

The New Decision-Makers in the Rural Landscape – Who Are Non-Farm Rural Landowners?

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Abstract

Rural areas are undergoing non-farm population growth as a result of various factors including changing lifestyle preferences, an aging population, and technological innovations which allow exurbanites to commute. This research investigated the rural non-farm landowner of Southern Ontario in order to describe their characteristics. It involved five preliminary focus groups with farm and non-farm landowners owning land in rural, urbanizing rural, and urbanized rural areas, and four final focus groups with non-farm rural landowners. The research also included a survey of 944 landowners in Southern Ontario. This mix of quantitative and qualitative data collection was intended to support a minor level of prediction (what will happen in the future as a result of the impact of this group?); process (working with the group under study to develop solutions through a research partnership); and generalization (as much as possible through the combination of methods). Study results suggest that the number and proportion of retirees and professionals in rural areas are increasing, and residents are more likely to live on or near their properties than in the past. Average property size has decreased, and education levels are increasing. Non-farm landowners should be considered separate and distinct from farmers, as they have different backgrounds, education levels relating to land use, and connections to the land. Policies and decisions relating to development and preservation need to treat these groups as having different priorities and perspectives on the issues. These results provide information which will assist with the development of new initiatives, support the continuation of successful programs, and enable the tracking and assessment of new and continuing conservation and stewardship initiatives for non-farm rural landowners.

Keywords: Ontario, non-farm rural, landowners, countryside

1.0 Introduction

Canada's rural population ranges from 22% to 38% of the population (approximately six to eleven million Canadians) depending on the definition of rural (Du Plessis, Beshiri, Bollman, & Clemenson, 2001; Mitura & Bollman, 2003). However, little more than 2% of the rural population in Canada continues to be involved in agriculture (Statistics Canada, 2001), and Canada's rural areas face new challenges from the migration of ex-urbanites and returning rural individuals who move into rural areas and unwittingly create tensions around land use, development, and services. Researchers suggest that belief in the inherent value of a healthy natural environment is leading increasing numbers of people to move from urban metropolitan centres to rural areas (Ilbery, 1998), in spite of research that indicates urban residents may be healthier (e.g., Weeks, Lee, Kazis, Wallace,

& Wang, 2006). Back in 1969, Ian McHarg called the “flight to the suburbs” the “greatest population migration in history...the memory insists upon a return to the land” (McHarg, 1969, p. 103). The next wave of migration seems to be rural migration. Unfortunately, the Canadian census does not track rural non-farm land ownership, only the ownership of farms. As land is purchased by non-farmers and goes into other land uses, there is no easy way to track the demographic characteristics of these landowners using census data. Past research would suggest that characteristics such as gender, age, education and personal history are important to understanding how this group is different from farmers and urban residents, but definitive research is limited.

This paper describes the rural non-farm landowner of Southern Ontario and explores the implications of this changing group for the rural landscape and communities through the use of nine focus groups and an extensive questionnaire mailed to 944 landowners. This mix of quantitative and qualitative data collection was intended to support a minor level of prediction (what will happen in the future as a result of the impact of this group?); process (working with the group under study to develop solutions through a research partnership); and generalization (as much as possible through the combination of methods) (Creswell, 1994).

Southern Ontario is an appropriate location for the study of non-farm rural landowners. The area is limited by geological and geographical characteristics such as the Oak Ridges Moraine, Canadian Shield, and Great Lakes. The generally amenable climate of Southern Ontario has made it one of the fastest growing areas in Canada, resulting in increased urban populations (Statistics Canada, 2001), decreased farm ownership (Rothwell, Bollman, Tremblay, & Marshall, 2002) (at least partially to support urban expansion), and the re-distribution of land into the hands of non-farm landowners.

The study defines non-farm rural landowners as individuals who live outside metropolitan areas of 10,000 residents or more, but within their commuting area (see Du Plessis et al., 2001).¹ They are owners of agricultural and non-agricultural rural land including cultivated land, pasture and range land, and natural areas including wooded areas, converted old fields, stream corridors and wetlands. Their property is over one acre in size. Non-farm landowners may be weekenders, retired farmers, people who work in a nearby town, retirees who have moved from the city, commuters who work in the city, or absentee landlords (among others). A portion of their property may be a hobby farm, but more substantial farming enterprises are managed by others.²

In the past, the term “exurbanite” has been used to describe non-farm rural landowners. It originated with Sectorsky (1955), and has been adopted by many

¹ A definition of rural as outside the boundaries of CMAs (Census Metropolitan Areas – urban core population of 100,000 or over) and CAs (Census Agglomeration – urban core population of 10,000 to 99,999) (Du Plessis et al., 2001) but within the commuting zone of urban areas was developed for this study. While it is recognized that this definition will include some urban residents, the additional parameter of property size of one acre or more and allowing landowners to self-define as “rural” eliminates the majority of city residents.

² Note that the Environment Canada study (1981) included both farmers and non-farmers. The Environics study (2000) results for non-farmers are specified where available. The 2001 Environics study focused on non-farm landowners as defined by small property size (25 acres or less in southern Ontario and less than 50 acres in northern Ontario).

authors and researchers, though there remains no commonly accepted definition (Joseph & Smit, 1981). Conflicting and inconsistent use of the term “exurban” contributes to the confusion. Older literature uses the terms non-farm and exurban interchangeably, or uses exurban to mean “former urban residents” (Neice, 1977), but more recent literature characterizes exurban development as a geographic phenomena: people who live outside major cities but within their commuting zones (Davis, 1990). For the purposes of this study, the latter definition is adopted, with “exurban development” being the “rural residential area beyond the suburbs but within the commuting range of the urban/suburban area” (Davis, 1989, p. 1).

