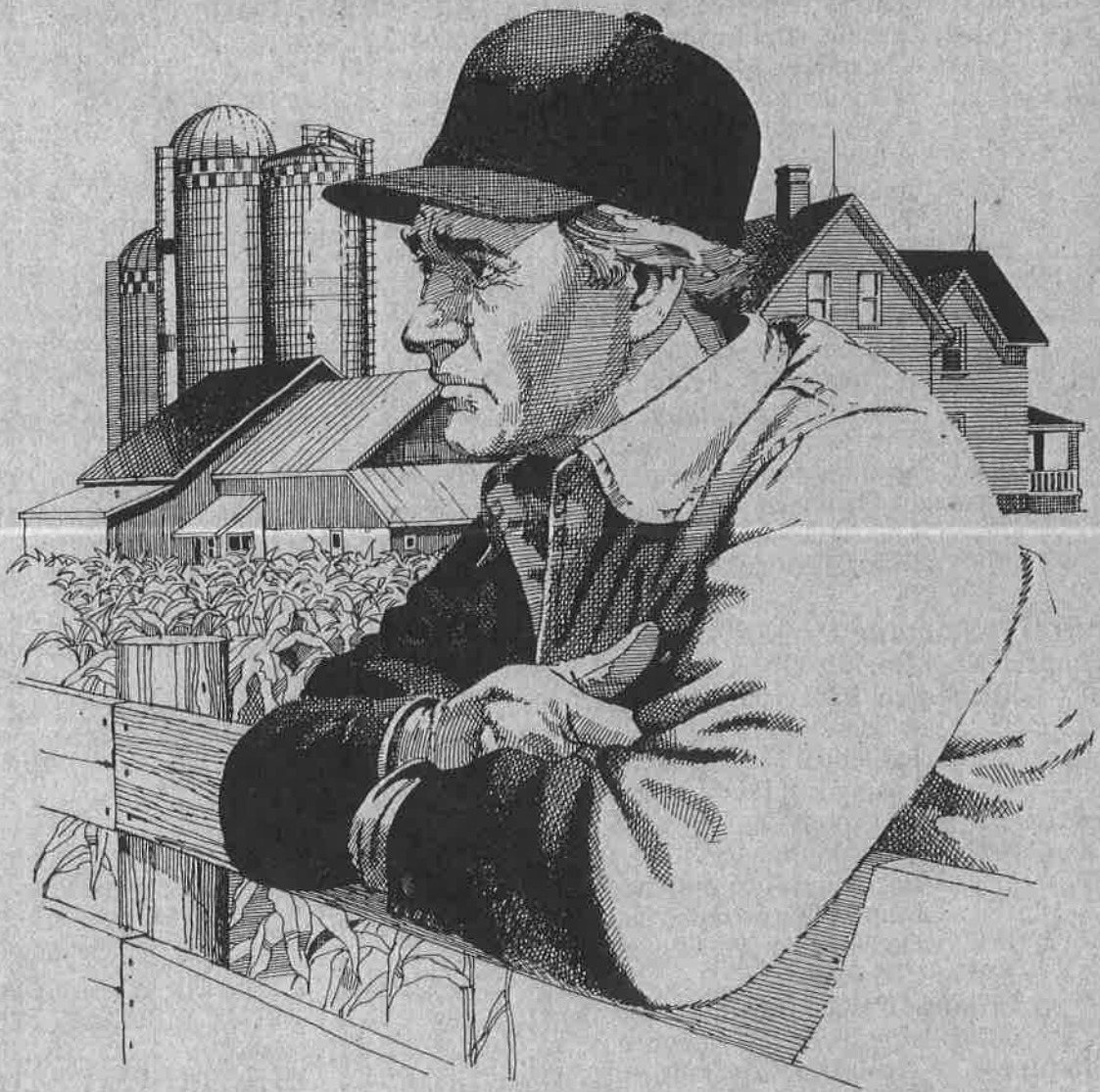


**WHO WILL  
STAND UP  
FOR THE  
FAMILY FARM?**



**Lowell Bolstad**

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A word of thanks goes to those people who offered special help. Those who read the manuscript and offered constructive criticism include the following: Craig Adams, Robert Albee, Rev. David Hurtt, Chuck Kanten, Jack A. Nelson-Pallmeyer, Rev. Ronald Nordin, Char Radintz, Robbi Rudiger, Tom Saunders, Gene Sylvestre, and Lee and Cindy Theorin. The assistance provided by Robert and Gayle Albee in typesetting, layout, and proofreading proved to be most valuable and showed that self-publishing at an affordable cost is possible.

