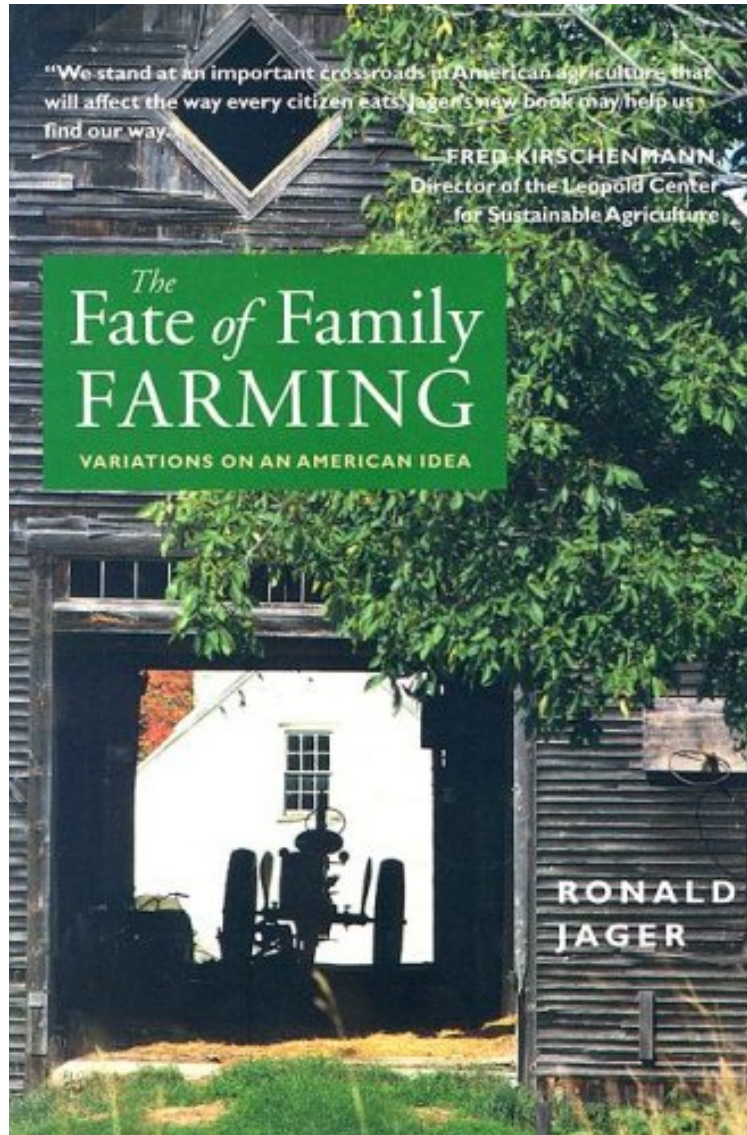


(Free download) The Fate of Family Farming: Variations on an American Idea

## The Fate of Family Farming: Variations on an American Idea

Ronald Jager

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**Ronald Jager : The Fate of Family Farming: Variations on an American Idea** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Fate of Family Farming: Variations on an American Idea:

3 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Perfect side-dish to your organic dietBy Aleksandar ToticI love food, especially of the locally-grown, organic type. This love comes from childhood memories of going to the farmers market, the excitement of being able to eat creamy spinach again after a nine month lull when it was out of season...

