmers Guardian (12.05.06)

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Here's one price drop you can't blame on Brussels.



Now only £13,990*

Rodeo Denver 3.0

* A class leading 3000kg tow-load • Multi-Award Winning • Car-like handling and refinement
• Equipped with air-conditioning • Alloy wheels • Tinted electric windows • CD tuner
• ABS with EBD • Selectable 4WD • Automatic also available • Take a test drive today.

7.2.2 The Effect of Change on Farmers' Identities

Change poses a threat to farmers' traditional roles. This has consequences, both social and psychological for those facing the change. One consequence of change is the way it is affecting farmers' identities. A fundamental requirement for identity is self-esteem. Change for many farmers, in challenging their understanding of what it used to be to be a farmer, producing food, is thus posing a threat to self-esteem and, therefore, to identity. Some farmers, according to certain narrative interviewees, are finding change so difficult that they are responding through emotions like guilt, because they are unable to continue farming the land in the way that previous generations have. Such emotions are resulting in stress, relationship and health problems and feelings of vulnerability. But other farmers are coping with the threat to self-esteem and identity. They are doing so by defending, protecting and

enhancing their identities in order to maintain self-esteem. These particular studies did not investigate why some farmers seem to cope with change better than others. I hope that might be the focus of future research.

Farmers are defending their identities by resisting change. This might be by blaming others or withdrawing into their own inner circles and being defensive of incomers to their communities. Stability is emphasised, seen in farmers' notions of what it means to them to be farmers - the generational nature of their family farms and the inevitability of their becoming farmers, for example. Another way of emphasising stability can be seen in farmers' representations of 'incomers' and 'newcomers' infiltrating what they perceive as having been, hitherto, fixed communities.

"...It's quite difficult when you have got newcomers coming into an area that don't respect and have a poor understanding of the locality, how community life works..." (SW01)

Farmers are protecting identity by dwelling on the positives of being a farmer. Their resilience in the face of change and their ability to work for long hours in difficult conditions can be seen in the following two examples:

"...we will continue to farm what we do at the moment, to achieve the perfection that we have always aspired to. No matter what there is always going to be a niche market for the top end and maybe it will be a case of doing less numbers but consolidating the quality. The men want to be producing good quality and they will stick at that..." (Scot06)

"...they are always quite surprised if they come up in the pouring rain that (name) is out there working and is absolutely soaking wet and has still got to do it. They don't understand that kind of thing, the newcomers don't. ..." (SW01)

Farmers are enhancing identity through learning new skills or adapting and diversifying in order to find other ways to compete in the market. By turning to organic farming and by selling their produce through farmers markets, for example, farmers are not only seeking a better return for their labours, they are

also reinforcing a more positive identity for themselves which they believe will come from them reverting to more traditional methods of production and marketing.

“...now we are able to explain that it’s (organic farming) to do with welfare and environmental considerations as well ...and you can talk to people about all these agronomic factors which they are buying into and it doesn’t need to cost that much more but the benefits are not only perhaps in human health but it is the bird life and water quality and all these other things that perhaps people didn’t think about first...”
(Init02)

What all these examples of defending, protecting and enhancing identity show is how individual farmers’ identity and self-esteem is bound up with the ways that others see them. Their self-esteem is built from the notion that others see them as enduring, part of a more stable era. It is built on the idea that others recognise their resilience in producing food for the nation in difficult circumstances. And it is built on the notion of others seeing them as reinforcing traditional values, as well as providing safe and wholesome food. So, as the perception of others varies according to changing circumstance, so too does that reflect back on farmers’ identity. The research findings show a considerable variation in the gaze of others. Farmers produce food for the nation. Their farming systems have resulted in much of the pastoral landscape in Britain today. Yet that very production and those very farming systems have not necessarily been of benefit to the environment. Several of the narratives referred to the dichotomy of farmers perceived either as “...still in a smock, sucking on a bit of straw, or in a pin-stripe suit leaning up against a Range Rover...” (N6). This diversity results in contradiction which makes it difficult for farmers to know how best to respond; how best to maintain the positive gaze of others or how best to counter any negative ones.

7.2.3 New Representations of Farmers & Farming

In the face of change new representations of farmers and farming are emerging both among farmers themselves and among others in the wider agricultural

public sphere or among the general public. Some of these emerge as farmers defend, protect and enhance identities affected by change. But such changes are not without risk. Emphasis on stability in order to defend identity, for example, can have negative consequences with others seeing farmers as averse to change and without the skills to adapt and take advantage of it.

“...Don Curry talks about reconnecting with the marketplace...my jaundiced side says these guys don't want to because they are not confronting the issues. They (the issues) are hard. How are they going to survive? What is it that they are looking to do? It's a lot easier to stand back and not be part of that process...” (N5)

At the time of the semi-structured interviews some 50% of livestock and cereal farmers' income was still generated by subsidy payments yet such mention as was made of it was merely speculation about how the system might change following the mid-term review. It seems that such payments were assumed as 'of right', and represented the farmers' fair return for providing food for the nation. In the event, however, the mid-term review of the Common Agricultural Policy signalled a steady decline in farmer subsidies, coupled with diverting reducing public payments to farmers from production to the provision of public goods – the environment and maintenance of the countryside. This has brought with it the notion of farmers as 'park-keepers'. Although an advisor to government sees the new role of being stewards of this countryside and delivering good environmental standards as *“...a new opportunity for farmers to feel that they are providing a valuable contribution...” (N9)*, farmers regard managing the countryside as having a negative connotation, compared to the positive connotation of providing food for the nation. They are concerned that this might evoke, among the general public, antagonism about the level of support that farmers receive.

“...when you start looking at farmers getting paid a highly visible subsidy for doing nothing then when the Daily Mail gets hold of that we

are going to get absolutely slated and I am pretty worried about that...” (Scot08)

The concern about how others perceived payments to farmers was not apparent in the content analysis of 2004 publications, although it had been in the past. In 1954 it was the second most important concern in *Farmers Weekly* and the most important concern in *The Times*. By 2004 this was not the case in either publication. However in 1984, and to a lesser extent in 2004, *The Times* depicts farmers as privileged or featherbedded. This is perhaps being countered, and identity enhanced, by farmers themselves, in the creation of a new image of farmers as important to the public because of the need of food-security. Whilst disputed by others in the agricultural public sphere this new representation can be seen from the following example:

“...I think over the years governments all around the world have taken on the idea that, generally, the world is at peace; we are not going to have problems as we did during the last war that caused food shortages. But I honestly don't see the world as that stable and I don't think we should give up our own ability to produce food...” (Scot06)

That 'farming is special' and therefore should be treated in a special way emerged strongly from the narrative interviews. The components of this theme were tradition and the loneliness and long hours which contribute to the farming lifestyle. This traditional idea of farming is one that the farming support organisations are fighting to maintain but it introduces a new representation of farmers as victims as these organisations try to support and preserve a lifestyle and way of life that is threatened by change.

“...if you are a tenanted dairy farm, say a county-council farm that insists you dairy, the parlour was probably built in the 50s for 25 cows and you might just be able to push 50 through. But no-one can make a living out of 50 cows and so you are unable to respond. There are obviously changes within the industry and if you are able to respond you have hope- that might be direct selling to the public or whatever. But in some instances you have such a prescribed existence that you can't do that. And there are others who quite simply do the job very

well but either the economies of scale are beyond them or they simply don't stack up financially..." (N2)

The content analysis demonstrated how representations of farmers and farming have changed over time. Both publications, *The Times* and *Farmers Weekly*, see farming as difficult and special and, with some small differences between the two and over time, this has been a broadly consistent representation in the press over the whole 50-year period. Sympathy for farmers and farming, however, declines in *The Times* over that period. Articles from both publications demonstrate the perceived close association between farming and government in both 1954 and 1984. By 2004, however, this perception remains in *Farmers Weekly* but has completely disappeared in *The Times* – farmers are no longer seen as part of the establishment, close to the seat of power. Indeed, in *The Times*, with their articles featuring individuals who happen to be a farmer as eccentric, or anti-social, the representations of farmers are rather negative ones. But we see, in *The Times*, how consumer matters like shopping, the environment and diet increase in importance, from not appearing at all in 1954. This becomes an opportunity for farmers to re-present information about themselves, to create new representations of themselves as producers of healthy, natural, safe and tasty food and to redress the notion that farmers are unpopular that emerges from the content analysis of *The Times*.

7.3 Why is Change Difficult for UK Farmers?

The objective of my research is to answer the research question “why is change difficult for UK farmers?” From the research findings and representations identified I see four reasons why change is problematic for this community. The first reason is the threat to identity which change is engendering. There are two interlinked strands to this threat to identity: threat to the idea of what it means to be a farmer and threat to self-esteem (which follows from the threat to the idea of what it means to be a farmer). A second

reason why change is problematic for UK farmers also involves identity and self-esteem, but is concerned with the grounding of farmers' pride in historical circumstance. The third problem of change results from the contradictions which change has brought about in the way 'others' regard farmers. The fourth problem for farmers is an impeded agency to accept change, which lessens their ability to cope with it.

7.3.1 *Change and Identity*

From all the study data, and despite the diversification which is seen in current farming businesses, there is a remarkably similar understanding that the outcome of the project of farming is food production. For all the farmers to whom I spoke, for many of those in the wider agricultural sphere who provided narratives, from the observations I have made from the agricultural events, conferences and meetings I have attended during the course of the research, and from the implications of the role of farming which can be taken from both *The Times* and *Farmers Weekly* magazine, the point of farming is seen as the production of food: corn, vegetables, meat, poultry, dairy products, salad crops, fruit or whatever. This is a task of which farmers are proud.

"...that's what farmers like doing. We love growing wheat, milking cows, feeding pigs and just producing things and being able to excel at the production side of things...(N8).

Farmers see their principal role in society as producing food for the nation but this traditional role is being challenged as public financial support is withdrawn from production and the percentage of food which could be produced in this climate is being reduced, to be replaced by food produced more cheaply elsewhere. Today fresh food can be obtained globally, and UK self-sufficiency of supply is no longer a national policy goal. But one's role in society is as much a key element of self as is one's individual traits. (The twenty statement test to answer "*who am I?*" Kuhn & McPartland, 1954). So,

for farmers, this challenge to their traditional role in society is a very serious threat to their identity. It raises the question what farming **is, does, and is for.**

The desirability of continuity for individual identity is not a bar to growth and change (Breakwell, 1993) so long as the change allows for development of the same identity. But with financial support for farmers now to paid for the provision of public goods such as care for the environment and managing the countryside, something which has not previously been a priority for farmers, the development of the same identity is less of a possibility. The threat to the traditional idea of self evokes a common current of opinion:

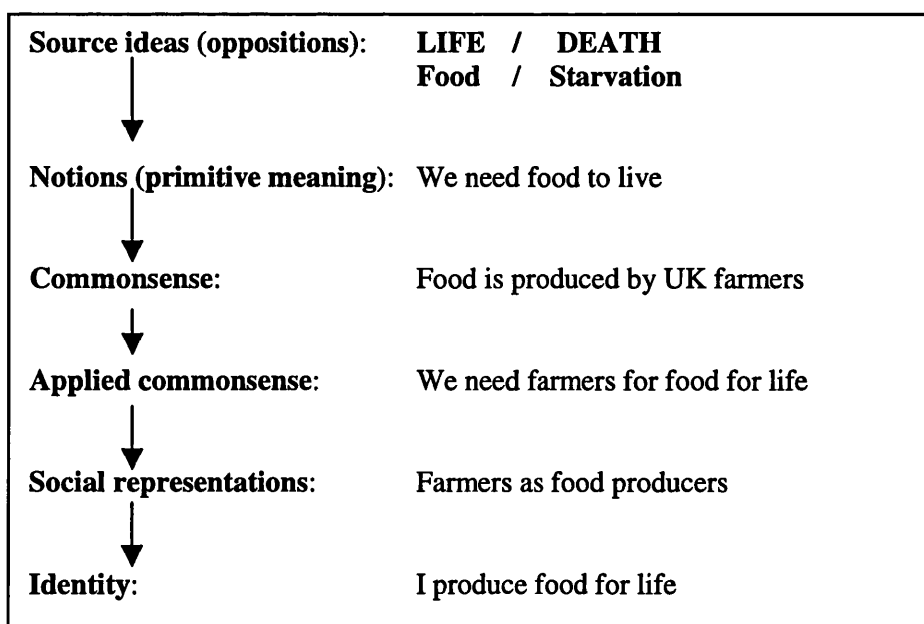
“...I see my role in life to produce that food for the nation...” (Init01)

“...if they told me basically all the sheep have got to go, we will pay you so much an acre to look after your fields, I wouldn't be interested. I would sell the lot...” (SW01)

The data provides evidence which enables me to suggest the reason why this challenge to what might be seen as a traditional farming identity – a producer of food – is difficult for farmers to accommodate. I described in Chapter 2 the concept of themata: how they constitute the origin of representation. I noted the point made by Moscovici & Vignaux (2000) that every social representation can be analysed in terms of an iconic and linguistic trajectory which runs back to the source idea, although themata *“never reveal themselves clearly; not even part of them is definitively attainable, so much are they intricately interwoven with certain collective memory inscribed in language...”* In that chapter I used the example of food to illustrate the concept of themata, adapted from that used by Moscovici & Vignaux (ibid), and explained how oppositions about the original idea lead to the development of thought (Marková, 2000a, Marková, 2003). Here I want to develop that idea with regard to food production, how that has led to an identity as a farmer which is now under threat.

