

**Still being the ‘good farmer’: [non]retirement and the preservation of farming identities
in older age.**

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Introduction

In recent years, the pages of *Sociologia Ruralis* have witnessed an evolving discussion of the importance of ‘good farming’ ideals, and the subject position of ‘good farmer’, to farming practice(s) (e.g. Burton *et al.* 2008, Burton 2004, Stock 2007, Sutherland & Burton 2011). Central to this discussion is that farmers will seek to accrue ‘good farmer’ capital (Burton 2004, Gray 1998, Haggerty *et al.* 2009) which, in turn, informs their farming strategies. Such notions of good farming have been shown to commonly relate to production-orientated goals, with oft-depicted symbols of good farming including crop yields, ‘tidy’ farms/fields and good ‘stockmanship’ (Burton *et al.* 2008, Burton 2004, Gray 1998).¹ Recent work has added nuance to this discussion by arguing that ‘good farming’ is not necessarily a temporally-static notion and may be open to reconfiguration (see Sutherland & Darnhofer 2012), with attention given to broad scale policy change as well as to how notions of good farming may vary in different geographical contexts (Haggerty *et al.* 2009) and under different types of farming such as organic production (Stock 2007, Sutherland 2013) and kiwifruit orcharding (Hunt 2010). Common across these studies is how capital, in its various forms, may be accrued through key processes of attainment, visual display and a recognition of this work amongst the wider community. One logical extension of this work has thus been a consideration of how farmers “may resist change on the basis of an anticipated loss of identity or social/cultural rewards traditionally conferred through existing commercial agricultural behaviour” (Burton 2004,p.196). Resultant studies have focused, for example, on the potential challenges that may arise from the move towards environmentally-orientated agriculture and its attendant practices and how this may challenge pre-existing notions of the ‘good farmer’ (e.g. Burton *et al.* 2008, Burton & Paragahawewa 2011). An area which has received much less academic attention is how advancing age and the prospect of retirement may be one such change that farmers face and which may also offer a challenge to their identity as a good farmer. The following paper explores this issue through a consideration of

¹ Although this literature has developed primarily in a Western context there is some evidence of these ideas having relevance to other areas – see for example Sitko’s (2008) discussion of Maize production in Zambia.

how farmers over the institutional retirement age of 65, but who self-define as not retired, (re)negotiate their subject position as a ‘good farmer’ as they move into older age.²

An ageing population holds potential implications for the agricultural industry, with the average age of farmers thought to be increasing in most Western contexts (Gale 2003) and estimated to be 59 years of age in the UK (DEFRA 2012). Despite this, the discussion of good farming mirrors the wider rural studies literature which “has largely neglected questions of age and ageing” (Garnham & Bryant 2014, p.228). Where attention has been paid to farmers of retirement age, this has most often been through a focus on the structural and economic aspects of retirement planning and the associated issues of locating successors (Chiswell 2014), with less attention paid to the impacts upon the socio-affective relationships within agriculture and the identity challenges that older age and the spectre of retirement might bring (although see Gullifer and Thompson (2006) and Riley (2011, 2012)). As the figures on average age suggest, being a self-employed occupation means that farmers are not subjected to the same institutional retirement exit points that we might see in other occupations and in characterising the main approaches to farming retirement, Lobley *et al.* (2010) suggest that the most common form of ‘retirement’ may not actually be retirement *per se*, but remaining on the farm in older age, albeit with some reduction in some of the more arduous tasks associated with the farm.³ The following paper focuses on such a group – those who remain working on their farms beyond the age of 65. Drawing on the experiences of 24 older farmers in Hampshire and West Sussex (UK) the paper explores how their understandings of, and the ways in which they perform, the subject position of good farmer change and become [re]configured in older age.

Conceptualising the ‘good farmer’

In exploring the subject position of the ‘good farmer’ Pierre Bourdieu’s ideas of capital, habitus and field provide a useful set of conceptual tools. Central to Bourdieu’s thinking is “the two-way relationship between objective structures (those of social fields) and incorporated structures (those of the habitus)” (Bourdieu, 1998, p.vii) and for the discussion of farming mean that we can move towards a more nuanced account of the social and cultural

² Whilst the default retirement age varies from country to country (e.g. 65 in the UK, 67 in the US) and has been phased out in the UK for example, it still provides an institutional reference point as it is when a state pension can be first claimed.