As I acknowledge my appreciation to these people, I am reminded of a verse from the song, "Hands Across America." It speaks of how none of us can do the work alone: "United we stand, divided we fall."

## Introduction

While presenting a workshop on *The Rural Crisis and the Church in Ministry*, a participant voiced the following statement and question, "Many people believe the family farm is dying. The most we can do is to help it die gracefully and to give it a decent funeral. How would you respond to that?" I could not allow such an assertion to go unchallenged. I responded by stating that I believed that the family farm is more than a business. It is a way of life.

At that point other participants jumped in. One said, "We cannot allow the family farm to die. Our rural communities are dependent upon the health of the family farm." Another added, "I would hate to see the large corporate concerns take over the food production. They would not care as much about the land or the community." Still another contributed to the discussion: "Farmers are the backbone of our country. I do not want to see the land and the wealth concentrated in the hands of the few. Sooner or later our democratic way of life will be compromised."

My adrenalin started pumping, causing my heart to start pounding. A fire began igniting in my mind during that exchange. While others were talking, I pictured in my mind having a small book which would explain clearly why we cannot simply stand by and watch the family farm slip away. I imagined a book which would provide specific areas of response to the rural crisis. I also saw a book which recognized that the biblical witness has a great deal to say about all this and cannot be ignored. As Christians, we are challenged to address the rural crisis, instead of washing our hands of it. At that point, I envisioned myself writing the book you are now holding.

I have reflected on the spirited exchange during the workshop. On the one hand, I am saddened by the statement and the question of the participant who stated that the family farm only deserves to die gracefully and to be given a decent burial. His assertion that there is nothing we can do to save the family farm reflects a fatalism shared by many throughout the life of the church. As such, the rural crisis becomes more than a crisis of the family farm, of rural communities, and of our country. It becomes a crisis of confidence, boldness, and courage. Of all people, Christians are called to live in hope and not in despair. The very character of the people of faith is being put to the test. On the other hand, I am gladdened by the passion of those who believe that the family farm is worth saving. They demonstrate an understanding of how important the family farm is to all of society. They show a passion for food and farming as a justice issue.

**Who Will Stand Up For The Family Farm?** is written in the midst of a dynamic tension within the life of the church. In this book, I will attempt to show you what factors are causing the loss of the family farm. I will also try to demonstrate for you what can be done to preserve the family farm. My goal is to challenge you to join the struggle to stand up for the family farm.

# Part I

## Facing Up To The Rural Crisis

### The Cry of the Farmers

I hear the earth groaning in pain,  
the voices of the people of the land rise to me.  
I see the deep scars in my land,  
I smell the smoke filling my air,  
I taste the poisoned water flowing darkly over a dying planet.  
I see my people being driven from their fields,  
from their ancestors' lands they are cast out.  
I see your moneylenders charge above my people's means,  
and the avaricious seize my people's lands.  
You bite the hand that feeds you,  
you deny the farmers a livelihood from their land.  
The family farmers cry for help,  
but their voices are drowned by the auctioneer,  
and welfare, not land, is their children's inheritance.  
You have denied the tillers of the soil food for their own table.  
Your bellies are full, their children are hungry;  
they hand to the bank the deed to their farm,  
to the mortgage company goes their awaited inheritance.  
I have entrusted you with my land, to be its guardians and caretakers;  
I have created you to serve me, each other, and the earth on which you walk.  
Therefore, do not turn your back on your neighbor,  
nor hoard my resources for the few while many perish.  
If you walk in my ways,  
the people of the land will reap good harvests,  
their families and the nation will grow strong from plenty.  
Other peoples will benefit from your prosperity,  
poor peoples will be fed and be healthy,  
all will prosper from your abundance.  
Then the glory of your God will shine about you,  
and all the nations will praise your generosity for all ages to come.