Although for centuries food has been imported into the UK, the more so since methods of preservation such as salting, canning and refrigeration have been available and transport links improved, food basics such as fruit and vegetables, grains for milling and brewing, dairy products, meat & poultry have largely been produced in the UK for home market consumption. Indeed, until the industrial revolution which, together with advances in mechanisation on farms, necessitated the population shift from the countryside to the towns, many worked on the land in the business of food production. The 2nd World War emphasized the applied commonsense that farmers were needed to produce food for the nation's inhabitants to live. During the war and until the 1980s the sequence, from themata to social representation (Figure 24), pertained for UK farmers. *"...I grew up in a farming industry that was being encouraged to produce as much food as it possibly could. And the drive was to incentivise farmers to produce through the support systems and the subsidy system and everything else..."* (N9).

Figure 24: Identity: from themata to social representation



Since the end of the war the pace of social change has accelerated. Working women looking for one-stop shopping and more convenience in food preparation, foreign travel and the desire for greater choice, a recognition that subsidising farmers to produce distorted the market, and an understanding that protected markets were inequitable to developing countries, have all combined to challenge the basic themata which was the basis of farmers' understanding of their identity. A new role for farmers, and the one for which they will receive payment from the public purse, is the maintenance of the countryside.

In the semi structured interviews farmers spoke of their closeness to nature “...I get a lot of pleasure from going round the livestock and chancing upon a kingfisher or seeing a barn owl late at night in the lambing shed...” (Init03). They spoke of their land as their factory. “...This is factory land really...Our factory is out of doors...” (SW04). What they did **not** speak of was what I categorised from the narrative interviews as *the countryside*. By this I refer to the landscape that farming has created. “...nothing is more beautiful to me than the farmed landscape...you would drive along this road of fairly smart suburban houses and the countryside started very suddenly... and seeing that view or those gently rolling hills it was like a wonderful pastoral landscape...” (N1). Many reasons could account for the fact that the farmers who provided these interviews did not refer to the countryside in the same vein as the interviewees from other parts of the agricultural public sphere.

Following Gervais et al (1999), the absence may have been due to an analytical and/or interpretative limitation on my part. Alternatively, that notion of the land as in landscape, or the countryside, as represented by the narrative interviewees, may have been missing from farmers' representations of change because it is irrelevant to them, non-conscious or unconscious. This raises the question of why, if countryside as landscape is part of the representation of change in the farming industry among others in the wider

agricultural public sphere, it does not appear to be the case for farmers themselves.

The reason for this lack of representation of the land as landscape, I believe, lies in the fact that the concept of **the countryside** is a construction, and a construction not of working farmers, but of others. Marsden et al (1993) speak of “*the preserved countryside*” (p187), noting “...*Throughout much of the English lowlands, as well as in attractive and accessible upland areas, anti-development and preservationist attitudes dominate much local decision-making and political organization. This is expressed mainly by fractions of middle-class residents oriented towards the protection of amenity...*”

Current attitudes to the countryside are conditioned by the transformation of Britain from a rural, agricultural country into an urban and industrial one (Burchardt, 2002, p13). The idea of a rural idyll, it could be argued, was conceived in response to the perceived destruction of the countryside resulting from industrial revolution. Art and literature reinforced pastoral notions of the countryside as peaceful, gentle, easy. Halfacree (1995) cites Short (1991, p.34) seeing the countryside as being:

“...a less-hurried lifestyle where people follow the seasons ...where they have more time for one another...have a place and an authentic role. The countryside has become the refuge from modernity...”

Gray (2000) tracks how this idealised view of the countryside has become enshrined in agricultural policy. Looking back on the formulation of the Common Agricultural Policy he shows how the European Community implied a causal link between the preservation of a rural society that was perceived as exemplary and family farms, which produced the kind of landscapes and social life characteristic of rural space. For Gray (ibid), this juxtaposition transposed rural as social representation of peace and pastoral tranquillity into rural as a specific locality.

Others have contributed to the notion of the rural, and the countryside, as a construction. For Halfacree (1995), for example, rurality was represented by the inhabitants of six rural parishes in England as a mix of place specificity, the context of the surroundings, the type of settlement, population size and density, the environment, occupation, location, function, social characteristics and animals – both wildlife and farm animals. Part of Halfacree's (ibid) study involved a question to the respondents as to whether they lived in a "typical" rural area. From the data he concludes:

"...there remains an awareness of an idealised rural village where, put simply, humans are in self-contained harmony with their physical and human environment. Even though this mythical image may be weakly developed and was soon unmasked by the majority of respondents, it still has a place as a cognitive framework. It may thus be capable of motivating people, even if only at a subconscious level. We may reject the myth but we all know it..." (Halfacree, 1995, p.14)

For farmers then, an identity which has been rooted in a themata arising from the opposition of life and death, to the commonsense that food is produced by UK farmers and on to the social representation that farmers produce food, is now being challenged. In its place, according to the idea that the point of farming which is now to be the one for which farmers will be paid by the public, is the maintenance of the countryside. My argument is that the countryside, as understood in the new single farm payment programme, is not something which can be traced back to the source idea of food for life, the source idea from which farmers' notions of identity can be traced. That concept of the countryside is not relevant for working farmers, it is not part of their representation of change because the concept of the countryside on which the new regulations are based is a construction not of farmers making. Concerned with their day-to-day farming business, the project of farming, the countryside is a construct which is not part of their experience. It is not surprising then that such change is difficult to accommodate. As seen from

social representations theory, there is no past image or experience of “countryside” on which working farmers can anchor or objectify the new situation:

“...farmers are there trying to produce a food product to the best of their ability for a market and that is very different to keeping a few sheep for nothing effectively but then getting paid to keep the land. Yes, the essence of farming is production from your resource which is your land...you are not farming the land to make it look something or other you are farming to produce a product and you therefore get an end result of landscape...” (SW05)

As well as threatening farmers’ basic notion of self, change is also threatening farmers’ self-esteem, the need for which is a basic tenet of every theory of identity (Breakwell,1993). While farmers were valued for their food production and were receiving regard, as well as a rewarding financial return for their labours, change was accommodated in the industry. Technological change was embraced, as machinery was able to replace horses and men, as pesticides, fertilizers and advanced feed formulations were able to boost yield. Of course pride in one’s endeavours is not unique to farmers. All industries have pride in their history and their contribution to the nations well-being. One can think of coal mining and shipbuilding and the resistance that reductions of those industries evoked. But what farming (and fishing too) contributes to the nation could perhaps be perceived as even more vital, the basic necessity of food. But change of role from food producer to countryside manager might, farmers’ fear, affect the perception of others. Farmers, for example, did not want to be seen as “just” park-keepers.

“...the raison-d’etre of farmers is producing food. Paying farmers to keep the land is a somewhat different reason. I don’t know that I would be happy being paid to be a park-keeper and not actually contributing to the general...being a park-keeper there is no tangible evidence of doing good....” (SW05)

We learn in developmental psychology that the development of self, of identity, arises from reflections of the way that others perceive us – the double aspect of self – the I and the me of Mead (1934) and the generalised other whose perspectives and attitudes are internalised as the self develops. The research findings indicate the importance of the perception of ‘others’ to farmers. ‘Others’ were a major representational grouping in both the narratives and content analysis: those who are associated with farmers or farming or have views about it or impact on it, but who are not practically involved in the project of agriculture. That farming is seen as special and difficult engenders both a source of sympathy, regard and respect among ‘others’ and a source of pride for farmers. Both of these sources of self-esteem are now at risk, with consequent effect on identity, from the challenges of change.

7.3.2 Change and History

In social representations theory the past frames the present because meaning and understanding of new experience takes previous experience as its reference. We understand some thing in the light of some other thing or by understanding what it is not (Marková, 2003). For farmers and farming the social representations circulating in their social milieu include the generational nature of the industry, its traditions, continuity and its history.

Stories of the past, the myths and history of an industry, infuse the present and influence the values and beliefs with which an individual faces change. For a group, such as farmers, their history “...*defines a trajectory which helps construct the essence of a group’s identity, how it relates to other groups, and ascertains what its options are for facing present challenges...*” (Liu & Hilton, 2005). Liu & Hilton also describe how significant events become selectively incorporated in representations to enable the positioning of identity. For many of those interviewed the case of the 2nd World War was

that significant event and the source of particular pride as UK farmers were called upon to feed the nation.

“...when the war came along they (farmers) were great people because they were producing food and they couldn't produce enough. Oh yes. They were all very nice, farmers, they were great people...” (Scot04).

The situation of the 2nd World War thus becomes a benchmark, a landmark event which serves both to ground memories of, or reflections on, the past. It was particularly so since a major depression in UK farming through the early part of the 20th century was ended by government action as the war began. But whilst that pride in the past might endure, the reason for it – farmers ability to produce food – seems to some to be the case no longer. Following Liu & Hilton (ibid), the trajectory, from the 2nd World War and the production of food for the nation, is not available for farmers facing change today.

7.3.3 *Contradiction in the Regard of 'Others'*

There is another aspect of the regard of 'others' which I see as one of the reasons why farmers find change problematic. Within a similarity of themes in the representational fields of change in all areas of the agricultural public sphere, there are different nuances, resulting in diversity. Farmers are seen as having some positive and valued traits: *“...they will just pull in their belts another notch...” (SW04)*; *“...they are amazingly stubborn and wonderfully resistant and persistent...” (Init03)* But there are negative perceptions too. Farmers as whingers, for example: *“...we have always been seen as a whingeing lot...” (Scot08)*; and farmers as averse to change, with poor business or marketing skills and little knowledge of the consumer they are supplying. *“...if you set up any other kind of business where you are selling to the general public you don't kind of hammer the general public because they don't want to buy things that you want to make...” (NI)* But for those farmers who do diversify their enterprise and add value to their produce, who do move

beyond what might be seen as the traditional role of farmers in commodity production, or who try to overcome economic pressure by intensifying their production, there remains the possibility of the negative view of modern agribusinesses spoiling the countryside: “...*the public perception of farmers as being determined to get every last penny, destroying the environment...*”(N2). Some try to obviate this, reinforcing the ‘local yokel’ producing wholesome food image in the branding they choose when they move into direct selling to consumers: “...*farmers are capitalising on the rural idyll...our products have got to have integrity but it is cashing-in like mad on the fact that people think that by eating it they will be healthier and it gives them a foot in the door to a lifestyle...*” (SW03).

Since the regard of others reflects back on self farmers, faced with discrepant representations, are unsure as to how best to position themselves. The diversity creates contradictions which cause problems for farmers in understanding how best to respond to change in a way which will maintain the positive regard of ‘others’.

7.3.4 Agency to Accept or Resist Change

One representation of farmers which can be seen in some of the narratives, particularly those of the agricultural support agencies, and in the content analysis of Farmers Weekly, where it increases over time, is that of farmers being at the mercy of others. This representation positions farmers as victims and raises the question of the extent to which farmers have agency to accept or resist the impositions of change.

Although the practical and economic aspects of change are being accommodated and coped with by some, resistance is evident in others. This resistance may be that of an individual farmer loathe to accept the new practices of being funded by government to provide public goods such as countryside care rather than for food production. It may be the direct action of

a group, like *Farmers for Action*, who feel that supermarket groups use their power inappropriately to force down prices to suppliers. It may be the result of an alliance of differing parties, like *Breaking The Armlock*, who seek what they feel to be a fairer deal for farmers. Such resistance can itself generate change. The genesis of farmers markets is one example. Farmers resisting poor returns from large processors and multiple retailers seek to improve those returns by selling directly to the public. The consumer who buys may be doing so to resist what they see as exploitation of farmers by supermarkets whilst valuing the provenance and naturalness of food sourced direct from the producer, as well as the connotations of returning to rural roots that such a shopping experience provides.

Such resistance brings about social change but for individual farmers it might require new definitions of identity. For such new identity definitions to emerge, agency is required (Hopkins et al, 2006). Collective identities, they argue, are (re)produced through wider social processes and practices and, as such, analysis of agency “*needs to pay due regard to institutional power and practice*” (p56). Hopkins et al were examining national identifications but a similar point could be made in the case of farmers, the farming industry and government.

I believe that the strong view that government is to blame for all the negative consequences of change has created a “learned helplessness” which affects farmers’ ability to accept or resist the impositions of change and to allow new identities to emerge. Social representations do not **preclude** individual agency but I do suggest that the way that UK farming has been structured and regulated over the last 50 years has created a representation that **impedes** agency.

The theory of learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975) was based on the observation that dogs, when exposed to shocks from which they could not

escape, became apathetic and accepted the shock: they learned to be helpless. This may perhaps seem an overstated proposition in the case of farmers but the research findings support it. The three quotations below show how individual farmers blame the government, in this case for the excessive regulation and bureaucracy which change has brought.

