

Geography of US Peri-Urban Agricultural Adaptation (72)

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Recent shifts in the commodification, vertical integration, and division of labor of agriculture, along with land use dynamics in U.S. peri-urban areas, have influenced structural change in the industry in these regions. Farmers are evaluating and making decisions regarding the inputs to their business - land, labor and capital - to either proactively or reactively address their business goals in the face of their changing environment. The peri-urban environment is the location of most intense post-industrial activity resulting in the greatest variety of socio-economic modes of production. The forces at play in this region are more complex and concentrated, partially as a result of the dynamics of land use, such as competition for land, increase in land prices, landscape fragmentation and other urbanization pressure. Agricultural modes of production are diversifying to address these pressures and the opportunities that the American lifestyle provides. These include strategies of intensification, deintensification, and on-farm and off-farm diversification.

Utilizing landowner surveys from five distinct farming regions in Georgia, Oregon, Michigan, Kentucky, and Maryland, we characterize the diverse trajectories of agricultural change and examine different theories of agricultural structural change. In particular, because conflict over and competition for land characterizes the rural-urban interface, we will explore the role that land plays in these varied, industrial and post-productivist modes of production. We answer questions such as: What are the types and geography of US peri-urban agricultural modes of production? How do peri-urban regions compare to more rural areas? What are the adaptive strategies employed by farmers at the urban-rural interface? Do these adaptations follow predictions of agricultural geography models? What factors influence adaptation? Given competition for land, how do different adaptations utilize land as an input?

As US peri-urban communities attempt to protect working landscapes while tackling the uncertainty of land use change and agricultural sustainability, it is necessary to understand how policy and planning perspectives reflect the perspective of the farmers themselves and how they evaluate adaptation strategies. The results of the survey analysis seek to provide a foundation for better understanding the role of land in farmer survival strategies. Preliminary findings demonstrate that peri-urban areas indeed encompass a wider array of adaptation strategies and that these strategies vary given factors such as the type of production, differences in local land use policy and governance structures, social infrastructure, local land markets, and family farm succession plans.