1.1 Defining the Problem

On the surface, decreasing numbers of farmers, youth and primary sector employees suggest that rural Ontario is struggling to maintain its population. However, as documented by Statistics Canada, while rural and small town regions lost population during the period between 1981 and 1991, there was net increase between 1971 and 1981, and again between 1991 and 1996, largely as a result of the in-migration of non-farm individuals between the ages of 25 and 69 (Rothwell et al., 2002), especially to areas at the periphery but within the commuting range of large cities and towns. The increased percentage of non-farm residents in rural areas can also be partly explained by the decline of farm numbers, the increase in average farm size, the expansion of the service sector, and the decline in employment in the farm and agriculture sectors (Bascom, 2000; Bascom & Gordon, 1999; Bunce, 1982). This shift has resulted in higher commuting times and increased residential development in rural areas (Bascom, 2000; Bunce, 1982). Increased development and tourism in rural areas is also a contributing factor to increasing non-farm landownership (Bascom, 2000). Research by Bascom (2000) suggests that future growth of the non-farm population is inextricably linked to the transformation of the North American non-metropolitan economies to service economies.

Research has proposed that some non-farm landowners may be more similar to suburban residents than to other rural residents (Davis, 1989). Davis (1989) identifies commuters or exurbanites as having the following distinguishing characteristics: higher income, white collar jobs, and often two wage earner households. Davis’ research (1990) identifies four types of households using cluster analysis:

- Child-raising: decentralized jobs with shorter commutes than suburbanites;
- Long-distance commuters: urban jobs, spend twice as long commuting, with large cheap lots at a distance from city;
- Affluents: urban jobs, less time commuting, with large expensive lots close to city; and,
- Economy-minded: suburban or urban jobs, average time commuting, with smaller lots.

In fact, the differences between suburbanites and non-farm rural landowners may no longer be defined by commuting distances. The suburbanization of employment (Dueker, Strathman, Levin, & Phipps, 1983), higher driving speeds, and less traffic (Zimmer, 1985) have reduced time spent commuting to and from work (Davis, 1989).

While there are a range of studies that discuss non-farm rural landowners, a large number study both farmers and non-farm rural (e.g. Caldwell, 1980, Hilts, 2000; Ryan, Erickson & DeYoung, 2003), and few differentiate between farm and non-

farm results (e.g. Caldwell, 1980; Hilts, 2000; Milburn & Mulley, 2003). Those studies which focus on non-farm rural landowners often focus on one aspect of their landownership (e.g. Bascom, 2000; Bascom et al., 1999; Caldwell & Weir, 2001; Davis, 1990; Weir, 2003), but rarely address the key demographic characteristics of this group.

2.0 Methods

The study involved three key stages of data collection: five preliminary focus groups (two with farmers, three with non-farmers), four final focus groups, and a detailed self-administered mail survey. Both sets of focus groups were organized by sponsoring groups such as the Ontario Stewardship Councils, who selected and contacted individuals for participation. The questionnaire mailing list was developed in partnership with various sponsoring groups including the Stewardship Councils and Conservation Authorities. The modified self-administered questionnaire and package format was designed using the Dillman method (Dillman, 1978, 2000). The survey was pre-tested by a group of conservation professionals from Southern Ontario, and a small number of non-farm rural landowners from the Guelph, Ontario area. All individuals identified by the partners were included in the survey, as the size of the population is unknown. Individuals with addresses outside of Canada and those who required a French language version of the questionnaire were eliminated from the mailing list as a result of limited available resources. The questionnaire included nominal, ordinal, and ratio data as well as open-ended questions.

The limitations of this study are the result of the method used to access the population. Because there is no record of non-farm rural landownership (non-farm landowners are “everyone left over when you take out the farmers”), they are a difficult group to access. Some of them are not rural residents, and as such, sometimes they are not on resident lists. Study participants were those non-farm rural landowners identified by the Stewardship Coordinators, so results may be inadvertently biased by the people to whom they have access, or the process they used to develop the lists for participation or distribution. While clustering and duplication were not problems with this study as a result of careful management and checking of the mailing list, missing elements remain a significant concern. Because of the limitations imposed by Part III of the Ontario Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA sections 38 to 43 inclusive), the researcher had minimal control over the representativeness of the sample.^{3,4}

³ The limited access that the Stewardship Coordinators have to urban residents who own rural properties, the high turnover of this group, and the reduced likelihood that this group would receive a survey sent to their rural (as compared to urban) residence, especially when sent during the months of March and April, suggests that the urban residents in the sample are under-represented. Other potential biases may be the result of the predominance of Eastern Ontario landowners (as compared to a random sample from across Ontario); the requisite connection between the participants and the Stewardship Coordinators (as compared to a sample of landowners with no specific connection to environmental groups); and landowners with large properties (as compared to non-farmers as ‘everyone who is not a farmer’ regardless of property size). The other sources of bias were addressed several ways. Factual and temporal inaccuracies were addressed with the return of “moved” envelopes, or through contact by phone, email or letter with family members of the respondent identified on the list. Foreign elements were excluded through coding: Question 2 asked, “Do you

3.0 Results

The preliminary focus groups were organized and conducted in December 2002 by a team of researchers and students from the University of Guelph (Milburn et al., 2003). The focus groups were located in Exeter, Markdale, and Belfountain, Ontario. The locations were chosen in an attempt to get feedback from individuals in rural, urbanizing rural, and urbanized rural areas. The non-farm focus groups ranged from 12 to 16 people in size and were located centrally for participants. Four final focus groups from different areas of southern Ontario were conducted in 2006. The final focus groups were intended to fulfill multiple roles: they provided exploratory information specific to the needs of the Ministry of Natural Resources, they supported the finalization of the survey, and they confirmed the analysis of past research. As such, they were part of the multiple stages of data collection involved in this project, and served a phenomenological function by allowing the researcher to interact with the group under study and share their experience of Ontario's rural landscape. Including both focus groups and a questionnaire supports results that are both statistically- and quotively-based. They supported the range of approaches necessitated by the methodological stance, which required the ability to move through a range of positions, issues, and perspectives as needed to effectively answer the questions, only one of which is the focus of this paper.

