

2

Reading regenerative vegetable farming for difference

Kerry Woodward

A story about agriculture and capitalism many of us are now familiar with begins with the enclosure of commons in Europe by the nobility and Church. Peasants who had lived with some freedom and ownership over the means of production were locked into servitude, they lost the means of production and the ability to grow food for themselves and their families, while surplus extraction and taxation became significantly easier for the rent-seeking aristocracy and clergy (Hickel, 2021). People in the majority world soon found themselves tied into the insatiable march for land and agriculture from wealthy elites in Europe. Colonial conquests violently extracted agricultural surplus and land from colonised peoples and territories to feed consumers in Europe, and to build colonial wealth (Bellamy Foster, 2016). For food, this meant products such as sugar, tea, and coffee, but also tobacco and cotton for the burgeoning working classes in industrial cities. As part of making territories legible so that they could be controlled and taxed, states undertook to radically simplify a range of socio-economic and ecological processes. Agriculture was standardised and simplified through land consolidation and monocropping (Scott, 1999). This approach to farming lent itself to capture for wealth accumulation and degraded subsistence farming underpinned by disparate local knowledges. Indeed, for centuries, capitalist food production, organised around extracting surplus value from workers and from the land, has continued to displace subsistence agriculture across the globe (Bello, 2009).

In the 20th century, the crystallisation of a globalised food system has been characterised by agricultural liberalisation, intellectual property rights, expanding gene revolution technologies, increasing industrial production, land grabbing, and the development of corporate agribusiness monopolies (Holt Giménez & Shattuck, 2011; McMichael, 2012). The global food system specialises in producing commodities. As a commodity, food's primary attribute is price (or its profitability), and the key aim of food production is to sell more in order to make more profit (Magdoff, 2012). Profitability is also affected by smaller margins between the cost of production and the market price of produce. This, in turn, means that corporate actors are implicated in demanding ever cheaper food, which can come at the cost of workers' rights, lower food quality, and environmental degradation.

It is difficult to deny that this story holds up to scrutiny. We only need to look at the extent of land grabs, the dominance that a handful of agribusinesses have over food provisioning across the world, the relentless deforestation to grow more commodity crops for feed, food and industry, or the role that commodity price speculation plays in destabilizing food prices locally in many parts of the world, making basic foodstuffs out of reach for millions.

This story rings true in the Australian context. Indigenous peoples were murdered and displaced, the Country they lived on was taken and parcelled out to or squatted by settlers to raise sheep for wool, and later on wheat, sugar and other grain crops (Bromby, 1989). Today, large farms account for the most market share, as well as productivity gains (narrowly defined in yields and income) in Australia (Jackson et al., 2018). Large farms have increased in number over the past few decades, and their share of output and land has increased even more (Jackson et al., 2018). The increasing corporatisation of farming in Australia has been driven by government policies that favour market solutions and deregulation (Botterill, 2016; Lawrence et al., 2013). While small and medium farms are disappearing, food production and supply chains are increasingly concentrated too. For instance, supermarkets have significant control over food distribution being the chief markets for food sales. Just two supermarket chains account for almost two-thirds of the grocery and food market in Australia (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023).

The chief concern in this story is that capitalist modes of knowing, being and doing drive farming practices that contribute to several planetary and human crises, such as climate change, deforestation, wildlife extinction, and water pollution. The story implores us to look to farming and food provisioning that operate beyond the logic of capitalism.

Telling other tales of agriculture

The evidence for the dominance of capitalist ways of knowing, being and doing agriculture is compelling. Yet, this story is not the whole picture, it does not account for the range of farming and food provisioning practices that are non-capitalist, or perhaps alter-capitalist (e.g. Cameron and Wright, 2014; Goodman et al., 2013; Nelson and Edwards, 2021). There are fewer official data on the extent of non-capitalist food provisioning in Australia than there are on formal, capitalist modes of farming. For instance, the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences are predominantly concerned with data on farm businesses that have agricultural operations of \$40,000 or more. This is no doubt linked to the capitalocentrism of both economic policy and food systems, and reflects an ongoing desire to maximise exports and taxes. Capitalocentrism refers to the way in which we relate all human economic activities to capitalism, they are either capitalist, or they are subordinate to, or in the orbit of capitalism (Gibson-Graham, 1996). In fact, the story that this chapter begins with is a capitalocentric tale, albeit a tale that is critical of capitalism.

A key strand that runs through capitalocentric narratives of farming is that farming is a human enterprise where profits and calories reign supreme. Non-humans, or earth-kin¹, are only acknowledged in as far as they contribute to or disrupt growing. Those that contribute to growing food are commodified or forced into a kind of slavery, those that disrupt food growing are maligned, managed or killed. Yet, earth-kin are integral to farming, without their labour and care, humans would simply not have anything to eat. Indeed, recognition of the agency of non-humans, both animate and inanimate has long been recognised in cultures around the world—such as Aboriginal cultures in Australia (Bawaka Country et al., 2015; Milroy & Milroy, 2008), where this research took place. In more recent times, scholars in science and technology and new-materialist studies have also given attention to the liveliness of things (e.g. Barad 2007, Latour 2007, Bennet 2010).

