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Reflecting on Research for *Grounding the New Farmer*

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My starting point was with the small farm. It was the focus of my internship, so I knew my topic had to be connected closely with issues surrounding small, sustainable farming. Initially, I planned to research urban farming. While I was thinking about this, however, I continued to talk with Margaret, the farmer for whom I was working, as well as other people on the farm. They were the ones who first suggested I write about the young farmer's access to land and capital, and told me about the generational gap in farmers. With these new ideas in mind, I talked to my advisor Dr. Geores, and we decided it would be better not to focus on urban farming, as that was not within the realm of my internship. I turned my focus to the issues I had discussed with Margaret. From that point, I was able to expand upon the challenges of land acquisition for young farmers, and discuss current legislative factors with potential to affect their lives and their causes.

My most valuable sources were primary—Margaret, Liz, and Johanna, who worked on One Woman Farm with me; Celine, who runs the Bean Stalk Farm, and who I emailed to get in contact with; my own past experience with Simon's Farm, where I had been employed. These were the places where I got much of my ideas and direction. They were the starting point and grounding of my research. The next level of my research was done through Research Port, searching numerous databases in the Environmental, Political, Social and Economic disciplines. I wanted to make sure that no matter what, there were academic, peer-reviewed journals that applied to my topic. From there, I felt safe in branching out to less traditional resources. These non-traditional sources were the next step, and were what truly allowed my research to grow. These sources featured everything from online resources for farmers, government websites, government reports, grassroots organizations' reports, newspaper articles, for and not-for-profit group pages, and even blog entries. With my topic, it was very important to seek out sources that came from farmers, not just academics. By reading things written by farmers for farmers, I was able to get a more dynamic idea of their issues.

I did seek assistance, and it was highly valuable. It was my advisor, Dr. Geores, who helped steer me along when I got frustrated with my research. I had

initially been operating with the plan to only use peer-reviewed, academic sources, and nothing else. I was worried that my paper would be considered unprofessional otherwise. However, when I restricted my pool of information like this, it severely limited my paper. Dr. Geores made me realize that with a topic like mine it was necessary to branch out and access the resources that a farmer would be accessing, and to read the things they were writing. It was also important for getting information that was extremely recent at the time, like new legislature—something that would not yet have been written about in an academic journal.

Even though I used sources that were not all peer-reviewed, I was no less discerning when I evaluated them. I used sources that were referred to me as useful ones for young farmers. I used sources that, if they made statements of fact, were reliable without a doubt—such as government organizations—or were from other respected sources. I made sure to make clear, within my paper, where my information was coming from. I never tried to pass a quote from a blog post off as a quote from the New York Times.

Once I felt I had fully exploited the sources specific to my topic that were available in academic, traditional forms, I forced myself to venture outside my comfort zone and regular methodologies. In the process, I learned the value of getting in contact with people. By taking the initiative and reaching out, I got a lot of information that would otherwise have been unavailable to me, and was directed to even more information, in places I hadn't looked. I am now much more comfortable with the idea of immersing myself in the world I am researching, and making connections with real people. These are skills that I will be able to utilize in the future, not only when I research for an academic pursuit, but also when I set a goal of understanding for myself in everyday life.