The survey was sent out to a total of 944 landowners in March 2006 with two follow-up mailings to non-respondents. The package included a cover letter detailing the purpose of the questionnaire and background on the rationale for the format and type of questions. Twelve percent (n=116) of recipients contacted the researcher by mail, email or telephone to say that they did not wish to participate. Another 0.7% (n=7) of recipients were identified as deceased, and 7% (n=69) of surveys were returned because the individuals had moved. Nine percent (n=84) of returned surveys were from individuals who considered themselves farmers.

As of July 16, 2006, of the 944 individuals who were sent surveys, 72% (n=676) either returned the questionnaire or contacted the researcher to request removal from the mailing list. Seventy-six questionnaires were not completed as a result of individuals being deceased or having moved, which yielded an adjusted return rate of 74.5% (n=560). Removing the farmers from the respondents yielded a group composed of 476 individuals.

Closed-ended questions (See Table 1) were pre-coded to retain detail, as categories are easily combined during the data analysis process (Babbie, 1973). The data was then inserted into SPSS 13.0, a statistical analysis program, to allow various statistical analyses to be conducted. The focus group and questionnaire results were examined using an inductive structure, and results emerged from the data collected rather than taking the form of deductive tests. Results of qualitative data were tested using content analysis.

consider yourself a farmer?", and by separating "yes" and "no" respondents, farmers were identified and removed from the analysis.

⁴ See Milburn (2007) section 5.6 for an extensive discussion of possible areas of bias in the study and how they were examined or addressed.

Table 1. *Selected Survey Question*⁵ (Milburn, 2007)

	Survey Question	Available Responses
1.	Where do you live?	a city; a rural village or town; rural estate development; property in a rural area; a farm; other
2.	Do you consider yourself a farmer?	yes; no; retired farmer
3.	What year did you first take ownership of your rural land?	[open ended]
4.	Is your rural or small town property your primary residence?	yes; no
5.	If no, is it:	weekend residence; future retirement property; financial investment; other
6.	If no, how close is your primary residence to your rural property (in km)?	[open ended]
8.	If yes, how long have you lived in the countryside?	[open ended]
11.	Which of the following best describes where you grew up?	a city; suburb; a rural village or town; property in a rural area; a farm; other
12.	Are you the son or daughter of a farmer?	yes; no
13.	Did you relocate to rural Ontario from an urban area?	yes; no; don't live in rural Ontario
14.	How far do you travel to work from home on an average day (in km)?	[open ended]
15.	What is the postal code of your rural property?	[open ended]
16.	What is the total size of your property (in acres)?	[open ended]
17.	My property is comprised of the following types of land:	cropland; pasture; wetland or seasonally wet; old field (retired farmland); woodland; reforested; other (scale=most/some/a bit/none)
18.	Are there any creeks or streams on or immediately adjacent to your land?	yes; no
21.	What year were you born?	[open ended]
22.	What is your gender?	male; female
23.	What is the highest level of education you have completed?	some primary school; completed primary school; some high school; completed high school; some college or university; completed college or university; completed apprenticeship; university graduate degree (masters or doctorate)
24.	What is the size of your household?	[open ended] (# of people)

⁵ A copy of the entire survey is available upon request.

25. What is your primary occupation? (If you have more than one, the job that generates the most income) [open ended]
26. Is your work or profession involved with environmental conservation issues? If yes, how? yes; no [open ended]
27. What is your ethnic background? [open ended]
28. What was your total gross household income before taxes for 2005? Please approximate. [open ended]
- 29a. Are you one of the people responsible for making the long-term management decisions regarding this land? yes - own, manage and make decisions on entire property; yes - own but rent some of it out; yes - own but rent all of it out; no - don't make decisions
- 29b. If you have a renter(s), are they responsible for management decisions on their part of the land? yes; no
30. If some or all of the land is rented, what purpose is it rented out for? [open ended]
31. If some or all of the land is rented, does the owner engage the renter in discussions about his or her methods or activities? yes; no; not applicable
37. Please rank how much you listen to the opinions of each of the following people or groups when you make a decision about managing your land and its resources: spouse or partner; children; other household members; friends; neighbours; town council; environmental groups; local businesses; private consultants; conservation authority; government; other (scale="not at all"→"a great deal")
- Question 43. Please rate your knowledge and experience with each of the following: native plants; invasive species; management of natural areas; natural history of the area; wildlife habitats; bird identification; wetlands and wildlife ponds; woodlot management; naturalization; water quality monitoring; well protection; pesticides and fertilizers; wastewater treatment; waste storage and disposal; water conservation; energy conservation; soil conservation; conservation easements; income opportunities re: resource management; other (scale="none at all"→"high level of expertise")
44. Referring to the list above, what issues are you most interested in learning more about? [open ended]
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3.1 Characteristics of Non-Farm Landowners in Southern Ontario

The following sections consolidate results from the focus groups and questionnaire. Statistics reflect the questionnaire results only. Focus group results were used to expand, explain, inform, and at times contrast with, the questionnaire results.

Gender

Respondents were 27% female and 73% male. This result is surprising, as the non-farm rural population is likely similar to the population as a whole, with 51% female and 49% male (Statistics Canada, 2006). While rural areas do sometimes have a higher than average male population because of limited career opportunities for women, it is anticipated that non-farm rural landowners would closely reflect Ontario's population profile. Phone discussions with some respondents suggest that, given the nature of the survey, the male member of the household was the automatic choice for completion. One reviewer suggested that "the decision to live in the country or the satisfaction of living in the country is more male dominated than female...I personally have a stronger attachment to our farm than my wife." Regardless, men responded as representatives of the household, meaning that the gender division is likely less significant than seems indicated.