Objects, animals, microbes, plants and minerals are not simply inert and waiting to be acted upon by humans, they do things in the world, they act on and with others. In farming, tools allow a range of practices to take place, or assemblages to form. For instance, sowing one thousand hectares of wheat would not be possible without a tractor, in this sense the tractor allows a particular form of farming to exist. Buying fresh mangoes in southern or northern cities would not be possible without a range of machines and objects, such as trucks, diesel and boxes. Integrated pest management is not possible without parasitic wasps, hoverflies or ladybugs. Yet at the same time,

¹ Karulkiyalu Country et al. (2021, p. 216) use Earth-kin to account for everything they share Country with including “rocks, plants, waterways, animals, fire, weather, seasons, sun, moon, and stars”. Inspired by Val Plumwood's notion of earth others, Karulkiyalu Country et al.'s use of earth-kin highlights connection rather than otherness. Country is an Aboriginal English word to speak of the connection, interdependence, liveliness and agency of the places that we inhabit (Bawaka Country et al., 2015). In research undertaken with Country, some researchers include that Country as a co-author. Such a move is an acknowledgement of the agency of Country, and the ways in which it is bound up in the research's becoming.

it is also not possible without mites, thrips or aphids. This last example points to the wanted and unwanted—by humans at least—nature of earth-kin. Humans may do their best to control more-than-human worlds, but we are ultimately only one part of the lively worlds we inhabit, though we are a part that has a significant impact (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017).

Farming can also be seen as performative. Farming is never given but is always in the process of being made by the intra-action of various constitutive agencies. Barad's (2007) account of performativity holds that worlds are made by the iterative intra-action of entanglements of both material (human and not) agencies and semiotic forces such as discourse, language and representation. Material-semiotic agencies create the worlds they inhabit—there are no given entities or identities that beget their expression. Following this logic, farming can be seen to occur at the interface of diverse more-than-human agencies coming together.

Bringing together the notion of capitalocentrism and plantations, Savinotko (Hyvärinen, 2020)² uses the phrase plantationocentrism to highlight the dominance of plantations in food production and the way in which other forms of food production are marginalised or rendered invisible. Most significantly for this chapter, in their work they show how mushroom foraging (a practice that is marginal to plantation production) cannot be separated from plantations; in fact, it is within the plantations that mushroom foraging occurs. Thus, plantation and subsistence, capitalist and non-capitalist are entangled. This is very much the story for many non-capitalist farming practices, they may endeavour to be other than capitalist but must also acquiesce in many ways to always being with capitalist modes of knowing, being and doing. Plantationocentric or capitalocentric narratives of farming can limit transformative possibilities by delegitimising non-capitalist ways of farming, or by failing to see possibilities in farm enterprises supposed to be exclusively capitalist.

This chapter looks beyond lifeless capitalocentric visions of farming to tell another tale. The chapter not only adds to the literature on documenting the diverse economic practices that sustain farming, but also thinks onto-epistemically about farming in a way that challenges the representational and human-centred nature of farming, and draws out the ways in which a single enterprise is un/made of more-than-capitalist and more-than-human entanglements.

Reading for ontological and economic difference on Morning Valley Farm

In reading for economic difference (Gibson-Graham, 2014, 2020) in my fieldwork on a regenerative vegetable farm in Narrm/Melbourne, I position vegetable farming as a more-than-capitalist and more-than-human endeavour, and show how the farmers

² Pieta Savinotko has changed their surname since the publication of this article.

negotiate living with capitalism, while also enacting values based on conviviality, mutuality and care for the world they live with.

The farm, Morning Valley, is a regenerative vegetable farm on the peri-urban fringe of Narm/Melbourne. The farm produces a wide range of vegetables that are sold to restaurants, small supermarkets and at a farmer's market. Human labour and hand tools are opted for over heavy machinery—though there is a tractor, no pesticides or herbicides are used, and only limited organic fertilisers and soil conditioners are used, such as feather meal and lime. An important ethical consideration underpinning the farm is to limit the impact of farming on the habitat of which it is part, this ethic has attracted human workers with a similar outlook.

This chapter draws on ethnographic fieldwork that took place over nine months between August 2021 and May 2022. I worked at the farm one day per week for thirteen weeks and conducted interviews with ten human farmers who had a range of experience on the farm, including the owner, farm staff, interns and volunteers. Drawing on these participant observations and interviews, I use Vincent and Feola's (2020) framework for recognising capitalist diversity in agri-food systems (which builds on the work of Gibson-Graham) to highlight the more-than-capitalist and more-than-human nature of the farm. Vincent and Feola's framework adds ontological considerations ('time', 'space', 'human nature' and 'logic of relation') as well as relations to the state ('legitimation' and 'participation') to Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healey's (2013) economic relations framework (which includes 'transactions', 'enterprise', 'labour', 'finance', 'property'). The addition of ontological considerations in reading for capitalist diversity helps to reveal the more-than-human nature of farming at Morning Valley. Time and space are mediated by, intervened in and co-created by tools, objects, animals, soils and climate. Human nature and logic of relation centre on the relationships between humans and earth-kin, and whether humans dominate or exploit the world around them based on a separation and hierarchy between humans and earth-kin.

