

Our Home and Native Land: Nation-Building, Land Ownership, and Rural Narratives in the Canadian Prairies

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Inception

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Abstract

Contemporary advertisement campaigns and media messaging from the Canadian agricultural industry often portray agriculture as closely intertwined with Canadian history and identity. This article offers a critical analysis of the narratives associated with the Canadian agricultural industry by examining elements of Canada's settlement history, interrogating historical narratives, and analyzing several contemporary advertisement campaigns, namely Farm Credit Canada's "Ag More Than Ever" campaign. The portrayals found in both historical and contemporary advertisements depict land ownership and the environment in mechanistic and industrial ways that frame farmers as environmental stewards. In the modern context, these narratives allow the agricultural industry to combat criticisms regarding the environmental impact of Canadian agricultural practices. This obscures the appropriative history of Canadian agriculture as well as any potential opportunities for meaningful dialogue and change.

Introduction

In 2012, Farm Credit Canada launched “Ag More Than Ever,” a program encouraging Canadian farmers to be ‘advocates’ and to promote the national agricultural industry.¹ Through several social media campaigns, Ag More Than Ever disseminated a variety of images, graphics, and testimonials dedicated to “improving perceptions, dispelling myths and creating positive dialogue about Canadian ag”²

“Sky, Water, Land” (Figure 1) is one of Ag More Than Ever’s promotional images.³ The graphic proposes that farmers do more than draw food and wealth from the land—they are also wise stewards invested in its safekeeping. The tagline, “Ours to Protect,” indicates that agricultural producers are invested in a kind of collective environmentalism extending through the soils they use, into the aquatic ecosystem, and to the atmosphere itself: sky, water, land. The goal of the image is to naturalize a set of assumptions: that farmers are ‘protectors’ of the environment and that the agricultural industry has a legitimate basis of claim when it says that the sky, water, and land are under their protection, and by extension their property. Yet if we take into consideration the historical background from which this image arose, and ask what processes and decisions led to it being created, we are left with a series of

¹ “Agriculture More Than Ever Inspiring Producer-Consumer Conversations,” *Farm Credit Canada*. Last modified Mar 10, 2015, web.

² “About Us,” *Ag More Than Ever*, available from: <https://www.agriculturemorethanever.ca/about-us/>, accessed April 1, 2017. Web.

³ “Untitled,” digital image. available from: https://www.agriculturemorethanever.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/38107-E-Agvocate-Quote-B2_Sprayer_1000x1000.jpg, reproduced with permission from *Ag More Than Ever*.

unsettling questions that point to a critical reassessment of the use of environmentalist narratives in the Canadian agricultural industry.



Figure 1

Stories about the farming industry often use patriotic elements to suggest that farming is synonymous with the nation's history and identity. These stories form what may be called a *narrative*: an overarching cognitive structure or "story" through which we can interpret events, actions, and ideas according to a specific set of

norms.⁴ Narratives also advance certain voices and silence others. Current narratives about agriculture obscure the systemically colonial and discriminatory practices that were foundational to Canadian nationhood, as well as the mechanisms of land ownership and patterns of dispossession that were instrumental in the settlement of Canada. However, legacies of these nationalist themes are still present in current agricultural advertising campaigns. Through them, powerful structures of the past serve to reinforce the ties between agriculture and Canadian identity, and present an alternative narrative in which Canadian farmers are 'conservationists,' allowing the industry to fend off emerging criticisms over the environmental impact of Canadian agricultural practices.

This paper proceeds by examining elements of Canada's settlement history, interrogating Canadian agricultural narratives, then analysing several contemporary advertisement campaigns. The aim is to better understand the narratives surrounding farming in Canada and advance the argument that such stories depict land ownership and the environment in mechanistic and industrial ways that frame farmers as environmental stewards. I argue that these have historically facilitated both dispossession and European claims to property, and continue to obscure the appropriative history of Canadian agriculture. The first section examines Canadian immigration policies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, exploring the processes through which settlement occurred. Using a series of posters advertising Canadian settlement, I show how the narrative wedded to these policies served to obstruct the colonial and discriminatory actions of Canadian state. The second section examines current advertising campaigns from the agricultural industry, paying attention to the way they reinforce colonial ideas about farming in Canada to create a positive image of the

⁴ David Herman, *Basic Elements of Narrative* (Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 7.

agricultural industry. I argue that these advertisements advance conceptions of land ownership, the environment, and productivity, which farmers can draw upon to respond to environmentalist critiques regarding the sustainability and impact of Canadian agriculture. This current narrative of Canadian agriculture obscures its past while emphasizing its role within Canada's future.

Methodology

This paper offers a critical analysis of narratives associated with the Canadian agricultural industry by considering the historical, economic, social, and political contexts from which they have arisen. According to Martha Feldman et al., a narrative is any "sequence of events, experiences, or actions with a plot that ties together different parts into a meaningful whole."⁵ This meaningful whole provides individuals, groups, and societies with a framework for understanding the world around them. While narratives can serve a variety of functions, the functions most relevant to my analyses are the two identified by Mary Witten, who argues that narrative can "unobtrusively and persuasively communicate core organizational values," and "covertly impart values that channel attention towards certain elements in the stream of events and away from others."⁶ Through narratives, certain ideas can be widely accepted as truthful or commonplace, thus obscuring any other potential interpretations or competing logics. Narratives allow for the preservation of ideas and frames of interpretation that go beyond one fixed point in time

⁵ Martha Feldman, Kaj Skoldberg, Ruth Nicole Brown, and Debra Horner, "Making Sense of Stories: A Rhetorical Approach to Narrative Analysis," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 14, no. 2 (2004): 148.