³ Such an approach has also been seen to be common in studies in Australia and the United States (Barclay *et al.* 2007).

contexts which iteratively shape the practice of being a ‘good farmer’ (Burton *et al.* 2008, Burton 2004, Sutherland & Darnhofer 2012, Sutherland & Burton 2011). In moving beyond a focus just on economic capital Bourdieu recognised social capital (coming from, and reaffirmed by, social contacts and networks) and cultural capital (skills, knowledge and dispositions which may be gained by education and socialisation).⁴ Alongside this, he depicts symbolic capital as the form that “various species of capital assume when they are perceived and recognised as legitimate” (Bourdieu 1989, p.17), or put another way the status, reputation or prestige that these forms of capital might underpin. The element of Bourdieu’s thinking which has been most readily applied to the discussion of farming is that around cultural capital (e.g. Burton & Paragahawewa 2011), of which he classifies three main types - Institutional, objectified and embodied – which may be utilised in a particular field (or “particular sector of the world” (Bourdieu 1998, p.81)) such as agriculture. Institutional capital involves certification of cultural competence, an example from within agriculture might be breed societies who validate and certify qualities of a particular herd or breed; objectified capital is that associated with high status value material objects, which Sutherland and Burton (2011) suggest might include agricultural machinery or ‘well-farmed’ fields; embodied cultural capital is defined as being “in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body” (Bourdieu 1986, p.47) which in relation to agriculture Burton and Paragahawewa (2011) suggest may be present in the form of skills and knowledge such as how and when to apply particular types of farm management, the use of technologies and so on. A key aspect of this, they suggest, is that the value of objectified cultural capital is dependent upon how it is actioned through the embodied cultural capital of the agent.

Although not always using Bourdieusian terms in framing their discussion, several studies have noted how farming prestige and a positive identity as the ‘good farmer’ (Burton 2004) can be derived from the successes relating to practices such as good livestock breeding (Yarwood & Evans 2006) and attendant good stock management (Haggerty *et al.* 2009) as well as the appearance of farms, particularly relating to being neat and tidy (Burton 2004).⁵

⁴ Although there has been some debate about the different conceptual approaches which use similar terminology around social capital, a Bourdieusian perspective is preferred here for the reasons outlined by Sutherland and Burton (2011), namely: its ability to talk to themes of human agency (at the level of the farmer); the recognition that capital may be transferred from one form to another (see Holt 2008); and that it offers a framework to explore how, through habitus, socialised norms and expectations shape dispositions to act.

⁵ There are slight variations on how ‘tidy farm’ has been defined. Some suggest tidy in the literal sense and others have extended this to explore the links between tidiness and profitability (e.g. Burton 2012).

This status as a good farmer, Burton (2004) argues, can be potentially built up over generations with cooperation between farmers often flowing in accordance with the preceding reputation. Indeed it has been noted that the better a farmer's reputation the more likely they are able to access the social capital of others in the field and, conversely, non-compliance with the norms of that field may lead to a reputation as a 'bad farmer' (Burton & Paragahawewa 2011). Underpinning this is the importance of surveillance by other, commonly neighbouring, farmers as "agricultural land becomes a display of the farmer's knowledge, values and work ethic" (Rogge *et al.* 2007, p.160). In their discussion of embodied cultural capital, Burton *et al.* (2008) suggest that in order for a farming activity to exhibit cultural capital to other farmers, three conditions are required: 1) the activity must require a skilled performance which is able to differentiate a 'good' and 'bad' performance; 2) there must be an outward sign that an effective action has been performed; 3) these signs must be accessible, usually visually, to other farmers.

The habitus – which is defined as the "system of lasting and transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, function at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions" (Bourdieu 1977, p.82) – is impacted upon by cultural capital and the experiences of how to use this capital within the 'rules of the game'. Haggerty *et al.* (2009) suggest that farmers take decisions based on this 'feel for the game' which is born out of long-term participation in this field. Importantly, however, the rules of the game may be open to change. As Sutherland suggests for organic agriculture: "As long as the rules of the game are stable, individuals with similar habitus can be expected to respond in similar ways. However, creative responses are elicited when the rules of the game change" (Sutherland 2013, p.432). In her study, Sutherland considers how a new, or at least adapted, set of 'rules of the game' might be developed by organic farming standards. Sutherland (2013, p.433) uses Bourdieu's notion of 'taste of necessity' here, whereby "valued cultural symbols directly reflect economic realities" and draws a parallel to the coevolution of symbols of good farming – high yields, quality livestock – and economic gain. Following this logic, Sutherland and Darnhofer (2012) argue that a change in reward structure, such as a higher price for organic products (which are produced in lower quantities) may change the rules of the game and might lead to a reduced status of objectified cultural capital such as higher yields. Such observations, they conclude, might result in a broadening of what is recognised as a good farmer and a potential fracturing of good farming symbols. Similarly, Haggerty *et*

al. (2009) have suggested that new subject positions of the good farmer may emerge around the neoliberalisation of agriculture and the greening of agricultural policy.

In framing the discussion of older farmers and their (re)negotiation of their subject position of good farmer it is useful to combine the insights from the good farming and Bourdieusian literature with those from the broader literatures on ageing. In relation to retirement and older age, this work has noted how a potential challenge of retirement is the loss of professional identity (Price 2000). Such research has highlighted that work roles may “provide not only a source of self-identity, but also a larger sense of social connectedness” (Taylor *et al.* 2007, p.1968) and thus a significant identity challenge occurs when an individual moves out of this occupation or is unable to perform it as successfully as they had done in the past (Lim 2003). Others have observed that retirement may lead to a “tragic loss of social capital” (Ranzijn 2002, p.80) resulting from the loss of connection to both work colleagues and also as a result of the loss of status that a particular occupation may confer (Moen 2003). Although studies of those who continue working in the same job beyond retirement age are relatively sparse, they suggest that in addition to the economic benefits, social contact as well as a continued daily routine are important factors influencing their decision to keep working (Fasbender *et al.* 2014).⁶ Whilst the rural studies literature on ageing as it relates to farming is similarly small, a number of observations on farming masculinities have been drawn upon in thinking about older age. For example the common prioritisation of hegemonic forms of masculinity – which place emphasis on bodily toughness, resilience and the status of breadwinner – have been referenced in suggesting that a decline of physical capabilities in older age may be a significant challenge (Alston & Kent 2008) and might lead to issues of depression and even suicide (Garnham & Bryant 2014, Polain *et al.* 2011). Others, however, have suggested that such experiences of advancing age may be far from universal, noting that despite older age farmers may still feel a sense of inclusion and worth within their communities (Bryant & Pini 2011).