The male to female ratio in the province is likely to be replicated in rural areas in the future. As the population ages, morbidity patterns result in women outnumbering men. In the over 65 group, there are only three men for every four women, and 43 men per 100 women in the over 85 group (Ministry of Finance, 2003a). This would suggest that future planning for rural area program delivery will need to be specifically tailored to the older population, with special attention paid to older, likely single, women. It should be noted that this group often has limited physical, financial, and personal resources.

Age

Respondents ranged in age from 21 to 90, with an average age of 59. There was no evidence that there was a greater willingness on the part of older people to participate. The 1981 study of rural landowners had 59% of respondents over 50 (Environment Canada & Ministry of Natural Resources, 1981), and the 'Caring for Your Land' survey (Milburn, 2004) had an average age of 57. This survey had 50% of respondents over 59, as compared to 50% 55 to 64 or older in Environics' (2000) study. These results suggest that this survey provides a relatively accurate reflection of the average age of the non-farm landowner in Southern Ontario. It should be noted that Ontario's population is 26% in the 0 to 19 age range, 61% in the 20 to 64 age range, and 13% over 65 (Ministry of Finance, 2003a). The average age in the province is 37.2 (Ministry of Finance, 2003a), and if the 0-19 age group is removed, it becomes approximately 47, which is still much younger than the survey average of 59. Thirteen percent of the total population of Ontario is over 65 (17.5% of the 20 and over portion of the population)⁶, whereas the respondents were 33.3% over 65, supporting the conclusion of an older than average population. The average age of the male respondents was 61, while the average for females was 54.

⁶ Statistics Canada uses the following age categories: under 15; 15-19; 20-24; 25-29; 30-34; 35-39; 40-44; 45-49; 50-54; 55-59; 60-64; 65-69; 70-74; 75-79; 80-84 and 85 and older. Statistics Canada presents many of the census results related to age in terms of the following categories: under 15; 15-54; 55-64; and 65 and older (see www.statcan.gc.ca).

Education

The educational profile of the respondents was largely inconsistent with the Ontario population as a whole. The respondents were 13% more likely to have graduated from high school and 21% more likely to have graduated from college or university (See Table 2). The high levels of education of the respondents has implications for the tenure of ownership and the sustainability of rural communities, as there is an association between higher levels of education and increased mobility (Rothwell et al., 2002), and positive attitudes to wilderness areas and environmental issues (Lyons, 1983).

Table 2. *Level of education comparison (2001 census and survey results) (Milburn, 2007)*

	2001 Census (Ontario)	Survey	Difference
Without high school certificate	20.6	7.9	-12.7
Completed high school / some college or university	24.4	24.6	+0.2
Trades certificate, diploma, completed apprenticeship	11.0	2.3	-8.7
Completed college or university	44.0	65.2	+21.2

Primary Occupation

‘Primary occupation’ was designed as an open-ended question, and coded using Statistics Canada’s categories of managerial, professional, intermediate, technical and unskilled (Magnusson & Alasia, 2004), with additional categories added as a result of high numbers of responses. The retired response is not considered to be an accurate reflection of the respondents, since respondents were inconsistent in identifying their profession as current or past (prior to retirement). Professionals and consultants made up 16.7% of the respondents, while managerial and administrative occupations included 9.4%. Teachers and professors (6.8%) and environmental consultants (5.9%) suggest the interest in land management reflected by the survey results may reflect an occupational source. Other categories included unskilled (8.2%), intermediate skilled (4.1%), technical (2.7%), and skilled labor (2.3%). Only 3% of respondents identified themselves as “self employed”, but as indicated by the other categories, a number of occupations in the results likely involve self-employment.

Household Size

Household size ranged from one to six, with an average of 2.5. While the average is similar to the population as a whole, the proportion of households with individuals living alone is greater in the general population, and the proportion of two person households is greater in the respondent group.

The proportion of two person households and the age of their members have significant repercussions for the long term management of land in the rural area as well as rural Ontario’s future. As the non-farm rural group ages, women will outlive men. In combination with the age statistics, this would suggest that as the

population ages over time, an increasing proportion of non-farm rural landowners will be older women living alone after the loss of their partner. With the predominance of two person households, a large portion of land in these areas will be held in the hands of aging widowed women, with their traditionally lower incomes and reduced capacity for labour. While it is possible that these women may sell their properties after their husband or partner passes away, long term planning still needs to address communicating with and accessing this important and growing group.

Ethnic Background

According to Beshiri (2001) and Statistics Canada (2003), in rural regions, immigrants constitute 6% of the population, as compared to urban regions with 27% of the population, and recent immigrants are even less likely to live in rural regions. New immigrants have a higher level of education, report lower incomes, and are likely to work in primary sector occupations (Beshiri, 2001). Survey respondents were less than 2% visible minorities, with 85.2% identifying themselves as either Canadian or Western European. Ontario's population is 19.1% visible minorities, dominated by Asians (48%), and Blacks (19%) (Ministry of Finance, 2003b). New immigrants are less likely to identify themselves as Canadian, and immigrants to Canada come from Asia, Europe, the Americas and Africa. It should be noted that immigrants who choose to live in rural areas are more highly educated, have lower earnings and are more likely to be professionals than other rural residents (Beshiri, 2001).

Household Income

The study median income is between \$70,001 and \$80,000, which is consistent with Ontario's median family income of \$79,697 (2000), though it is surprising in light of Singh's (2004) results, which indicate that incomes in rural areas are lower than those in urban areas. Non-farm rural incomes match those of urban Ontario, but must be substantially higher than those of other rural residents (such as farmers), since rural areas have lower average incomes than urban areas.

