

Rural Sociology / Volume 61, Issue 4 / p. 559-576

## The De/Repoliticization of Cooperation and the Discourse of Conversion<sup>1</sup>

Patrick H. Mooney, Jerry Roahrig, Thomas W. Gray

First published: December 1996

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1549-0831.1996.tb00634.x>

Citations: 16

<sup>1</sup> This research was funded by a grant from the USDA Cooperative Services, #58-RDA-4-0038. The views expressed here are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the sponsoring organization.

### Abstract

**Abstract** In recent years, several agricultural cooperatives have undergone significant restructuring. Some have been taken through a conversion process and have been reorganized as “investor-oriented firms” (IOFs). This phenomenon has attracted the interest of agricultural economists, but it has not been analyzed by sociologists. This article examines the discourse with which agricultural economists have approached the conversion issue. Drawing upon Fraser's discussion of “needs talk,” and inspired by Kloppenburg's analysis of the agricultural scientific complex, an argument is made that a reprivatization discourse of neoclassical economics has effectively depoliticized discussion about the future of cooperative enterprise. It is further argued that a repoliticization of cooperation is necessary in order to assure the protection of extra-economic values and oppositional discourse that is embedded in the historical development of cooperative practices and institutions. We focus here on the role of expert discourse as it relates to the reinvention of cooperative institutions in the agricultural economy. It is argued that this discourse would be improved by greater attention to historical and sociological forces, rather than remaining narrowly focused on economism.

### References

Barlett, Peggy F. 1993. *American Dreams, Rural Realities: Family Farms in Crisis*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

[Google Scholar](#)

Block, Fred. 1990. *Postindustrial Possibilities: A Critique of Economic Discourse*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

Bonanno, Alessandro. 1987. *Small Farms: Persistence with Legitimation*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

Brubaker, Rogers. 1984. *The Limits of Rationality: An Essay on the Social and Moral Thought of Max Weber*. London: George Allen and Unwin.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

Busch, Lawrence and William B. Lacy. 1983. *Science, Agriculture, and the Politics of Research*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

Busch, Lawrence. 1984. "Science, technology, agriculture, and everyday life". Pp. 289–314 in *Research in Rural Sociology and Development: Vol. 1.*, edited by H. K. Schwarzweller. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

Buttel, Frederick H., Olaf F. Larson, and Gilbert W. Gillespie. 1990. *The Sociology of Agriculture*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

---

Collins, Robert A. 1991a. "The conversion of cooperatives to publicly held corporations: a financial analysis of limited evidence. *Western Journal of Agricultural Economics*. 16: 326–330.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

---

Collins, Robert A. 1991b. *Analysis of Economic Motives for Cooperative Conversions to Corporations*. University of California: Center for Cooperatives.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

Danbom, David B. 1979. *The Resisted Revolution: Urban America and the Industrialization of Agriculture, 1900–1930*. Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

Fraser, Nancy. 1989. *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

[Google Scholar](#)

Freeh, Vern. 1993. "Beyond the bottom line". Pp. 187–193 in *American Cooperation: 1993*. Washington, D.C.: National Council of Farmer Cooperatives.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

Harding, Sandra. 1986. *The Science Question in Feminism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

Hightower, James. 1973. *Hard Tomatoes, Hard Times*. Cambridge, MA: Schenckman.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

Ketilson, L. Hammond. 1995. The Saskatchewan wheat pool in the globalized food sector: can they remain true to their roots"? EIASM Conference: Institutional Changes in the Globalized Food Sector. Brussels. April.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

Kloppenburg, Jack. 1991. "Social theory and the de/reconstruction of agricultural science: local knowledge for an alternative agriculture. *Rural Sociology* 56: 519–48.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

---

Mooney, Patrick H. and Theo J. Majka. 1995. *Farmers' and Farm Workers' Movements: Social Protest in U.S. Agriculture*. New York: Twayne Publishers.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

Mooney, Patrick H. 1982. "Labor time, production time and capitalist development in agriculture: a reconsideration of the Mann-Dickinson thesis. *Sociologia Ruralis* 22: 279–91.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

Mooney, Patrick H. 1983. "Toward a class analysis of Midwestern agriculture. *Rural Sociology* 48: 563–84.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

---

Mooney, Patrick H. 1988. *My Own Boss? Class, Rationality and the Family Farm*. Boulder, CO: West-view Press.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

National Catholic Rural Life Conference. 1939. *A Manifesto on Rural Life*. Milwaukee, WI: Bruce Publishing.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

Ormerod, Paul. 1994. *The Death of Economics*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

Pestoff, Victor A. 1991. *Between Markets and Politics: Cooperatives in Sweden*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

Rasmussen, Wayne. 1991. *Farmers, Cooperatives, and USDA: A History of Agricultural Cooperative Service*. Washington, D.C.: Agricultural Information Bulletin 621.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

Sachs, Carolyn. 1983. *The Invisible Farmers*. Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Allanheld.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

Salamon, Sonya. 1992. *Prairie Patrimony: Family, Farming and Community in the Midwest*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

Schrader, Lee. 1989. "Equity capital and restructuring of cooperatives as investor-oriented firms." *Journal of Agricultural Cooperation* 4: 41-53.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

Smith, Frank J. 1988. Review of Cooperatives in Agriculture, edited by David W. Cobia, in *Journal of Agricultural Cooperation* 3: 107-9.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

Staatz, John M. 1989. *Farmer Cooperative Theory: Recent Developments*. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Cooperative Service. ACS Research Report Number 84, Washington, D.C. June.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

Taylor, Peter Leigh. 1994. "The rhetorical construction of efficiency: restructuring and industrial democracy in Mondragon, Spain." *Sociological Forum* 9: 459-89.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

---

Torgerson, Randall E. 1990. "Restructuring cooperatives as IOF's: the issues". Talk presented to NCR-140 "Research on Cooperatives" meeting, National Institute of Cooperative Education. St Paul, MN. August.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

Torgerson, Randall E. The mission of the Agricultural Cooperative Service: commitments, crises, and possible futures. *Journal of Agricultural Cooperation* 8: 63-77.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Development Administration, Cooperative Services. 1993. Cooperative Historical Statistics. Cooperative Information Report 1. Section 26. January.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Development Administration, Cooperative Services. 1994. Farmer Cooperative Statistics, 1993. CS Service Report 43. November.

[Google Scholar](#)

## Citing Literature



[Download PDF](#)

### ABOUT WILEY ONLINE LIBRARY

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Terms of Use](#)

[About Cookies](#)

[Manage Cookies](#)

[Accessibility](#)

[Wiley Research DE&I Statement and Publishing Policies](#)

[Developing World Access](#)

### HELP & SUPPORT

[Contact Us](#)

[Training and Support](#)

[DMCA & Reporting Piracy](#)

### OPPORTUNITIES

[Subscription Agents](#)

[Advertisers & Corporate Partners](#)

### CONNECT WITH WILEY

[The Wiley Network](#)

[Wiley Press Room](#)