Human nature

A longstanding and powerful explanation of human nature is that humans are utility maximisers, driven by individual self-interest (Smith, 1776). This view is linked to capitalist modes of being and doing, and has been contrasted with caring, cooperative, and reciprocal existences (Tronto, 2017). The 'human nature' component of the framework considers human values and actions on Morning Valley. At Morning Valley there were many examples of values grounded in cooperation, reciprocation and care for one another, both from humans and earth-kin. For instance, listening to each other's problems and 'looking out for one another', cooking morning tea and lunch for one another, and supporting each other to complete farming tasks.

The farm was also underpinned by an ethic of sufficiency rather than expansion and accumulation. The owner of the farm, Basil, was happy with the size of the farm as it was. Basil did not want to grow bigger, but did want to be better or more efficient at what they were already doing on the farm. Basil said he would be happy with an

income of \$50,000–\$60,000 annually—which was in line with the median income in Australia (ABS 2019), and he was optimistic about achieving this goal.

Similarly, paid staff acknowledged that they did not work at the farm for the income they earned, and they knew they could get more money doing something else (and some in fact had left higher paid careers to be at the farm). Instead, they pointed to and valued the non-monetary benefits of working at the farm, including conviviality, being outdoors, and working towards something they believed in—farming in a way that minimises its impact on the world around it, while producing nutritious and delicious vegetables.

Morning Valley farmers saw themselves as having concern for the environment, climate change, plastic use, waste, soil health, quality of vegetables, and the animals and insects that also lived in the bounds of the farm. Human farmers were aligned with ‘alternative’ food systems, and their values were a testament to that. At times, they contrasted themselves and the practices on Morning Valley with conventional farming that was seen to be overly focused on self-interest and profiteering at the expense of the environment and food quality. The superior morality of alternative food systems was at times taken as given. For example, I was told by one farm worker, “you can't buy your vegetables from the supermarket” (Juniper, Field Notes, 2021).

Yet at the same time, some action was driven by efficiency and a desire to profit, highlighting that the farm needed to make money in order to exist given the hegemony of capitalist economic logic the farm operated alongside. Basil opined that “everything has to pay its way” (Basil, Interview, 2021). For instance, he felt that if you want to plant native species as habitat for birds and insects then you would look to cut the flowers and sell them, or if they wanted to beautify the farm, they would then look to run farm tours.

Another common materialisation of the need to be efficient was the practice of minimising walking around the farm. Farmers endeavoured to have all the equipment they needed for their tasks with them so they would not have to walk back to the shed. It was acknowledged that too much walking could eat into the productive labour of human farmers. At times, farmers acknowledged that they could not always care or cooperate with insects and animals, and that they were sometimes killed because they got in the way of human work—which was to produce vegetables to sell. As a farm staff member, Lily admitted, “I guess when I'm working, I have to be efficient, I can't care about each individual being. Which is sad” (Lily, Interview, 2021). Snails and worms were two beings that could find themselves in the way of people's interests. Snails were crushed underfoot or washed down the drain, worms could be sliced by hori hori knives or hoes.

The diverse subjectivities on display at Morning Valley may be inseparable. Drawing on Marcel Mauss, Alain Caille (2013) argues people act out of self-interest, but are also driven by obligation, creativity, and lovingness—self-interest is just one aspect of social relations. An interesting example of the trouble with siloing motives at Morning Valley could be seen in ‘giving love’ to vegetable beds, which could be understood as providing care for soil and vegetables. However, care was also being

provided to increase planting space, to produce more vegetables which leads to profits—so, for profit maximising ends.

Ultimately, the farmers were balancing a desire to limit the destruction to or extraction from others required to grow vegetables, while still making a profit that allowed them to live in a world where money is important. Values and practice of being slow, local and convivial, sat alongside profitability and efficiency. As Ginger put it, it is possible to be “efficiently inefficient” (Ginger, Interview, 2021).

Logic of relation

It is difficult to separate human nature from the logic of relation. From a relational perspective, being in this world is being together. In other words, being in relation to other things, earth-kin, or people, is fundamentally part of our nature. Everything that occurred on Morning Valley was about being in relation. Slugs, snails or birds were never spoken about without their relation to the vegetables that were growing, or human aesthetic perspectives. Tools were always interacting with plants, animals and humans. Fences were only invoked in relation to rabbits, kangaroos or gallina; and hori hori knives intertwined with talk about soil or unwanted plants. Gravel bags did not exist without tarps, nor did tarps exist without weeds and light. This irreducible ecology of interdependence was central to farming at Morning Valley.

Agencies come together or interact in diverse ways; for instance, they might compete, complement or conflict with one another (Mol, 2010). These relationships can be also intertwined with domination or exclusion (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). The logic of relation refers to how we are related, whether relationships are hierarchical, involve domination, or recognise interdependence with earth-kin (Vincent & Feola, 2020).