Methodology

The research reported upon here comes from a study in Hampshire and West Sussex in the UK which sought to explore the work and [non]retirement experiences of farmers aged over

⁶ Whilst the literature focusing specifically on remaining in the same job is relatively small, there is a rapidly growing literature on alternative occupations taken up in retirement, part-time work, bridge employment and replacement activities – for a broad-ranging review see Wang and Shultz (2010).

65. Hampshire and West Sussex represent some of the wealthier agricultural regions of the UK with land of high value and the predominant farming types being general cropping and mixed farming systems. The farmers considered here are those who, whilst being over the age of 65, self-defined as not being retired. Initial contact was made with farms via random selection from the Yellow Pages directory, with chain referral sampling (after Heckathorn 2002) used to locate farmers over the age of 65.⁷ The twenty four interviewees that are drawn upon are those for whom a farming successor, who they are currently working alongside, was in place (and hence are defined as family farms). In 21 cases this successor was their son and in 3 cases their daughters.⁸ As research on good farming has highlighted that symbols of what constitutes good farming may vary according to farm type, those discussed here are those who considered livestock to be the main focus of their farming business (see table 1). Whilst recognising the significant work on women and farming identities (see Riley 2009a) the focus here is on male farmers in particular both because the extant literature on ‘good farming’ which this paper seeks to contribute to has focused primarily on men and also because what little work has focused on ageing amongst farmers has suggested that older age presents potentially the greatest challenge for farm men (see Riley, 2012).

[Table 1 around here]

Semi-structured, open-ended interviews were conducted with the farmers on their farms (even in the cases where the farmers resided away from the main holding). Whilst the majority of interviews began in the farm house interviews were, where possible (in 19 cases), conducted whilst moving around the farm itself. This offered the advantage of allowing farmers to undertake tasks whilst being interviewed, and hence the interview could be less of an imposition on their time, and also allowed the farmers to illuminate their discussion through visual reference to aspects of the farm and its contents. Where possible (in 15 cases) farmers were interviewed on more than one occasion, which allowed both an interviewer-interviewee rapport to be developed, more material to be covered and for other members of the farm family to join the interviews where appropriate (see Riley (2010) and Riley and Harvey (2007) for a fuller discussion of this methodological approach). The interviews were

⁷ Although it has been noted by Burton and Wilson (1999) that the Yellow Pages may be biased towards commercial farming, this was not considered a major issue for the aims of the current research as the intended focus was on those seeing their farms as a fulltime occupation rather than a part-time one or a hobby.

⁸ Whilst it has been suggested that the number of willing successors may be declining, recent analyses have suggested that succession remains a central aspect of farming in UK as elsewhere (see Riley (2009b), Chiswell, (2014)).

semi-structured and whilst questions were left as open-ended as possible, in order, as Gilbert (2001, p.126) suggests, to “gain spontaneous information about attitudes and actions, rather than a rehearsed position”, several broad themes were covered in each interview, including: the history of the farm and its management; the roles (today and in the past) of the older farmers and any reasons for these changes; respondents’ views on retirement (and associated succession) as well as ageing; how they defined ‘good farming’; and their relationship with their successors. The interviews lasted between 1 and 4 hours and were transcribed verbatim. Each transcript was read through several times and coded manually following the framework set out by Jackson (2001). Several overarching themes were identified using this thematic coding and are discussed in the following sections.

We’re still ‘here’ – maintaining involvement on the farm

A dominant theme across all interview responses was the importance of “still being *here*”(C) – that is, remaining on the farm as a sign of still being active and working. As previous research has noted, the farm is consubstantial with the farmer and reference to “this is where I belong” (B) and “I’d be lost anywhere else” (E) were common. We see here the functioning of the farming habitus whereby the structural and the social combine into a framework for operating. At one level, this deeply consubstantial link between self and place (see Gray 1998, Setten 2004) sees the older farmers as being unable to separate their self from the material (and social) space of the farm. For them, a move away from this spatial context becomes unthinkable and, as farmer E suggests, would leave them ‘lost’. At a second level we see how this consubstantial relationship comes to style a moral framework within which activities of previous generations – that is an “accumulated history” (Bourdieu 1986, p.46) – serve as a blueprint for their actions. This is important for understanding farming non-retirement as whilst we might use proxies as an indicator of retirement – in lieu of a visible geographical exit from the workplace that we might see in other occupations – such as signing over legal control of the farm⁹ or moving out of the main farm house, these are seen less as a transition into retirement, but more as “what it’s always been like over the generations” (D) and “making sure we give the next generation the chance we had” (T) and being part of what good farming should be. Using Bourdieu’s (1990, p.91) terminology we can see the farmer as “the individual trace of an entire collective history” and their continued

