

Elizabeth Castle

“Living off the Land”

IRB Application

Research topic:

For my senior project, I will research small local farming and contemporary homesteading communities in and around the Hudson Valley, as well as in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont. I define homesteading as a household that attempts some form of self-sufficiency by growing and making a significant amount of their daily necessities, and I make the distinction between farming and homesteading because as I see it, farms sell their produce as a business while homesteads produce for only the homestead inhabitants, but I also plan to explore this borderline. I plan to research the ways in which farmers and homesteaders form self-sufficient communities, and I am most interested in the reasons why many farmers and homesteaders choose to live off the land and provide local food for their family and community. I also plan to study the meaning participants give to everyday chores, and how the participants have combined their personal lifestyles with careers. Ultimately, I want to focus on the philosophical and perhaps spiritual implications of deciding to live off the land.

Participants:

I will recruit participants by going to many local farmers’ markets, and approaching and speaking with many of the people who have farm stands. Since the farming communities are usually tight communities, I also plan to use the method of “snowball sampling,” by asking participants for the names of other possible participants. I am also in contact with a few people who know of specific farms I can reach through them. For recruiting homesteaders, I already know a few homesteading families, and I plan to reach more homesteading participants through them.

Research methods:

I will conduct interviews with farmers, homesteaders and community members who buy food and/or interact with the farmers/homesteaders on a regular basis. The interviews are designed to last 30-45 minutes and will be audio recorded with the participants’ permission, and/or recorded on paper. They will take place on the participant’s farm/homestead, or at the farmer’s market. Participants must be over 18 years old to participate in my study.

I will conduct participant observation: I will observe and take notes on naturally occurring interactions and conversations among farmers/homesteaders and I will also participate by doing volunteer work on their farm/homestead or farmer’s market stand.

Risks:

I will ask participants not to reveal anything that could get them or others in legal trouble. If they say something that either they or I consider incriminating, I will remove that statement from my audio recording and notes. I will also make it clear that I do not have a legal right to withhold my interview audio recordings and notes in the event that they are subpoenaed in a court of law.

Potential risks of participation include discomfort when talking about personal beliefs and decisions related to farming or homesteading. There are also potential physical risks, when I ask a participant to give a walking tour of his or her farm or homestead, but these risks would not exceed the everyday risks of working on a farm. The interview will also take time that could be spent doing something else.

Potential benefits of participation include the opportunity to reflect on and share one's knowledge of farming or homesteading.

Oral consent process:

I am a student at Bard College conducting research for my senior project on local farming and modern homesteading. If you agree to participate in this study, I will ask you to answer questions about your experiences with farming/homesteading. The interview is designed to last approximately 30-45 minutes, and will be audio recorded with your permission, and/or recorded on paper. If you're ever uncomfortable for any reason and would like to skip a question or stop participating, that's OK, just say so.

It's important that you read this consent form carefully. It describes potential risks and benefits of participation. It explains that you can decide whether or not I should use your real name, how I plan to preserve confidentiality, and how I will store data. If you have any questions later on, you can contact me, my faculty adviser, or the chair of the Bard College Institutional Review Board. The contact information is on the consent form. You can mark on the form whether you agree to an interview, to letting me volunteer on your farm/homestead, or both. You can also mark whether or not you want the interview to be audio recorded and whether it's OK for me to use your real name.

After you fill out and sign two copies of the form, I'll keep one and you'll keep the other. Do you have any questions?

Confidentiality:

I will keep all interview audio recordings and notes secure: audio recordings and paper notes will be kept in a locked container and computer notes in a password protected file on my personal computer. I plan to keep my notes after I am finished with my senior project, as suggested by the American Anthropological Association:

"The AAA supports the sharing of research data and encourages ethnographers to consider preserving field notes, tapes, videos, etc. as a resource accessible to others for future study. Ethnographers should inform participants of the intent to preserve the data and make it accessible as well as the precautions to be undertaken in the handling of the data."

- American Anthropological Association Statement on Ethnographic Research and Institutional Review Boards (www.aaanet.org/stmts/irb.htm)

I plan to keep my notes because after I graduate I plan to start an ongoing project on local farming and sustainable living in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont.

Debriefing statement:

Thank you for participating in this research for my senior project about local farming and modern homesteading. Please contact me if you have any questions in the future or think of anything else you'd like to share. My contact information is on your copy of the consent form. Do you have any questions for me now?