At Morning Valley, interdependence between humans and earth-kin was practiced and recognised at times. Concern for soil biology and rebuilding soils depleted of organic matter could be seen in part as a recognition of the work that soil biology and chemistry did in producing food, and in contributing to a safe climate via carbon sequestration. Plants, insects and soil microbiology were afforded space to live and at times flourish through not tilling soils, not using herbicides or any chemical pesticides, planting native species, and allowing weeds to grow in areas not used for vegetable growing. Similarly, the reduction of industrial inputs and shift towards working *with* ecosystems indicates a move away from an extractivist mindset towards an acceptance of the interconnectedness between humans, earth-kin and the physical, biological and chemical processes of the planet. Human farmers often spoke about and acted respectfully towards earth-kin. Such as being impressed by a ‘clever heron’ that always knew the right time to show up for an easy feed, or relocating snails from vegetable beds instead of killing them. However, interdependence with earth-kin did not always mean happy mutuality. Farming inevitably involves killing, who or what gets to survive and who or what does not is a decision largely made by human farmers in the farming methods and tools they use, as well as the pressure to harvest a saleable crop within certain timeframes.

As already mentioned, if snails, slugs, or cabbage moth larvae impacted the Morning Valley's profitability too much they would be killed. Some animals were seen as interlopers on the farm, such as the ducks that ate seedlings instead of insects, while other insects scared or repulsed human farmers, such as spiders and slugs. During transplanting or weeding worms were killed by hori hori knives, and weeds were pulled by hand or cut with hoe blades or a string grass trimmer.

Weed and pest management illuminate the way that human farmers control, kill or care for earth-kin. According to Basil, the diversity at Morning Valley protected against pest concerns. Pests were always there, Basil said, but they were not necessarily problematic. Basil had noticed over the years that pests go for weak or sick plants, while the vigorous, healthy and saleable plants (or parts of plants) were often left alone. Still, human farmers occasionally used iron to control and kill snails, while Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*—a biological pesticide) has been used to control and kill caterpillars on brassicas early in the season. Weed management was also driven by a need to control. Couch grass, for instance, was perhaps the most maligned plant on the farm. The grass grows rhizomatically underground, its roots spread deep into the soil and were difficult to remove, requiring significant manual labour.

Some insects, animals, bacteria and fungi were very much welcomed on the farm such as frogs, ducks that ate snails, lacewings, ladybugs, mycorrhiza and rhizobium. Similarly, in some instances plants that would be weeds in one place, were not seen in the same way in another place. Grasses on access tracks were useful for providing habitat for beneficial insects and ensuring the soil did not erode or bake under the sun; these same species of grass in a vegetable bed were unwanted. What is important here is whether the plants were harmful or not to production or to the local ecosystem. For instance, gallina (a sprawling ground plant) had to be removed from wire fences as it slowly pulled the fences down, which might then need to be replaced or repaired. At the same time, native grasses growing along the same fence line were allowed to live as they “aren't doing any harm” (Ginger, Field Notes, 2021).

The farming tools that were used mediated the kind of relationships humans had with earth-kin. For instance, the grass trimmer disconnected humans somewhat from the soil, from plants and insects and from other human workers; farmers had to wear ear-muffs, a head-net and glasses when using it. Moreover, it was more indiscriminate in its killing than hands or hori hori knives. Similarly, the tractor (which had been mostly relegated to use as an oversize wheelbarrow on account of the no-till farming) destroyed soil structure and made it harder for some microbiology to live. This is compared to stirrup hoes, double wheel hoes and hori hori knives which were less invasive and destructive to soil structure and health.

Often the interdependence between human farmers was recognised at Morning Valley and manifested in non-hierarchical convivial relations. The farmers at Morning Valley cooperated, reciprocated and asked each other's opinions about how tasks ought to be completed and whether they need help. They took turns in completing different roles on the farm, such as being in charge of particular crops, or being in charge of packing, organising and delivering vegetables. They also took turns cooking

morning tea and lunch for each other. Decision-making was somewhat deliberative. Farmers said things such as “we decided to do something this way” (Field Notes, 2021) as opposed to “I decided that we should do this” Volunteers (who came to work on the farm) were asked what they thought about a particular strategy or approach to a task, and Basil asked for input from others about intercropping. Human farmers at Morning Valley often listened and asked questions instead of, or at least before, telling others what to do.

Still, hierarchical relations also existed as some farmers had more experience, skills and knowledge, worked more often, or were more invested in the farm. The ultimate decisions about the farm operations were made by Basil—each morning he provided the other human farmers with the tasks they would be doing for the day; there was also an assistant manager who helped manage the farm. Basil checked how people were going with the tasks, this could be for seeing if there were any questions alongside ‘checking up’. When volunteers came to the farm, paid staff were responsible for overseeing them and providing direction, for instance by testing out the tools before giving them over to volunteers to use or providing demonstrations of how to use tools or how to complete tasks. Some level of hierarchy was necessary for the smooth functioning and profitability of the farm.