—Author Unknown



*Courtesy Madison Art Center*

***Who else would work so long and so hard for such a low return on labor and investment except those whose very hearts and lives are tied up in the family farm?***

# 1

## Food And Farming Is Everybody's Business

For 15 years Tom and Carol Johnson have been highly successful farmers in the productive farm area of central Illinois. During that period of time they won numerous awards and recognition for their exemplary farm operation. To all outward appearances they are good farmers who are making it. The Johnsons grow corn and soybeans and raise pigs and beef cattle. Their farm has been a model of efficiency. A local extension agent characterizes them as "among the best farmers in the county." A neighbor describes them as "good folks, good farmers, hard-working, progressive, and honest." Their pastor pictures them as "the kind of citizens you would want for neighbors and friends."

In recent years the rural crisis has hit home to their family farm. One lending institution warned them that they may not receive ongoing operating loans. Another lender has told them that they will have to sell part of their pig operation and 100 of their 300 acres in order to meet the loan payments. Tom shows some strong emotions when he recounts the change of events. "I get angry that the lenders were so eager to loan money in good times and so ready to call in loans in bad times. I'm disgusted with government programs which are driving people out of business rather than helping them to stay in business. I'm also saddened that my farming skills accumulated over a lifetime of experience seem to go unappreciated."

Tom sought help from a rural life advocate in order to deal with the lenders. Only through strong negotiations did he manage to secure extensions to his loans. Tom explains the various factors of his financial difficulties: "Part of our economic troubles came from the expansion of the farm in order to make room for our oldest son, Gerald. In addition, prices for corn, soybeans, pork, and beef have fallen rapidly. Land values in the area have dropped dramatically. Disease hit part of the beef herd. With the high interest rates, it has become almost impossible to keep up the loan payments."

In all of this turmoil, Tom and Carol agonize over what other people will think. Carol tells the story this way: "Tom's mother and father raised five children on the home place even through the midst of the Great Depression. Will they understand if we can not make a go of it? What will be our reputation in the community if people find out our shaky financial condition? Will Gerald ever be able to take over the family farm?" Tom and Carol refuse to give up. "We have worked too hard and too long to let go of the family farm. Our pastor has been very supportive of us. We continue to be active in the church and in the community. We have taken leadership roles in the past and will keep it up."

Tom and Carol are not the only farmers facing this predicament. An increasing number of farmers in their area and in farm areas all over the country are feeling the pain. Their difficulty is eventually felt by the wider community.



## **The Ripple Effect**

Like a pebble dropped into a pond, the threat to the family farm ripples out in concentric circles to affect others. The first ones to feel this ripple effect are the rural communities. The financial impact of this is vividly illustrated by a 1985 study of Faribault, Minnesota, by Doug Wirtish and his colleagues at the Faribault Area Vocational-Technical Institute.<sup>1</sup> They made use of 30 years of well-kept records to determine how much farmers spend and what happens when the money is not there to spend.

A number of assumptions were made in this study. There are 500 farmers in the Faribault trade area. Most of these are dairy farmers. About 30 per cent of the farmers are having some financial difficulty. About 10 per cent of these would be expected to go out of business. In other words 50 families would be forced out of farming. Of those, 40 would have to go elsewhere to find jobs. As part of the analysis, the land would continue to be farmed. But it would be farmed for cash crops by larger operators with no need for additional machinery. There would be no livestock. These larger operators would purchase a fourth of their seed, fertilizer, fuel, chemicals, and other supplies directly from the distributors. That business would be lost to the local area. Cash rents would drop by 20 per cent because of less competition for the land. The dairy farms in that area average 456 acres and 54 cows in milk.

This is what losing 50 farms would mean to the Faribault area as calculated on actual records. Other farmers and business people would receive \$580,000 less for feeder pigs and feeder cattle, replacement heifers, and custom work. Approximately \$2,300,000 in sales of fertilizer, feed, other supplies and custom work would be lost. As many as 14 jobs would be cut. Bad debts amounting to \$326,000 would have to be written off. Sales of farm equipment would be down \$590,000, and three dealership employees would be put out of work. Three farm workers would lose their jobs. Banks and other lenders would face loan defaults of up to \$1,856,000. Those 40 families leaving the community would mean \$421,000 less would be spent on food, clothing, and other expendable items. Spending for automobiles and appliances would be cut by \$76,000. Store owners would lay off 3 employees. The school district would realize a loss of 80 children and a cut in state aid of \$118,000. Seven teachers would be laid off. In addition, 30 nonfarm people would lose their jobs. Total revenue loss to the Faribault area would be \$6,576,000.