“...environmental issues and the huge amount of rules and regulations and bureaucracy that this government seems to want to place upon us, even over and above the EU...” (Init03)

“...I call defra the department for the eradication of farmers and rural activities and that is what I honestly think. We are being penalised all the time. Insurances, inspectors, this, that and the other....” (SW02)

“...in a political sense a huge change – paperwork. The IACS, beef premiums, the cereals and beef have a huge amount of paperwork. Subsidy driven I suppose but its time consuming....” (Scot11)

Even those in the media listened to and watched by the general public (N1 & N12) base their views on the assumption that farmers’ hands are tied by government.

“...with the whole post-war experience of guaranteed prices for all the main commodities we have had two or three generations of farmers growing up with that kind of psychology that somehow they are indispensable, that they have a direct line with policy makers. That intervention of the state in managing agriculture has disconnected farmers from their customers...” (N1)

“...in recent years that (farmers fatalism) has been compounded by the fact that their destiny has largely been in the hands of government negotiators and bureaucrats in Brussels...” (N12)

We can also see that, far from the prospect of the mid-term-review providing an opportunity for farmers to retake responsibility for their own destiny, there is a contrary assumption of continuing involvement, regulation and direction by government in the future:

“...what are farmers going to be doing at the end of the 8 years? Nobody knows. It’s just a black hole. Nobody knows quite what will happen. Everybody assumes that some other policy will be introduced in the meantime which will replace whatever is finishing. But there is no promise of that. Its simply a vague assumption...” (N8)

“...I think one of the huge problems at the moment for farmers is that government has absolutely no idea what they want to do with this industry...” (N13)

These representations circulating in the agricultural public sphere indicate a climate of acceptance of government support over which individuals feel they have little influence. Individual farmers in the semi-structured interviews claimed that they would prefer that there were no subsidies:

“...I think the sooner the subsidies are cut the better for everyone and get us onto a level that is fair for everyone...” (Scot02)

“...I’ve said all along if we could farm without subsidies and the consumer paid the cost of production and something for ourselves to live on it would be a much better way of running things...(SW05)

As I write, however, the current concern about the lateness of the newly introduced single farm payments demonstrates that this view of financial support being unnecessary is not a widely held farmers’ view. What government involvement in the industry has bought about is “...a comfort zone” (N9). The comfort zone is undoubtedly an unintended consequence (Roots, 2004), but it has, I believe, impeded farmers’ agency to accept change and, consequently, boosted their resistance to it.

7.4 Responding to Change

My research has sought to understand the meaning of change circulating in the agricultural public sphere and why farmers find it difficult to accept and accommodate that change. I have shown that change is threatening the self-esteem that farmers feel in producing food for the nation; that it is engendering a feeling of exclusion among farmers from those who formulate policy

relating to their farming business; that it is creating a feeling of alienation of farmers from those who move into their rural communities; and that it is challenging farmers business skills as they seek to cut costs or increase profits in a competitive marketplace. All these are having a detrimental effect on farmers' identity. But there are also positive effects: change is helping farmers to learn new skills as they diversify their farming businesses; it is providing them with new roles, like that of caring for the countryside, which will, in time, provide new identities in which they can feel pride; and it is creating an opportunity for them to forge closer links with the general public as they embrace farming practices and food marketing methods which engage with increasing public concerns for animal welfare and food safety.

The research has enabled me to identify four reasons why farmers find change problematic. Firstly, the way that change is threatening their identities, particularly their notion of self and the self-esteem that flowed from that traditional identity. Secondly, the historical origin of their pride and self-esteem as producers of food for the nation, a role which is now being challenged. Thirdly, the mixed messages and multiple representations of farmers and farming which circulate in the agricultural public sphere resulting in contradiction in the regard of others. Fourthly, the impediment to agency which continued government involvement has wrought, leading to a learned helplessness in coping with change.

The objective of this research was to try and understand why UK farmers found change difficult to accept and accommodate. In doing so I hoped that I might be able to extend that understanding into the wider social world. One way to do so is to use the understanding I have reached as to why change is problematic to UK farmers to make some predictions about change. Change will be resisted or accepted depending on the extent to which:

- Change affects identity, particularly the threat to the self arising from change in accepted roles, self-esteem and the positive regard of others;
- The previous situation was positive compared to the current one: the importance of history;
- The new situation allows for consistency of identity;
- Individuals or groups in a change scenario have agency to accept or resist.

Such predictions allow me to consider the future of UK farming and engage in some speculation about how change might be accepted and accommodated by farmers themselves.

Farmers have left the industry already and this trend continues. It is reasonable to suppose that most of those who remain are acquiring the skills necessary to take advantage of new opportunities in the market place. Some of these farmers will be able to maintain their identities as food producers, and the self-esteem and positive regard of others by, for example, trading direct with the consumer through farmers markets and other retail arrangements, or diversifying into crops with a clear demand in specialist markets such as pak choi or fenugreek. Other farmers will retain the production imperative and their identity as producers by growing crops for markets such as flowers or bio-fuel. The economics of their situation and their proximity to conurbations will, of course, affect the opportunities available for individual farmers but increasing interest in food provenance, local sourcing and the need to reduce “food-miles” does, I believe, offer a positive future for those farmers able to maintain their identity in this way.

The importance of history will clearly endure whilst the current generation of 50+ year-olds remain on the land. But eventually the significance of the farming role in the 2nd World War, as a foundation for self-esteem, will fade,

as a younger generation of farmers begins to benefit from some of the positive outcomes available from change. Many younger farmers will see their current situation as infinitely preferable to the “crisis” in farming in the early part of this decade, and so be more amenable to change.

Whilst identity as a producer of food or crops will therefore remain for some, for those for whom this is not feasible comes the option of a new identity as manager of the countryside. As the interviews with farmers demonstrate, this is at odds with farmers’ own notion of identity. Since consistency of identity will not be possible, my view is that those who are in this position will be more likely to resist the new identity which change is imposing. It might be possible to help overcome this resistance by repositioning maintenance of the countryside as a ‘product’, but such repositioning is likely to require more time and public financial resources than are available.

Not only will the imposition of a new identity as countryside manager preclude consistency of identity, but also the situation under which such an identity is imposed will preclude agency to accommodate change. I have proposed that continued government involvement impedes agency to cope with change. As I write, eighteen months after the decoupling of support payments from production, there seems little indication that the farming industry as a whole is preparing itself to cope with the reduction of public funding which is part of the mid-term review. Deep-rooted, historic attitudes persist and farmers still, on the whole, assume future government support, with the consequent learned helplessness and lack of agency to cope with change that that engenders.

From a social psychological perspective therefore the future seems bright for those able to maintain identity, self-esteem and the positive regard of others. This will not be the case, however, for those whose are not in this position,

who assume and rely on continued government support and who, in their situation of learned helplessness, do not have the agency to accommodate change in a way which will enhance their identities.

Whilst concluding the current chapter these predictions provide a starting point for the next. In that final chapter the findings of the empirical studies and the answers to the research question are used to consider change, from the perspective of social psychology, in the wider social world.

Chapter 8

RESEARCHING CHANGE: TOWARDS A SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF CHANGE

Having proposed, in the previous chapter, reasons why UK farmers find change difficult to accept and accommodate, this final chapter focuses on the second part of my research objective: a consideration of how those insights might contribute more widely to social psychology's knowledge about the process of change. The chapter is in four parts. The first part uses my research to illustrate why social representations theory is a useful tool to understand change situations which cause practical social problems. But social representations theory has its critics and, if it is to become the theory of choice in investigating change, those criticisms need to be addressed. This is the topic of the second part of the chapter. However, my research has recognised two areas of the theory where further development and clarification are required. These are discussed in the third part of the chapter. The fourth part of the chapter links my observations from the research with the research findings to initiate some thoughts about a social psychology of change. The fifth and final part of the chapter draws conclusions from the research and makes recommendations about how it might be developed in order to enhance social psychology's understanding of change and its consequences for individuals in their society.

8.1 Social Representations Theory and Practical Social Problems

Marková (2000b, p109) poses the question "to what do our theories contribute?" I would answer that social representations theory has been a valuable tool in my understanding of an applied social problem – why farmers and the farming industry find change so difficult to cope with. It has provided me with a common way of accessing all areas of the social object and identifying the representations of change circulating within them. That has allowed me to observe some of the subtleties and nuances of viewpoints about

change in different areas of the agricultural public sphere which provide insights to the problems of farmers, farming and change. This section demonstrates how that has been the case.

All the elements of the representation of change, identified through ALCESTE and NVIVO analysis of the semi-structured interviews, each of the organising themes emerging from the ALCESTE and thematic network analysis of the narrative interviews and each of the thematic codes from the content analysis were considered together. A final thematic analysis of all these elements identified six broad representational groupings: the **project** of agriculture, its **history**, the **policy** which frames the agricultural industry, the **rural communities** in which farmers are embedded, the components of farmers' **identities** which are affected by the representations of change circulating in the agricultural public sphere, and **others**, not directly involved in the project of agriculture, but whose gaze affects it. All this data was drawn together as a map of the representational field of change.

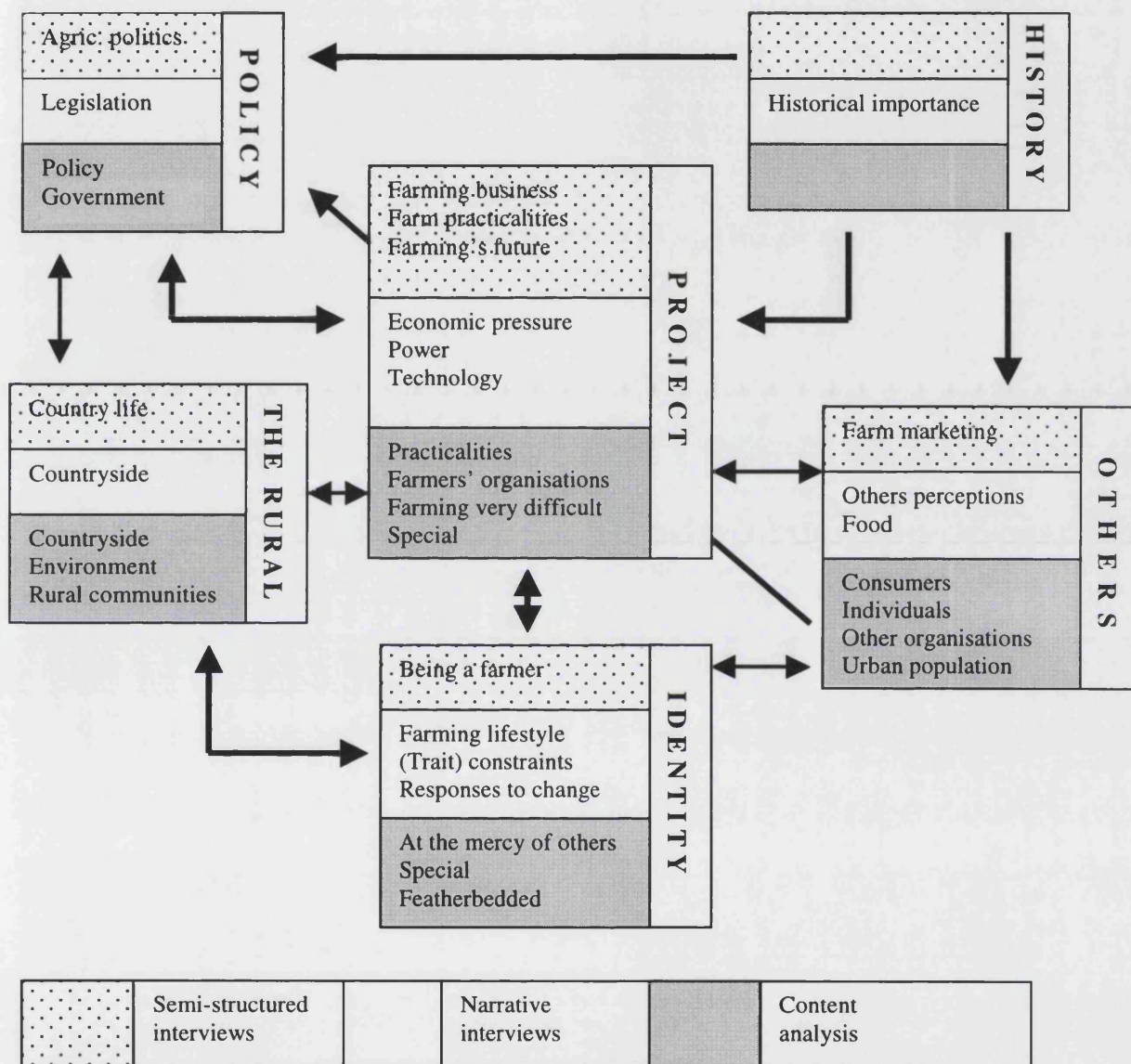
Social representations have been described as a “...*network of concepts and images tied together in various ways according to the interconnections between the persons and media that serve to establish communication...*” (Marková, 1987, cited in Moscovici, 1988, p222). Taking the representational groupings identified in the secondary thematic analysis, the map allows me to propose the dynamics – the interconnections which serve to establish communication – which created it. One small caveat remains. A feature of social representations is their constant renewing and reshaping, as a result of the dynamics of those interconnections. They change as new information is fed into the symbolic space within the subject/subject/object triangle. They change as different power balances come into play. And they change as different ideologies come to the fore. Whilst the longitudinal results from the content analysis did track change over time, other than that, the research findings comprise a snapshot of the representations of change circulating in

the agricultural public sphere over the duration of the research. They will have changed during that time and since.