⁶ Mary Witten, "Narrative and the Culture of Obedience in the Workplace," in *Narrative and Social Control: Critical Perspectives* (California: Sage Publications Inc, 1993), p. 109.

and can inform and shape the worldview of individuals long after the original formation of the narrative.

In this paper I also augment a methodological approach to understanding narrative using the lens of rhetorical criticism. Iversen describes the study of narrative within rhetorical criticism as “[offering] analytical and evaluative readings of narratives and narrative elements in situated discourse or acts aimed at persuading, convincing, uniting or otherwise moving people towards specific ends.”⁷ Understanding narrative through the framework of rhetorical criticism allows us to not only examine the stories being told about Canadian agriculture, but also analyse the power relations, hierarchies, and ‘specific ends’ involved in the production and dissemination of particular narratives.

In examining the characteristics of narratives associated with Canadian agriculture, this essay utilizes historical immigration advertisements and graphics disseminated by the “Ag More Than Ever” campaign. Through a careful deconstruction of these images using narrative and rhetorical criticism, and by establishing the context within which both the historical and contemporary advertisements arose, I demonstrate how agriculture and Canadian nationhood are inextricably linked.

Historical Context: Settler Colonialism and Nation-Building

On July 1st, 1867, the Province of Canada, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick were united through the British North America Act into a federal dominion under the British Crown⁸. While this act of Confederation legislated Canada into a unified political state, its cultural and social divisions persisted. Settler nations had to engage

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Constitution Act, 1867.

in nation-building activities due to the way they came into being. Bennett, Turner, and Volkerling have argued that settler societies had to “undertake the process of nation formation urgently, visibly, defensively...[the nations are] caught in the act, embarrassed by the process of construction.”⁹ Read through these claims, Sir John A. Macdonald’s government had the particularly difficult challenge of crafting a unified, distinct, and *Canadian* identity that could assert its legitimacy on the global stage and resist incursion from the United States.

The idea of ‘nation-building’ is a particularly useful concept to apply to the Macdonald government’s actions in the years following Confederation. Karl Deutsch describes nation-building as a deliberate formation or construction of a national identity through the actions of the state.¹⁰ While Deutsch does acknowledge that a multitude of factors and actors influence the creation of a country’s ‘national identity,’ his definition of nation-building is particularly useful because it allows us to examine the ways that the states have overseen and consciously constructed national identities through policies, programs, and laws. In addition, under this definition of ‘nation-building,’ the process of developing a Canadian national identity can be understood as inorganic. Deutsch’s understanding of national identity makes it clear that national identities are deliberately produced. Canada’s national identity is certainly no exception.

⁹ Tony Bennett, Graeme Turner and Michael Volkerling, “Introduction: Post-colonial Formations,” *Culture and Policy* 6, no. 1 (1994): 1.

¹⁰ Karl W. Deutsch, “Nation-Building and National Development: Some Issues for Political Research – Introduction,” in *Nation Building in Comparative Contexts* (New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction, 2010), p. 3.

The Ideology of Settlement: Macdonald's "National Policy" and *Terra nullius*

Beginning in 1867, the Canadian state engaged in a concerted effort of nation-building. One of the most notable examples of this was Macdonald's 'National Policy.' The policy called for the economic integration of Canada, carried out through the imposition of tariffs on foreign goods, the building of canals and the completion of the transcontinental Canadian Pacific Railway, as well as the creation of land ownership policies that promoted immigration to the Canadian Prairies.¹¹ As later governments adopted Macdonald's policy through these land and immigration policies, the Canadian state sought to expand the borders of its territory and assert sovereignty over the wild, undeveloped Canadian land. The sale and transfer of Rupert's Land by the Hudson's Bay Company to the Canadian state in the late-nineteenth century is another significant milestone within this timeline of acquisition and growing control of the state over the geographic territory of Canada. While these developments may appear practical economic matters, they were deeply informed by ideology. Eva Mackay argues that the idea of creating a Canadian nation that drove this geographical expansion was inextricably linked to the idea of transforming 'wilderness' into 'civilization'¹².

This idea of conquering supposedly wild, empty territory in the name of the state can best be understood through the concept of *terra nullius*. Roughly translated from the Latin to mean 'no man's land,' *terra nullius* is a legal term that refers to territory that is considered vacant and uninhabited. Europeans believed that in the eyes of God and the law, they were free to occupy and own vast swaths of

¹¹ Kenneth Norrie, "The National Policy and the Rate of Prairie Settlement," in *The Prairie West: Historical Readings* (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1995), p. 243.

¹² Eva Mackay, *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 29.

territory designated as *terra nullius*.¹³ Ownership over this empty land could be finalized through several actions: the ‘act of discovery,’ other symbolic actions such as planting a flag, or through effective occupation.¹⁴ According to this doctrine, the Crown—and the Canadian state—had a legitimate claim to the vast territory of the Americas. The most important ideological work of the ‘terra nullius’ idea in this legal mechanism was the complete denial and erasure of previous Indigenous occupation and ownership across the interior of North America. A corollary operation sought to replace Indigenous ties to the land with European ones, through a doctrine derived from philosopher John Locke’s conception of property. Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government*, published in 1689, sought to articulate a philosophy of freedom that explained what extent states should go to in order to protect individual liberty. In explaining the primary basis of human freedom, he provided a justification for the acquisition and defense of private property. He stipulated that “the *Labour* of his Body, and the *Work* of his Hands, we may say are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that Nature hath provided and left in, he hath mixed his *Labour* with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property.”¹⁵ According to this view, humans acquire property rights through ‘mixing’ their labour with the land—usually through productive action. Locke’s theory provides a rationale for property ownership, specifically ownership through ‘working’ the land and adding value and labour to it. Abramson and Theodossopoulous provide a relevant analysis of the way Locke’s labour theory of property was interpreted, stating that

For Locke, ‘development’ meant the productive improvement of pristine Nature according to God’s will on this earth.