The effects of the rural crisis are not unique to Faribault, Minnesota. Communities all over the country are experiencing a similar relationship to the plight of the family farmers. But many choose to deny the crisis. They gloss over the decline of the family farm and the erosion of community. This denial has become a stumbling block in uniting farm and town people in the important work of finding solutions. But other people in rural communities are beginning to catch the connection between the farms and the towns. They realize that, in order to save the rural communities, it becomes necessary to stand up for the family farm. The ripple effect extends beyond local communities to affect the national economy. Because of this relationship it can be said that food and farming is everybody's business.

## **The National Economy**

Farmers and ranchers produce raw materials. Along with lumbering, mining, oil drilling, and fishing, these producers of raw materials generate new wealth. They begin the exchange of money. Consider dairy farmers. These farmers clear the land, plow the ground, and plant the crops necessary to feed the cows. Dairies purchase their milk from these farmers who, in turn, use their milk checks to pay their production costs and to support their families. Processors use the fluid milk to make dried milk products, whole

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and skim milk, ice cream and cheese, as well as specialized ingredients for other food products and industrial uses. This whole processing cycle includes manufacturing, wholesale trade, transportation, and service industries.

Economists often tell us that money paid to farmers turns over seven times in the economy. Farmers pay out the money for commodities and services, interest, and wage rates. When they receive a fair price, it promotes a balanced economy. By the same token, when farmers receive 50 per cent of a fair price, it cuts in half the amount of money turned over and contributes strongly to a deficit economy. Fair prices are needed to keep the different sectors of the population in balance with each other. What happens when farmers do not receive fair prices? Credit then replaces price. Farmers have been forced to borrow to continue farming instead of being paid a fair price for their product.

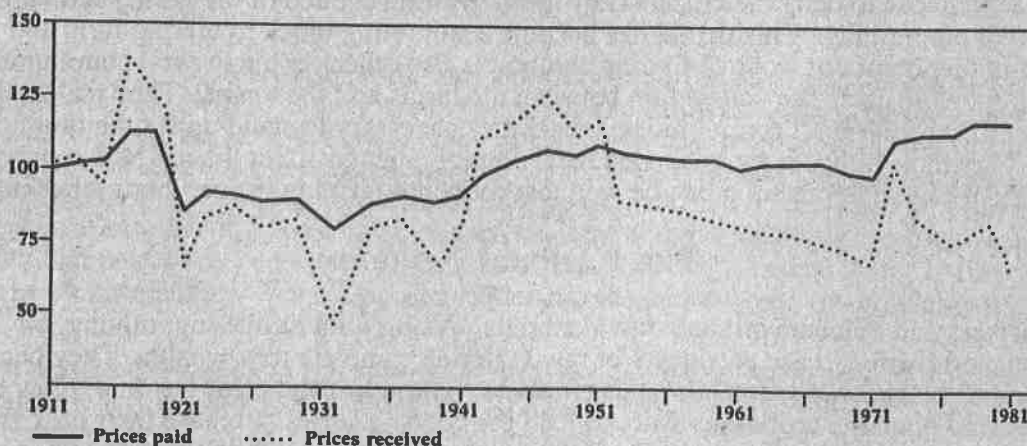
The concentric circles of the ripple effect gradually widen to include the national economy. In looking back over the past 30 years, a close correlation can be drawn between the rise in farm debt and the rise in national debt. Both individual farmers and the federal government have been forced to borrow their way to survival. In the midst of all the supposed complicated matters of the economic crisis, it all comes down to a very simple fact. Credit has replaced price as our way of doing business. Do we have the will as a people of this country to restore equity to our economy by seeing to it that those who generate new wealth receive a fair price for the raw materials which they produce?

### The Decline of the Family Farm: How Has This Happened?

Some people account for the rural crisis by asserting, "it just happened, and there is not much we can do to keep the family farm. It has gone the way of the Ma and Pa grocery store. Nostalgia is not a good enough reason to save the family farm." This attitude leads to a passive resignation of the loss of the family farm. But others challenge this view.