Location of Residence

Location of residence' is one of the key issues where there is a possibility for bias in the sample that is extremely difficult to confirm or disprove using the data. It is likely that the study partners would have less access to landowners who live elsewhere than on their properties, and as such, we expect that the urban residents and absentee owners in the sample are under-represented. Regardless, while 10% of the respondents were retired farmers (distinguished from active farmers who were removed from this analysis), 18% considered themselves to be living on a farm. Seventy-two percent live in a rural area on a non-farm rural property, and 8% live in the city⁷. Almost 18% of respondents identified another property (non-rural or small town) as being their primary residence. This is higher than expected, as only 8% of respondents identified themselves as living in the city (See Figure 1). In response to follow-up queries, people identified their properties as recreational or bush properties or purchases for investment or retirement. This would suggest that a number (possibly 10%) of respondents own multiple properties in the rural area.

⁷ Some of the categories were not exclusive; for example, retired farmers could live in the city.

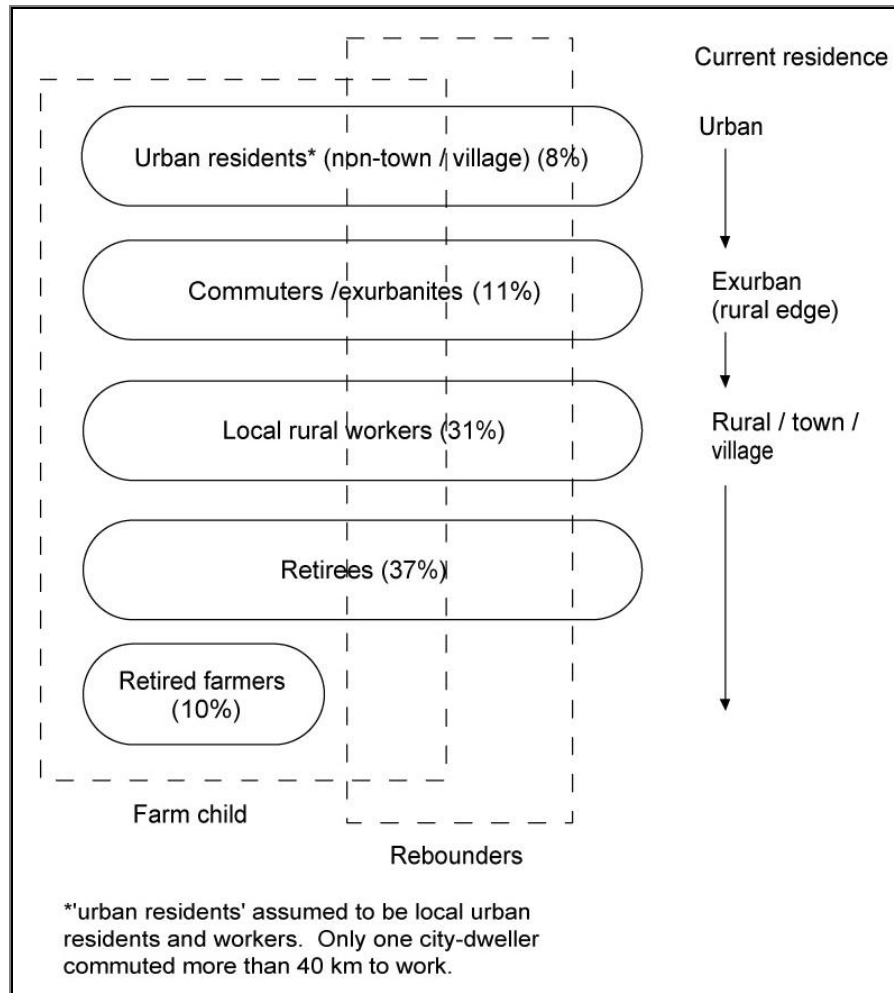


Figure 1. Non-farm rural landowners by residence and work location (Milburn, 2007)

Respondents had owned their land for over 19 years on average, with a median of 17 years. Where residences were not on the property, they ranged from less than one to 400 km away, with an average of 84 km. For those who live in the country, the average duration is 23 years, with 14% less than 5 years, 30% less than 10 years, and 25% over 30 years.

Respondents travel between 0.10 and 200 km from home to work each day (one way), with an average distance of 36.5 km. Over 20% of people traveled less than 10 km, whereas 36% traveled over 50 km. Having adopted a definition of exurban as being the “rural residential area beyond the suburbs but within the commuting range of the urban/suburban area” (Davis, 1989, p. 1), with over 50 km each way being classified as “commuting” for the purposes of this study, 27% of survey respondents fall into the category of “exurbanite.”

The relationship between residency and demographic factors were tested using Pearson's chi-square to identify the impact of location of residence. There was no relationship between residency status and demographic variables such as age, income or occupation. There was a weak relationship between residency and motivation, wherein residency was found to reduce the error rate by only 6.8%

when compared to what would have been expected from randomly assigned values. This could have been the result of sampling error (see Footnote 3). According to Davis (1990), exurbanites have higher incomes and are more likely to have white collar jobs than other rural residents, the results of this study find no relationship between commuting distance and income or occupation. These results would suggest that, contrary to the literature, Ontario non-farm rural landowners who live on their properties and commute over 50 km to work are very similar in profile and motivations to other non-farm rural landowners.

Personal History

While 42% of respondents grew up in the city or suburbs, 58% grew up in the country, with over 20% being raised on a farm (See Table 3 and Figure 2). Twenty-nine percent identify themselves as the son or daughter of farmer, and 61% relocated to rural Ontario from an urban area (either they grew up in the city or a suburb, or moved there from the country and returned). As a result, 25% of respondents are “rebounders” or people who grew up in the country, moved to the city, and moved back to the country (See Figure 3). As stated by one participant: “...after 40 years I have chosen to retire to my roots. I believe many boomers will follow my move back to my childhood. Just imagine if it were the other way around. Born in a city, have to work in the country setting for 40 years and then can just not wait to retire back to the city! Shocking thought!” Younger respondents are less likely to be the son or daughter of a farmer than older respondents. It is possible that younger respondents are the children of non-farm rural landowners.