Significantly, whether or not interdependence was recognised, interdependence was undeniable. Humans had to negotiate with earth-kin and each other on the farm—whether that was changing how they did a task because a vegetable had grown too large, or because a control method did not work, or because a broken-down tractor had forced a change in how tasks could be done.

Time and space

Time and space can be seen as socio-material constructions, rather than given constants (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, p. 175). At Morning Valley, time and space were mediated and constructed by the human farmers’ values and stories, the tools and methods employed in farming, the vegetables grown, weeds and pests, soil structure, weather, and climate.

Farming practices and methods at Morning Valley slowed time, and worked within seasonal cycles, contrasting with capitalist temporalities. Slow time was achieved through the use of human labour and hand tools. For instance, hori hori knives or hand weeding were much slower than tilling with a tractor. This can be seen as making time to care for the lives of earth-kin on the farm, particularly those that were part of soils (Krzywoszynska, 2019; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2015). The use of hand tools also opened space for convivial relations between farmers by allowing conversation, as well as space for mindfulness.

Basil explained that Morning Valley did not have a ‘perennial summer’ approach to growing vegetables, an approach which is driven by supermarket and consumer expectations of having the same range of vegetables available year-round. The farm operated in line with the seasons, rather than attempting to transcend or extend seasons using greenhouses or polytunnels. However, succession planting was used

as a way to ensure an extended period of crop maturation. On the other hand, time and space were often organised to maximise productivity, in line with capitalist or productivist temporalities (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2015). Farmers tried to organise themselves so they did not have to spend too much time walking around the farm. This was seen as a ‘waste’ of time; time that could have been used in more productive ways. As Ginger explained, “you’re not meant to walk all over the place, you’re meant to be efficient” (Ginger, Interview, 2021). Farmers told stories of where they wasted time on doing tasks the wrong way and had to divert labour from other tasks. Again, this was linked to a concern that they could have used the time more productively. There were examples of farming practices that aimed to maximise the use of space and extend time. For instance, intercropping was used to maximise space and linked to productivity and profitability—getting the most out of the vegetable beds. Moreover, the farmers used a cool room, a refrigerated truck and (limited and compostable) packaging was used to extend the shelf life of vegetables.

Ultimately, time and space were understood and performed along capitalist and non-capitalist lines. This was due to the reality that the farm was part of broader capitalist networks. Human farmers needed to be productive to ensure sufficient revenue to cover production costs as well as the wages that sustained their lives. Thus, human farmers were conscious of ‘wasting time’ and being efficient in their labouring. Yet at the same time, Basil had chosen to stay small and local, to practice no-till farming and use a range of hand tools on the farm. This approach deliberately slowed down the work, contradicting productivist farming logics, and stemmed from an ethical commitment to minimise the farm’s environmental impact. Interestingly, human farmers endeavoured to work within these ethical commitments *and* to maximise productivity through practices that cared for earth-kin survival and made productive use of space, such as intercropping.

Relationship with the state, regulation and legitimisation

In many ways, Morning Valley farmers desired to escape capitalist modes of being, yet the farm was constantly stratified by the state and capitalist economic relations. Desire, at some level, to oppose ‘conventional’ food practices was expressed by numerous people who work on the farm—as was wanting a future in which food provisioning was focused on community and sociality. However, these desires came up against the hard reality and acknowledgment that “the farm is operating within the capitalist economy and broken food system... we’re entrenched within that realm” (Basil, Interview, 2021). Such realities were, in part, constituted by the state via regulation and legitimisation, that support the maintenance of ‘free markets’, private property, and often view tax paying businesses that contribute to ‘jobs and growth’ as legitimate enterprises (Vincent & Feola, 2020).

Morning Valley was largely entangled or enmeshed in state regulations. Morning Valley maintained property rights, sold into ‘free markets’, and paid wages according to labour laws. Playing by the rules of the game allowed human farmers to make a living in a world heavily organised around money. It also allowed the farm to exist

over time in a place in which private property rights reign supreme. Concurrently, Morning Valley also participated in alternative capitalist regulation, notably via its organic certification. However, organic certification is unlikely to challenge the state as an alternative vision of regulation. Instead, certification can cede regulatory control to markets, where ethical behaviour is ascribed economic value (Guthman, 2007). Ultimately, certification can be understood as being about making capitalist farming practices better for the health of humans and environment, but certification does not challenge the status quo.

Morning Valley contributed to the ‘economy’ by paying taxes, employing people and paying wages, and producing goods to sell on the ‘free’ market. As such, the farm might be seen as legitimate from the perspective of a capitalist state. However, Basil suggested that small, independent farming is not supported enough by institutions or governments in Australia, and this has been a barrier to its proliferation (Basil, Interview, 2021). Indeed, in recent decades the approach from the Australian Government has been to push neoliberal export-oriented farming (Lawrence et al., 2013).