Anne Kanten, Assistant Commissioner of Agriculture in Minnesota and an active layperson in the American Lutheran Church, is one of those challengers. Speaking at the 1984 *Conference on Rural Ministry*, held at Wartburg Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa, Kanten told how deliberate federal and state government policies and legislation have been responsible for the decline of the family farm. Kanten used the graph pictured below to tell a brief history of food and farming public policy in this country.

Index of Prices Paid and Prices Received by Farmers, 1910-1981  
(1910-14 = 100)



Data from USDA, *Agricultural Prices—Annual Summary*, 1980.

Kanten points to the years of 1910 to 1914 as the base years for the purpose of a comparison of prices received by farmers and prices paid by farmers. The years of 1910 to 1914 were chosen because it was seen as a fairly prosperous time for United States farmers. The prices farmers received and the prices farmers paid were approximately the same. Some critics challenge the use of this era as obsolete. But a specific time period is needed to make a comparison of prices.

At the conference, Kanten explained the concept of parity. The United States Department of Agriculture calculates a figure called *parity* in order to measure what farmers deserve in price. If farmers had 100 per cent parity prices, it would mean that they would be able to purchase as much as other workers in society for each hour of time worked. Kanten claimed that certain measuring sticks are necessary. The parity index is similar to the consumer price index for the rest of society.

Kanten followed the time line of the graph to explain a bit of American history. The farm economic crisis of the 1920's, along with rampant stock market manipulations, caused the Great Depression of the 1930's. The Great Depression was farm-led and farm-fed. The political response to the farm economic problem came in the form of parity legislation in 1933. This public policy put a floor on farm prices, administered through Commodity Credit Corporation. The legislation also provided supply management which attempted to balance farm production with demand for farm products. The bill also provided for consumer protection. Because of this parity legislation, farmers received an average of 98.2 per cent of parity from 1935 to 1954. About 99 per cent came through the marketplace.

But something happened in the early 1950's to change this era of economic stability. Kanten explained that parity legislation farm policy ended in 1952-53 when special interest groups successfully attacked and broke the programs. Grain corporations and cotton processors wanted to buy commodities cheaper. Farm supply companies wanted unrestricted production because planting more acres would increase demand for their products. The agricultural program was changed to a sliding support scale. Farm prices began to fall. From 1955 to 1977 farmers received 75 per cent of parity. Taxpayers paid between 3 and 4 billion dollars per year.

Kanten pointed out that the only exception came in the early 1970's when, for a short time, the level of parity approached 100 per cent during the Russian grain deal. But prices soon dropped, and the level of parity began sliding again. Kanten stated that this country has been on a boom and bust cycle ever since that time. The new programs created by the federal government in the 1970's were the target price/deficiency payment programs which led to the boom years of the late '70's and the bust years of the 80's. These programs were designed to provide subsidies which would make up the difference between market prices and target prices by deficiency payments. Kanten claimed that the new programs were not enacted for the benefit of the family farm or the rural communities, but to give corporations low-priced commodities. As a result of these programs, land values soared in the late 1970's and crashed in the 1980's. The farm debt has expanded to \$227 billion. Taxpayers are paying unprecedented subsidies to keep commodity prices low.

In the following table, drawn from the latest USDA Agricultural Prices Report, the first column shows prices received for the various products as of October 15, 1986; the second column is 100 percent of parity for each item as of October 15; and the third column is the percentage of parity that farmers were getting for the items at mid-month.

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Commodity & Unit	Prices Received	100% Parity	% of Parity Received
Wheat, bu.	\$ 2.33	\$ 6.74	35
Corn, bu.	1.31	4.92	27
Barley, bu.	1.53	4.48	34
Soybeans, bu.	4.50	12.10	37
Edible beans, cwt.	23.30	37.90	61
Milk, cwt. (all)	13.00	23.20	54
Beef cattle, cwt.	54.60	100.00	55
Calves, cwt.	63.40	115.00	55
Hogs, cwt.	53.40	84.50	63
Lambs, cwt.	62.60	114.00	55
Wool, lb.	.682	2.43	28

—National NFO Reporter

Anne Kantan refuses to accept the notion that the loss of the family farm is beyond our control. She argues that, if conscious public policy can be used to force people off the land, then, too, the conscious will of the people can be mobilized to stand up for the family farm.