¹³ Boyce Richardson, *People of Terra Nullius: Betrayal and Rebirth in Aboriginal Canada* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1993), p. 26.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988 [1689]), p. 287-8.

Consequently, so long as it was predicated upon the systematic investment of productive labour, the human urge to acquire property rights in land and enclose it emerged as an extension of God's purpose...In this way, embedded in Locke's myth and without precedent to rely upon, colonial land law found against native relations of economic intimacy and spiritual belonging in favour of settler enclosure, technical dominion and appropriation¹⁶

The Lockean concept of obtaining sovereignty over the land through settlements and labour is reflected in the mechanisms through which the Prairies were settled. The primary legislation that regulated immigration and homesteading on the Prairies was the Dominion Lands Act. Ratified in 1872, the Act granted 160 acres to any settler for a minimal ten-dollar fee upon the condition that the settler live on their section of land for three years and cultivate at least thirty acres during that time¹⁷. To receive official documentation confirming their ownership of the land, homesteaders were required to provide proof that they had increased the value of their acreage through 'improvements' such as cultivation and construction.¹⁸ In effect, the Act enshrined Locke's concept of labour mixing and property ownership influenced official legislation and was fulfilled through the daily mechanisms of homesteader life. By 'working the land' and increasing its value, homesteaders and their labour served as one of the means through which the state could gain full sovereignty over the West.

¹⁶ Allen Abramson, and Dimitrios Theodossopoulos. *Land, Law, and Environment: Mythical Land, Legal Boundaries* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p. 21.

¹⁷ "Backgrounder: Facts in Canada's Immigration History," Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, modified June 7, 2011.

¹⁸ "Land Grants of Western Canada, 1870-1930," Library and Archives Canada. Last accessed April 1, 2017. Web.

This narrative, and the way land ownership was conceptualized, is deeply problematic because it encouraged farmers to be active agents of colonialism and dispossession. It is therefore important to examine how Indigenous peoples and settlers interacted within the context of settlement and immigration in the nineteenth century. In the late 1800s to the 1900s, the British Crown undertook a series of one-sided negotiations known as the Numbered Treaties. These treaties created the reserve system and formalized the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the state.¹⁹ According to Taiaiake Alfred, the policy goal of the Canadian state at this time was, to “extinguish Aboriginal title and facilitate the exploitation of the natural resources on or under those lands.”²⁰ Lowman and Barker echo this interpretation in their argument that the forced relocation and resettlement of Indigenous peoples created both geographical and metaphorical space for settlers to occupy. According to them, “as Indigenous peoples are physically and conceptually displaced, settler society grows into the (perceived) open space created by their (perceived) absence”.²¹ These analyses illustrate how the concept of empty land was deployed to advance the Canadian project. By displacing Indigenous peoples and confining their existence and movements to circumscribed geographical locations, the Canadian state was free to reap the benefits of Westward expansion and occupation. This displacement, and the subsequent restrictions of Indigenous rights and freedoms under the Indian Act (1876), structured Canadian society in a way that privileged Euro-Canadian immigrants and deeply disadvantaged Indigenous people.

The concept of *terra nullius* and the depiction of Indigenous societies as inferior to European immigrants were only two of the justifications

¹⁹ Emma Lowman and Adam Barker. *Settler: Identity and Colonialism in the 21st century Canada* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2015), p. 12.

²⁰ Alfred Taiaiake. *Peace, Power, and Righteousness* (Ontario: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 28.

²¹ *Settler: Identity and Colonialism in the 21st century Canada*, p. 27.

behind the Canadian 'opening' and settlement of the West.²² In addition to economic benefits, colonizing Canada's disputed territories served the state's nation-building efforts since it was hoped that settlement would lead to a population that could call itself Canadian.

Canadian Immigration Policy and the Role of Clifford Sifton

The first 'great wave of immigration' to Canada began in the 1890s under the purview of Sir Wilfrid Laurier's Liberal government.²³ From the late-nineteenth century to the 1930s, hundreds of thousands of immigrants settled in the Prairies—a definitive success on the part of the Canadian state to populate the West.²⁴ This first great wave of immigration was credited to several factors. Some were external—a population boom in Europe led to an increased demand for land, and in the United States and Eastern Canada the dwindling stock of available land led many to relocate northwards.²⁵ Other factors increasing Canadian immigration over this period are linked to specific state-driven initiatives undertaken by the Laurier government.

Laurier's Minister of the Interior is often given singular credit for his role in attracting settlers to Western Canada. Sir Clifford Sifton was determined to bring farmers to the 'empty' land of Western Canada,

²² Glenn Coulthard, *Red Skin White Masks* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), p. 100.

²³ "Forging our Legacy," Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, last accessed April 1, 2017. Web.

²⁴ E. Gagnon, "Settling the West: Immigration to the Prairies from 1867 to 1914," *Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21*, last accessed April 1, 2017. Web.

²⁵ "Forging our Legacy," Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada," last accessed April 1, 2017. Web.

and shaped the Department of the Interior's efforts and initiatives to achieve this end.²⁶ Sifton's main contribution during his time in this post was producing a massive international advertising campaign encouraging foreigners to emigrate to the West to take advantage of farming opportunities there.²⁷ The focus of his advertising campaign was primarily immigrants who already possessed agricultural skills.²⁸ Throughout these campaigns, Sifton reinforced elements of the Canadian narrative and connected them to Canadian agriculture. Through the narratives featured in Sifton's advertisements, the Canadian state advanced an image of what it meant to be Canadian, and also encouraged those immigrating to Canada to view themselves as true citizens with legitimate claims to the Canadian land and national identity.

