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Review of *Changing the Way America Farms: Knowledge and Community in the Sustainable Agriculture Movement* by Neva Hassanein

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Changing the Way America Farms: Knowledge and Community in the Sustainable Agriculture Movement. Neva Hassanein. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999. xii+216 pp. Illustrations, notes, references, index. \$35.00 paper.

This book makes a significant contribution to the literature on the sustainable agriculture movement in the United States. While Hassanein acknowledges that the movement arose in response to systematic, global problems, her purpose here is to go beyond large-scale analysis of the movement and dig deeply into what makes it tick at the local level. Her interest is in the dynamics within the movement and in the ways that knowledge is created and disseminated in the sustainable farming networks that operate largely outside public agricultural research and extension systems. For this she selects two case studies, the Ocooch Grazers Network and the Wisconsin Women's Sustainable Farming Network. Her study of the grazers illustrates the tensions inherent in developing alternative practices, particularly in the socialization of knowledge and in making strategic decisions about when to focus on practices alone or on larger social goals.

Yet it is the second case study that I found the most compelling, illuminating as it does the concerns and processes of a group disenfranchised in the traditional American agrifood system. More than in the grazers network, those in the women's network gave attention to how decisions were made within the group, how organizational structure affected participation, and the ways in which personal and professional lives were interconnected. As people who had been historically left out, the women in the network focused on not reproducing pointless or damaging processes, wanting to create instead an environment in which everyone could contribute and benefit.

Perhaps even more importantly, by including women's stories in the first person, Hassanein is able to capture the insidious, damaging ways in which women have been excluded from material and social power in America's agrifood system. How women have often been infantilized is born witness to in one woman's particularly poignant description of her experience first as a farm child and then as a farmer starting her own business: "I

was very insecure about what I was doing. . . . I had a terrible time to get myself to even call someone on the telephone. . . .” She reflects that this insecurity results from the disabling experiences of never having any choices or controlling any resources: “Here you are thirty-five years old and still getting an allowance, as if you were a little kid. . . . You’re an adult, but you never make adult decisions.” Ironically, in telling these stories, Hassanein provides a counter example to her own perspective that local is correlated with democratic and socially responsible. Hassanein points out that often the problems these women faced arose not only from overt gender discrimination or institutional barriers, but from “their own socialization and the unequal gender relations they experienced in their personal lives.” This extremely important point helps explain the relative silence of activism around gender issues in rural communities. In fact, the leader of this network was at pains to point out that it was not a “feminist” organization.

In all, Hassanein’s book is a well-written and carefully researched text, the kind of detailed participant observation and ethnography that can shed light on the day-to-day workings and realities of those who participate in social movements. While the specificity of her research is what makes this study unique and important, it may also limit the generalizability of some of her observations and conclusions. Still, this study will be useful to those interested not only in sustainable agriculture but social movements in any field. **Patricia Allen**, *Center for Agroecology, University of California-Santa Cruz*.