At the centre of the representational field (Figure 25, overleaf) is the project of farming. This comprises the actuality of farming the land and all the matters relating to it. For farmers this is the focus of their representations of change because they experience it and understand it in their day-to-day farming lives. It affects the practicalities of managing and working the farm as well as the business that stems from it. Change has brought with it new realities for farmers – more paperwork, lower incomes, fewer people working on the land – and these new realities cause farmers to think what the future holds for them and their farm, how new farming structures will emerge.

Narrative interview representations of change focusing on the project of agriculture revealed a somewhat different slant to those seen in the semi-structured interviews. Here the project widens to embrace farming as an industry, rather than the farm businesses of individuals. Technological innovation and economic pressure feature as causes of, and reasons for, change. This is also the one site in the representational field where the notion of power, as part of the change scenario, is clearly articulated. Among farming insiders views about supermarkets had been mixed, some seeing them as having led improvements in food quality; some seeing them as being fickle and unfair in their dealings with farmers; and yet others seeing them as hard but fair customers. Narratives from agricultural support organisations and from the media serving farmers, however, were adamant that supermarkets were to blame for farmers' poor returns, brought about by imbalances in the food industry which supermarkets were exploiting to misuse their centralised and strong buying power.

Figure 25: Representational field of change in the agricultural public sphere



Representations of change focusing on the project of agriculture seen in *The Times* and *Farmers Weekly* reveal yet another slant. Like the narrative interviews it is the whole farming industry rather than individual farming businesses which is the object of these representations. The viewpoints seen move towards the general – to notions of farming as very difficult, special, involved in practicalities like the weather. Farmers’ organisations, like the National Farmers Unions, appear in this representational grouping as acting

for farmers, providing lobbying services for the farming industry in order to create a more favourable environment for farmers to engage in their individual farming projects.

Farmers engaged in the project of agriculture establish connections with others through farm marketing activities. These may be supermarket buyers, keen to provide their customers with safe food at competitive prices. They will look for innovation in product or presentation in order to promote their particular retail unique selling point and so provide a competitive advantage. Local foods are the idea of the moment. This creates new business opportunities for the agricultural industry, the project of agriculture, and so, in turn, will cause those involved in it to add new information to the subject/subject/object. Representations in the press indicate how images of change in the agricultural social object are seen by consumers, or organisations other than those working specifically for farmers, those whose interests centre on wildlife or the environment for example, widening the net of connections which feed into images of change about farmers and farming.

The representations held by others, because of their media connections, their lobbying skills, their ability to vote with their purse in terms of food purchases and the need for them to have access to safe, nutritious food, connect with and influence those who regulate the agricultural industry – the project of agriculture – the legislatures of regional, UK and EU governments. So too do representations of change within the project of agriculture, taken up by farmers' organisations with the specific aim of influencing policy. A vibrant image of change held by individual farmers is the increase in paperwork and bureaucracy that appears to them to be the direct result of policy and “interference” in their industry. Farmers' organisations provide the conduit along which this feeds back to the makers of policy and the national

democratic process allows for such representations to feed into government by elected politicians in rural constituencies.

One outcome of the 2001 foot-and-mouth outbreak was that farming became seen as part of a wider rural economy than had been the case previously. In the representational grouping entitled “rural”, the interconnection with policy matters can be seen, operating in both directions. So too can be seen the way different parts of the agricultural public sphere think of rurality. From the semi-structured interviews individual farmers see change in the rural community and in the way it affects their country life. Others who are part of the social object consider the rural as the countryside – the view or landscape which has evolved as a result of farming practice. The Times and Farmers Weekly broaden this still further. Their concepts of farming change as it affects rurality relate not only to the countryside (the landscape), but also to the wider environment which includes such elements as water purity or pollution, air quality, wild life and so on, as well as rural communities and the people, businesses and services which make them up. Significant here is how change has meant that this representational grouping now influences the project of agriculture to a much greater extent than was previously the case. This is well illustrated from comments in the semi-structured interviews about “incomers” views about being held up on the road by tractors. Farmers bemoan it, but certainly ensure that they pull to one side frequently to let cars pass.

In the representational grouping covering notions of history fewer connections can be seen. It is the only grouping with input from only one empirical study – the narrative interviews. This does not mean that the traditional role of farmers in providing food for the nation is not important throughout the agricultural public sphere, as discussed in the previous chapter. It simply means that, in the studies I conducted, it was only identified as an organising

theme in the transcripts of the narrative interviews, contributing to the global theme that 'farming is special'. Clearly the connections here are not two-way, representations cannot communicate in retrospect. I cite it as a distinct representational group, however, because of its importance in informing policy, the project of agriculture and others views about change in the industry.

The final grouping in this map of the representational field of change in the social object relates to farmers' identities. The way farmers regard themselves feeds into and is, in turn, fed by the representational grouping comprising the rural. So too is there reciprocity between farmers' identity and others perceptions of them, for example whether change resulted in others seeing them as 'whingers', living off subsidies, or more sympathetically as a result of BSE and foot-and-mouth disease. And to be a farmer is to farm, so the representational flow between farmers' identities and the project of farming is also two-way.

In this grouping of farmers' identities we have representations held by farmers about themselves and about others involved in the same project, as well as representations circulating among others who are part of the agricultural public sphere. For farmers themselves the change they experience affects how they understand being a farmer. Interviewees spoke of the inevitability of their becoming farmers and the fact that this might change for future generations unable to make a sustainable living from the farm. This affected the family and generational nature of their farms. They spoke of the pros and cons of being a farmer, working outdoors, being their own boss, living close to nature and so on. These benefits were giving way to the pressures of long hours to make ends meet, not having others to work with and being "on the job" all the time. But farmers saw themselves, and others like them, as being resilient and resourceful in the face of change.

As was evident in the representational grouping of the 'rural', we see within the representational grouping of farmers' identities different nuances, depending on the position within the social object from which interviewees are speaking. For individual farmers representations of change about their identity are part of their lives as farmers. In their narratives interviewees looking in on farming and farmers represented change in farmers' identities as the way change affected farmers' lifestyles, the sort of traits observed among farmers in general, like age or lack of business skills, which might constrain their ability to accommodate change, and the way farmers were responding to change, whether that be by adaptation, emotion or resistance. For readers of *The Times* and *Farmers Weekly* representations of change in this identity grouping see farmers more as a homogenous group, a generality of farmers for whom change is rendering them at the mercy of others or as special or, in a less sympathetic view, as featherbedded.

8.2 Answering the Critics

During the late 1980s the theory of social representations was criticised as being theoretically ambiguous, socially deterministic and cognitively reductionist, (Jahoda, 1988; McKinlay & Potter, 1987; Parker, 1987; Potter & Wetherall, 1987; Semin, 1985). The theory has also been charged with failing to address issues of power and ideology and over-emphasising the direction of influence from the reified to the consensual, from expert to lay-person, from science to commonsense. In these respects, it is suggested, (Jahoda, 1988; Parker, 1987), social representations theory lacks the critical agenda to address contemporary social problems. My research findings permit the provision of evidence for the defence.

8.2.1 Theoretical Ambiguity

In the matter of theoretical ambiguity Moscovici's resistance to a formal definition is cited because, in his view, social psychological theories have to be "... *'richer'* ...so as to *adequately describe and possibly explain specific*

phenomenathe model.. .could not be the hypothetico-deductive model of physics...” (Moscovici & Marková, 1998). I have characterised and depicted the dynamics of the representational field of change identified in my research findings. They certainly illustrate the complexity of the understanding of change in the social object. They also illustrate the fluidity of the flows of ideas and knowledge which make up the representation of change. In this respect the findings are an ideal case for Marková’s (2000a, p430) view that to require an exhaustive definition of such phenomena is based on a misunderstanding of their nature.

Part of the case for supposing that social representations theory is ambiguous – too broad and too vague, is a lack of definition as to what social representations actually **do** (Howarth, 2006). Again, definition would constrain, but my research findings demonstrate that, in the study of farmers, farming and change, social representations can be shown as fulfilling six functions. Firstly, social representations are both **of change** and can **constitute change**. Secondly, social representations expedite the **understanding of change**. Thirdly, social representations enable **resistance** to change. Fourthly, social representations facilitate **communication** about change. A fifth function is the way social representations serve to **legitimise** the power, in this case the power of policy. Each of these five functions can be seen in all areas of the agricultural public sphere. For farmers themselves, the research findings illustrate a sixth function for social representations: providing a resource for **coping** with change by serving to enhance, defend and protect identity in the face of change.

The notion of change circulates in the agricultural public sphere through social representations. They not only are **of change**, they can also **constitute it**. When a Scottish farmer says, “*...mechanisation was one big change. By the time the beet was finishing there were beet-lifting machines on some of the*

bigger farms. Everything got more mechanised and there were fewer people on the land. Bigger... all sorts of machinery..." (Scot04), his representation is a reflection of how he conceptualised change – bigger machinery and less people. Later in the interview he notes, *"...if you look in the paper they are always talking about high quality lean meat. It has got to be less and less fat all the time. This is what the housewife or the supermarket buyer or whoever it is wants. So you have got to try to produce that quality of carcass. And you can improve that by your choice of rams and not only that, by your female sheep as well..."* (Scot04). The interviewee has learnt from the media that the shopper wants lean meat today. That knowledge has been **constituent** in his making changes to his breeding stock in order to meet the new requirement.

Moscovici (1984) speaks of social representations illuminating by making familiar the unfamiliar. Here are two examples to illustrate how social representations are expediting the **understanding** of change and doing so by drawing on representations of previous or current knowledge. In the first the farmer is commenting on the changes that he is experiencing in the light of his observations about change in another industry – coalmining. In the second example the interviewee is explaining his understanding of change by rationalising it in terms of the prices paid for consumer goods other than food:

"...we had a government who didn't listen to us and seemed very aggressive. Huge numbers of changes and the agenda, I suppose...its like the coalminers and the conservatives and the farmers and this government...take the Lords out...so you are hitting at landed gentry...trying to change to structure of society and farming, fortunately or unfortunately depending on what view you take..." (Init03)

"...All consumers want...we are in a cheap food society...we want cheap TVs, washing machines, dish washers, cars, holidays, airfares, everything we do is probably far cheaper... all the major consumer items apart from houses is far cheaper in real terms than it has been...." (Scot08)

From the interview transcripts we see social representations as enabling **resistance** to change. Four examples are given below, each bolstering resistance in a slightly different way. In the first the interviewee is re-stating history, emphasising the past importance of farmers. In the second example the notion of cultural heritage – loosing our links with the past – presents a case for maintaining the status quo. Emphasising the positive in the current situation is seen in the third example of how social representations serve to enable resistance to change. In the final example change is being suggested as imposing a threat, suggesting that resistance to change would obviate the threat.

“...we filled the barns – overflowing with intervention stores of grain and milk powder and beef and everything else...farmers just got too clever and too efficient...” (N9)

“...what we risk is not just a few farmers being forced off the land, what we risk is the loss of that countryside and everything that is good about it in nothing more than the pursuit of cheap food that’s not cheap anyway. We risk loosing the rural communities, destroying the rural economy, again for no good reason...” (N13)

“...sheep producers always seem to be the ones with the least amount of say and least amount of clout when it comes to it. That is slightly unfortunate because most of the areas of outstanding natural beauty within the country, whether it’s the moors or the mountains or the hills or the coastline is actually managed or grazed by sheep...” (SW01).

“...what makes farming different is the fact that food supplies are very important, particularly in this wretched era that we are in at the moment with security and there is a great concern and I think food supply is rather important...” (N6).

A fourth function for social representations identified in this analysis of farmers, farming and change is the way representations facilitate **communication** between different areas of the agricultural public sphere. I take as my example here the phrases ‘*animal welfare*’, ‘*food safety*’ and ‘*environment*’. These are complex concepts covering notions like livestock densities, access to food and water, herbicide and pesticide use, pollution of

water courses, and disposal of waste, to list but a few. But the phrases appear in almost every transcript, as well as in many of articles which made up the corpus for content analysis. They are in common usage because representations of them are shared and provide a shorthand understood by all.

A fifth function for social representations is their symbolic power to **legitimise**, through language (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The first three quotations below illustrate this function. They are justifications for the changes in the Common Agricultural Policy, legitimising the change in payments from production to care for the countryside. The first is from a director of the main farmers' organisation, who justifies change because of WTO agreements. The other two come from interviewees in, or advising, government. In both of these the cost of subsidy payments and inefficiencies of the system are the justification.

