

Foreword by Wes Jackson xiii

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Introduction 1

1. *Shaping the Agrarian Republic, 1780–1825* 9

*This section features writing from the years in which the United States was founded and many of the nation's fundamental institutions and policies were put in place. Several of the writers we include took active roles in formulating, promoting, or attacking those policies. Many understood that their choices would determine the future course of American society. Alexander Hamilton's Report on Manufactures calls upon the central government to foster a strong manufacturing sector. The other writings express the agrarian vision that farming as a way of life was essential for building the kind of self-reliant character that is the mainstay of a democratic republic.*

J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, from *Letters from an American Farmer*  
(1782) 15

Alexander Hamilton, from *Report on the Subject of Manufactures* (1791) 27

The *National Gazette*, from "An Old Prophecy" (1792); and a letter to the editor  
(1792) 33

John Taylor of Caroline, from *Arator* (1813) 38

James Madison, from "An Address Delivered before the Albemarle, Va.,  
Agricultural Society" (1818) 44

William Cobbett, from *Journal of a Year's Residence in America* (1819) 49

## 2. *A Nation of Farmers: The Promise and Peril of American Agriculture, 1825–1860* 57

*Here we draw on writings from the early to mid-nineteenth century, when farming was growing rapidly, finding a new place in an increasingly specialized and integrated national economy. The United States was still largely agricultural, and westward expansion seemed to offer an unlimited future to the nation's farmers, but in most regions farming and the agrarian vision that went with it had become committed to market production. The agricultural press also grew, featuring articles on improved farming techniques, better implements, and the importance of maintaining soil fertility. Agricultural writers expressed their belief that life on farms could be not only healthy and morally sound but as financially rewarding as other career pursuits. At the same time, early conservationists such as George Perkins Marsh began to warn that farmers were capable of destroying the very soil upon which civilization depended. These years also saw increasing tension between two visions of agrarian democracy, slave and free.*

Jesse Buel, from *The Farmer's Companion* (1839) 64

George Perkins Marsh, from "Address to the Agricultural Society of Rutland County" (1847) 72

Wilson Flagg, "Agricultural Progress" (1859) 81

George Henry Evans and the Working Men's Movement, "A Memorial to Congress" (1844); and "Vote Yourself a Farm" (1846) 86

George Washington Julian, "Speech before Congress on the Homestead Bill" (1851) 89

Edmund Ruffin, from "An Address on the Opposite Results of Exhausting and Fertilizing Systems of Agriculture" (1852) 96

## 3. *The Machine in the Garden: The Rise of American Romanticism* 105

*This section features writing from the first major "back to the land" movement in the nation's history. Well-educated men and women disaffected with the growing materialism of American culture tried to forge a more humane, integrated way of life through closer contact with the land. Although these efforts often marked a clear break from mainstream society, they also incorporated familiar agrarian ideals, such as the belief in economic self-reliance as the basis for political independence.*

*The movement was marked by a reverence for nature that would become central to twentieth-century versions of America's agrarian tradition. Yet in her childhood memoir, Louisa May Alcott injected some humorous skepticism of utopian dreams that would become equally familiar.*

Albert Brisbane, "False Association, Established by the Capitalists, Contrasted with True Association" (1846) 111

Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, from "Plan of the West Roxbury Community" (1842) 118

Louisa May Alcott, from "Transcendental Wild Oats" (1873) 123

Andrew Jackson Downing, "Cockneyism in the Country" (1849) 129

Susan Fenimore Cooper, from *Rural Hours* (1850) 133

Henry David Thoreau, from *Walden* (1854) 140

#### 4. Agriculture in an Industrializing Nation, 1860–1910 149

*The writing in this section reflects dramatic changes in American agriculture during the second half of the nineteenth century. As the economy became still more specialized and integrated, American farmers in many regions found themselves in deep financial trouble. The opening of vast territories of fertile soil drove production up faster than demand, leaving many farmers in debt and at the mercy of banks, railroads, and wholesalers. Economic pressure set the stage for the Populist revolt, which sought to restore agrarian moral principles to the governing of an increasingly urban nation.*

Thomas Starr King, from "Address before the San Joaquin Valley Agricultural Society" (1862) 155