In her analysis of national identity and patriotism, Sherene Razack argues that nation-building and other patriotic initiatives such as Sifton's produce "mythologies or national stories are about a nation's origins and history. Looking closer at Sifton's advertising posters reveals an imaginary landscape that at once reinforced pre-existing narratives about the importance of agriculture within the nation and, as Razack points out, enabled" citizens to think of themselves as part of a community, defining who belongs and who does not belong to the nation."²⁹ Sifton's advertisements encouraged conceptions of Canadian citizenship and modes of living within the field of agriculture. These conceptions highlight the economic and social

²⁶ Jean Burnet and Howard Palmer, *"Coming Canadians": An Introduction to a History of Canada's Peoples* (Toronto: McLelland & Stewart, 1988), p. 27.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Jeffrey Murray, "Printed Advertisements," Library and Archives Canada, last accessed April 1, 2017. Web.

²⁹ Sherene Razack, "When Place Becomes Race." In *Race, Space and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2002), p. 74.

benefits of settlement through underlying references to Lockean concepts of labour and land ownership, as well as the concept of *terra nullius* and other justifications for settlement.

Narratives in Action: Sifton's Advertisements and the "Last Best West"



Figure 2

To attract prospective settlers, Sifton directed his department to produce and distribute posters featuring picturesque landscapes and idyllic depictions of homesteading life in the Prairies, rendered in eye-catching colours and including concise, appealing descriptions of Canada.³⁰ Often posters were divided evenly between picture and text, with the picture depicting a homestead set against a backdrop of a blue sky and the writing detailing the many beneficial aspects of settlement. As a result, many settlement advertisements appear benign or innocuous

³⁰ Jeffrey Murray, "Printed Advertisements," Library and Archives Canada, last accessed April 1, 2017. Web.

without deeper analysis. A more careful reading is possible. For example, Figure 2, "Ready Made Farms," was created and distributed sometime between 1910 and 1930.³¹ In the advertisement, a female figure, standing tall and confident, is foregrounded in front of an idyllic and clean farmyard. The title, stretching above the scene, reads: "Ready Made Farms in Western Canada." The bottom half of the advertisement proclaims: "Get your home in Canada from the Canadian Pacific. Special farms on virgin soil near the railway and close to schools, markets, churches. Are prepared each year for British farmers of moderate capital. Payments in easy instalments." Here, the term 'virgin soil' subtly reinforces the concept of *terra nullius*, implying that Indigenous people had not utilized the land productively, thus leaving it free for productive European improvement. Additionally, the use of the term 'virgin' implicitly sexualizes the landscape. Anne McClintock asserts that the eroticism of the term virgin "effects a territorial appropriation, for if the land is virgin, colonized peoples cannot claim aboriginal [sic] territorial rights."³² This concept of 'virgin soil' further advances the colonial narrative within Sifton's advertisements.

³¹ "Ready Made Farms in Western Canada," Image. Hosted at The Archives Society of Alberta, retrieved from <https://albertaonrecord.ca/is-glen-1342>. Accessed Dec 6 2017.

³² Anne McClintock, *Imperial leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 30.

In Figure 3, “Canada West: The Last Best West” (publication date unknown), the caption states: “Homes for millions. Ranching, dairying, grain raising, fruit raising, mixed farming.”³³ The focal point

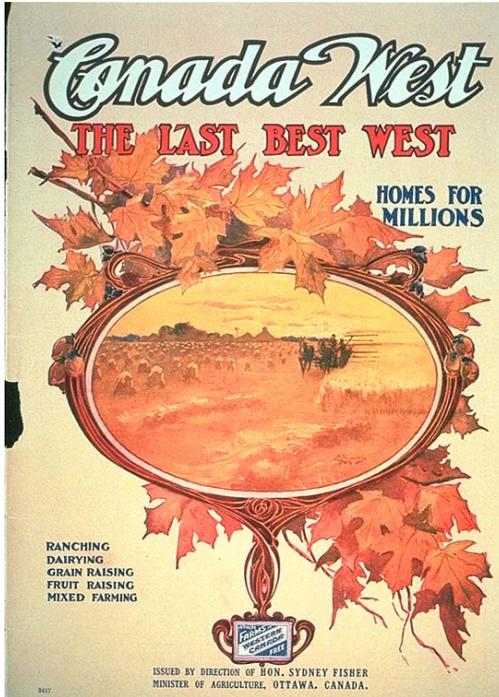


Figure 3

of this advertisement is a scenic illustration of a wheat field mid-harvest, set against a golden skyline. This depiction of a bountiful summer harvest is a largely idealized portrayal of the agricultural capabilities of Western farms. The wheat in the advertisement is bathed in a rich golden light, emphasizing the economic returns of the harvest and the prosperity available to any that make the journey to Canada. This depiction would be incredibly appealing to potential immigrants who had agricultural experience, produced at a time when the government was already well aware that much of the Prairie interior was not suitable for agriculture. Additionally, the scene is framed by an intricate border, and set against a bed of maple leaves. The border almost resembles a gilded handheld mirror, reflecting an image back to the viewer. The border's base is a small rectangle, upon which the words, “Farms in

³³ Jean Bruce, “The Last Best West: Advertising for Immigrants to Western Canada, 1870-1930,” *Canadian Museum of History*. Web. Retrieved from <http://www.historymuseum.ca/cmhc/exhibitions/hist/advertis/ads1-01e.shtml>

Western Canada Free” are printed. The title of the poster is noteworthy, depicting Canada as the last true frontier.

