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**Review of *Farming the System: How Politicians and Producers
Shape Canadian Agricultural Policy*, by Barry K. Wilson**

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understanding of the development of societies. This volume illuminates much of social importance that is often misunderstood, hidden, or ignored. **Ralph F. Harris**, *Department of Economics, University of Manitoba*.

Farming the System: How Politicians and Producers Shape Canadian Agricultural Policy. Barry K. Wilson. Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1990. Notes and index. ix + 296 pp. \$24.95 paper (ISBN 0-88833-317-X).

Canadian agricultural policy has been undergoing major multidimensional changes over the past decade. They include how policy is developed, how different actors have become major and minor players, a redefinition of the major (and the mix of) objective function(s), and how the whole process is orchestrated. *Farming the System* is an exercise in describing and analyzing this decade of change. The book contains a vast amount of anecdotal information on the Canadian agricultural and political system. The content, structure, and style relies heavily on Wilson's background as a political scientist and as a journalist. The book contains thirteen chapters, however a more useful way of analyzing the contents is to divide it into three sections. In the first two chapters, Wilson lays the groundwork by defining the nature of the agricultural system in Canada and does a credible job of portraying the situation within which agriculture finds itself. He provides this description as a base for defining the problem with which the Mulroney government found itself faced as it began its first term in the 1980s.

The last chapter of the book provides a section in which Wilson summarizes the outcome of the decisions taken by the Mulroney government in coping with the problem which he defined in the first section. The ten chapters between are a detailed history of the developments prior to the coming to power of the Mulroney government. Much time and detail is devoted to analyzing particular players, events, and settings.

Given the structure outlined above, the style of the book is one of submerging the reader in a mass of detail. In one sense, Wilson has done a magnificent job of describing the agricultural policy system in Canada. Upon completing the book one feels that one has reviewed two decades of newspaper headlines or agricultural TV news clips, but one begins to wonder whether this description has provided an understanding of the agricultural system. For example, the final chapter seems to bear little relationship to the main body of the book. The material in this book would be excellent background material for academics interested in agricultural policy, as well as for those actors in the private sector or in the

farm community involved in the policy process. At the same time, the structure and style of the book will prevent many agricultural economists from taking it seriously. My personal judgement is that it would be excellent background reading for students of agriculture as well as students of politics. However, I would caution any educator who supplies this book to their students. Unless they are able to provide a structure upon which the contents of this book could be analyzed and provide a basis which would allow the reader to come to a position in which students could analyze and digest the enormous amount of material within the book, the educational experience gained from its reading might be less than desirable.

The last item that deserves attention is the title itself. Agricultural policy development and implementation takes place within a system. Those employed and engaged in agriculture to some extent farm the agricultural policy system. However, I find that the book itself is less of an analysis of how the system is farmed, but more of an analysis of how the system of politicians and bureaucrats farm the agricultural industry. **George E. Lee**, *University Coordinator of Agricultural Research, University of Saskatchewan.*