Table 3. *Relationship between childhood experiences and current residence location (Milburn, 2007)*

Live	Grew Up			Total
	City	Non-farm Rural	Farm	
Rural	38%	33%	19%	90%
City	4%	4%	2%	10%
Total	42%	37%	21%	100%

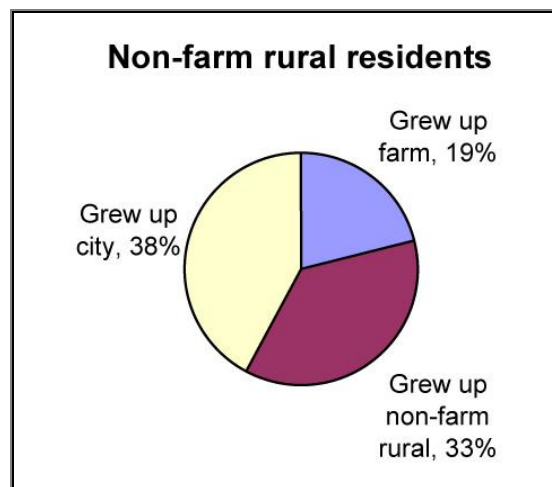


Figure 2. Location of childhood experience (non-farm rural) (Milburn, 2007)

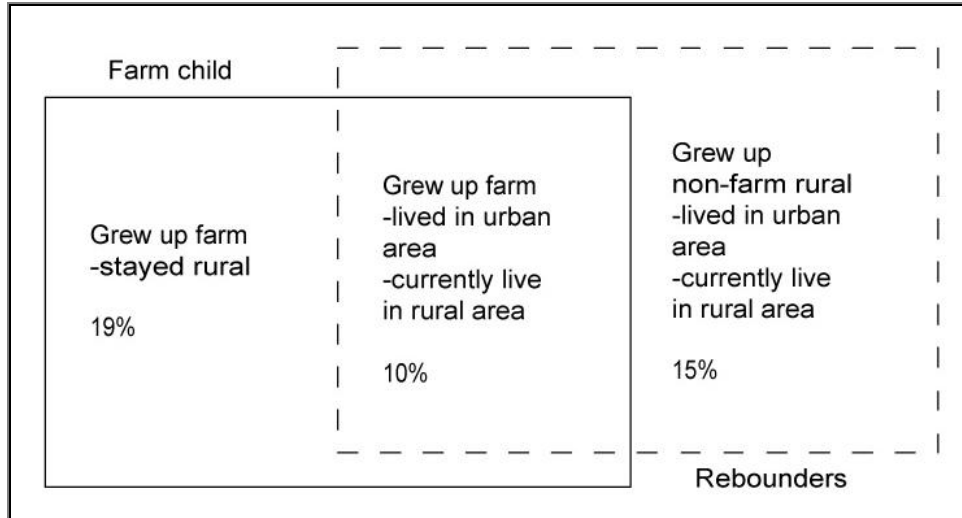


Figure 3. Farm children and rebounders (Milburn, 2007)

Property Description

Properties range in size from 0.14 acres to 6000 acres, with an average of 95 acres, and a median of 48.75 acres. Four percent of respondents had less than one acre, while 25% had less than ten acres. Half of respondents owned less than 49 acres, and 90% had 165 acres or less. Almost half of landowners had no cropland or pasture, and 88% had some amount of land that was seasonally wet or a wetland. Eighty percent of respondents identified their land as some or mostly woodlot, and almost 80% identified their land as reforested to some extent (see Figure 4). Seventy percent of respondents had creeks or streams on or immediately adjacent to their land.

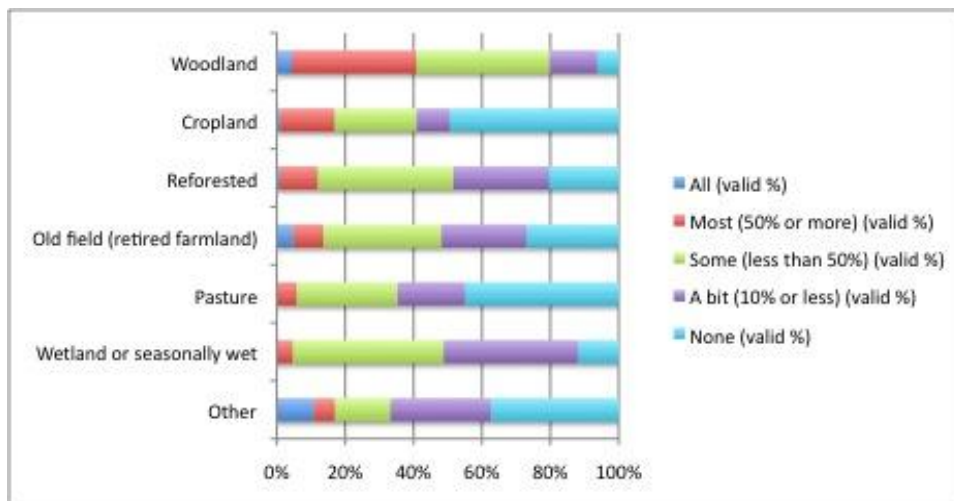


Figure 4. My property is comprised of the following types of land (based on Milburn, 2007)

The majority (83%) of respondents owned, managed and made all the decisions on their entire property, but 15.7% rented some or most of it out. Only 1.3% claim not to be involved in the decision-making on their property. Eleven percent assign their renter responsibility for management decisions on their part of the land. Research by

Erickson, Ryan and De Young (2002), has shown that, even in cases of multiple ownership, cooperative management is still not a generally accepted practice for farmers or non-farmers. In spite of this, 34% of those who rent some portion of their land engage the renter in discussions about their methods or activities. Most rented land is used for cash cropping (46%), hay (25%), or cattle (15%).

