Ethnoecology of the Ozark Highlands’ Agricultural Encounter

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Abstract

Throughout the twentieth century, many farm families in the Missouri Ozarks, USA, significantly changed their practices or abandoned agriculture as an occupation altogether. Researchers, farmers, and the general public assume the shift was an inevitable process of increasing economic efficiency. This article utilizes ethnoecology to demonstrate the importance of the overlooked cognitive aspects of agricultural modernization and to elucidate contemporary agricultural heterogeneity in the Ozark Mineral Area of southeast Missouri. Research included two years of participant observation, agro-ecosystem analysis, and ethno-ecological and semi-structured interviews to document Ozark farmers’ perceptions of their farming environments and their agroecological practices. While some farmers’ perceptions of their farming environments have changed with agricultural modernization, removing traditional morality from agricultural decisions, other farmers maintain traditional practices within their agroecological landscape.

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