⁹ In the UK system, inheritance tax can be reduced if the business is transferred to a successor more than 7 years prior to the death of the transferee, with several farmers in the study pointing to this rather than their desire to retire as a reason for signing over control.

work on the farm whilst signing over the farm or moving from the farm house is part of the process repeated over generations and one that cannot be disentangled from the farm's capital(s) built up over this long time period.

In addition to the way that the farming habitus may cast staying on the farm into older age as a normal aspect of good farming, continuing particular roles on the farm allowed farmers to maintain various forms of capital and enabled their position as a good farmer to persist. The following extracts help illustrate this point:

Well I might be a bit of a senile old codger these days, but I'm still around [...] I've done my share other days...I think I'm still pretty well thought of around here for what we've achieved (T)

The relief tanker driver¹⁰ will laugh and say "you're still going then? You've not retired to the Mediterranean?" ...I say 'no, we're still keeping the place going' (R)

For farmer T, his reference to senility (which was a turn of phrase rather than a medical condition in his case) and being 'an old codger' was balanced out through reference to 'having done my share other days' – that is, a direct pointer to his past endeavours on the farm. As Burton (2004, p.206) has observed, the farm is a "store of symbolic capital" and "it is difficult to disentangle the work of one [farming generation] from another" and for farmer T he is able to draw from this accumulated capital. Moreover, whilst Burton (2004, p.207) has observed a temporal lag between bad farming performance and the decline in farm reputation in his observation that "while the farmer's reputation may not be good, the reputation of the farm as an identity is slow to decline", we see how this might work in reverse for older farmers whereby a continued high status farm can afford them high status even after a change in age category or a reduction in tasks undertaken.

Farmer R's extract illustrates the importance of his continued presence on the farm in terms of visibility – something which Burton *et al.* (2008) have noted is essential to the development and maintenance of cultural capital through the observation of peer groups. The exchange with the driver is important not only in terms of an outside recognition of his continued work, but also its timing (early in the morning) indicating the long hours the farmer

¹⁰ Driver, collecting the farm's milk, who comes to the farm during the rest days and holiday periods of their regular driver.

continues to work. Whilst previous good farmer research has focused on other farmers as a peer group (although see Sutherland and Darnhofer (2012) on farmers' connections to consumers/customers) the exchange above illustrates that farmers also exist within a generational cohort which extends beyond farming. The tanker driver provides broader cultural scripts of ageing and retirement, in particular how non-farming people of similar age have commonly retired, often in pursuit of warmer conditions¹¹, against which the farmer is able to refute such scripts of ageing through his own activities and gain symbolic capital through his continued working presence.

The good farmer, Sutherland and Darnhofer (2012, p.235) suggest “is a financially successful farmer” and discussions of farming retirement have often focused upon economic capital in terms of informal, and often lack of, pension planning (Williams 2006). Interlinking these previous observations were the quite intricate ways that the farmers positioned themselves in defining this ‘success’ and how good farming, in this context, was associated with not taking significant economic capital *out of* the farm. The following interview extracts help articulate various elements of this process:

Well, when you say about retirement, I suppose we could sell up and take the money out of the farm and go off and buy a huge house by the seaside...or be in a very posh old folks home [laughter]...but that's not how it works is it? [...] It's John's [farmer's son] turn now...I was given my chance and I want to do the same, I don't want to start breaking this up and running off with the money just for a nice life (H)

I get my pension now...yes, I'm a pensioner I suppose...well, I can tell you where my last pension cheque went...on those new [fence posts] there...that's my pension [laughter] (G)

In addition to reaffirming the importance of financial independence to good farming (cf. Sutherland 2013), Farmer G highlights how additional income from his pension may be used not for retirement but reinvested in the farm (in his case in an activity arguably part of the maintenance of the symbolically important ‘tidy farm’ (Burton 2004)). For such farmers, the “economically acceptable trajectory” of good farming referred to by Sutherland (2013, p.437) is one, in their case, wherein symbolic capital and status could be realised through not taking

¹¹ Although it is beyond the intended scope of the current paper there is an interesting discussion of how older age and retirement are closely linked to migration and relocation - for a useful review see Warnes (2010)

money (or at least significant sums) away from the farm and instead “living basically”(B) and “not spending a fortune”(H) in their personal lives. Whilst high-value goods are often associated with a demonstration of cultural capital and good farming (see Burton 2004) a ‘taste of necessity’ (Bourdieu 1984, p.374) observed among these older farmers is a preference for living a relatively frugal existence rather than spending the economic capital previously accumulated on the farm. This taste of necessity, references to the similar practices of previous generations (Farmer H) suggests, is something developed through socialisation over a long time period. Whilst a different form of living, such as the seaside house or the ‘posh’ residential home referred to by farmer H, might be possible it becomes inconceivable to the good (older) farmer as it might necessitate dismantling the economic capital of the farm or the breaking of the symbolically important practice of reinvesting in the farm.