Participation in Groups

Of those landowners surveyed, 54% were members of one or more conservation or environmental groups or organizations, with an average membership rate of 1.17 groups. Age was not a factor in involvement in these groups. It would appear that regardless of membership, respondents consider the most credible sources of information to be the Conservation Authorities, with the Ministry of Natural Resources as a second choice. When a broader list of people or groups was introduced, spouses, children, friends and neighbours became more important than all other groups except for the Conservation Authorities (#2) and environmental groups (#3), though these results need to be considered in light of the study limitations resulting from the role of the partners in creating the participant list. Ewing's (2001) study of curb-side recycling identified two normative factors as of primary importance: the expectations of household members and of friends and neighbours. The survey results certainly support that conclusion: the people with whom non-farm landowners have familial or personal relationships are the primary influences on conservation and stewardship decision-making.

Knowledge and Experience with Environmental / Conservation Issues

Research has indicated that practical knowledge and personal experience have a strong impact on the rural landowner's attitudes and behaviours (Erickson et al., 2002; Buss, 1994; Vogel, 1986). A surprisingly large proportion of the respondents (32%) identify their work or profession as being involved with environmental conservation issues, but a response cross check indicated that people identify "involvement" broadly. For example, both plumbers and truck drivers include themselves in this group as they "adopt responsible practices". Thirty-five percent are involved in managing natural resources in some way, with an additional 14% being involved in environmental education.

When asked to rate their knowledge and experience with different aspects of conservation, respondents ranked themselves as *most knowledgeable* in the areas of:

1. Energy conservation
2. Water conservation
3. Wildlife habitat
4. Natural history of the area
5. Woodlot management
6. Soil conservation
7. Management of natural areas

They considered themselves *least knowledgeable* in the areas of:

1. Income opportunities from resource management
2. Conservation easements
3. Wastewater treatment
4. Water quality monitoring
5. Naturalisation
6. Waste storage and disposal
7. Invasive species

3.2 Summary Profile

Table 5 summarizes the demographic results noted above. Results of significance include the average age of the group, high level of education, professional orientation of the population, and the low proportion of visible minorities.

Table 5. *Summary – profile of non-farm rural landowners (Milburn, 2007)*

Category	Survey	Ontario population (available data)
Average age	59	47 (20 and older)
Education	65% completed college or university	44% completed college or university
Primary occupations	17% professionals/consultants 7% teachers 6% environmental professionals 9% managers	
Work involved with environment and conservation	32%	
Visible minorities	Less than 1%	19%
Income	Median: \$70,001 to \$80,000	\$79,697
Live in a rural area	82%	
Average land tenure	19 years	
Lived in country	23 years	
If not primary residence	84km away	
Median property size	49 acres	
Land is some or mostly woodlot	75%	
Creek or stream on or adjacent to land	70%	
Rent out some of the land	16%	

Figure 5 provides a summary which addresses the defining demographic-related characteristics of non-farm rural landowners. Forty-seven percent of landowners are retired, and 13% of respondents intend to retire to their properties in the future. Twenty-nine percent of landowners grew up on a farm, and 25% grew up in the rural area, moved to the city, and returned. Urbanites and weekenders make up 21% and 18% of the study population respectively.

Past research has tended to categorize non-farm landowners by their location of residence and/or work (as either residents or non-residents, and local workers or commuters). The above results suggest that neither residence nor work location should be considered primary factors in determining demographic characteristics or ties to the rural landscape. This analysis suggests that, in terms of attitudes and priorities for learning and engaging in conservation and stewardship, these groups should be treated as largely contiguous.

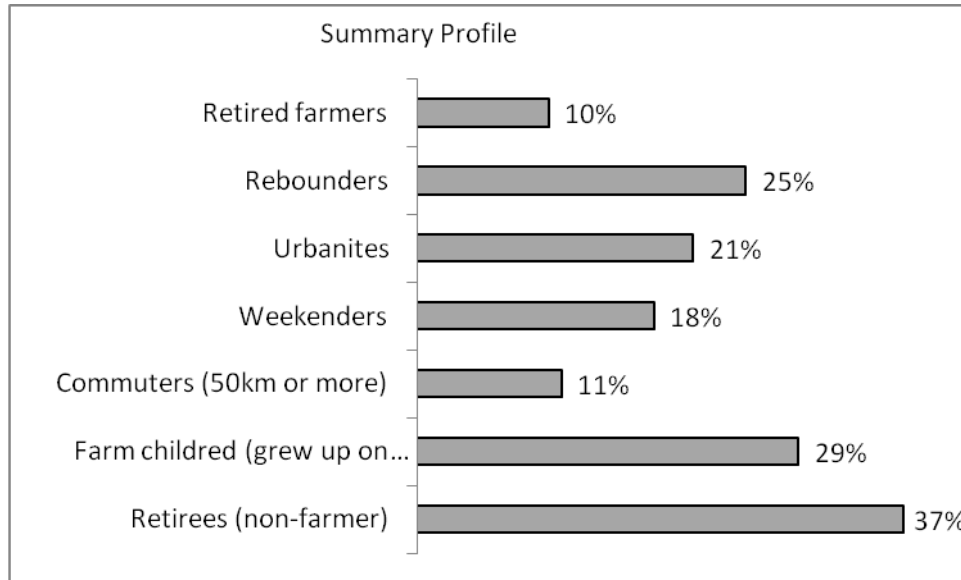


Figure 5. Summary – who are they? (Milburn, 2007)

4.0 Implications of the Demographic Profile

The following discussion compares the results of this study to previous studies of non-farm rural landowners in Ontario to identify key patterns and trends. While it is recognized that some results may reflect sampling bias, the results can be considered as suggestive of certain patterns (see Footnote 3).