This perceived or real lack of support and government funding for small market farmers in and around Narrm/Melbourne can be seen as a lack of legitimisation. I mentioned to Basil that it might be interesting to document the diverse consequences and benefits of the farm enterprise to make a case for more funding for similar endeavours (much like the work of Dombroski et al. (2019) who accounted for diverse non-monetary benefits of an urban farm in Christchurch). Basil appeared interested but clarified that “it would have to be done properly, you couldn’t just say ‘it’s the lifestyle’” (Basil, Interview, 2021). This response suggests that attempts to legitimise ought to fit the expectations of the state, or the status quo. A convivial lifestyle is not sufficient to legitimise an enterprise; the enterprise must show that it is economically viable, and perhaps socially or environmentally responsible.

Ultimately, Morning Valley’s relationship with the state, its involvement in regulation and whether it is seen as a legitimate organisation testifies to its entanglement with capitalist modes of knowing, being and doing pushed by the Australian Government. This is despite a desire in many respects to farm in non- or post-capitalist ways.

Knowledge

There were a range of ways in which farmers gained skills and knowledge at Morning Valley. Often the origin of knowledge can be difficult to ascertain, it may come partly or entirely from private enterprise, research at public universities, or via agricultural extension—which can be enmeshed in capitalist modes of existence (Vincent & Feola, 2020), at the same time knowledge can be gained from practice and learning from one another. At Morning Valley, it was much clearer *how* farmers came to learn about farming and gained relevant skills, rather than *where* the knowledge was developed. Farmers learned about vegetable farming from books, podcasts, and online videos. This could be scientific knowledge or about farming practices, and was both paid, shared and open access. While information might have originally come from research

institutions or possibly even private enterprises, it was not necessarily capitalist in the way it was accessed and shared.

Farmers had undertaken formal TAFE (Technical and Further Education institutes) and university courses to upskill and build their farming knowledge, including horticulture, fencing, tractor and carpentry courses. At least one farmer paid for a series of online courses in market farming too. Learning from practice on the farm was a key source of knowledge for human farmers. This was through learning from each other, from repetition, and from being close and attentive to soil, weather, insects or plants. Basil said they were happy to learn and reflect and observe and interact while they worked. Several human farmers had undertaken an internship at Morning Valley where they learned intensively over a few months about vegetable farming.

Flora, a farm intern, felt that being out in all seasons, being able to touch, smell, and feel the plants and soil facilitated understanding or respect for soils, insects and plants. Adding to this, Lily believed that through weeding you could observe and learn about the soil, where it was different on the farm, why it might be different and how their farming practices affected soil. Interestingly, learning through observing and interacting directly with soil and plants was seen by Ginger as a better conduit for knowledge than learning through machines or technology. Ginger felt humans were more open to difference or possibility than machines, which can only tell you what you program them to tell you. For some, this practical learning was more accessible than learning from books: “you can always read about something, but I'm someone who really needs to see and do and that's how it probably sticks with me more than just reading” (Rosemary, Interview, 2021). Human farmers also gained knowledge about or relevant to vegetable farming from previous employment or volunteering, such as on other farms or in landscaping. While some farmers have had previous employers act as mentors for them.

Human farmers recognised the importance of agricultural research to inform their work, but also food networks more generally: “I think there's still lots of learning that can be done there for us. Yeah, we could be tuning into some more research and really following best practices and recording what we're doing and then observing what changes are being made” (Lily, Interview, 2022).

Significantly, knowledge about farming was not only seen as relevant for the farmers. Knowledge of farming, of what it takes to grow vegetables in a no-till system, and issues around food waste were seen to be important for non-farmers as well. Such knowledge, or perceived lack of knowledge, impacted what happened on the farm. Moreover, in some ways the farm played a role in educating non-farmers. Basil's communication with buyers about what is available, when, and the seasonal limits to growing vegetables might be seen as a form of knowledge dissemination, helping to educate buyers about the seasonality of food. Similarly, the weekly farmers' market acted as a site of consumer education too, as consumers asked questions about how the vegetables were grown.

Economic relations

There were numerous forms of labour on Morning Valley. There were several paid staff at the farm, though people also volunteered labour, worked as WOOFers (a program that connects people with farms to work and stay on, exchanging labour for food and accommodation), or as interns. Non-monetary forms of compensation included conviviality and friendships, vegetables, enjoyment of work, valuing work, and learning. Hosting WOOFers, volunteers and running an internship program were interesting strategies to overcome labour cost concerns. This revealed how the farm operated within the constraints of capitalist economic relations, and how non-capitalist labour relations were central to Morning Valley's ability to survive—which bears similarity to the way in which care labour has been central to the ability of capitalist economies to exist more broadly (Vogel, 1983).

The transactions that underpinned the farm were largely market transactions, the farm sold produce at a farmer's market, to restaurants, wholesalers, and some small organic supermarkets. Though the outlets they sold to could be seen as valuing more than mere profit or utility, environmental and health concerns also factored in the transactions. At the same time, alternative market transactions supported Morning Valley's operations too. For example, Ginger mentioned that "it is not all about exchanging money, Basil swaps things with people and you get things other ways" (Ginger, Interview, 2021).

