

ANT 450/Cultivating Change Fall 2013

Peer-review responses by Group 1

1) *What is your favorite part of the paper? Why?*

Reviewer 1: My favorite section of this report was the discussion and analysis section. The narrative voice was firm and informative, the pace and diction of the content was readable, and a number of interesting points and questions were posited (i.e. connecting the frustrations of the office to desires for a 'simpler' Jeffersonian time). It articulates valid observations about the undeniably unique and privileged position from which the founders of the two farms come from and how it has shaped and guided the evolution of their agricultural ventures. In other words, I would say this section is successful in that it clearly demonstrates the links between the personal profiles and backgrounds of the farmers and the operations that they manage as they are today. It does justice to the agency a farmer has in uniquely structuring their operation to match their outlooks, aspirations, and constraints. That said, this is achieved through the comfortable financial buffer afforded by the owners, though this is a central topic in this section.

R2: The section on the importance of relationships for beginning farmers was clear, particularly in the section explaining Cara and Andrew's relationship with the government, and how it benefited their new operation. Additionally, in the conclusion, your explanation on capital as being key in their success as beginning farmers is well put. I like the "voting with the fork" concept.

R3: I like the questions you ask about the "agrarian myth" and your thoughts about how these farmers' financial background shapes their farming decisions.

R4: I thought the Discussion and Analysis section of the paper was really well written. The tone was confident and inquisitive at the same time and I think the writer integrated the facts with a smart analysis of them in relation to broader themes from the class material/discussion.

2) *How does the introduction position the reader to appreciate what's to follow? Could it be made more compelling? How?*

R1: It is my opinion that the introduction is very limited in acquainting the reader with the topic and orienting them along the line of argument to follow. Many of the facts detailed in this section (e.g. the soil, the prevalence of nurseries in CT, chief livestock animals in CT, etc.) I felt were irrelevant to understanding beginning farmers as a phenomenon. On the preamble in general, if I weren't already acquainted with the topic, the introduction would not prepare me at all for wanting to know why beginning farmers are worth studying, how Preston Ridge and JW Beef complement that study, or what is about to be discussed other than something pertaining to agriculture in Connecticut. The preliminary mentioning of the findings in the introduction did little to illuminate what the line of argument or topic of discussion would be in the ensuing pages; I'm still unsure of what is meant by the "phenomenon of progression" and whether this was ever discussed in the report. It is my recommendation that the introduction be completely rewritten following a thorough reading of the other sections with relevant and informative statistics and facts to shape the issue, a quick description of Preston Ridge and JW Beef that contextualizes them within the issue and illuminates the importance of their study, as well as a clear and concise thesis statement to orient the reader.

R2: You did a good job of starting to formulate a "hook" to bring readers into the introduction, but I think you lost focus on the central focus of the report. Beginning farmers aren't really mentioned in the section.

R3: Agreed. You really need a "Framing the research" section before jumping into the farm descriptions. Without, it doesn't make sense why these two farms are important to the research.

R4:

-I like the fact that the introduction highlights that this is one of the first studies of its kind. I think this will make the reader appreciate it more. Some of the statistics seem really relevant but they seem a little

out of the blue - or not clearly connected with each other.

-It seems like you say: this report will discuss, first ...

-but you never say what else it will outline, you just jump right into the first part

-i think the intro is a little hard to follow...jumping from statistics to quotations and then to introducing the farm visits...it just could use a little better organization

3) *What additional material and/or editing would enhance the farm description?*

The farm descriptions could benefit from hard facts. I was surprised by the fact that the author(s) neglected to mention solid statistics such as farm acreage, variety and quantity of output, production processes (distinct value-added processes, for example), dates of operation, facilities, and so on. Though these don't have to be excessively thorough, it is my opinion that a description of what it was like 'being there' is not enough to construct a contextualized profile of the farms. I also feel some more elaboration on the backgrounds of the farmers would be beneficial (i.e. education, years spent in finance, etc.), as well as some photos of the farms that illustrate what is described in the text.

4) *What additional material and/or editing would enhance the discussion and analysis?*

Though I found the discussion and analysis articulate and informative, this section—as could the entire report—could benefit from more references to the reading we have touched on in class. For example, it would be interesting to see how Josh's disdain for farmers' markets relates to some of the readings on the topic, even if only to say that he represents a voice not captured in the works we have covered. However, this is not to say the section and the report suffer from a lack of references to studied materials, though adding to the report in this regard would only enhance it.

5) *What additional material and/or editing would enhance the considerations of the research process?*

I believe the research methods reflection could be improved. The narrative voice is chatty; overall I would say the style of prose is a significant limiting factor in conveying the sincerity of the group's introspection. It fails to capture the committed analytical authority that such a section ought to entail. This feeling is reinforced by some of the content. The fact that the review was entirely uncritical of their research process leads me to question the sincerity of this section. For example, I find it suspect that the group's "first interview went flawlessly"—that is to say, that the research process couldn't have possibly been improved in anyway, that it was literally without flaw. From my own experience and the experience of our group, even the best interviews could be improved in some way. The fact that this report fails to explicitly identify anything the group would change, remove, or add—not even a specific question or reflection on the broader course experience—from their research process (and here I do not include their desire to extend the research project into other semesters for this is no reflection on their own research methods) causes me to think the author(s) did not seriously question and reflect on their input to the research experience. Thus, I would recommend rewriting the content of this section so that the overall tone is more fitting of an analytical report; that is to say, an engaged critique of the research process and the methods employed to facilitate that process rather than a personal reflection on the experience.

6) *To what extent does the conclusion do justice to the report? Can you suggest any additional or alternative points to make?*

The conclusion does a good job of recapping the findings and highlighting the needs and features of the farmers interviewed. I would add a few (1-4) more sentences to the end so that the concluding discussion is brought to a conclusive point and does not end on an inconclusive note about Josh's

difficulties acquiring a certain grant. Also, I would question the use of the word 'capital' in the first sentence of the conclusion. Is it meant to mean pre-existing/non-farm wealth or assets used in the production/distribution process?

7) Are there any additional items that you recommend for the appendix?

The appendix could be enhanced with some photos of the farmers and their farms that highlight distinct features and qualities mentioned in the report. This could be as simple as adding some photos of Josh's herd or Preston Ridge's vines and cellar, for example. However, this does not have to be an extensive collection.

Also, your paper would benefit stylistically from being the same line spacing and formatting. The distinction of sections makes clear the difference in voices and needs some unification tweaks .