The number and proportion of retirees in rural areas is increasing. Retirees have increased from 7% of the population in 1969, to 11% in 1981 (Environment Canada et al., 1981). This study had 47% of participants in the over 65 category. Residents are getting older: 59% were at least 50 years old in 1981, but 17.5% of those over 20 are 65 and older (Ministry of Finance, 2003a). Seventy-six percent of the study respondents were at least 50 years old in 2006. This has several implications for rural areas: older residents have less physical resources to work on their land, but more time. The discrepancy between male and female life spans may result in more rural land being owned by single elderly women, who traditionally have lower financial resources than other members of the population. Furthermore, this characteristic is likely to reinforce high property turnover rates as seniors move for higher care levels or as properties are sold upon death of the owner.

The number and proportion of professionals in rural areas is increasing. Professionals have increased from 5% of the population in 1969, to 9% in 1981 (Environment Canada et al., 1981). Environics' (2001) study of non-farm landowners identified 25% of non-farm landowners as involved in professional occupations, compared to almost 40% of the sample for this study. This

characteristic will reinforce the focus on environmental issues in rural areas, and is likely to exacerbate conflicts between farmers and non-farmers.

Non-farm landowners are more likely to live on or near their properties. In 1981 73% of respondents lived within five miles of their property or on it, whereas in 2006 84.2% show a similar profile - 82% live on their property and 3.4% live within eight kilometres or five miles (Environment Canada et al., 1981). In 1969, 86% lived within 25 miles of their property, whereas in 1981 83% lived that distance, and in 2006 90.6% live on or within 40 km or 25 miles. In the category 51 to 200 miles, 1969 had 8%, 1981 had 11% (Environment Canada et al., 1981), and 2006 had 7.4% (80 to 330 km). This result likely reflects the influence of the high number of retirees, who are less likely to own multiple properties.

The average property size has decreased. Average property size has decreased from 263 acres in 1969, to 231 acres in 1981 (Environment Canada et al., 1981), and 148 acres in 2000 (Enviro-nics, 2000). Participants of this study had properties averaging 95 acres (49 acre median) in 2006. As the retired portion of the non-farm rural population increases, it is likely that the average property size will continue to decrease as seniors purchase rural properties which are smaller than those preferred by younger residents for maintenance reasons. Increasing property costs in rural areas (Heimlich & Anderson, 2001) may also be a factor in decreasing property sizes. Smaller parcel sizes have implications for farmland preservation and effective farm operations. Smaller property sizes will result in a decreased landscape "grain", greater visual dominance of architecture, and an increased percentage of land being used for the architectural envelope (cleared land around the building). The landscape will be less capable of providing ecological goods and services as land is fragmented and less connected. The development of appropriate planning approaches to address rural subdivisions and severances will be crucial to maintain the aesthetic and functional character of Ontario's rural landscape into the future as this trend continues.

Education levels are substantially higher. In 1969 8% of respondents had graduated from college or university, in 1981 17.6% (Environment Canada et al., 1981), and in 2000 21% of both farmers and non-farmers had graduated college or university (Enviro-nics, 2000) in Ontario. The current Enviro-nics study (2006) suggests that 65% of non-farm landowners have completed at least one college or university degree. This would imply that non-farm landowners are substantially higher educated than their farming neighbours: while the education level of non-farm landowners may have increased, Enviro-nics (2000) result of 21% would suggest that the average level of educational attainment is very different between farmers and non-farmers. It is, however, likely that education levels in the non-farm landowner population have increased, though not to as great an extent as would be suggested by the difference between the 2000 and 2006 studies.

5.0 Conclusion

The results of this study highlight the conflict between theory and practice. In theory, "non-farm" is comprised of disparate groups including retirees, commuters, and summer residents. As argued by one study participant, non-farm landowners range along a "spectrum of overlapping characteristics that makes separating them into groups fairly meaningless." In practice, non-farm landowners are not only a contiguous group geographically (eastern vs. central vs. western Ontario), they also have similar motivations, priorities, and interests. While non-farm is inclusive

of a number of different groups, defining these landowners by resident or work status when discussing land management practices places undue emphasis on these characteristics. Non-farm landowners can be consolidated for the purposes of land use planning and development even though their residence location (city vs. rural property) and status as employed or retired may be different. This contrasts with Davis' (1990) research that created distinct groups based on parental status and commuting distance.

In general, we can conclude that the number and proportion of retirees (Environment Canada et al., 1981) and professionals in rural areas is increasing (Environment Canada et al., 1981, Ministry of Finance, 2003a, Environics' 2001) and education levels are substantially higher (Environment Canada et al., 1981, Environics, 2000). The average property size has decreased (Environment Canada et al., 1981, Environics, 2000) and non-farm landowners are more likely to live on or near their properties (Environment Canada et al., 1981).

These characteristics significantly contrast with those of farmers as identified by Environics (2006). While both groups are very concerned about the health and long term sustainability of the environment, farmers' conservation activities must exist within a framework of financial sustainability: they must either be supported by external financial resources, or they must demonstrate a positive cost / benefit relationship. Non-farm landowners, on the other hand, are motivated by environmental and quality of life considerations. Non-farm landowners should be considered separate and distinct from farmers, as they have different backgrounds, education levels relating to land use, and connections to the land. Policies and decisions relating to development and preservation need to treat these groups as having different priorities and perspectives on the issues. Program design for these two groups needs to be very different: they not only use their land differently, but they understand it differently as well. As such, while non-farm landowners have much in common with one another, we should anticipate increased conflict in rural areas in the future. The dynamics of this relationship will have significant impact on our rural landscape as increasingly large areas around urban centres become the homes of commuters, retirees, and weekenders.

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