The farm had been financed through personal savings, borrowing from family, and government grants, as well as support from the landholder. Thus, finance was drawn from a mix of alternative and non-capitalist relations. Interestingly, Basil told me that he could not get a loan from a bank to support the start-up of the farm and was forced to find some other forms of finance. The landlord assisted by offering reduced rent for the first 18 months of operation, to help the farm get on its feet. A win-win situation, as it helped the farm start up, and has also ensured a long-term tenant for the landlord.

Insecure access to land was seen to be one of the biggest barriers to farming, this is particularly a problem for peri-urban farming which faces incursions from residential development. Basil searched for land to lease using creative strategies, such as printing flyers and leaving them at cafes in regional towns. He ended up leasing land that had been used for organic vegetable farming previously. As such, the land had a water license to pump from the river next to the farm and already had infrastructure, such as irrigation and some washing and processing equipment.

As a private enterprise, decisions about how surplus was managed and put to use at Morning Valley appeared to be largely made by Basil. Unfortunately, there was limited information about how surplus was managed from observations and interviews.

Overall, farmers at Morning Valley practiced and embodied capitalist as well as alternative capitalist and non-capitalist ways of being and doing. Additionally, tools, machines, microbes, animals, soils, plants and climate were all inseparable from growing vegetables at Morning Valley. At times, this inseparability was recognised by human farmers, and there were also examples of where earth-kin were respected and

cared for by human farmers. Still, the relationships between farmers and earth-kin also took a pragmatic or utilitarian form.

Making farms beyond capitalism

Reading Morning Valley for ontological and economic difference helps us to move past capitalist ways of knowing and doing farming in at least three significant ways. First, by showing farms are made by more-than-capitalist economic relations. Second, revealing the ways that farms are made through the work of more-than-human entanglements. Third, showing that farms are always in the process of being un/made. These three insights contrast with narratives that see farms as predetermined, discrete, human-centred enterprises that are wholly or inevitably capitalist—accounts that can be termed capitalocentric or plantationocentric (Gibson-Graham, 1996; Hyvärinen, 2020).

Morning Valley was made via a diverse range of economic relations and practices, some of which were capitalist, and others that were not. Human farmers were paid a wage and sold vegetables in markets; they were at times motivated by a desire to be efficient, productive and profitable. At the same time, farmers cooperated, reciprocated and cared for one another's wellbeing and survival. This inventorying of the diverse relations and motivations that make Morning Valley is key to shifting attention from plantationocentric and capitalocentric visions of farming by highlighting the other-than-capitalist relations and practices that are already there.

Capitalist ways of farming are supported by, and support, human dominance over earth-kin, and make farming about making human desires of profit. As Morning Valley shows us, however, humans are not farming alone. The farm would not be possible without the work and support of a diverse range of agencies, such as the tools, soil, insects and plants documented in this chapter. Farming is the collective labour of human/earth-kin entanglements. Looking past the anthropocentrism and static ontologies linked to human/nature; animate/inanimate, and subject/object binaries reveals the complex and fluid entanglements that constitute farming, highlights the lively agencies that are involved in farming, and opens the door for ethical questions about who and what does or does not benefit from farming (as more agencies are acknowledged), and how farming can be more accountable to the lives and well-being of humans and earth-kin.

Thinking about farming as performative, as always in the process of being made and unmade, rather than seeing farms as static predetermined entities, helps us to move beyond plantationocentric and capitalocentric visions of farming. The farm cannot be accounted for by simply adding the various constitutive agencies together—such as soil, plants, humans, or water. Rather, it is work that occurs at the interface of the coming together of these agencies that produce the farm. This insight is significant as it illuminates that farms are made by agencies doing something together, which

means that things can be done differently and gives hope for taking up and working with the ways that Morning Valley was made by care, reciprocity, cooperation and sufficiency. Moreover, the performativity of farming allows for performative ethics, as opposed to a predetermined morality. A performative ethics works to shift our attention from what farms *are*, and what farming *should* look like, towards what farming *could* look like. Thus, by troubling the nature of Morning Valley as a static, discrete, human-centred business this chapter shows Morning Valley as a place where human and earth-kin farmers can work towards what farming could look like, rather than what it is, or should be.

