



Larding the Lean Earth: Soil and Society in Nineteenth-Century America

Steven Stoll

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A major history of early Americans' ideas about conservation

Fifty years after the American Revolution, the yeoman farmers who made up a large part of the new country's voters faced a crisis. The very soil of American farms seemed to be failing, and agricultural prosperity, upon which the Republic was founded, was threatened. Steven Stoll's passionate and brilliantly argued book explores the tempestuous debates that erupted between "improvers," who believed in practices that sustained and bettered the soil of existing farms, and "emigrants," who thought it was wiser and more "American" to move westward as the soil gave out. Stoll examines the dozens of journals, from New York to Virginia, that gave voice to the improvers' cause. He also focuses especially on two groups of farmers, in Pennsylvania and South Carolina. He analyzes the similarities and differences in their farming habits in order to illustrate larger regional concerns about the "new husbandry" in free and slave states.

Farming has always been the human activity that most disrupts nature, for good or ill. The decisions these early Americans made about how to farm not only expressed their political and social faith, but also influenced American attitudes about the environment for decades to come. *Larding the Lean Earth* is a signal work of environmental history and an original contribution to the study of antebellum America.

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