‘Doing my bit’ - performing good farming in older age

Whilst both remaining on the farm (and drawing on its store of symbolic capital) and not taking significant money out of the farm may be seen as more passive acts of good farming, more active performances were also important to the farmers. The first aspect of this related to the more conscious reinforcement of the objectified cultural capital on their farms:

We bought about 30 acres off another farm 6 months or so ago...I went to the auction at the pub and did the bidding [...] paid up well for it, but I was pleased to leave the pub knowing we’d got it (L)

I’ve been showing one of the neighbours around our new parlour. They are thinking about getting something similar and I was showing them how we go on with it and how it works [...] it’s a big investment, so they want to make sure that they get it right (Q)

It has been well noted that objectified cultural capital plays a central role in good farming identities and for farmer L he is keen to be involved with this *public* purchasing of land – perhaps the ultimate status symbol in agriculture - despite, his interview went on to reveal, the fact that the business had been transferred into his son’s name. Farmer Q’s example is a similar exhibition of economic capital (the parlour is a very expensive addition to the farm) and associated objectified cultural capital, but also illustrates the importance of his attendant embodied cultural capital. Central to the interaction with his neighbours was the

demonstration of skill and understanding (embodied cultural capital) relating to how the parlour worked. On one level this demonstration of embodied cultural capital allows the objectified cultural capital of the parlour to be actioned in developing the social capital between the neighbours. At a second, and interrelated, level the farmer's reference to being able to operate the parlour – because, it can be assumed, he uses it regularly – positions him as actively involved in the everyday work of the farm and avoids the “sense of loss relating to being left behind in the modern world” (Polain *et al.* 2011) which has been suggested in relation to older people and new farming technologies.

Less overt than the objectified cultural capital associated with high-value goods was the reference made by the farmers to their everyday tasks around the farm. Two broad, yet intertwined, themes emerged from the interviews – the importance of the farm's appearance and the role of skill. Whilst both of these have been referred to in previous good farming studies, the research found age-specific particularities of these amongst the older farmers. The first, relating to farm appearance, was how older farmers undertook a selective prioritisation of *which* farming tasks they completed:

I still make sure everything is tidy and the place is well kept [...] I know I can't lay a hedge all day long like we'd do when we were lads, but I'm around making sure they are cut properly [...] and making sure we've got the fert[ilizer] on right (P)

We still make some small bales because they're easier for handling and pitching into the big loft we've got [...] I slide them down the trailer to my son to throw in because my bad shoulder means I can't throw very high [...] I still have to go around and sweep up the loose straw...I can't help myself I can't do with the bloody stuff blowing around the yard and onto the road (N)

In talking about older age more generally, Rowles *et al.* (2003) have noted how a ‘miniaturization’ of activities may occur with advancing years and farmer P's extract can be seen as a form of this. Whilst he admits to being less able to complete certain tasks, he is keen to ensure that those symbolically important, and highly visible, tasks – tidy hedges and well-tended crops in this case - are completed. Farmer N represents a slight variation to this approach. Whilst he, similarly, notes reduced capabilities (throwing bales) he refers to what might be termed substitute activities. Rather than “sitting in the house with the feet up” (N) he undertakes the task of clearing up straw – that is, upholds the appearance of the farm and

overcomes any challenge to the good farming identity associated with hard work (see Hunt 2010) by stressing how he continues to undertake these replacement activities long after those throwing bales have finished working.

This latter point links to the second broad theme emerging from the discussion of which roles these older farmers undertook – namely that of skill. The two following extracts serve as a useful entrée to how such skill was used by the older farmers:

I don't do the volume I once did I suppose...[my son] is running around like a headless chicken, he's thrashing about all day...I try to make sure that I pick my fights a little bit more (I)

Well, there is still a lot I offer...nobody knows the land better than me [...] given that I've lived so long I think I've probably farmed it longer than anyone...I know how to handle it, what it can do and what it can't (J)

As Burton and Paragahawewa (2011), amongst others, have noted, embodied cultural capital is developed through the performance of everyday activities and the ability to demonstrate particular skills, which they break down into motoric, mechanical and managerial. Both respondents above draw attention to how, despite not having the same levels of stamina or physical strength they once had, they are still able to exhibit field-relevant embodied cultural capital. Indeed farmer J's narrative suggests that where good farming relies heavily on the detailed site-specific knowledge which takes many years to build up (see Riley 2008), it is possible that such types of farming capital may actually continue to develop and be improved into older age. Running alongside references to this continued development of skill is the selective application of skill exemplified by farmer I – which is an extension of the conscious selection of tasks noted earlier in the case of farmers P and N. Through using terms such as 'headless chicken' and 'thrashing about all day' he is able to minimise the impact of any decline in strength or stamina, and reduce (discursively at least) the perceived distance between the volume of work he and his son respectively complete, through highlighting his own increasingly refined ability of how best to apply his skill without expending unnecessary time and effort.