"...for the first time world trade negotiations included agriculture; the fact that against the predictions of many they ended in agreement. I think we saw that this was going to fundamentally change the framework in which we existed and it seemed to me that what had been a fixed system couldn't continue and would have to change..." (N9)

"...we suddenly had things like set-aside introduced and the intervention prices were being weakened to discourage overproduction and set-aside was an attempt to reduce production and different forms of subsidy to prevent this hugely expensive business of dealing with surplus food which was really expensive to store and expensive to dispose of..." (N8)

"...(at that time) the average subsidy per hill farmer was, I think, £31,000 and that was getting them an income of £4,000. It would have been cheaper just to give them the money. That was at a very poor point in the cycle and it may not be that bad now. But it encourages all the wrong things. It encourages overgrazing. It encourages people to cling on when perhaps they should give up..." (N13)

The narrative interviews also have good examples of how social representations, symbolised in language, come to legitimise views, become

accepted as fact and subsequently be used to influence policy-making. In this case supermarket power is seen as causing farming's problems. It is a widely accepted view, with the connotation that government should do something about that power. The first two quotations are from agricultural support groups. The third is from an agricultural lobby organisation.

"...I don't think there are many farmers who will say I can't sell because we are going to stand up to the supermarkets, because the supermarkets will just import it. They have got the reserves and they will import it from abroad..." (N2)

"...unless people care Tesco will carry on taking over the world and paying peanuts for whatever they buy.. You have actually got to get people to think about those things..." (N3)

"...these (Tesco's) profits are not necessarily from their own endeavours but from what they manage to cream off from others endeavours...it's the irresponsible way in which they squeeze their suppliers..." (N12)

A sixth function for social representations, seen in the transcripts of the semi-structured interviews with farmers, is in providing a means of coping with change by serving to enhance, defend and protect their identities challenged by change. In the first example below we can see the interviewee enhancing identity by claiming that UK farmers have to work to much higher standards than those from other countries. At the same time the speaker suggests that UK farmers (in this case the interviewees farm manager) are much more concerned about animal welfare than those of other nations.

"...we are finding in this country that we actually impose on our farmers a code of practice that no other nation does. I'm not saying whether its right or wrong but our animal welfare codes are much, much tougher. It's true. If you went to France and watched geese being fed for foie gras, well you wouldn't do it in this country. Even our farm manager from here who went there saw it and came back and said, I wouldn't do that..." (SW03)

The next two examples show how farming identity is being defended. In the first the speaker indicates that he wants more to life than just being a park-keeper or environmental manager. He wants to run what he sees as a “proper” business – one that earns money. In the second example the interviewee is defending farmers’ record of progress in production.

“...we don’t just want to be environmental managers. We want to run businesses that earn money...” (SW04)

“...we have progressed...we have been breeding different varieties and things for 100 years...we have wheat varieties now that will do 3 or 4 times more than they did in the 1920s...” (Scot11)

Protecting identity is shown in the next example where the interviewee proposes that special allowances should be made to cope with all the regulations that seem, to him, to be inhibiting his ability to farm in the way he would wish.

“...environmental issues and the huge amount of rules and regulations and bureaucracy that this government seems to want to place upon us, even over and above the EU, so there has to be allowances for that, otherwise producers will find it increasingly difficult to produce the right sort of product, re-invest and maintain a countryside that everybody seems to wish to have...” (Init03)

Finally, we see farmers coping with threats to identity by creating new ones. This might be in relation to diversification in the business, moving to organic production perhaps or, as in this example, moving into direct selling through farmers’ markets.

“...We were loosing money on every lamb we were selling so we had to make some serious decisions as to which way we were going...we do 3 and some weeks 4 (markets)...I don’t think we ever expected to sell as much as we sell now....people are wanting to buy better food – definitely. You can’t sell rubbish. You have got to sell good quality stuff. We only sell the top quality stuff and its all beautifully packaged and that’s what people want...” (SW01)

This is clearly not an exhaustive list of what social representations do. What it demonstrates is the diversity, flexibility and versatility of representations in this particular arena of study. And this versatility will apply to every other sphere of life with the function of the representations equating to the needs of the individuals and groups involved in the social milieu and specific phenomena being studied.

8.2.2 Social Determinism and Cognitive Reductionism

A similar misunderstanding of the nature of social representations can be seen in the charges of social determinism and cognitive reductionism. If shackled by representations how is an individual “...to break out...?” (Jahoda, 1988). At the other end of the spectrum are those who charge social representations theory with too little regard for societal input. The case here is that anchoring or objectification of new knowledge, in order to make the unknown knowable, “...is little more than an exercise in speculative cognitive psychology...”, (Potter & Wetherall, 1987, p145). The processes of anchoring and objectification, according to this argument, is too much akin to the psychological cognitive processes of categorization and schemata.

What these two criticisms reveal is a fundamental misunderstanding of the theory of social representations. They still see the individual and society as separate entities. I spoke in Chapter 2 of the centrality of the social to the theory of social representations and commented that, although farming is thought of as a lonely occupation there are many social elements. Markets, meetings, agricultural shows are part of the farming lifestyle, as are the visits to farmers of machinery dealers, hauliers, veterinarians and so on. The family element of farming, part of being a farmer, the rural communities of which farmers are part – all these aspects of farming are social. But the theory of social representations rests on more than the fact that an individual is part of his or her social milieu.

The central tenet of the theory of social representations, which criticisms of social determinism and cognitive reductionism miss, is that knowledge, meaning and understanding are social in origin, not the product of the cognition of individual minds (Wagner & Hayes, 2005). There is no society alone or individual alone but a dynamic interdependence “...*between socio-culturally shared forms of thinking, communicating and acting and their transformation through activities of individuals and groups...*” (Marková, 2000b). What is needed here is a conceptualisation of the individual mind and society/culture as interdependent and aspects of the *same system* (Raudsepp, 2005, my emphasis).

The case of farmers and farming in the midst of change allows the idea of a dynamic interdependence to be seen in an applied setting. Looking at individual farmers and analysing the representations they hold we see that, although they often work in isolation, the elements of their representations of change (Figure 8, p114) have arisen from experience of, relationships with, and communication with others. Farm marketing refers to relationships with supermarkets or other produce purchasers, and the consumers buying from them. Country life meant being part of the local rural community. Farm business encompassed outside interference, competition and the bureaucracy imposed by government. Farm structures, input costs and financial returns and labour difficulties were some of the notions which made up the theme of farm practicalities. Influence and direct action were part of agricultural politics. Even the interviewees thoughts about being a farmer were centred on the family nature of the business and others perceptions of them. Finally, when speculating about farming’s future, interviewees spoke of the need for food – for others. Change, for these individual farmers, is experienced, understood and given meaning by their relationships and communication with others.

What the representational field (Figure 25) illustrates is that, within each of the areas of the agricultural public sphere accessed, the representation of change has similar components. Apart from the notion that history frames the understanding of change, seen only during the narrative interviews, all other components of the representational field of change - the project of farming, farmers' identities, policy, rural communities and others – include representations identified from each of the three studies. Were the different areas of the social object separate, were individual farmers separate from others in the wider agricultural public sphere, or were the media analysed neither read by the individuals interviewed nor taking ideas from, or reporting or commentating on the industry in which those individuals operate, one would expect that the representations identified in one group would be distinct from those of other groups. This is not the case. On the contrary, although there were differences of degree and different nuances from the different groups with respect to certain representational groupings, the data converges.

This research is an example of how meaning is co-constructed, rather than being the cognition of individual minds. The representations identified from the transcripts of the semi-structured interviews came about as the result of the informal communication between myself, the researcher, and the interviewee – the farmer. The farmer responded to my prompts, based on the flow-guide for the interview, and to specific questions I raised to probe certain comments. The responses were couched in terms which the interviewee believed would be meaningful to me. The resulting text, from which the representations were identified, was therefore a co-construction between us, reflecting the triadic subject/subject/object construction which is the basis of all social representations.

Within this applied setting of the farming industry Jahoda's (1988) charge of social determinism can also be answered. If a farmer is completely unable to

cope with change he or she can choose to leave the farm. This is an option which has been taken by many and one of the key points which led to the general view of there being a crisis in farming in the early part of the decade. These farmers were not so shackled by representations that they were unable to break out from them. And there is a further critique of social representations theory which is linked to the notions of social determinism and cognitive reductionism. In essence it suggests that social change is inhibited because novelty, new knowledge, is anchored or objectified in previous experience. McKinlay & Potter (1987, p 483) see this stance as being “...so strong that it rules out any notion of individual influences or subsequent change..”. We can see however, in the case of farmers and farming, that this is not the case. Change is evident in the industry. It is happening. But this does not mean that change is not being resisted. There is, however, some validity in the notion that history influences current thinking and understanding. Moscovici (1984, p8) asserts “...Nobody’s mind is free from the effect of the prior conditioning which is imposed by his representations, language and culture...” In the research findings the frequency of specific reference to the historical aspects of farming was such that it appeared as a discrete theme only in the narrative interviews. But the importance of history, farmers pride in being called on at a time of national emergency to feed the nation is, in part, responsible for the difficulty that farmers have in adapting to the new situation as discussed in the previous chapter.

8.2.3 Lack of a Critical Agenda

Social representations theory has been seen as failing to address issues of power and ideology and over-emphasising the direction of influence from the reified to the consensual, from expert to lay-person, from science to commonsense (Jahoda, 1988; Parker, 1987). Howarth (2006) has answered this criticism by pointing out that the theory has addressed contemporary social issues in the case of, gendered identities (Duveen, 2001), racialized

differences (Howarth, 2002) and health and community development (Campbell & Jovchelovitch, 2000; Wagner, Duveen, Verma & Themel, 2000). However she acknowledges that, in order for the theory to fulfil its potential as a tool for critical social psychology there are three areas of it needing further clarification. These are: the relationship between psychological processes and social practices; the reification and legitimisation of different knowledge systems; and agency and resistance in the co-construction of self-identity. Howarth, (2006, p66) calls for:

“...applications of the theory within a broader array of social arenas (in order for social representations theorists to) ...develop a critical perspective on how we can use such applications to confront and address the social inequalities we research and experience...”

This thesis has taken social representations theory into a social arena, the farming industry, which is relatively unexplored from a social psychological perspective. My research objective was to understand how change is being understood and experienced by farmers in order that I could contribute to social psychology's knowledge of change. In this respect the empirical studies were designed to identify the currents of opinion about change circulating in the agricultural public sphere in order to answer the research questions rather than to confront and address social inequalities in the agricultural industry. However, a second research objective was to answer some of the criticisms of social representations theory by illustrating it at work in an applied setting. To answer the criticism that the theory lacks a critical agenda I give below some examples from the research findings to illustrate the three areas that Howarth (2006) sees as needing further clarification.

To understand how social representations affect the relationship between psychological processes and social practices we need to understand what they do. I have set out above the functions I observed for social representations in the research findings: depicting and constituting change, expediting

understanding of change; enabling resistance to change; facilitating communication about change; legitimising policy; and providing a means of coping with change by enhancing, defending, and protecting identity in the face of change. In all these ways social representation serve to construct new realities. The example below illustrates how this occurs. It is a series of three quotations about the change in the Common Agricultural Policy and the decoupling of payments from production. The first two quotes come from farmers. We see in them their concern about what they perceive as being asked (in the sense that they are being paid for it) to change from producing food, a previously valued role, to caring for the countryside. In using the word “just” the interviewee in the first example is implying that caring for the countryside is of less value than producing food. He is objectifying his understanding of the care for the countryside by personifying it as a park keeper. The connotation is of the loss of self-esteem that this might engender. In setting up “environmental managers” as in opposition to “food producers” the speaker in the second example suggests that farmers can only be one or the other, not both. The connotation is that the role of food producer is as much as the individual farmer can cope with. In both these examples we see the psychological effect for these individual farmers. They resist by contesting the change to their identities as food producers. The third quotation is from a government advisor. He is building up the case for farmers to look upon the new situation in a favourable light, to accept and adapt to the changes. He gives examples of the positive aspects of the changes and how, by adopting them, farmers will be able to improve their public (social) image and make themselves feel good (psychological) in the process. The quotation demonstrates how, by influencing actions, by persuading farmers to accept and accommodate the changes resulting from decoupling payments from production, new realities and new identities will be constructed of them and by them.

