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Guest Editor's Introduction: Outreach and Applied Agriculture Research with Plain Anabaptists: Lessons Learned and Future Directions

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Guest Editor's Introduction: Outreach and Applied Agriculture Research with Plain Anabaptists: Lessons Learned and Future Directions

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This issue of the *Journal of Amish and Plain Anabaptist Studies (JAPAS)* contributes to a dearth of literature on ways to understand how plain Anabaptist culture influences agri-environmental beliefs and practices and how it informs outreach and research. Only a few studies currently focus on outreach with plain Anabaptist growers (e.g., Brock, Ulrich-Schad, and Prokopy 2018; Bergefurd 2011; Jepsen and Mann 2015; Stoltzfus 2019; Hoorman and Spencer 2001/2002). This issue of *JAPAS* is the first comprehensive publication to include research articles and service provider reports focusing on plain people and agriculture. This issue addresses the history of Anabaptist agriculture and environmental practices; complications of applying agrarian ideals; collaboration with and within the community; and extension programming, communication, and collaborations. These research articles and service provider reports highlight insights from past outreach efforts and opportunities for future improvement.

Anabaptist identity and its potential influence on agricultural beliefs and practices span the scope of history in this issue. Anabaptist identity is associated with distinct agricultural practices in Europe and their early settlement in the U.S. In the 17th and 18th century, Anabaptist farming in Europe and the United States was associated with the use of soil conservation practices (e.g., manure, gypsum, and crop rotation) and innovative livestock care (improved meadows and warm and stable livestock housing) (Shenton). Historical perspectives of collaborative efforts of extension working with plain farmers are provided from Pennsylvania (Martin) and Missouri (Quinn et al.).

This issue also provides the first data that estimate Amish farm produce numbers using agricultural census data from Missouri (Quinn et al.).

The role plain Anabaptist identity plays in research about conservation and extension outreach is explored in this issue with sensitivity towards the cultural and religious context. For example, surveys that are based on secular depictions of the environmental movement may not adequately depict plain Anabaptist conservation views and behaviors (Hockman-Wert). As another example, Martin contributes to the exploration of plain Anabaptist identity matters in agricultural outreach in nuanced ways given his own plain upbringing and faith identity, experience growing up on a farm, and his graduate-level agronomic training. While relationships and farmer-to-farmer networking are especially important for outreach endeavors as echoed by other authors of this issue (e.g. Haugen; Bergefurd; Reid; Quinn et al.; Hoopkila), Martin also points out that technological restrictions of plain people do not always fundamentally drive agricultural practices with plain people. Outreach and implementation of integrated pest management, use of high tunnels, and managed grazing are examples illustrated in this issue (Haugen; Quinn et al.; Bergefurd). Extension outreach with Old Colony Mennonite growers in Belize presents unique agronomic, economic, and cultural challenges as well as unusual alliances between extension and a committee of Old Order Mennonites (Reid).

Another reoccurring discussion in this issue addresses the mass turn toward web-based materials for extension programming, particularly

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during the coronavirus pandemic. With this move, our authors emphasize the continued importance of providing programming culturally appropriate to plain people. Penn State extension agents and a Wisconsin educator describe how voicemail recordings provided timely information on a variety of agricultural topics (Shoop et al.; Halopka). The use of local agriculture newsletters and in-person programming are discussed in articles from Pennsylvania (Martin), Ohio (Bergefurd), and Missouri (Quinn et al.). Extension educators also discuss the effect of presentation modality (i.e., PowerPoint over hard copy training manuals) on the effectiveness of food safety training in Pennsylvania. Their results indicate, perhaps contrary to expectations, that modality may not be the most important factor in developing effective training for Amish growers (LaBorde, Stoltzfus, and Thorn).

This issue also demonstrates that researchers need to focus more on exactly how plain Anabaptist identity affects agri-environmental issues. Outreach and training in areas such as food safety and nutrient management may be more challenging given the fears of farm economic viability, as with increased regulation and historical hesitation to work with the government (Martin). Food safety and nutrient management is an increased component of extension programming given societal concerns in these areas (LaBorde, Stoltzfus, and Thorn; Quinn et al.; Bergefurd; Halopka). More research is needed to better understand how to develop effective training to help Amish growers implement produce safety guidelines (LaBorde, Stoltzfus, and Thorn).

Though this issue is a milestone, much more work is needed. Future work needs to better reflect and incorporate the diversity of the plain people and the evolving economic challenges of agriculture. The role of women in agriculture—especially produce and ornamentals—is not addressed. Research and extension must better incorporate women into their programs and studies (LaBorde, Stoltzfus, and Thorn; Bergefurd). In addition, more research is needed on a variety of Anabaptist groups in the vein of Hockman-Wert. Most of these studies focus primarily on the Old Order Amish, reflecting the trends of scholarly research on the Anabaptists in areas beyond agriculture (Anderson 2013). Incorporating more Mennonites into these studies would also help fur-

ther the questions and thoughts on the influence of plain identity and technology restrictions (Martin) as some plain Mennonite groups have few agricultural technology restrictions (Kraybill and Reid 2013). In addition, while the focus of most of these articles is on extension, the role of the private sector in agricultural knowledge exchange is also important (Welk-Joerger; Bergefurd). Future research should explore how growers assess and incorporate information coming from their own social circles, the public sector, and private sector sources. As Welk-Joerger states, tensions between agrarian identity and church may also evolve as Amish occupational profiles continue to shift away from agriculture.

Finally, this issue illustrates the importance of values, local relationships, and the potential for collaborations across groups. Community-based solutions include extension working with produce auctions (Quinn et al.; Bergefurd), university researchers working with plain farmers with on-farm research trials (Martin), and extension coordinating with stateside-Old Order Mennonites to provide outreach for Old Colony Mennonites in Belize (Reid). Such community-based solutions and unique collaborations have been demonstrated in the literature (e.g. Parker, Moore, and Weaver 2009; Jepsen and Mann 2015). This issue highlights the importance of collaboration and community-based solutions; future work should continue incorporating diverse partners to navigate evolving agri-environmental challenges.

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