Interview Questions:

Interview questions for farmers:

1. At what point in your life did you decide to farm?
2. What led to that decision?
3. Where did you live and what did you do before deciding to farm?
4. Could you tell me about your livestock and/or agriculture and why you chose these?
5. Do you consider yourself a member of a community and, if so, who is part of this community?
6. What are the characteristics of that community?
7. How do you feel you contribute to this community?
8. Is it important to you that your farm remains small scale? If you had the opportunity to expand, would you?
9. How do you think about nature? How do you understand your relationship with nature through farming?
10. Do you consider the choice to live off the land to be a philosophical or spiritual choice? Was your choice philosophical or spiritual?

Interview questions for homesteaders:

1. At what point in your life did you decide to homestead?
2. What led to this decision?
3. In what sort of area did you live before deciding to homestead?
4. Could you tell me about your livestock and/or agriculture and why you chose these?

5. Do you consider yourself a member of a community and, if so, who is part of this community?
6. What are the characteristics of that community?
7. How do you feel you contribute to this community?
8. Is it important to you that your homestead remains small scale? If you had the opportunity to expand into a farm, would you?
9. How do you think about nature? How do you understand your relationship with nature through homesteading?
10. Do you consider the choice to live off the land to be a philosophical or spiritual choice? Was your choice philosophical or spiritual?

Consent Form

4/18/10

“Living off the Land”

Student Researcher: Elizabeth Castle

Faculty Advisor: Megan Callaghan

I am an anthropology student at Bard College, and I am conducting research for my senior project on local farming and modern homesteading communities.

As part of this study, I am inviting farmers, homesteaders, and community members to participate in interviews. Each interview is designed to last approximately 30-45 minutes and will be audio recorded with the participant's permission, and/or recorded on paper. Interviews will take place on the participant's farm, homestead, or at the farmer's market, and will include questions about the history of his or her farm or homestead, and his or her involvement in the community. Participants must be over 18 years old in order to participate in my study.

As part of this study, I will be participating as a volunteer working on the farms and in the farmer's market. I will also be observing and taking notes on naturally occurring interactions and conversations among farm workers and homesteaders on their land, and in the farmer's market. This research will sometimes require additional time or activities if I ask them to give me a tour of their farm/homestead, or if I volunteer on their farm/homestead and training is needed.

During interviews, participants should not reveal anything that could get themselves or others in legal trouble. If they say something that either they or I consider incriminating, I will remove that statement from my audio recording and notes. However, participants should know that I do not have a legal right to withhold my interview audio recordings and notes in the event that they are subpoenaed in a court of law.

Other potential risks of participation include discomfort when talking about personal beliefs and decisions related to farming or homesteading. There are also potential physical risks, when I ask a participant to give a walking tour of his or her farm or homestead, but these risks would not exceed the everyday risks of working on a farm. The interview will also take time that could be spent doing something else.

Potential benefits of participation include the opportunity to reflect on and share one's knowledge of farming and living off the land.

Participants may decide whether or not I should include their real name in my senior project. If participants choose to have their interviews remain anonymous, I will assign them a pseudonym. I will also remove all other identifying information, such as a farm or homestead name from my senior project. I will also keep all interview audio recordings

and notes secure: audio recordings and paper notes will be kept in a locked container and computer notes in a password protected file on my personal computer. I will keep data following completion of the project, because I plan to start an ongoing project on local farming and sustainable living in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont.

Upon completion, my senior project will be publicly available at the Bard College Stevenson Library.

Participation in this research is voluntary. Participants may decide to stop the interview at any time without penalty and may refuse to answer any question, also without penalty.

Participants might decide that they do not want information that they shared with me to be made public. At a participant's request, I will remove such statements from my audio recordings and/or notes and will not use them in my project.

Please feel free to contact me at any time with questions, concerns, or if you have more information you'd like to share. You can reach me at ec198@bard.edu and my faculty advisor, Megan Callaghan, at callagha@bard.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as research participant, you may contact the chair of the Bard College Institutional Review Board at irb@bard.edu.

Participant Information

Please check one of the following options

- I agree to both the interview and the observation
- I agree to the interview only
- I agree to the observation only

Please check one of the following options:

- I agree to have the interview audio recorded
- I do NOT agree to have the interview audio recorded

Please check one of the following options:

- I understand that my real name may be used in the senior project and any other publication of this research

I prefer that this interview remain confidential and that my statements be attributed to a pseudonym in the senior project and any other publication of this research

I have read and understand the information provided above. I have asked all the questions I have at this time. I voluntarily agree to participate in this research.

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Printed Name of Research Participant

Signature of Researcher

Date