“...I think if we were paid for just that ...I don't think just being a park-keeper ...I couldn't cope with it. Wouldn't enjoy doing it because you wouldn't have the satisfaction or the thrill of actually making anything....” (SW01)

“...the problem is are we going to be food producers or are we going to be environmental managers and that's one of the questions that I don't think anyone in the European Community has decided whether we are one or the other yet...” (SW04)

“... we never ever said that farmers should become park keepers. We have to marry together these two responsibilities that farmers have – which is to produce food and to look after the countryside. It doesn't mean that you completely abandon one role and just take on the other...and this new role of managing the countryside, being stewards of this countryside and delivering good environmental standards, looking after habitats, countryside features and all these things.. is a new opportunity for farmers to feel that they are providing a valuable contribution. They need to lift their heads up and say OK, we are up for this... We can stand in front of taxpayers and consumers and say we are managing this countryside which you regard as important....” (N9)

Social representations are accused of reification and legitimisation of different knowledge systems, over-emphasising the direction of influence from the reified to the consensual, from expert to lay-person, from science to commonsense. To counter to this critique I cite the example of the ideology of the small and family farm. On the face of it economies of scale and the current situation in the market place, with a small number of buyers for the produce of many, would not support the idea that the small and family farm is the best model for UK agriculture today. Yet the support for this way of farming is shown in the plethora of voices speaking out for it, in the number of organisations involved in supporting smaller farmers, together with the funding those organisations receive for it, as well as in the publication of books looking at the demise of the family farm with nostalgia (eg. Benson, 2005). The following quotation, referring to a small family farm, captures this view:

“..there is something about the continuity. Something about the land around you and the ground around you. Its generational, handed down for many farmers through generations. But I suppose that, for someone like me, it matters personally because it’s the food, its all linked with healthy living and so forth...” (N3)

Were it the case that the direction of influence is from the reified to the consensual the economics of the market place would have subsumed the ideology of the family farm. In fact the opposite is true. That ideology maintains.

For Howarth (2006), there is a third area where social representations theory needs further clarification. It relates to the criticism that the theory does not allow for agency and resistance in re-presenting negative identity (Potter & Billig, 1992) She argues that the very process of re-presentation allows for meanings to become contested. A quotation from a farmer in Scotland illustrates this point.

“...Our son works at the potato merchants. They keep trying to poke fun at him. “Oh the farmers live on subsidies”, but as he says, a lot of them have families that are subsidised too. They get family allowance and credit for this and that. We are all subsidised on way or another. They get as much for a child a week as what we get for a ewe for a year...” (Scot04)

In proposing that the subsidies that farmers get are no different to the financial support that others receive the speaker (or the speaker’s son) is not only resisting negative comments about farmers he is also positioning farmers alongside others, rather than apart from them.

8.3 Developing Social Representations Theory to Research Change

In part two of this chapter I used some of my research findings to answer criticisms of social representations theory. But, for the theory to become the tool of choice for investigating the problems of change, my research leads me to suggest that two further elements of it require clarification. The first is the

nature of the individual/society interface (Marková, 2000b; Raudsepp, 2005). The second is the need for development of the concept of themata and the core/periphery structural approach, particularly in change situations.

8.3.1 *The Individual/Society Interface*

Marková (2000b) notes a problem for social representations theory in the difficulty in conceiving of the “...*interdependence of the individual and society as a dynamic ontological unit...*”. This is a problem not unique to social representations theory. Valsiner (2001, p27) cites Schweder’s (1990, p25) task for cultural psychology as:

“... to imaginatively conceive of subject-dependent objects (intentional worlds) and object-dependent subjects (intentional persons) interpenetrating each other’s identities or setting the conditions for each others’ existence and development, while jointly undergoing change through social interaction...”

Marková (ibid) makes the point that there is still an implicit ontological presupposition of individual/society dualism. Part of the problem lies in the long past of social psychology (Farr, 1996). The discipline emerged from psychology and a focus on the individual. It embraced symbolic interactionism. And whilst there is a current acceptance of an individual/society interface there is still the tradition of the different sub-sections of the discipline each maintaining their own literatures and practices.

During this research I accessed each part of the social object, insiders (farmers and interest groups) and outsiders from the theatres of government, the media and the general public, as separate elements of the social object rather than one dynamic ontological unit. It seems to me that an individual/society ontological unit is too great a methodological leap. Moreover, is it not superfluous, because an individual is part of society, completely interrelated with it, as the map of the representational field of change resulting from my research shows?

One way of overcoming this problem might be to draw on the notion of synapses and neurotransmitters from clinical psychology. Within the central nervous system are synapses, the junctions across which impulses jump. Neurotransmitters aid this jump. One could envisage the individual and society as two adjacent synapses between which the social representation aids the flow (of ideas, knowledge etc). Could we not acknowledge that social representations ARE the individual/ society interface because they arise at this interface and ARE the conduit between individual and society, “...*the medium linking objects, subjects and activities...*” (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999).

8.3.2 *Themata, Core & Periphery*

In the previous chapter I suggested that one of the reasons why UK farmers find change difficult is because their concept of self arises from their traditional role as food producers. This was being challenged as a new role, countryside managers, was being created for them. I proposed that this new role did not fit with their perceived role because their identity as food producer arose from a themata based on the dialectic of life and death and the need of food for life. I went on to argue that the new role, the one for which they will now receive funding from the public purse, relates to a construction of the countryside to which farmers do not relate.

That latter part of that argument, that ‘the countryside’ is a construction to which farmers do not relate does, I believe, remain. But a recent observable trend in the UK agricultural industry, not widespread at the time of the interviews, leads me to review the point about the origin of farmers’ concept of self. As the price which farmers receive for the production of commodities reduces, and as the cost of fuel increases, there is much interest in the production of renewables: rape or linseed for bio-diesel or beet or corn for bio-ethanol. Such production appears to retain a positive connotation rather than the negative connotation among farmers of their being “just” park-keepers.

This does not appear to fit in with the idea of farmers' concept of self as food producers, arising from a themata based on the life/death dialectic, that I proposed.

That renewables are felt to be a legitimate output for UK farmers seems to suggest that their identity has more to do with the whole **project** of farming than with **food** production, the project of farming seen at the centre of the representational field mapped using the findings of the empirical studies. So, does identity as a farmer arise from a themata or from the core of the representation of change – the project of agriculture? And, following from this question is a second: what is, or is there, a difference between a themata and the core of a representation? Such questions are the reason why the concept of themata, as the source of social representations, needs further clarification.

What both themata and the core of a social representation have in common is their apparent stability. This leads me to another element of the theory of social representations which my research suggests requires further development for change situations: the core/periphery structure and, in particular, the claimed stability of the core.

I have described, in Chapter 2, Abric's (1993) depiction of a social representation as having a central core and peripheral elements. The map of the representational field of change (Figure 25, p260) appears, on the face of it, to reflect this model. The project of agriculture is at the centre of the representational field of change and, in attempting to resist that change, is attempting to maintain stability. The project in a state of change is influenced by the peripheral constellations of representations of farmers, farming and change as part of the wider rural community, as related to policy, as influenced by history, as perceived by others and as affected by the identities of individual farmers. But the project of agriculture, as seen in the study

findings, influences other representational groupings in the field of change - policy, others, the rural community and farmers' identities - as much as it is influenced by them. The flow is two-way with neither element exerting on the other more pressure than is exerted on it

The representations mapped in the field of change are not static reflections of some external reality (Voelklein & Howarth, 2005). They are in constant flux from the flow of thoughts, notions, ideas and knowledge about change between the players of the agricultural public sphere. At the same time they are continually evolving in response to context and history. This raises the question of whether, if social representations are fluid rather than fixed, moving rather than still, they can be said to have a structure? And reiterating Marková (1987, cited in Moscovici, 1988, p222), social representations are *networks* of concepts and images, *tied together in various ways*, (my emphasis), which makes the stable core and flexible periphery structure, conceived by Abric (1993), difficult to envisage.

Perhaps what the dynamics of this structure of the representational field of change suggest is that, rather than having a core and periphery structure, with a stable core linked to collective memory and the history of the group (Abric, 1993; 2001), representations are "*in the making*" (Parales Quenza, 2005). They are more dynamic and responsive to change than the structural approach would suppose. What my research findings imply is that, certainly in times of social change such as UK farmers are facing, the structural model of social representations needs to be extended to assume much more flexibility between the core and periphery. This suggestion could be likened to a Lakatosian research programme (Chalmers, 1978) where the hard core of a programme, its basic assumptions, is supplemented in order to explain real phenomena.

8.4 Towards a Social Psychology of Change

Despite many books containing the words “social change” in their titles (Marková, 2003) research on change within the discipline of social psychology is limited. A theory of social change emerged from Moscovici’s (1961) study of the spread of understanding of the practice of psychoanalysis through French society. This described how ideas from a minority group (psychoanalysts), not recognised by the French scientific, political or religious elite, percolated through society by diffusion, penetration and propaganda. That theory became known as the theory of minority influence. Moscovici (2000) himself, however, in his discussion with Marková, suggests that the theory should more properly be called the theory of innovation. Those two titles give a clue to difficulties of conceptualising change. On the one hand change is conceived as arising from minority influence, with the negative connotation of the discrimination of minorities. On the other hand change arises from innovation or opportunity, a much more positive inference. Change impinges on different areas of different individual’s lives in different ways: it depends on whose perspective is being taken.

So do we need a social psychology of change? I would certainly argue that the lack of a social psychology of change is detrimental to the discipline. If it is to be taken seriously as a discipline this omission must be addressed. Social psychology, because the individual/society interface which it studies is so infinitely variable, might be unable to propose principles and predictions in the same way as does natural science. It does, however, have the tools and methodology for conceptual analysis. This gives the discipline the ability to highlight influences and assumptions that have not proved useful in the past making social psychology well placed for “... *solving problems of immediate importance to the society...*” (Gergen, 1973, p317). Change is at the heart of some of the most pressing problems of contemporary society. It is all around us, part of modernity. The achievements of science are measured by the way

they change our lives for the better. Economic prosperity is driven by creating desire for the latest consumer goods; the fashion industry, for example, thrives on the novelty of the new seasons “must haves”. But, whilst generating positive opportunity, change also brings with it threats. Understanding this contradiction and its effect on the lives of individuals would allow social psychology to make a real contribution to modern society.

The research findings have enabled me to identify specific reasons why change is problematic for farmers and, following from them, make some predictions about the extent to which change will be accommodated or resisted. Undertaking the research has also enabled me to make some observations about change which might contribute to a social psychology of change. They cover the meanings of change; the perception of change; the actors of the change scenario; the methodology of research into change; and the consequences of change.

8.4.1 Meanings of Change

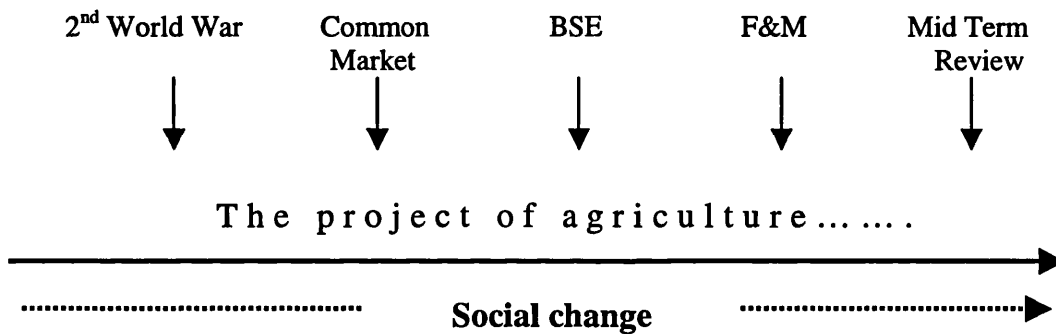
When we speak of ‘*change over time*’ we must recognise the temporal dimension of society (Sztompka, 1993, pp41-55), and how the irreversibility of the flow of time implies a distinction between past, present and future. It was noticeable in the semi-structured interviews that change was discussed in terms of how things used to be – how many men used to work on the farm for example, or how much farmers used to receive for a tonne of wheat compared to the price they got today.

“...about 10 years ago we had 2 men....way back we would have about 5 including myself and we grew potatoes so we would have extra staff when we were picking....when I left school we would have about 6 or 7 people on the farm and now its down to just 1...(Scot01)

*“...in 1983 grain was £134/tonne which I think was the peak it ever got to for feeding wheat and last year it was less than half of that...”
(Scot05)*

When we talk of change it is in the sense of ‘a change’, noun, or ‘change’, verb. Change has a dual aspect. It is both event and environment. For farmers and farming, if one starts from the end of the 2nd World War, moves on past the end of food rationing to joining the Common Market and becoming part of the Common Agricultural Policy a sequence of landmark events can be seen. The BSE experience, foot and mouth disease, the mid-term review of the common agricultural policy and the decoupling of payments from production complete that series, and bring us up to the present day. (Figure 26)

Figure 26: The duality of change



Each of the landmark events listed marked a change. The 2nd World War established a demand for farmers to produce food after the hardship of a farming depression. Joining the Common Market brought with it adherence to a Common Agricultural Policy which would, from thereon in, frame UK agricultural policy within an established support system. BSE established the link between food production and food safety and an awareness, in consumers, of that link. Foot-and-mouth disease brought disturbing images of animal cremations into consumers homes via the media, resulting in sympathy for affected farmers, previously thought of, by some, as featherbedded. As the whole tourism industry of the countryside suffered from the effects of foot-and-mouth disease, farming became seen as part of a wider rural economy rather than an industry standing alone. In 2005 the proposals of the mid-term review of the Common Agricultural Policy set support on a long-term decline

and decoupled public payments to farmers from food production to rewarding care for the countryside and the environment.