References

- Barad, K. (2007). *Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*. Duke University Press.
- Bawaka Country, Wright, S., Suchet-Pearson, S., Lloyd, K., Burarrwanga, L., Ganambarr, R., Ganambarr-Stubbs, M., Ganambarr, B., & Maymuru, D. (2015). Working with and learning from Country: Decentring human authority. *Cultural Geographies*, 22(2), 269–283. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474014539248>
- Bellamy Foster, J. (2016). Marx as a food theorist. *Monthly Review*, 68(7).
- Bello, W. F. (2009). *The food wars*. Verso.
- Bennett, J. (2010). *Vibrant matter: A political ecology of things*. Duke University Press.
- Botterill, L. C. (2016). Agricultural policy in Australia: Deregulation, bipartisanship and agrarian sentiment. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 51(4), 667–682. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10361146.2016.1239567>
- Bromby, R. (1989). *Unlocking the land: The saga of farming in Australia* (New ed.). Lothian Publishing Co.
- Caillé, A. (2013). Anti-utilitarianism and the gift-paradigm. In *Handbook on the economics of reciprocity and social enterprise*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Cameron, J., & Wright, S. (2014). Researching diverse food initiatives: From backyard and community gardens to international markets. *Local Environment*, 19(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13549839.2013.835096>
- Commonwealth of Australia. (2023). *Food and Grocery Code Independent Reviewer Annual 2022–23*. Commonwealth of Australia. <https://grocerycodereviewer.gov.au/sites/grocerycodereviewer.gov.au/files/2023-11/fg-ind-reviewer-ar-2022-23.pdf>
- Dombroski, K., Diprose, G., Conradson, D., Healy, S., & Watkins, A. (2019). Delivering urban wellbeing through transformative community enterprise (National Science Challenge 11). *Building better homes, towns and cities*. <https://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/server/api/core/bitstreams/867d806b-4de0-46b2-8b51-5ecf40cd26f7/content>
- Gibson-Graham, J. K. (1996). *The end of capitalism (as we knew it): A feminist critique of political economy*. Blackwell Publishers.
- Gibson-Graham, J. K. (2014). Rethinking the economy with thick description and weak theory. *Current Anthropology*, 55(S9), S147–S153. <https://doi.org/10.1086/676646>
- Gibson-Graham, J. K. (2020). Reading for economic difference. In J. K. Gibson-Graham & K. Dombroski (Eds.), *The handbook of diverse economies* (pp. 476–485). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Gibson-Graham, J. K., Cameron, J., & Healy, S. (2013). *Take back the economy: An ethical guide for transforming our communities*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Goodman, D., DuPuis, E. M., & Goodman, M. K. (2013). *Alternative food networks: Knowledge, practice and politics*. Routledge.
- Guthman, J. (2007). The Polanyian way? Voluntary food labels as neoliberal governance. *Antipode*, 39(3), 456–478. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2007.00535.x>
- Hickel, J. (2021). *Less is more: How degrowth will save the world*. Windmill Books.

- Holt Giménez, E., & Shattuck, A. (2011). Food crises, food regimes and food movements: Rumblings of reform or tides of transformation? *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 38(1), 109–144. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2010.538578>
- Hyvärinen, P. (2020). Sienestystä pohjoisilla puupelloilla: Metsien moninaiset taloudet ja plantaasiosentrismin ongelma. *Alue Ja Ympäristö*, 49(2), 22–43. <https://doi.org/10.30663/ay.97101>
- Jackson, T., Zammit, K., & Hatfield-Dodds, S. (2018). Snapshot of Australian agriculture. *Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences*.
- Karulkiyalu Country, Gordon, P., & Spillman, D. (2021). Embracing Country as teacher in outdoor and environmental education. In G. Thomas, J. Dymont, & H. Prince (Eds.), *Outdoor environmental education in higher education*. Springer Cham.
- Krzywoszynska, A. (2019). Caring for soil life in the Anthropocene: The role of attentiveness in more-than-human ethics. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 44(4), 661–675. <https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12293>
- Latour, B. (2007). *Reassembling the social: An introduction to actor-network-theory* (1st publ. in pbk). Oxford University Press
- Lawrence, G., Richards, C., & Lyons, K. (2013). Food security in Australia in an era of neoliberalism, productivism and climate change. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 29, 30–39. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2011.12.005>
- Magdoff, F. (2012). Food as a commodity. *Monthly Review*, 63(8).
- McMichael, P. (2012). The land grab and corporate food regime restructuring. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 39(3–4), 681–701. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2012.661369>
- Milroy, G., & Milroy, J. (2008). Different ways of knowing: Trees are our families too. In *Heartsick for country: Stories of love, spirit and creation*. Fremantle Press.
- Mol, A. (2010). Actor-network theory: Sensitive terms and enduring tensions. *Kölner Zeitschrift Für Soziologie Und Sozialpsychologie. Sonderheft*, 50, 253–269.
- Nelson, A., & Edwards, F. (Eds.). (2021). *Food for degrowth: Perspectives and practices*. Routledge.
- Puig de la Bellacasa, M. (2015). Making time for soil: Technoscientific futurity and the pace of care. *Social Studies of Science*, 45(5), 691–716. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306312715599851>
- Puig de la Bellacasa, M. (2017). *Matters of care: Speculative ethics in more than human worlds*. University of Minnesota Press. <https://virtual.anu.edu.au/login/?url=http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctt1mmfspt>
- Scott, J. C. (1999). *Seeing like a state: How certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed*. Yale University Press.
- Smith, A. (1776). *The wealth of nations*.
- Tronto, J. (2017). There is an alternative: Homines curans and the limits of neoliberalism. *International Journal of Care and Caring*, 1(1), 27–43. <https://doi.org/10.1332/239788217X14866281687583>
- Vincent, O., & Feola, G. (2020). A framework for recognizing diversity beyond capitalism in agri-food systems. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 80, 302–313. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2020.10.002>
- Vogel, L. (1983). *Marxism and the oppression of women: Toward a unitary theory*. Rutgers University Press.