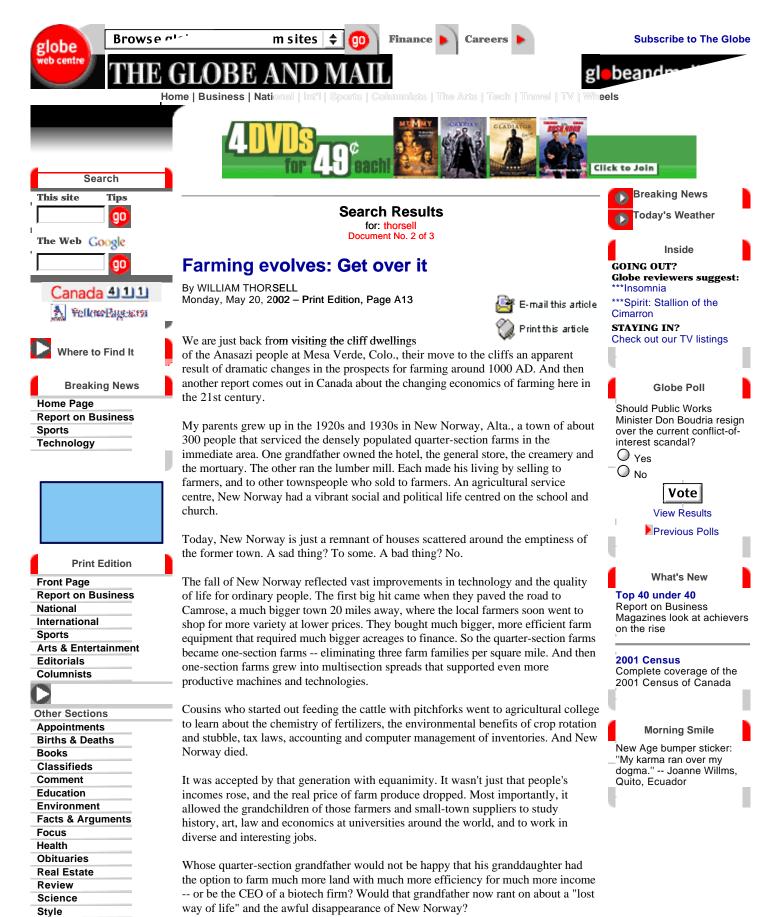
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If politics had allowed it then, would that grandfather have fought to retain the quarter-section farm (or fishery) through vast regional development programs, protectionist subsidies and chronic dependence on unemployment insurance programs to keep a parochial and inefficient lifestyle alive -- purportedly in the interest of his children?

The Anasazi people had no choice. They lived as farmers for some 700 years on the high mesa overlooking the desert below, irrigating crops of corn (the most efficient cereal in nature for converting sun and water to food) and creating villages of many rooms centred on communal *kivas* half buried in the ground. And then, apparently, the water ran out.

Suddenly, the Anasazi started building dwellings into the cliffs along the deep canyons that rent their lands -- places requiring enormous effort to construct and inhabit. Most of the dwellings are set in crevices created by water seeping through the sandstone, that water being the apparent rationale for the move and fortress-like construction of the sites.

And then, just 100 years later, the Anasazi abandoned even these last redoubts, and moved away from the mesa itself -- another in history's myriad uprootings, many of which, like forest fires, lead to renewal and improvement.

Agriculture in Canada is a fascinating mixture of continuing technological and economic progress based in the market, stark interventions against market forces through subsidies, quotas and trade barriers ("supply management"), changing environmental conditions and competition for other uses of the land itself.

Some people in Alberta think (illogically) that the public should pay billions of dollars to pump water uphill from northern rivers to the southern Prairies so farmers there can grow crops at a loss in inhospitable nature.

Some people think (too logically, perhaps) that we should abandon our marketing-board system for milk, chickens and other products in exchange for cheaper food, reducing the farming population even more and enervating little towns. And some people think (wisely) that we should discourage the expansion of suburbs on good farmland, because good farmland just isn't made anymore.

It is choice that differentiates us from Mesa Verde and New Norway, and which makes farmers into politicians and politicians into students of cows.

William Thorsell is president and CEO of the Royal Ontario Museum.

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