As well as change flowing from a one-off act, or instance, change is also a continuing process of which all are part. The project of agriculture moves forward within an environment of ongoing social change. Social change bubbles along constantly, carrying farmers and farming with it. They too are part of social change. Social change does not impinge on the project of agriculture in specific ways or at specific times, but it does affect the way food is purchased, prepared and consumed. This, in turn, affects the way farmers produce and market their products.

We need to be clear what we mean when we speak of change. Are we looking at a one off act or a continuum? Are we considering change from one point in time to another? Whilst a social psychological analysis of change in any specific situation needs to consider both event and environment it must be clear of which one it speaks and of how each influences the other. And it would not be productive to investigate the social problems to which change contributes without some understanding of what went before, the historical circumstance against which change is being gauged. This does not mean that social psychology is historical enquiry (Gergen, 1973). In the case of farmers and farming, for example, there would be little point in looking at history only as the cause of current concerns. Social change in terms of shopping habits and greater environmental awareness is as much part of the problem as was the need to boost food production in the past. This does not necessarily mean looking at stability in order to measure change. That presupposes, firstly, that there was a condition of stability in the past and, secondly that it is, or was, measurable. In searching for meaning of change among farmers neither is the case. But for a valid social psychological analysis of a phenomena or problem relating to change, we must recognise that the present is not only framed by history although, in the case of identity for example, “...*once an official*

history or anthropology has been proclaimed in a culture and enters the public domain, that very fact alters the process of Self-construction..."

(Bruner, 1990, p110). We must recognise that any analysis of change needs to understand how both history and current experience interact for a proper evaluation of the social problem. The experience of time is universal so "...can studies that neglect this issue be taken seriously at all...?" (Jahoda, M., 1988).

8.4.2 The Perception of Change

Ideas emerge from dialectics (Marková, 2003). Change is thus conceived of as in opposition to stability. There are aspects of farming which imbue it with a strong perception of stability. One is the generational nature of many family farms - of the farm having been farmed by the same family for generations. Another is the dependence of farmers on the weather and the seasons. There is an inevitability that summer will follow spring, that the seeds, once planted will grow and be harvested. Yet another aspect of farming which emphasises stability is the land itself and its solid permanence. Against such stabilities change presents itself almost as a violation. But to what extent is that stability stable and, consequently, to what extent is change real or perceived.

To answer that question we must consider landmark events, as explained in the previous section. "...there is the story that just happens –event driven stories – f&m is a classic example, clear, no doubts, get your arse down there and start finding out what's going on..." (N12) The same narrator goes on to comment "...I just want to show what's going on in farming but there is going to be a bias towards innovators because I am talking about novelty. Its half of what news is about..." (N12) So, whilst landmark events attract media interest, it is the new, the novelty, and the innovative which is sought out. It creates an illusion of change and it matters because people's perceptions, the representations which circulate in society about change and the amount and speed of it, create their realities. The following quote is from social

commentator William Cobbett. It leads me to suggest that the perception of change is not just a feature of the present.

“...The farm-houses have long been growing fewer and fewer; the labourers’ houses fewer and fewer; and it is manifest to every man who has eyes to see with, that the villages are regularly wasting away....”
(William Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, 31.10. 1822)

To understand change we must be clear of the extent to which it is real or perceived. What the Cobbett quote indicates is not that change is being seen in opposition to stability, but that the **perception** of change is actually the stable feature. Pearson (1983), examining the notion that crime and hooliganism result from ‘the permissive society’ makes a similar point: the idea that the ‘British way of life’ is currently being destroyed is a myth. It is a view that has been held by successive generations. Recent evidence from a survey of agricultural households in England makes a similar conclusion:

“...despite widespread speculation about the likely future extent of agricultural restructuring in the UK...commitment to remaining in agriculture remains strong amongst farming families. A substantial proportion of agricultural and agri-environmental assets seem likely to remain in the same hands for the foreseeable future...” (Lobley & Potter, 2004). So, whilst there have undoubtedly been changes in the farming industry, it seems that the notion of a sudden crisis in agriculture which will result in a mass exodus of farmers from the land and considerable agricultural restructuring is more perceived than real.

8.4.3 Actors in the Scene of Change

The diversity of representations of change is a product of the constant flux of thoughts, notions, ideas and knowledge circulating in the agricultural public sphere. These representations and re-presentations are constructed in the tension created in the subject/subject/object relationship. The media records change and speculates about its outcome, but individuals bring their own

experiences of change, together with their attitudes and beliefs, into their communication encounters with others. This was well demonstrated in the ALCESTE analysis of narrative interviews with others in the agricultural public sphere (Chapter 5). When conceiving of change then, its influence and impact on individuals in their social worlds, it is important to know not only the variety of representations circulating in any social milieu, it is also important to know the context from which those communicating about change speak. A good example is the way small and family farms are seen. The first quotation below is from the director of an agricultural support organisation. Her image of small and family farms reflects her role in providing advice, counselling and other support for farmers at risk from stress. The second quotation is from an adviser to government. He acknowledges support for the family farm but assumes that economics will eventually dislodge the ideology. The final speaker is head of a large food processing company. Having experienced business dealings with smaller farms he recognises the reality behind the myth:

“...the ones at risk tend to be the smaller family farmers. There are some big farmers that are doing very well. The smaller family farmers do work very long hours. If you are tired and working very long hours then there is less time to be thinking about paperwork...” (N3)

“ society does move so the dynamics of modern economies apply to farming as much as they do to anything else. So the people who cling on...some people in authority talk a lot of rubbish about this...clinging on to the idyll of family farms, small family farms, are doing nobody any favours...” (N11)

“...some of the farms are not ones that you would be very proud of. If you go down to Cornwall and see the gates held together with string; you see old beds in the hedgerows trying to keep the cattle in. So the quality isn't very good but they enjoy the way of life...” (N7)

When we speak of change we need to be clear to whom we refer. Social problems have both protagonists and antagonists. Only by accessing the

representations of all the actors in any social milieu will we see a clear picture of the dynamics of the representational field of change; what change is doing to whom, who benefits and who is disadvantaged. We also need to recognise the social context from which actors speak if we are to identify bias, vested interest or the uses or misuses of power.

Finally, as well as individuals and groups, the structures or institutions which are part of society must be considered too. Many social structures and institutions pre-exist the individual. The interface between them and individuals is the site of many of the tensions which change engenders and an important site for collecting evidence about change. The media too must be included in the cast of actors involved since they are so influential in recording and contributing to the representations circulating in society. Mapping a representational field of change requires an understanding of the viewpoints of all the actors who are part of the phenomena as well as an appreciation of the dynamics operating in the field of change.

8.4.4 Researching Change

Social psychology studies the views people hold and the behaviour induced by those views. It tends to be more evidence based than the other social sciences (Steuer, 2003). Social psychology needs a conceptual tool which is capable of untangling complexity. The methodological consideration for researching change is not that there is only one way to do so but that the way selected must be both sufficiently robust to produce evidence and flexible enough to access all the complexity and variety of man in his social world. We will want to uncover spectrums of viewpoints and patterns rather than specifics, although we may want to measure these at different points in time in order to observe changes in understanding and meaning.

Different disciplines in the social sciences claim that understanding and knowledge of change come about by social cognition, cultural 'contagion' (Sperber, 1996), or widespread beliefs. My position is that understanding and knowledge arise from an individual/societal bond, from their interrelationship rather than from each separately. This is why social representations theory is an ideal tool with which to research change. The individual reaches understanding through the social representations circulating in the society in which he or she is located. At the same time that individual, through his or her attitudes and beliefs can, in their communicative acts with others, be part of the creation of those representations.

Despite some areas which need further development, such as themata and the stability of the core, social representations theory has the necessary attributes for such investigation. Its theoretical construction makes it particularly apt for capturing change (Philogene, 2002). It allows for the analysis of the complex situations of a modern world because it recognises the interrelatedness of its different components. It is able to identify understanding and meaning in different levels of a social milieu, and to unearth power inequalities, ideologies and legitimising practices. And it can use a diverse array of methodology for acquiring data, both qualitative and quantitative. These include ethnography (Duveen & Lloyd, 1993); content analysis (Lahlou, 2001); focus groups and interviews (Jovchelovitch & Gervais, 1999); and questionnaires (Moloney et al, 2005).

In studying the interface between individuals and society, the interrelated system of the individual and society, we who carry out research are part of that system. Our observations about it are not value-neutral and our work can affect our object of study. But improving knowledge has the potential to help with solving problems (Steuer, 2003). So, for the moment, the broadness and depth of social representations theory, its wide range and deep grasp

(Moscovici, 1985) are, I believe, a strength for social psychology in analysing and addressing contemporary social problems.

8.4.5 Consequences of Change

Change “...is perturbing...it reaches through to the very grounds of individual activity and the constitution of the self...” (Giddens, 1991). Not surprisingly then change creates anxiety. There is a positive correlation between the perceived rate of social change and anxiety level (Lauer & Thomas, 1976). In clinical psychology certain changes or life events are rated so that their potential for contributing to depression can be measured. (Holmes & Rahe, 1967; Miller & Rahe, 1997). In sociology Sztompka (2000) likens social change to the concept of trauma drawn from medicine and psychiatry because of the potential adverse affects of social change. For social psychology the consequences of change can be seen in terms of both the individual and society. Drawing on the research findings this can be seen in the diverse range of consequences of change for farmers. For example change has led to:

- New skills being acquired for diversification
- ‘Paperwork’ and bureaucracy increasing
- Ways of working being altered or adapted
- Income being reduced
- Farmers having to think about whom they are producing for
- The marketplace farmers serve becoming globalised, resulting in increased competition
- Both farmers role in the community, and the community around them itself, being altered
- Feelings of being devalued by the public
- Feelings of being marginalized by government
- Feelings that they are wrongly portrayed by the media

- Feelings of guilt about having to give up after a family history of farming
- Feelings of being unfairly treated by the multiple retailers

What these examples show is that, for farmers, change has had both positive (learning new skills), and negative (reduced income) consequences. Change has also had both psychological (feelings of marginalization and guilt) and social (altered roles in the community) consequences. And these changes also have consequences for society. For example, a positive outcome for society is that farmers' new skills will provide an improved array of product or services for others; a negative outcome for society will result if farmers' reduced income means that they need social support, or if their negative experiences lead to a need for counselling or medical intervention.

The consequences of change vary according to circumstance. A social psychology of change, investigating the individual/society interface, would incorporate all such aspects of the situation, negative and positive and for both individuals and society.

8.5 Conclusions

My research leads me to the observation that a social psychology of change would have four requirements: clarity of what and of whom we speak; an appreciation of how history frames the present; a methodology which is both theoretically able to conceive of the individual/society interface and sufficiently flexible to access all facets of it; and an understanding of all the likely consequences of change, individual and social. All these appear to be commonsense, something to which any research undertaking should aspire. Indeed, many of the elements are well established as part of social psychological enquiry. It would be the inclusion of all these elements together which would make up a social psychology of change.

Social change, and the development of models to depict it, is a topic for sociology. Change, as it is understood and as it affects the individual is the domain of psychology. Change is already a key element of organisational social psychology, where the need for managing change in business groups is well understood. The points of difference for a social psychology of change would be twofold. Firstly, there must be the inclusion of an assessment of the past in order to understand the present. This does not mean that social psychology **only** becomes historical enquiry (Gergen, 1973). Nor does it mean that change can **only** be seen foregrounded against the perception of stability (Marková, 2003). It does mean that a social psychology of change would involve a more holistic context than hitherto. The second point of difference for a social psychology of change would be the inclusion of the viewpoints or experiences of all the actors who are part of the social domain under review. Taking both of these points of difference together would allow a social psychology of change to acknowledge society as the living, developing, dynamic system that it is. No one time point of investigation, and no one group of actors without the whole cast, can provide the whole story.

One of the objectives of doctoral research is to contribute to one's discipline. In noting the lack of a social psychology of change and offering some observations about how this might be remedied I trust this objective has been met. One of my specific objectives was to illustrate social representations theory in an applied social setting. Again, I believe this objective to have been met and it has allowed me to demonstrate the attributes of social representations theory as a tool for researching change.

To conclude, I propose three areas where the work and approach in this applied social setting, UK farmers and farming, has relevance in the wider social world.

Firstly, change continues to affect the UK farming sector, and those rural sectors which are closely concerned with it. These include those employed in country sports, the agricultural supply industry, small-scale rural food producers and distribution, and agricultural services like surveying, contract harvesting and auctioneering. The likely effects of this continuing change on UK farmers, and their capability to adapt, are still poorly understood and thus difficult to predict. Approaching the problem in the way I have suggested could bring a better understanding of the dynamics and consequences of social change, not only for farmers themselves, but also for the wider agricultural and rural communities of which they are a part. This would be of use to those charged with shaping future policy.