Not all posters emphasized the same narratives. Figure 4, “Canada’s Call to Women” (published approx. 1919-1930) depicts a woman turning to smile at the viewer, a basket and several apples next to her.³⁴ An open window behind the woman reveals a



Figure 4

next to her.³⁴ An open window behind the woman reveals a wheat field mid-harvest. The woman is smiling coquettishly at the viewer, and her hair is perfectly coiffed. She is wearing an apron and is situated in a domestic environment—outside her open window the harvest is underway, where several male figures are working in a field, but she remains fixed within her kitchen. This advertisement depicts the Canadian farmwife as cheerful, conventionally attractive, and most importantly *domestic*. The idealized role for women in agriculture, as depicted by these advertisements, traced a well-

established border around the kitchen and not within the fields. This advertisement was not produced by the state or Sifton directly, but the creators—White Star Line—sought to profit directly from transporting individuals to the West and thus issued “Canada’s Call

³⁴ “White Star Line. Canada’s Call to Women,” Image. Hosted at The Archives Society of Alberta. Web. Retrieved from <https://albertaonrecord.ca/is-glen-1346>. Accessed Dec 6 2017.

to Women.”³⁵ Ultimately, the themes and narratives advanced by this advertisement are similar to that of the Department of the Interior. This poster invites women to participate in the Canadian agricultural narrative—albeit within the confines of patriarchal gender roles.

Advertisements addressed men and women differently. In ‘It’s Mine’, (Figure 5) the focal point of the poster is an illustration of a farm with golden fields to one side and a railway on the other.³⁶ The illustration is depicted as if it was a painting on a frame, with a man in a cowboy hat holding up the image. The title exclaims: “It’s Mine!” with the advertisement’s caption stating, “Canada: the right land for the right man.” The bottom of the page is dominated by a Canadian National Railways logo. This advertisement encapsulates the entire narrative being advanced by the Canadian state regarding immigration and the place of farmers within Canada. The man, appearing vaguely paternalistic, is resting his hands on the top of the illustration, claiming ownership over the bucolic scene presented to the viewer. The scene itself

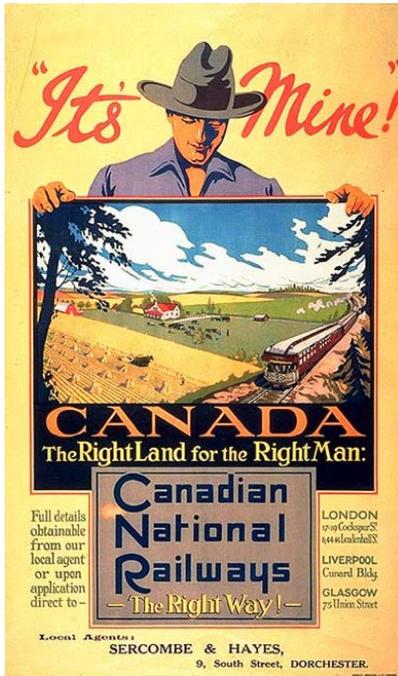


Figure 5

³⁵ “White Star Line. Canada’s Call to Women,” Image. Hosted at The Archives Society of Alberta. Web. Retrieved from <https://albertaonrecord.ca/is-glen-1346>. Accessed Dec 6 2017.

³⁶ “It’s Mine! Canada,” Image. Hosted at The Archives Society of Alberta. Web. Retrieved from <https://albertaonrecord.ca/is-glen-1338>. Accessed Dec 6 2017.

features an idealized, picturesque depiction of agriculture on the Prairies, offering an equivalence between freedom, farming, and ownership calculated to appeal to European emigres. The train crossing through the illustration also directly references the importance of the Canadian Pacific Railway—one of the pillars of Macdonald's nation-building platform—within the lives of Canadian farmers. Additionally, the subheading speaks volumes about the nation-building narrative and its implicit exclusions: the *right* land, for the *right* man. The “right man,” in this context, can be interpreted as the white, agrarian, civilized immigrant, rather than the Indigenous peoples who can rightfully claim the land as theirs.

Conceptions of Property Ownership, the Environment, and Agriculture

Sunera Thobani has argued that historical conceptions of Canadian nationhood are highly romanticised. She explains that “the foundational narrative of Canadian nationhood is a romance of pioneering adventure, of wild lands and savage peoples, of discovery and enterprise, of the overcoming of adversity through sheer perseverance and ingenuity.”³⁷ The advertisements produced by Sifton and his Department of the Interior, exemplified by the four posters, presented an image of immigration and settlement on the Prairies. These portrayals often involve a romanticism of the ‘empty’ Canadian landscape and of the ‘untouched’ wilderness. According to this narrative, the Canadian landscape once existed in a pure and untouched state, and only through the efforts of homesteaders could that wilderness be tamed and rendered prosperous. In explanation, Paul Josephson has advanced that such narratives reflected humankind's relationship to nature from the sixteenth century

³⁷ Sunera Thobani, *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), p. 33.

onward as highly influenced by a 'science-based' or 'mechanistic' view of the environment.³⁸ For him,

...rulers, policy-makers, and businesspeople, continued to act as if nature could be controlled mechanically, its rivers and lakes altered by dams or locks or dredged to operate in a predictable, orderly fashion; its forests planted in neat rows as required by military or the housing and paper industries; its wetlands drained and the reclaimed land made "more perfect" than God had intended, in that it had been put to productive use.³⁹

This perspective borrows greatly from the works of John Locke and his concept of labour and property. But Josephson's comments also suggest that agriculture and the process of resource extraction played a significant and important role within this mechanistic paradigm. Not only did agriculture produce the food and resources needed to feed and support a growing country, it also served as a keystone of Canada's productive development itself. Indeed, narratives about agriculture and its importance vis-a-vis Canadian nationhood continue to shape modern discourse.

