

# Family Farm or Factory Farm? How Cooperatives Struggled with Member and Co-op Identity in the Pork Industry

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Farmers were challenged to maintain their historical identity as independent family farmers when the pork industry transitioned to a new industrialized production model during the 1990s.

Industrialization's advances eroded an infrastructure of open markets, cooperatives, and pricing practices that reinforced farmers' identity as independent, self-sufficient entrepreneurs, who took control, who privileged choice and variety.

If identity is defined by or anchored to particular institutions, how does identity change or modify when those institutions disappear? How did the replacement of one set of economic institutions by another affect the stability or robustness of the construct of the "family farm" or family farmer? Another way of asking this question is to say, can a culture be preserved without preserving the past? This was the question confronting cooperatives who contemplated entry into the industrializing pork industry.

An issue raised by this study is, if change is inevitable, that is, set in place by forces beyond the cooperative sector's control, are

producers better off if their cooperative actively participates in such change and risks a certain degree of member ire, as long as some members are made better off? That is an economist's argument. Or, should the cooperative "protest" such change by withdrawing from that commodity sector? That might be an anthropologist's argument. Both choices were used by cooperatives.

Comments?