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SUPPLY CHAIN (RE)ALIGNMENT IN NEW ZEALAND'S SHEEP MEAT AND DAIRY INDUSTRIES: KNOWLEDGE, NETWORKS AND LEARNING AT THE FARMER-PROCESSOR SITE

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Geography,
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ABSTRACT

Emerging from the ‘agricultural crisis’ of the 1980s, producers and processing companies in New Zealand’s sheep meat and dairy industries, found themselves in an evolving neo-liberalised environment. By the late 1990s major structural (re)alignment had taken place in production and processing to accommodate shifts in markets and regulation, centring on ‘food safety’, ‘quality’ and ‘availability’. For both farmers and processing company staff, this meant venturing into unfamiliar *jointly occupied spaces* and unchartered relational territory. Through a participatory research approach using multiple methodologies, this thesis examines supply chain (re)alignment at a macro and micro-scale, focussing on the farmer-processor relationship and knowledge, network and learning processes of farmers in (global) lamb and dairy supply chains in New Zealand.

In seeking to account for evolving agri-food chain relations at multiple scales, this research turns to the global commodity chains (GCC) literature and draws on pragmatic solution-oriented ideas emerging from the developing field of Supply Chain Management (SCM). It also includes theoretical input from the cognitive and behavioural sciences to interpret the empirical data on farmer’s knowledge, networks and learning in different supply chains, which it argues are key features of globalising agri-food economies. In this research these literatures and theories are enveloped by a broader yet, incomplete, theoretical foundation - that of *evolutionary political economy* (EPE), which is extended in this thesis. The thesis argues that an EPE framework provides a useful window on the governance of New Zealand’s relations at a distance because it allows the specificity of micro-scale coordination activities and relations (in jointly occupied spaces) in New Zealand to be embedded in local and macro scale governance regimes and historical development processes.

The findings show global market and regulatory pressures continue to drive supply chain (re)alignment in New Zealand, and chain building is occurring in different ways at the farmer-processor interface, between and within the different industries. Farmers’ place specific *on-farm* knowledge co-evolves with *off-farm* knowledge through a combination of concrete experience, trial and error, socialisation and reflection, with both *on* and *off-farm* knowledge becoming more overt in practice and strategy as supply chain specifications becomes more precise. Farmers utilise a range of networks (informal, formal, specialist and general), which serve as both information channels and learning forums. New Zealand’s agricultural industries are like many in competitive globalising economies – ‘new’ knowledge is being generated and used to broker global and local social, economic and environmental contexts and values, and in the process, supply chain partners’ capacities and relations evolve.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many friends, colleagues and family members who have helped in diverse ways along the pathway to completion of this dissertation. In the four year life of this process, I have been inspired by the goodwill, generosity, pragmatism, skill and intellect of so many people, that the burden that comes with ‘doing a PhD’ has been made much lighter than it could have been. To you all, I am very, very grateful.

Most immediately I wish to convey my deepest thanks to Professor Richard Le Heron for his guidance, and continued enthusiasm throughout this study. It was Richard’s phone call in July of 1998 and ensuing eagerness for this project that instigated this work and kept me going at times. Entering a new field of study was risky for us both, but with Richard’s patient, open-minded, persuasive and engaging manner, and lots of talking (and thinking and writing on my part), I have come to appreciate the discourse of economic geography, the art of formulating and refining research questions and arguments and the discipline of (science) writing. Thank you also, for providing financial assistance and many ‘development’ opportunities, and for your pragmatic and structured style to supervision, which has allowed me to ‘learn by doing’. I thank the University of Auckland for their financial assistance through the Maori and Pacific Doctoral Scholarship, which I received for three years from 1999-2001.

To Mark Paine, I express my considerable gratitude on many counts. As a novice social scientist engaged in participatory research, I could not have hoped for a better ‘working’ model to learn the craft of social science research and its only in retrospect I realise this. I appreciate your patience at that time and the later invitation to Melbourne and the opportunities that provided. Thank you also for the criticism of early drafts, which helped shape the end product. My appreciation also extends to Gavin Sheath of AgResearch, and other members of the Learning Challenges Project team for their many forms of assistance.

This work has only been possible by the contribution and support of many family members and friends. Most significantly my wife Frances for your unconditional support and encouragement over a ten-year period of strain on our family, which has required that we (re)align many aspects of our lives. Your own interest and work in sustainable agriculture research has helped in many ways too. Our children, Eva and Solomon, whose young lives have been shaped by this experience, have provided both inspiration and welcome relief. Kia ora tatou taku whanau.

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<td>Dispute Settlement Mechanism</td>
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<td>MFN</td>
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