Farmer J's quote also highlights the approach which may be termed 're-activating' past contributions. Here, reference was made to the forms of capital that are inseparable from the longer term history of the farm and hence their own roles within it. The most commonly used

example of this - often been referred to in previous work on good farming - is that relating to livestock, with reference to how “you can’t get to the quality of stock we’ve got on show overnight, I’ve worked on it for years” (L). Here, we see their contribution and associated claim to cultural capital as not just limited to the past, but actively embodied, in this case by ‘quality livestock’, in the present. This re-activating was perhaps more clearly evident in the discussion of managing land:

Whilst we’ve got new technology and stuffthings I’m not always up with...we’re never going to grow bananas [laughter] we might produce a bit more...but I’ve learned what this land will do over many years...I tell them [his son and grandson] how far they can go with it (P)

We are always improving the productivity of the land. David’s using all sorts these days – new-fangled fertilizers and computers on the tractors...but it’s what we’ve always done, improving things a bit (U)

In addition to restating the observation that older farmers may glean cultural capital through being selective in the application of their skill – in telling their son ‘how far they can go with it’ in farmer P’s case – the examples also illustrate how they are not precluded from sharing in, and utilising, the cultural capital associated with new technologies even when they admit to not having a full working knowledge of them. This is achieved through setting these observations into a broader temporal context and highlighting the temporal continuity of the farming habitus which places emphasis on continually improving the land (cf. Setten 2004). This land is “a symbol of success of several generations’ commitment to the land” (Setten 2004, p.401) and its current management is shaped by the knowledge built up over many years – of which the older farmer has played a central role – which sets the parameters of what the land can do and thus how the land is managed *today*. For these farmers, they avoided being ‘left behind’ (Polain *et al.* 2011) by the new technology, and indeed share in its symbolic capital, not by claiming to fully understand its specific working (as with farmer Q earlier) but by relegating it to just being another example of ‘improving things a bit’ – something which they themselves have (re)practiced over many years and hence can claim ownership of.

Whilst demonstrating high skill levels was a key aspect of maintaining their status as good farmers, the interviews revealed that this was not the only one and, counter-intuitively perhaps, low-skilled tasks completed alongside these were also seen to be important:

I do the lad's jobs a lot more these days...chain harrowing, a fair lot of muck spreading...the stuff I was doing when I left school over 60 years ago
[laughter] (F)

I'm still putting my shoulder to the wheel...I was out this morning throwing calf beds out¹²...it's dirty work, but they are all jobs that need doing [later in the interview] He [nearby farmer] is up in his 70s and I don't think I've ever seen him let anyone else do the mowing or baling....his lad's nearly 50 and I've never really seen him doing any of the main jobs (K)

On one level, the quotes can be read, particularly that of farmer K, as conscious demonstrations of continued physical capabilities in older age - a theme considered further in the next section of the paper. Alongside this, it illustrates how overt performances of good farming skill, such as quality livestock, require these complimentary, but less prestigious, tasks such as cleaning out calf beds. More significant, however, is not the skill level involved nor the visibility of the tasks *per se*, but how they serve to illustrate the older farmer's role as nurturing the next generation of good farmers. As Bourdieu (1986) suggests, the benefits of inheriting economic capital are only fully realised when the benefactor possesses the cultural capital relevant to using this in the appropriate manner. For these farming successors, the inheritance of good farms can become meaningless without the skills with which to develop it. For the farmers interviewed, part of their role in older age is moving beyond just holding (and performing) knowledge and passing it on to the next generation, but also facilitating their successors' performance and expression of it too. Whilst doing 'the lad's jobs' might be seen as a regression and a potential identity challenge, and following the logic of Garnham and Bryant (2014) might be seen as leading to depression in older age, when it is framed in parallel to letting their successors 'have a go' – that is allowing them to exhibit this cultural capital – it becomes an exhibition of good farming. Indeed it is seen that whilst performing highly skilled tasks is important to maintaining their status as good farmers (as noted earlier), performing *only* these tasks detracts from the good farmer status. In a similar way to Burton's (1998) observation of how displays of cultural capital do not always lead to an elevation of the good farmer status – in their example how the purchase of expensive machinery on a farm that does not warrant it, or where farmers are unable to use it effectively, may be seen as bad

¹² Straw placed under calves to keep them dry. Usually removed – in the case of this farmer by hand – when they have reached a certain height/level or become too saturated to keep the animal dry.

farming – we see here that there is a delicate balance whereby the demonstration of retaining their skilful performance in older age needs to be set in conjunction with allowing others a role in developing the farming capital or it will be seen as an example of bad farming.

