



# Mapping the Farm (Minnesota)

*John Hildebrand*

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To some, the fields and farms of the Upper Midwest all look the same, but to the people who have struggled to raise families and make a living from the soil, each farm is a "small kingdom" with a rich and often troubled history. In *Mapping the Farm*, John Hildebrand, whom the *New Yorker* magazine praised for his "skill of mind and craft," focuses on the O'Neills, the family of his wife Sharon, and their 240 acres near Rochester, Minnesota.

When William O'Neill began raising dairy cows in Minnesota in 1880, America was a nation of farmers. A little over a hundred years later, William's grandson Ed is too old and ill to continue farming. The farm is being chopped into subdivisions, an interstate has cut off access to the river, and changing technology and the tightening market have made small farms a thing of the past. Ed's children and grandchildren gather to try to find a way to keep the farm in the family.

In this absorbing and hauntingly beautiful book, Hildebrand tells the story of four generations of farming O'Neills and, in doing so, tells a quintessentially American story of land and labor, memory and loss—and one family's struggle to keep their dream alive. From boom times to bust, the bloody farm strikes of the Great Depression to the bittersweet optimism of a county fair, Hildebrand weaves a narrative that is at once an elegy for a vanishing way of life and a celebration of the tenacious and deeply held American values that have made today's way of life possible.

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