Orson Hyde, from "Instructions" (1867) 161

Hamlin Garland, from *A Son of the Middle Border* (1917) 165

Willa Cather, from *My Ántonia* (1918) 171

L. L. Polk, from "Address before the Inter-States Convention of Farmers" (1887) 179

Ignatius Donnelly, for the People's Party, from the Omaha Platform of the People's Party (1892) 187

Luna Kellie, from "Stand Up for Nebraska" (1894) 192

#### 5. Agrarians in an Industrial Nation, 1900–1945 199

*The selections here focus on writing from the first half of the twentieth century. With the nation's available farmland settled and its urban population and industrial economy rapidly expanding, many worried about the ability of farmers to feed the*

nation. Some called for the most efficient, scientific, large-scale agriculture possible; others, such as Liberty Hyde Bailey, envisioned an updated agrarian culture, founded on values of community, conservation, and appreciation of nature, practicing a more ecologically based “permanent agriculture.” Although rural America was perceived by many leaders to be falling behind modern standards of living and education, these decades also saw a wide variety of agrarian movements (including Jewish and Catholic versions), as some disaffected Americans continued to look to the land for a more wholesome way of life.

- Liberty Hyde Bailey Jr., from *The Holy Earth* (1915) 206  
David Grayson, from *Adventures in Contentment* (1907) 215  
Edwin G. Nourse, from “The Place of Agriculture in Modern Industrial Society” (1919) 222  
Henry A. Wallace, from “Putting Our Lands in Order” (1934) 226  
Ralph Borsodi, from *Agriculture in Modern Life* (1939) 230  
John C. Rawe and Luigi G. Ligutti, from *Rural Roads to Security: America’s Third Struggle for Freedom* (1940) 236  
Louis Bromfield, from *Pleasant Valley* (1945) 243

## 6. Southern Agrarianism, 1925–1940 251

The writings here focus on the work of the so-called Nashville Agrarians, also known as the Southern Agrarians, who published the collection of essays *I’ll Take My Stand* in 1930. These writers mounted a broad defense of the South’s agrarian and (as they saw it) humane traditions, in contrast to the culture of the increasingly industrialized North. Their perspective was self-consciously shaped by the long Southern agrarian tradition that went back to Thomas Jefferson and John Taylor. Predictably, the Agrarians aroused intense skepticism from the likes of H. L. Mencken. Deeply integrated into the Southern agricultural experience was the place of race in the region, and so we also include some reflections from the black sharecropper Ned Cobb on agricultural production in the Deep South.

- Twelve Southerners, from *I’ll Take My Stand* (1930) 257  
Andrew Nelson Lytle, from “The Hind Tit” (1930) 263  
John Crowe Ransom, from “The Aesthetic of Regionalism” (1934) 272  
Allen Tate, from “Notes on Liberty and Property” (1936) 277  
H. L. Mencken, from “The South Astir” (1935) 283  
Ned Cobb (Nate Shaw), from *All God’s Dangers* (1974) 287

## 7. Back to the Land Again, 1940–Present 299

*This section draws primarily on writings from postwar America. Long-term trends of land concentration have accelerated, leaving the nation with a heavily industrialized farming sector, a shrinking number of farmers, and a population increasingly unfamiliar with agriculture—developments often celebrated by mainstream agricultural leaders such as Earl Butz. But many in the modern era feel discomfort with urban and suburban life, a sense of alienation. The period has seen a revitalized back-to-the-land movement, strong growth in organic and sustainable farming, and a wealth of writers reflecting on what the changing nature of farming could mean for the nation.*

- Aldo Leopold, from “The Farmer as a Conservationist” (1939) 305  
Helen Nearing and Scott Nearing, from *Living the Good Life: How to Live Sanelly and Simply in a Troubled World* (1954) 311  
Earl L. Butz, from “Agribusiness in the Machine Age” (1960) 322  
Victor Davis Hanson, from *The Land Was Everything: Letters from an American Farmer* (2000) 326  
Hayden Carruth, “Marshall Washer” (1978) 340  
Wes Jackson, from “Becoming Native to Our Places” (1994) 346  
Wendell Berry, “Seven Amish Farms” (1981) 358

*Conclusion: American Agrarianism in the Twenty-first Century* 369

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