‘Keep getting the job done’ – the ageing farm body

The final area which the paper turns to, which has been relatively underexplored in the discussion of farming identities and capital, is that of the farmer’s body. As suggested earlier, the extant literature on farming identity and masculinity points to a prioritisation of rugged, hard-bodied masculinity associated with hard work (Brandth 2001) which has led to a conclusion that a move away from the masculine ideal in older age may bring a period of crisis (Garnham & Bryant 2014). Many of the interviewees made reference to bodily capabilities, both explicitly and more implicitly, through statements such as “the old body creaking a bit”(J) and “not being as fit as I once was”(I), but importantly these were commonly set within wider narratives in which the body might be seen as a bearer of symbolic capital (Lovelock 2011, Shilling 2012). One approach taken to negating any bodily deficiencies or, to borrow Lovelock’s (2011, p.579) term, allowing the body to “recede from focus” was via the use of technology. The two following examples illustrate this approach:

I always say ‘I’m still as fast as anyone at rounding the sheep in [pause] when I’m on the quad bike’ (R)

I can plough all day on a tractor...never miss a beat (L)

Here the embodied cultural capital referred to earlier – the ability to skilfully operate machinery – allows any loss in bodily ability to be written out of the narrative. The reference of farmer R being ‘still as fast as anyone’, which emphasises the subtle competitiveness between farmers (cf. Burton 2004), shows focus is taken away from bodily performance *per se* toward still being able to undertake crucial tasks. For others, their approach to taking the focus away from the body was to make reference to working through any pain. References for example to “sucking it up and getting on with it”(S) and “forgetting about the pain on my knee and just gritting my teeth and keep getting the job done”(A) could be seen as ‘absenting the body’ (Lovelock 2011) – a process which Bourdieu (1984) suggested is central to identity formation – and which allowed the farmers to both adhere to the masculine farming ideals of stoicism and hardwork (Alston & Kent 2008) and continue to undertake the symbolically important tasks associated with being the good farmer. A further way that the ageing body

was referred to by farmers was as a testament to their farming history. The symbolic capital of the body was to remain tough and this was expressed by farmer F through comparison to a non-farming neighbour:

The solicitor who lives down the road, he had a bad knee...ended up getting a new one put in [...] I said that's alright if you take six weeks off work or have retired like him [...] he said he couldn't take the pain anymore, 'unbearable' he said...the soft sod

The drawing in of players from another field, again, was important here as it allowed the specificity of agriculture to be drawn out. The cultural capital associated with stoicism and endurance that is particular to the field of agriculture was invoked by the farmer through comparative reference to others of similar age outside that field and his own declining strength and stamina substituted by his ability to cope with or ignore pain in getting the job done. Intertwined with this approach was the discursive placing of signs of ageing so that they could be used to heighten the symbolic capital of the body. Here their ailments and bodily damage were placed as inextricably linked to the active self and a life in farming:

I'm like most of us farming lads....I'm a bit bow legged...a life of corn bags on my back and chasing sheep [laughter] (J)

I've a dodgy knee [...] it's all the kneeling down milking cows...thrashing in and going on a bit (H)

Apparent in the frame of reference of 'us farming lads' and following on from farmer J's comparison to his non-farming neighbour, is the farming habitus which "mediates the judgement of others...through its own logic" (Lovelock 2011, p.587). Such a logic is framed through the ability to carry on regardless and mask, downplay or ignore physical pain – which itself generates both symbolic capital and social capital through inclusion within the group. As Bourdieu (1984) argues, the habitus is expressed *through* bodies and, following his logic, we can see that bodies might take on a particular aesthetic. Whilst an easily cognisable example of this might be those whose work on the body might facilitate inclusion into a particular groups – such as that associated with bodybuilding (see Bridges 2009) – we see for these older farmers the work *of* the body becomes important. For farmer H the references to 'thrashing in and getting on' illustrate the ways that hard, even excessive, work is laid out as a reason for his bodily scars ('bad knees') and 'going on a bit' connects these scars directly to

active progression – in this case the good farming practices of building up the farm’s herd and its associated cultural and economic capital.

Conclusions

This paper has focused upon those farmers who remain on farms past the age of 65. The paper opened by noting how this blurred geographical boundary between home and work makes retirement status – retired, non-retired, semi-retired – difficult to define and locate. This observation has important implications for studying retirement and retirees themselves. For studying retirement we see that farming retirees, where they remain in place, represent a somewhat hidden population. At one end of the spectrum there may be farmers who have signed over legal control of their farms to their successors (as well as claiming a pension) but continue to work fulltime on the everyday activities of the farm, whilst at the other end of the spectrum there may be those who remain the legal owner of the farm but have much less involvement in its everyday workings and management. In the absence of participant observation of their activities the paper has relied on the self-reporting of [non]retirement status and it is possible that those farmers discussed represent a divergent range of positions across this spectrum of involvement.¹³ This observation offers a note of caution to those studies and surveys on older farmers which rely on data on farm transfer, rather actual tasks and roles undertaken, to ascertain the retirement status of older farmers. This fuzziness between the work/retirement boundary, which this remaining on the farm permits, also has implications for the farmers themselves. Unlike other occupations where the move into retirement is often a distinct process, both geographically and legally, for these farmers on family farms with successors they are able to avoid the often negative connotations ascriptions of ‘retired’ or ‘retiree’ might bring forward.