Secondly, such an approach could be utilised within and across the European Union. This Union of 25 countries (soon to be 27) contains member states, to the east and south, where farming is still a major sector and where most farms are small family units, many almost at subsistence levels. Since the EU agricultural policy is common to all members, it may be predicted that the change induced difficulties faced by a relatively modern UK agricultural sector, described in this research, will be many times magnified as millions of small peasant farmers face similar problems of change. The scale of the likely problem in terms of social cohesion is great. There is therefore real urgency in promoting discussion within the institutions in the European community on the topic of social damage caused by responses to agricultural change, especially those institutions charged with maintaining social cohesion in agricultural and rural communities.

A third area where a better understanding of the social psychology of change might be utilised, and would be relevant, is the wider canvas of the developing world. In the UK people and social activity are now mainly urban based and the service sector now forms the largest part of our economic activity. The

developing world, however, is very different. In China, for example, some 65% of the total population of 1.5 billion are still farmers. Their displacement to either modern forms of agriculture, or indeed to urban life itself, has commenced with resulting social dislocation and rural discontent. But the more recent link to farming and the land, might reveal very different representations of change to those seen in this research of UK farmers. It could provide a different model of the dynamics of change and different options in obviating its negative effects.

A social psychology of change is not going to be an easy project to develop. There is still the task of refining some of the concepts of social representations theory, like themata and the stability of the core/periphery structure, to enhance its use as a tool for researching change. Limited financial and time resources may mean that shortcuts will be looked for in terms of the time frame within which any problem or phenomena can be considered and how many different areas of the social domain can be accessed. But there will be benefits. This study of change, for example, has allowed me to propose the significance of something which perhaps had not been given sufficient importance previously – a constructed ‘countryside’ which is not part of farmers’ understanding of the project of agriculture, the project from which their sense of identity arises. Had that been more widely understood earlier it might have been possible to better overcome resistance to change. This is more than just managing change, it is understanding it and anticipating it from the point of view of the individuals who are experiencing it and who have to deal with it in their everyday farming lives. For policy makers, and indeed all groups of actors in change situations, it is about being clearer about likely consequences in order to mitigate effects. For farmers change has certainly had economic consequences but investigating the detail of their understanding of change has identified the origin of other important consequences too. The new information generated from this research might have enabled the provision of other or different sorts of resources to have been made available,

or different presentations made of the way change was to be introduced, that would have better assisted farmers to accommodate and adapt to change.

Three final observations may have value in this analysis of farmers, farming and change. Firstly, it is likely that the most inefficient farmers have already left the industry and it is likely that they were among the most resistant to change. If this is so, those who remain will find future change less problematic. Secondly, although the content analysis indicates that farming policy is much less of an issue for the media serving the general public currently than was the case in earlier years, this is balanced by a growth in interest in food provenance and the environment. Both of these matters are being used by the supermarkets as part of their retail offer and so are encouraging such interest. Thirdly, it must not be forgotten that the ongoing legislative framework for the UK farming industry is defined and controlled by the EU in Brussels. Discussions here are likely to continue to be dominated by those states which still possess a large and powerful agricultural voice. On the one hand UK farmers may find that change will bring them new market opportunities; on the other hand, the broad EU agricultural constituency will see to it that the harmful effects of over-rapid change will be cushioned. All of these are cause for optimism for UK farmers.

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APPENDIX 1

Preparation of Text for ALCESTE Analysis

To run an ALCESTE analysis text produced in Microsoft WORD needs certain preparation.

- 1 The researchers dialogue was removed from the transcript.
- 2 The interviews were separated and identified using certain symbols recognised by ALCESTE:
 - (i) To identify the interviews each commences as follows:
**** *chapter_name.
 - (ii) To separate the interviews each terminates as follows:
\$

These two steps together allow each interview to become an *Initial Context Unit* (ICU), a pre-existing division of the text, from which *Elementary Context Units* (ECUs) are identified by the programme.

- 3 Capital letters are not recognised by ALCESTE. Those starting a sentence are automatically changed to lower case by the programme. Those which make up acronyms have to be changed manually, using the find and replace function of WORD. The following are examples:
 - (i) National Farmers Union (NFU) = nfu
 - (ii) Foot & Mouth Disease (F&M) = f&m
 - (iii) Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) =cap
- 4 Apostrophe's, as used in English, are not recognised by ALCESTE. Again using the search and replace function apostrophe's in all words such as can't, wasn't or doesn't need to be found and replaced with underscores i.e can_t, wasn_t , doesn't.
- 5 All the interviews were then amalgamated into one corpus and saved as a TEXT file with line breaks.

Looking through the lists produced by the initial analysis certain words in the text or the word stems identified by ALCESTE in lemmatising words (reducing word variants to their stems) which have been used during the interviews to convey the same meaning, are shown separately. A second find and replace exercise enabled synonyms and word stems with the same meaning, to be manually altered so that the programme then counts them as one and the same.

APPENDIX 2

Interview topic guide for Semi-Structured Interviews

1 *Topic Flow Guide*

The farm and the farming enterprise now

Why did you decide to take on the farm?

Could you imagine having done anything different?

Change over the past 5/10 years

Being a farmer then cf now

How farmers were thought of then cf now

Views about farming today

Main concerns

Thoughts about the farm

Views about the way farmers and farming is portrayed in the media

Thoughts about the way farmers are thought of

Your ability to influence change – legislative, market, consumer

Interface with Govt, industry bodies, the market place, multiples, consumers

A rural / urban divide ?

The future –for you for the industry-for the next generation

On being a farmer

2 *The ladder scale*

Where were you and your farm on the ladder c10 years ago

Where was the farming industry on the ladder c10 years ago

Where are you and your farm on the ladder now

Where is the farming industry on the ladder now

Where will you and your farm be on the ladder in c10 years time

Where will the farming industry be on the ladder in c10 years time

APPENDIX 3

Coding Schedule for Narrative Interviews

TOPIC AREA:

Basic Codes:

<i>Sub Codes:</i>

Description

BACKGROUND TO CHANGE/ CAUSES OF CHANGE

Technology

Technological innovations, machinery, chemical & IT

Government intervention

Legislation & regulation; resulting bureaucracy

Exposure to world markets

Those in Europe and the rest of the world. WTO

Currency arrangements

Difficulties in exchange rates – green pound

Social change

Socio-demographics altering food presentation & distribution

Attitudes to agriculture

Perception of others. Food scares and the nature of farming

ACTORS IN THE CHANGE SCENARIO

Policy makers

EU/CAP

Legislators in Brussels

UK Government

Legislators in UK government

Farmers

Traits

Personality traits, age, habits

Feelings

About change, emotions

Farming lifestyle

Way of life, hours, lifestyle

Reaction to change

Responses like denial, resistance or adaptation

Business capabilities

Financial, marketing planning abilities

General public/consumers

Image of British food

How the public think of British food

Image of British farming

How the public think of British farming practices

Concerns about food safety and animal welfare

Public concerns about the safety of food and how animals are treated

Taxpayers money

Subsidy, single farm payments & other public purse payment

Media

Print, radio & tv media

Retailers

Supermarkets, grocers selling to the general public

COMPONENTS AFFECTED BY CHANGE

Food production

Food security

The need for production to avoid food shortage

Domestic production

UK food production by farmers

Food safety and animal welfare

How these are affected by change. ie cheaper food means mass production which creates concern in these areas

Countryside

Farmed landscape

The land used by farming: patchwork or prairie

Environment

The soil, air and water of the land used in agriculture

Rural communities

Villages, remote areas

CONSEQUENCES OF CHANGE

Farm structure

The changing average size of farms

Farm incomes

The returns farmers get for their produce

Sustainability of rural communities

Depopulation leading to the demise of local services

Exposure to world markets

Facing competition from producers with lower costs

Power of supermarkets

The size of business compared to those from whom they buy

APPENDIX 4

Code Book for Thematic Analysis of the Media: Issues, Actors, Causes

ISSUES: 1954, 1984 & 2004

- 1 Policy**
Govt/EEC; payments/subsidies/price review; imports; policy driven marketing arrangements; lobbying; surpluses; the lack of a food security policy; EU enlargement; TB; F&M failures; the budget; bureaucracy.
- 2 Practicalities of farming**
Yields; weather; specific sorts of production; costs of production; quality of production; incomes; animal health and welfare; diversification; co-operation; labour costs.
- 3 Environment**
Landscape; pesticide use, overproduction; wildlife; conservation; waste control; pollution; GM crops (other than need for farmers protection); need for green legislation to support non-food crops for bio-energy.
- 4 Broader countryside matters**
Rural communities; planning; estate size; rabbits; rural/urban relationships & conflict; National parks; rating; hunting; windfarms; protection issues (eg hunting & GM production); rural depopulation.
- 5 Consumers/Food**
Cost of subsidies to consumers & taxpayers; promoting British food; perception of farmers; farmers markets; demand for food; purchasing on price.
- 6 Ancilliary farming matters**
City farms; farm accidents; dispossession, corporate involvement in farming; tank damage; corn vs horn conflict; press reporting; labour matters not included in 2 above (eg gangmasters); common grazing rights; history of NFU & MMB.
- 7 Activities relating to individuals who happen to be farmers**
- 8 The future of farming**
Speculation about changes to come; how sfp might work; decontrol; levy board change; lack of young people; new organisations like EFPF; new marketing skills needed.
- 9 Supermarket power**
Relationship between farmers and retailers.
- 10 International concerns**
World trade; loss of rainforest; farming overseas; fuel crisis;

ACTORS: 1954, 1984 & 2004

The key player featured (in addition to farmers)

- 1 Govt/MAFF/defra/EEC
- 2 Farmers organisations; marketing boards, breed societies
- 3 Conservationists/environmentalists
- 4 Single issue organisations (eg FoE)
- 5 Consumers/customers/taxpayers
- 6 Local communities/country communities/Councils
- 7 Town dwellers
- 8 Companies/business/shareholders
- 9 Industries and institutions related to agriculture (Milling; meat trade; academics; Church; army; RSPCA; Transport industry; sugar beet factories; agrochemicals)
- 10 Other (Energy providers; Met office; City Farms, prisons, NASA; overseas farmers eg Danish;)
- 11 Lawyers & police
- 12 Media
- 13 Individual farmers whose activities are reported for reasons other than agriculture
- 14 Supermarkets & other purchasers of farm products.
- 15 Young people
- 16 Farm workers (in 1954 seen as separate from farmers)

CAUSES: 1954, 1984 & 2004

- 1 Policies unfair/don't work; farmers being let down by Govt/EEC; too much bureaucracy; policies not being implemented fast enough.
- 2 Farmers Organisations letting farmers down/not doing what might be expected of them; need revision.
- 3 Concern about cost of subsidies to the taxpayer/consumer. Difficulty in reconciling farmer and consumer interests. Problem of food surpluses. Concern about animal fats & health.
- 4 The effect of production/overproduction & GM crops on the environment/countryside/wildlife. Change in sfp to benefit of environment
- 5 Farming maintains tradition/is old fashioned.
- 6 Poor returns to farmers; restrictive tenancies; lack of labour
- 7 Weather; weeds; pests & diseases.
- 8 Supermarket domination; protests & blockades against supermarkets
- 9 Imports undermining UK farmers; improvements by overseas farmers; world trade concerns.
- 10 More being/should be done to promote British food; farmers markets; there should be a food policy to ensure food security; need to reconnect farmers & consumers; consumers only want cheap food
- 11 Farmers must cut costs/improve efficiency/improve quality/diversify/improve animal welfare/become more businesslike/ compete in world markets/ Needs to change to meet the market and other new conditions
- 12 The actions of an individual farmer
- 13 Farmers featherbedded/privileged – paid too much from the public purse
- 14 Farmers **are** becoming more efficient, progressive, enterprising, coping
- 15 Farmers need safeguarding. They face unfair competition from imports and change. They need protection from anti-GM campaigners; they have more food safety & animal welfare legislation than do overseas farmers

(like pesticide container disposal); they are not being allowed to change (eg grow GM crops); the land is their business, not an urban playground.

- 16 Other – Rural/urban relationships; tank damage; farmland values; losing common grazing; farm accidents; windfarming; travellers; overseas aid; myxo in rabbits.
- 17 Press (& others) unfair to farmers.
- 18 Hunting & country sports being threatened by urban prejudice.
- 19 The new policies are working; they are good for farmers.
- 20 Farming is a good way of life and there are good opportunities in farming.
- 21 Farmers being prevented from changing, eg growing GM crops

APPENDIX 5

Code Book for Thematic Analysis of Key Phrases from The Times

Victims

Dissatisfied, powerless, victims of EU, CAP, Govt. other EU members, the weather, supermarkets, divided politically and let down by Govt and their organisations, at odds with traditional allies, denied home market monopoly.

Unpopular

Supported by the taxpayer, unjust support, feather-bedded, greedy, privileged, landscape destroyers, mercenary, winning unfairly, rude protesters.

Resilient

Improving, fighting back, facing up to reality, innovative, diversifying, adapting well, EUs most efficient farmers;

Deserving support

Not farmers fault, still worthy of help, role in the rural community, betrayed by Govt policy, enhance countryside, good stewards.

Improvement required

Need to improve marketing skills, need to produce less and cause less damage, need to improve conditions for wildlife and the environment.