Modern Agriculture: Prominence and Economic Impact

Agriculture has always been an important part of Canada's economy. Historically, resource development and staples such as lumber, fish, and fur drove economic development through foreign exports.⁴⁰ Amongst these, agriculture continues to be one of the

³⁸ Paul R. Josephson, *Resources under regimes: Technology, Environment, and the State*, (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 8.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁴⁰ Innis, quoted in Aguiar, Luis, and Tina Marten. "Shimmering White Kelowna and the Examination of Painless White Privilege," in *Rethinking the Great White North*, ed. Kobayashi, A., Cameron, L. & A. Baldwin. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), p. 129.

most important contributors to the economy. In 2013, the Canadian agriculture and agri-food system generated \$106.9 billion, accounting for 6.7% of Canada's gross domestic product (GDP).⁴¹ Canada was the world's fifth-largest exporter of agricultural products in the same year.⁴² In the twenty-first century, Canada's agricultural industry is highly industrialized, technologically advanced, and capital-intensive.⁴³ Farms are increasingly becoming large-scale operations, and the number of individual farm-owners is decreasing while the industry's contribution to the GDP has increased.⁴⁴⁴⁵

Recently the agriculture industry has faced criticism regarding the environmental impact of agricultural practices. Ron Wimberley argues that agriculture, to a far greater extent than other industries, faces public scrutiny regarding environmental stewardship, food safety, and the industry subsidies received from government programs.⁴⁶ Moreover, an increasing amount of evidence points to industrial agriculture and livestock operations having a significant impact on the environment.⁴⁷ These issues have gained a great deal of media attention and sparked a tremendous amount of conversation and criticism: from *TIME Magazine's* article "The triple

⁴¹ Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, "An Overview of the Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food System 2015." Web.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Grace Skogstad, "The Two Faces of Canadian Agriculture in a Post-Staples Economy," in *Canadian Political Science Review*1, no. 1 (2007): 26.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, "An Overview of the Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food System 2015." Web.

⁴⁶ Ron Wimberley, *The Social Risks of Agriculture: Americans Speak Out on Food, Farming, and the Environment* (Westport: Praeger, 2002), p. 1-2.

⁴⁷ Jason Clay, *World Agriculture and the Environment: a Commodity-by-Commodity Guide to Impacts and Practices* (Washington: Island Press, 2004), p. 1.

whopper environmental impact of global meat production”⁴⁸ to documentaries such as *Food Inc.* and *Cowspiracy*.⁴⁹ Now more than ever, the agricultural industry is facing increased attention from the public regarding the impact of their practices. This trend is usefully compared with historical context and narratives of Canadian agriculture, since current conceptions of humankind’s relationship with technology and the natural world are both similar and different from historical views of the same. In Sifton’s advertisements, and within the settlement narrative in general, nature was portrayed as something to be tamed and subordinated. This was conveyed in numerous ways, including through referencing colonial and patriarchal concepts of ‘virgin land,’ as in Figure 2, and through the inclusion of enticing imagery that portrayed bucolic harvest scenes such as Figures 3 and 4. Locke’s view of property and labour, which explicitly asserted humankind’s dominion over nature, was also very influential in shaping the language around settlement and agriculture. A mechanistic conception of the environment dominated humankind’s relationship to nature.⁵⁰ These factors helped contribute to the dominant position of agriculture within early Canadian nationalist narratives, which celebrated the role farmers played within the nation, particularly throughout the West.

Today, farmers are seen by many as anti-environmentalist and as active participants in the degradation of the Earth’s natural

⁴⁸ Brian Walsh, “The Triple Whopper Environmental Impact of Global Meat Production,” TIME

Magazine. Last modified Dec 16, 2013.

⁴⁹ M. Weiss, “Cowspiracy: Inspiration for a Fallen Vegan”, Huffington Post. Last modified Sept. 21, 2015.

⁵⁰ Paul R. Josephson, *Resources Under Regimes: Technology, Environment, and the State* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 8.

resources.⁵¹ The domination and subjugation of the land for industrial purposes is met with widespread criticism and suspicion, which is a marked contrast from earlier views regarding humankind's inherent right to use natural resources as they desired. Certainly, the environmental degradation caused by large-scale industrial farming is an incredibly important issue that merits the seriousness and urgency it has been receiving in the media. For farmers, the current criticisms of industrial agriculture represent more than a simple speaking point: these criticisms can be understood as a direct assault against their livelihoods.

Historical Narratives for Modern Times: The Role of “Ag More Than Ever”

In the face of increased criticism over the environmental impacts of corporate agriculture, several campaigns have sought to emphasize the importance of farming to those outside of the industry. One of the most prominent and well-organized of these is Ag More Than Ever, a multi-year initiative that seeks to “[improve] perceptions, [dispel] myths and [create] positive dialogue about Canadian ag.”⁵² Ag More Than Ever was launched in 2012 by Farm Credit Canada, a federal Crown corporation that provides loans and other financial services to farming operations across Canada.⁵³⁵⁴ As such, their mandate is closely tied to the promotion of the agricultural industry and its products. Ag More Than Ever's activities include social media

⁵¹ Ron Wimberley, *The Social Risks of Agriculture: Americans Speak Out on Food, Farming, and the Environment* (Westport: Praeger, 2002), p. 1-2.