When framed within the discussion of the good farmer and drawing on Bourdieusian thinking, a clearer picture of farming non-retirement and older age can be gleaned. If we approach the issues from a solely economic perspective we might frame non-retirement as a result of farmers being locked into farming on the basis of poor pension planning and provision (Williams 2006). However, the paper has seen that the farming habitus shapes the disposition to both continue working and makes movement away from the farm – a constubstantive element of the farmer’s identity – an often inconceivable act. Bourdieu’s

¹³ Although a glimpse into these was given through the use of on farm interviews in the majority of cases discussed here.

ideas of capital help us see that remaining on the farm has implications beyond the economic. When we recognise the farm as a store of symbolic capital which is achieved both relationally and cumulatively we see that it can provide resources from which the older farmers can continue to draw out, perform and develop their own social and cultural capitals into older age. The farm may thus have a ‘shadow effect’. On one level this means that the challenges associated with older age that farmers may experience, such as a decline in physical capability, can become hidden, downplayed and masked within the shadow of a ‘good farm’. Interlinked to this is the process of ‘de-individualising’ the farm which means that the older farmer may access the capital associated with the past activities which become indivisible from the current status of the good farm, whilst the reference to ‘we’ in the collective work on the current farm may be used to shadow or mask any reduction to their current contribution. Similarly, such conscious linking to the past also takes on an embodied form, whereby the negative connotations associated with bodily scars and ailments can be recast as symbolic capital when they are framed as the result of years of good farming practice.

The paper has contributed to the discussion of the good farmer, specifically the call to recognise the potential temporal dynamicity of symbols of good farming and to move beyond more ‘snapshot’ appreciations of these (Sutherland & Darnhofer 2012). Bourdieu (1984) has suggested that new knowledges and practices may be generated in accordance with changing ‘rules of the game’ and whilst we may see ageing as one such change for farmers it does not result in new symbols of good farming *per se* (cf. the observations of the impact of changing reward structures for organic farmers noted by Sutherland and Darnhofer (2012)), but subtle changes in how these are performed and interlinked. For example, the visual appearance of the farm remains a key symbol of good farming, and the older farmers here prioritise this within their continued day-to-day tasks. Whilst wider research on ageing makes reference to the importance of a ‘busy ethic’ (Ekerdt 1986) in older age, it is important for farmers that this busyness is tied to symbolically important activities. The capital associated with hard work and performing long hours (Hunt 2010, Sutherland & Darnhofer 2012) – which may sometimes be compromised as farmers age – is fused with capital associated with skilful operation of machinery, so that the farmer both continues to be a ‘good farmer’ into older age and is able to challenge dominant cultural scripts of ageing by highlighting how they can still get the job done. In addition, those practices seen as important in previous research, such as exhibiting high levels of skill, are not temporally static and may take on different meaning

during the lifecourse. Whilst continuing to undertake these activities remains an important demonstration of good farming, this becomes supplemented by: a sharper focus on both how and where these are applied, with selective and studious use becoming an extension of embodied cultural capital; and also the interlinked demonstration of being a good [older] farmer which is ensuring that they allow sufficient opportunity for their successors to build up and exhibit their skills too.

The observations presented in this paper are relevant to the broader discussions of farming men and older age. At present such observations have focused on the one hand on how older age may bring a challenge to the masculine ideals of the farmer as an able-bodied bread winner and may thus lead to depression, whilst on the other hand are suggestions of a more positive depiction of older age (Bryant & Pini 2011). The discussion here leans towards the latter depiction but some observations on the particular contexts of the respondents are needed. First, the majority of respondents here are in older age (usually defined as 65-75) rather than older old age (75 plus) and a study focusing just on the latter cohort, with likely higher levels of physical frailty, might glean different results. That said, even amongst those older old farmers considered here, the processes of reactivating the past and performing symbolic, if less voluminous, tasks allowed them to report feelings of continued worth and the ability to still occupy the subject position of good farmer. Closely interlinked with this point is the respondents' position on family, and also economically viable, farms. The longer term nature of involvement – both by the older farmers and their forebears – provided the necessary capital(s) through which to counterbalance ageing. Crucial too is the role of the successor, both to allowing this de-individualising of the farm, such that the older farmers' current contribution may be very small but they continue to have access to the symbolic capital of the wider farm, and also because the rules of the farm do not become significantly rewritten – that is the pattern of succession allows farmers a familiar disposition passed through the example of previous generations. Such observations are likely to be different for those farms where a successor is not in place and future research could usefully explore how experiences differ for those who decide to let or sell their farm (cf. Riley, 2011) or who rely on paid, non-family, labour in structuring their retirement. Finally, as previous research has suggested, symbols of good farming are associated with the economic viability of the farm. Whilst it has been observed here that cultural capital can be derived from not taking economic capital out of the farm, this cultural capital is itself underpinned by the farm progressing (economically and otherwise) and where a farm becomes economically unstable,

this process is likely to be less straight-forward. Such observations arguably open avenues for future research on farmers and ageing. Whilst the paper has broadened the notion of good farming by extending its discussion into older age, new research could usefully expand the focus away from just male (often principal operator) farmers to explore what performing, and assisting the performance of, the good farmer means for others. For example attention could be paid to the intersecting and complimentary roles played by farm workers, children (including older children not employed on the farm) and farming spouses and partners.

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