

Margaret Morganroth Gullette
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Excerpt from the lecture: <https://youtu.be/s6UsqKROcI4>

The One Who Feeds Us All

The farmer is the man
The farmer is the man
Lives on credit 'til the fall
With the interest rates so high
It's a wonder he don't die
For the mortgage man's the one that gets it all.

When the banker says he's broke, and the merchant's up in smoke
They forget that it's the farmer feeds 'em all.
It would put them to the test, if the farmer took a rest
Then they'd know that it's the farmer feeds 'em all.—

-Pete Seeger (1966); words and music from 1880s', American Grange Movement
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Coj1v8FM2Cs>

One. Rapture
Two. Hardship
Three. Villains
Four: Suicide
Five: Fantasy

Farm novels in order of mention:

Ruth Ozeki, *All Over Creation*, 2004. Momoko and Lloyd Fuller.
Barbara Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer*, 2000. Nannie Rawley, Garnett Walker, in their sixties.
John McGahern, *Amongst Women*, 1990.
Jane Smiley, *Golden Age*, 2014. Joe Langdon, into his sixties.
Jane Urquart, Interview, author of *Sanctuary Line*, 2010.
Jane Smiley, *Early Warning*, second volume of *The Last Hundred Years* trilogy
Ann Mohin, *The Farm She Was*, 1998. Irene Leahy in her nineties is narrator, journal writer.
Jane Hamilton, *The Excellent Lombards*, 2016.
James Herriot, *All Creatures Great and Small*, 1972.
Alice Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, 1971. Del Jordan's aunts.
Wendell Berry, *Hannah Coulter* 2004. Hannah in her seventies is the narrator.
Mike Davis, *The Planet of Slums*, 2006.
Schwipps, Greg. *What this River Keeps*, 2012. An old couple, former farmers.
Fynaardt, Keith Edward. *Writing the Farm: The Agricultural Imagination in an Age of Farm Crisis*. Dissertation, 2000.
Douglas Unger, *Leaving the Land*, 1984. Marge Hogan over forty years of adulthood.
USDA, National Commission on Small Farms, "A Time to Act," 1998.
Jane Smiley, *Some Luck*, 2014, first volume of *The Last Hundred Years* trilogy.
Lois Coleman Nelson, *Son of Blue Feather*, 2006. The "useful" old couple, Sarah and Henry Lomax.

Big Farma, my term for the large chemical and agribusiness (seed, fertilizer) corporations, like Dow, DuPont—a coinage based on Big PhRMA, the pharmaceutical giants. Glyphosate, a broad-spectrum herbicide used in Monsanto's RoundUp. Scientists have found a high incidence of birth defects and cancers in people living near crop-spraying areas. USDA= United States Department of Agriculture.

Some quotations from the essay: “*Want of imagination makes things unreal enough to be destroyed.*”—Wendell Berry, *Hannah Coulter*

In many family-farm novels, old people are respected as horticulturists, historians, teachers, hard workers, and stewards of the land. From reading these novels I learned to think of older small farmers—whatever their personal characteristics—as “planetary heroes.”

How many know that farmers in the US are old? I certainly didn't know it. Their average age is fifty-eight. Principal farm operators over sixty-five—the hands-on farmers—now outnumber those under thirty-five *by more than seven to one*. It isn't generally known, but in the 21st century, farmers *everywhere* are old. In Spain the average age is fifty-five.

To be interested in food but not the producers of food is ignorant ingratitude. To be interested in the producers, but not the old ones, is ageist.

Over 80 percent of an American farmer's gross sales are absorbed by farming expenses, and the average net income excluding nonfarm jobs was \$26,000 in 2007, the year *before* the 2008 crash and the foreclosures. Whatever is hard at thirty-five is harder at fifty-five.

If the economic goal of a small farmers is, come hell or high water, to not lose the family land, an *old* farmer's existential goal is *to stay put and grow old in the beloved place*. . . . A farm is a profession, a business, a home, a way of life that includes friends and neighbors. Some people do leave as they age, worrying about being alone if something happened. Still, the term “*aging in place*” probably cannot be as deeply meaningful to any other category of elders.

Most risks can't be shrugged off as “natural.” In a climactic showdown with Garnett, the chestnut-tree man, Nannie Rawley of the organic apples says pointedly, “Look around you, old man! In your father's day all the farmers around here were doing fine. Now they have to work night shifts at the Kmart to keep up their mortgages. Why is that? They work just as hard as their parents did, and they're on the same land.”

Farming is a powerful domain of knowledge, not so different from what is admired as “technology.” If children don't inherit it to use it, it's gone.

By 1990 the share of the ag economy received by farmers dropped to 5 percent, according to a USDA report. The power of Big Farma means more auctions, more loss of habitat, more rapid degradation of millennial soil, less control over the quality and variety of foodstuffs, higher transport costs. . . . and in extreme cases, the farmers' unwillingness to go on living.

The trial scene [in *Son of Blue Feather*] is a good old-age fantasy.