⁵² “About Us,” Ag More Than Ever. Available from: <https://www.agriculturemorethanever.ca/about-us/> Accessed April 1, 2017. Web.

⁵³ “Agriculture More Than Ever Inspiring Producer-consumer Conversations.” *Farm Credit Canada*. Last modified Mar 10, 2015. Web.

⁵⁴ “About FCC,” *Farm Credit Canada*. Accessed April 1, 2017. Web.

campaigns, as well as outreach at agriculture conventions.⁵⁵ They encourage Canadian farmers to become ‘advocates’ and to promote farming by sharing advertising material and participating in their social media campaigns.⁵⁶

Read through the context of Western Canadian history, however, the Ag More Than Ever campaign is clearly utilizing historical narratives about the importance of agriculture in Canada’s national identity. These narratives seek to address criticism regarding industrial agriculture’s environmental impact. Like Sifton and the Department of the Interior’s advertisement campaigns, the Ag More Than Ever initiative produces images and posters. These can be analyzed to show that while Ag More Than Ever is operating under different circumstances than Clifford Sifton, they rely upon similar narratives regarding the role of agriculture within the Canadian national project.

Similar analyses of agriculture-related advertising campaigns are worthy of consideration here. Cairns, McPhail, Chevrier and Bucklaschuk have examined the Manitoba Pork Council’s “The Family Behind the Farm” advertisements, arguing these ads sought to grant a personalized, ‘friendly’ face to the hog farming industry.⁵⁷ They showed how “the campaign mobilizes pride in the family farm through heteronormative and racialized affects of intimacy, tradition, and intergenerational continuity.”⁵⁸ Through the Family Behind the Farm campaign and its advertisements, which affectively construct

⁵⁵ “About Us,” *Ag More Than Ever*, Available from: <https://www.agriculturemorethanever.ca/about-us/> Accessed April 1, 2017. Web.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Kate Cairns, Deborah McPhail, Claudine Chevrier, and Jill Bucklaschuk, “The Family Behind the Farm: Race and the Affective Geographies of Manitoba Pork Production,” *Antipode* 47, no. 5 (2015): 1184.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

hog farming as white, heterosexual, and wholesome, the Manitoban hog industry is distanced in the public eye from the environmental degradation and pollution that can be traced back to hog farming practices.⁵⁹ I argue that Ag More Than Ever functions similarly to the Family Behind the Farm campaign, while possessing several interesting features that are distinct from the Manitoba Pork Council's campaign.

Narratives in Action: “Ag More Than Ever”



Figure 6

The first image to consider, “Strong and Farmed,” (Figure 6) is relatively simple in composition, but contains an intriguing quote.⁶⁰ The banner reads, in bold letters against a red wooden backdrop, “True North, Strong and Farmed.” Not only is this tagline meant to be appealing, it explicitly reinforces the connection between farming and Canada by placing the word *farmed* directly into the national anthem. In the context of nation-building, anthems occupy a prominent place in national identities, and are also immediately

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ “Untitled,” [Strong and Farmed?] Image. *Ag More Than Ever*, retrieved from https://www.agriculturemorethanever.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/35118_E__5.jpg. Accessed Dec 5 2017. Reproduced with permission from Ag More Than Ever.

recognizable by almost all of a nation's citizens. This image explicitly ties farming to Canadian patriotism.

The second image of interest, "Myths to Rest," (Figure 7) consists of a stock photograph of a tractor in a lush green field.⁶¹ The



Figure 7

foreground of the graphic consists of a red text box, which contains a quote from one of Ag More Than Ever's 'agvocates.' The quote reads: "**We need to connect with the consumer** and talk to them about how their food is produced **so we can put some myths to rest.**" This image directly references criticisms about the agricultural industry. The

ad frames farmers as the bearers of knowledge who have the power to connect with non-farmers and correct the 'myths' surrounding agriculture. However, the background image in this advertisement is also revealing. The tractor depicted in advertisement is a sprayer, used to apply pesticides to crops. As a result, this message implicitly addresses myths surrounding pesticides by reinforcing the position held by most farmers involved in industrial agriculture that the

⁶¹ "Untitled," [Myths to Rest?] Image. *Ag More Than Ever*. Retrieved from https://www.agriculturemorethanever.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/38107-E-Agvocate-Quote-B2_Sprayer_1000x1000.jpg. Accessed Dec 5 2017. Reproduced with permission from Ag More Than Ever.

modification and management of nature to make it more productive is a good thing.

In another advertisement, “My Legacy,” a father and son kneel in a field, examining something (Figure 8).⁶² Beside them, a wall of text reads: “The land is my *lifestyle* and my *livelihood*, but it’s also my *legacy*”. The son,

who appears to be between the ages of four and six, is wearing a plaid shirt and brown overalls—apparently traditional farmer attire. This advertisement, which aims to present a normal farm family, in actuality subtly reinforces patriarchal and heterosexual values within agriculture. While no women are present in

this advertisement, and its content is different than “Canada’s Call to Women” (Figure 3), it still relies upon gendered conceptions of farm work.” Little contends that the heterosexual family occupies a central place within rural narratives partly because it is closely linked