But I've been shopping in a supermarket for the last 30 years, and feel as if I've fully lost contact with how the food actually got to my fridge. This book comes to the rescue. The author talks about history of family farms in US, and then does 4 case studies of today's working farms. Maple syrup, Milk, Chickens, they are all in there. Great stuff, he writes well, and kept me turning page after page. Highly recommended to those who enjoy intelligent writing and good food.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Different By Austin Duerfeldt It is a required book for a class I took. I am not sure if I agree with it all, I am from a farm family, but the opinion is fairly stated.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Farming in a global community By Timothy J. Bazzett Ronald Jager cares deeply about the "The Fate of Family Farming", which is the title of his latest book. His interest has very personal roots. Jager grew up on a farm near McBain, Michigan (not far from Reed City, where I grew up), and wrote movingly (and often quite humorously) of those formative years in his 1990 memoir, "Eighty Acres: Elegy for a Family Farm", which I re-read recently and found it to be one of those rare books which improves with age and yields new pleasures and insights with each reading, the mark of a true classic. Jager left the farm over fifty years ago when he went off to Calvin College, then Harvard, and finally landed at Yale where he taught philosophy for a number of years. He has lived in rural New Hampshire for over thirty years now and has obviously immersed himself in the community, the culture and the history of his adopted state, and has written extensively of all these things. In "FoFF" Jager first sketches a brief history of four hundred years of farming in America, starting with the first pilgrims who landed on our shores pitifully ill-equipped. Many of these first settlers died, and those who did not owed their survival to the generosity of Native Americans who shared their corn and knowledge of primitive farming methods. Jager then cites two early presidents, Adams and Jefferson, as champions and practitioners of farming. Jefferson described farmers as "the most valuable citizens [and also] the most vigorous, the most independent, the most virtuous ..." Emerson, Thoreau and other nineteenth century writers also weigh in on farming before Jager focuses in on three contemporary agrarian writers from the second half of the twentieth century. Louis Bromfield was an enormously successful writer turned farmer whose experimental Malabar Farm in Ohio became a showcase in the forties and fifties. Victor Davis Hanson, a classics professor and also a California fruit farmer is also heard from, and, in his "Field without Dreams" (1996), writes: "we are now in the penultimate stage of the death of agrarianism, the idea that farmland of roughly like size and nature should be worked by individual families." Finally, the writings of writer-farmer Wendell Berry of Kentucky are examined, particularly his scathing indictment of modern corporate agribusiness in "The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture" (1977). Twenty-five years later Berry pointed out: "In 2002 we have less than half the number of farms in the United States that we had in 1977." At the heart of "FoFF" however are in-depth profiles of four farms and the families who are currently operating them in New Hampshire. One is a modern "sugarbush", or maple syrup operation, which bears very little resemblance to the small-time sugarbushes that flourished throughout the west Michigan of my childhood. The metal spiles, buckets and boiling tubs of those days have been replaced by miles of plastic tubing, vacuum systems, and reverse osmosis machines, all needed to efficiently process the sap from the more than 40,000 maples on the Bascom farm. Similar esoteric and modern methods are examined at a family-run dairy farm of nearly 200 cows, and still other innovations are explained at an egg and sweet corn farm and, finally, an apple orchard. The common thread that unites these four family farms, in addition to their specializations, is the odd dance of these fiercely proud and independent people's resistance to and yet cooperation with the giant agribusiness corporations which now control the food industry of the world. Yes, the "world", because globalization has invaded the world of farming too. U.S. farmers are now in competition with the food growers of China, Chile, New Zealand and other far-flung points of the globe. The greatest irony of this globalization is that less and less of the money spent on food today (which is cheaper than ever) ends up in the farmer's pocket. Modernization equals increased efficiency, which results in higher production creating surpluses which drive down prices, and the farmer is the one who pays. This vicious cycle is a dilemma which Jager emphasizes throughout his book. While this is a tragic situation, what is even more frightening is Jager's depiction of the rapid and widespread use of genetically modified organisms, or GMOs. No long-term studies are available on the ultimate effects of these gene-spliced super seeds on world ecology and the continued safety of our food supply. Corporations like Monsanto, Novartis, DuPont and Dow, which produce, patent and sell these seeds and also certain herbicides, stand to profit enormously, and these companies have lobbied successfully for their products' quick approval by the FDA, the EPA and the Department of Agriculture. Other countries have been much more cautious about GMOs; indeed the European Parliament has even passed legislation requiring GMO labeling. Jager finally offers some hope for the future of family-run farms in America as he looks at several current agrarian movements such as organic farming, community supported agriculture, farmers' markets and niche farming. The greatest strength of "FoFF" is the obvious passion of the author's commitment to responsible stewardship of the land. Here finally is an eloquent and knowledgeable voice for family farming who draws not only from extensive research and careful scholarship, but also from personal experience and a deep and unquenchable love of the land. Jager's book should be required reading not just for the agricultural community but for the world community. If America chooses to ignore intelligent agrarian voices like Jager's, it is entirely possible that we will one day become as dependent on foreign sources for our food supply as we are now for our oil (if we haven't already). Not exactly a happy thought. - Tim Bazzett, author of the REED CITY BOY trilogy

The Fate of Family Farming employs a hands-on approach, with much local New England detail, in its exploration of the history and future of American family farming as an idea and as an ongoing way of life. Early chapters situate family farming within American history, beginning with Jamestown and Plymouth, continuing with Jefferson and Emerson and others, and including the technological transformations during the twentieth century. An extended chapter deals with the idea of "agrarianism," and considers in detail the work of Louis Bromfield, Victor Hanson, and Wendell Berry. The middle section of the book opens a window on present-day farming with detailed portraits of four farms devoted, respectively, to the production of maple syrup, eggs and corn, milk, and apples. The author takes the reader to the barns and fields of these farms, introduces the farm families, helps the reader taste the syrup and corn and smell the silage and ultimately enables others to see the economic and ecological challenges that farmers today face, and to consider their strategies for survival. In the last portion of the book the author provides a very accessible examination of the role of farm technology and global economics, including the many ironies of farming "success," followed by a chapter that balances the threat and promise of biotechnology, and a concluding analysis of the current struggle for "the soul of agriculture."

"This is an ambitious work with a moral imperative . . . Jager is efficient and entertaining while giving us the context for the news . . . The Fate of Family Farming is sweetly moving; you really do end up understanding why it matters." New York Times Book