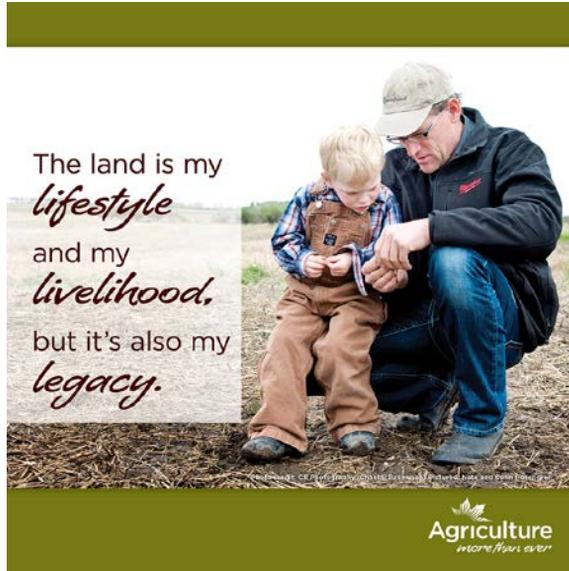


Figure 8

⁶² “Untitled,” [My Legacy?] Image. *Ag More Than Ever*. Retrieved from https://www.agriculturemorethanever.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/35118_E_3.jpg Accessed Dec 5 2017. Reproduced with permission from Ag More Than Ever.

to the continuity of rural communities.⁶³ The traditional gender roles depicted in Ag More Than Ever's image, along with the fact that it includes a young child already acting—and dressing—like a real farmer, suggest that agricultural narratives remain primarily heteronormative. This depiction of agriculture positions white Europeans as being intrinsically tied to the land, completely obscuring Indigenous views of nature and the environment.

The “Ag More Than Ever” Ad Campaign

Returning to “Sky, Water, Land” (Figure 1) reveals more about the narratives underpinning Ag More Than Ever's campaign. The background of the image consists of different photographs of natural landscapes, spliced together in an aesthetically pleasing arrangement. Upon initial observation, this appears to be another message indicating that farmers are good stewards and are invested in the environment, contrary to public perception. However, it also blatantly reinforces historical narratives about land and land ownership in Canada. By advancing the idea that the entirety of nature—sky, water and land—both belongs to farmers and is their responsibility to protect, this advertisement reinforces the *terra nullius* doctrine that was used to justify European colonialism and the injustices perpetrated against Indigenous peoples in the name of progress and settlement. With this example, we can see how familiar historical concepts of land, settlement, and agriculture have evolved to fit the twenty-first century within the Ag More Than Ever campaign.

Ag More Than Ever's ad campaigns utilize several different themes and concepts that can be traced back to historical narratives about agriculture and land ownership. Yet while Sifton's advertisements sought to draw ‘desirable’ European immigrants to Canada, Ag More

⁶³ J. Little, “‘Riding the Rural Love Train’: Heterosexuality and the Rural Community,” *Sociologia Ruralis* 43, no. 4 (2003): 409.

Than Ever's advertisements take place in a context where Canadian property relations and agricultural land ownership are relatively solidified. As a result, in the Ag More Than Ever campaign the narrative has evolved and changed to its current context and new audience, while still maintaining several themes of Sifton's original advertisements. Despite the statements from Ag More Than Ever stating that their goal is to improve perceptions of Canadian agriculture,⁶⁴ ostensibly to those not involved in the agriculture industry, the main audience of this campaign are farmers themselves. This advertising campaign is thus a form of validating the beliefs of Canadian farmers in a time where increasing amounts of scrutiny are levelled at Canadian agriculture.

As a state-run Crown corporation, Farm Credit Canada aims to reinforce a narrative where Canadian nationhood is equated with the European agricultural settlement regime. Farm Credit Canada's primary function is to grant loans to farmers, and so they have a defined interest in the continued success of Canadian agriculture. Confidence in the agricultural industry results in more potential risks and capital ventures undertaken by farmers, which may increase the number of farmers seeking loans and the overall size of loans. Yet increased scrutiny of the Canadian agricultural industry and pressure from the wider public regarding farmers' environmental practices has led to chilling effect on the industry. As industrial farming practices come under increasing levels of criticism from everyday Canadians, state enterprises like Farm Credit Canada have engaged in promotional efforts like Ag More Than Ever in the interest of ensuring the continued stability of the agricultural industry and the confidence of farmers in their livelihoods.

⁶⁴ "About Us," *Ag More Than Ever*. Available from: <https://www.agriculturemorethanever.ca/about-us/> Accessed April 1, 2017. Web.

Farmers, like any other group, are deeply invested in the narratives and mythologies that perpetuate and validate their existence and actions. A greater understanding of the root causes of global warming has illuminated the environmental challenges posed by industrial agriculture, which while important can also be perceived by farmers as a threat to their traditional livelihoods. By reinforcing land ownership and agriculture as inherently Canadian, the Ag More Than Ever campaign draws upon historical conceptions of homesteading and nation-building to reassure Canadian farmers that their livelihoods and identities as environmental stewards are valid and inextricable from the Canadian nation.

Conclusion

The agricultural industry constitutes a significant part of Canada's history and economy. Farming and land ownership were one method the Canadian state could conquer the untamed wilderness and consciously engage in nation-building through populating Canadian territory. Subsequent narratives about agriculture and homesteading romanticize the past while obscuring the injustices perpetuated against racialized bodies throughout Canadian history. It is important to recognize these historical stories about Canada's origins are carefully constructed narratives that rely upon and camouflage systemic forms of disenfranchisement.

My analysis of the Ag more than Ever Campaign shows that continuing to interrogate and analyze these narratives is an important political project. Current narratives attempt to promote Canadian farmers as stewards of the environment, but they do not acknowledge the environmental degradation caused by industrial farming. Most egregious of all, these advertisements completely obscure any potential conversations that could occur between farmers, Indigenous communities, and the wider Canadian population regarding practical, holistic, and systemic solutions to our current global environmental crisis. We are at a tipping point in

history, and the choices we make as a society today will have innumerable effects on our environment's future trajectory. At this moment, there has never been a greater need for a public conversation regarding the importance of meeting society's needs while ensuring our environment is protected for generations to come.

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