### Why You Should Stand Up for the Family Farm

Oftentimes I hear the argument that the family farm accounts for less than 3 per cent of the population. Why should anyone care about this minority group? I believe that the key to standing up for the family farm lies in making connections. (A "family farm" may range from a one-acre vegetable operation in Florida to a several-thousand-acre wheat spread in Montana. It is defined not in terms of acreage or volume of production but of independent entrepreneurship. A given family provides the management, economic risk, and most of the labor.)

Family farmers are a small group. But the rest of society depends upon these producers of raw materials. The plight of farmers is connected to that of workers. Concerns over militarization, hungry people, and the environment can be related to the family farm. Consumers need to understand the situation of food producers. These connections are depicted here like snapshots to suggest the interconnectedness of farm people and the rest of the population. Each connection will be accompanied by an appropriate scripture reference. I invite you to explore these connections further in order to discover how the family farm best serves all of us.

#### Farms, Jobs, and Justice

Farmers and workers are experiencing a similar predicament. Farmers are receiving less for their products. Workers are being forced to accept concessions and layoffs. Farmers are being pushed off the land. Unions are being busted. When farmers do not receive a fair price for their products, they can not purchase the goods and services of the workers. Workers do not want farmers to come to the cities. Farmers should stay on the land. The cities do not have room for a mass migration of rural people. The competition for the few available jobs has become even more fierce. City services are stretched to the limit.

The Bible speaks a word to the relationship of farmers and workers. "You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your brethren or one of the sojourners who are in your land within your towns; you shall give him his hire on the day he earns it, before the sun goes down (for he is poor, and sets his heart upon it);

lest he cry against you to the Lord, and it be sin in you" (Deuteronomy 24:14-15). Elsewhere the Bible declares that the "laborer deserves his wages" (Luke 10:7b and I Timothy 4:18).

A connection just beginning to be explored is the strong desire to humanize the workplace by allowing workers a louder voice in the decision making process. Together with this there is an impetus in part of the labor movement for the workers to share in the ownership of the company. Farm people are raising the banner, not only for themselves, but for others in society, in exercising control over the work to be done.

### **Farm the Land, Not Arm the Land**

I have grave concerns over the increased militarization of our country. People, finances, and research are being directed towards the production of more and bigger weapons of destruction. The *Rambo* movies symbolize a mindset which believes military intervention in the affairs of other countries can be justified. For instance, the United States spent \$100 million in 1986 on Contra aid to help them attempt to overthrow the government of Nicaragua when that money could have gone for farm aid to save family farmers. In the same year this country sent supplies to both Iran and Iraq in their war against each other.

The Bible offers a different vision. "He (the Lord) shall judge between many nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2:4). In this vision the weapons of war will be turned into the tools of peace.

In addition, food has been used as a weapon to bully enemies and to reward friends. In his book, *Hunger for Justice*, Jack A. Nelson-Pallmeyer writes how public policy has been designed to create food dependency:<sup>2</sup>

The more dependent a nation is on the United States for a commodity as essential as food, the more leverage this government has in pursuing its political and economic interests regardless of where those interests conflict with the majority of people in a poor nation. Just as displaced farmers and other poor people in Israel were ruthlessly exploited by merchants who monopolized the grain trade, so it is or will be with poor people in countries dependent on the United States for food.<sup>3</sup>

By dumping cheap grain on Third World countries, local farmers are driven out of business, forced to move to crowded urban areas, and made dependent on imported food. When food is employed as a weapon, people are injured and killed, not by bullets and tanks, but by hunger and malnutrition. The next section explores the hunger connection more fully.

### **Feed the Hungry**

In Third World countries, the global supermarket of exports and imports determines in the end who eats and who does not. James Wessell in *Trading the Future* recounts how an advertisement by Continental Grain, the second largest grain trader, proudly proclaims that "Jomo's Getting A Taste for Bread."<sup>4</sup> The marketing team of this grain trader persuaded the Nigerian government during the oil boom of the early 1970's to import wheat to make white bread. Nigeria could easily produce enough food for local consumption but decided to trade oil for wheat. When the population becomes dependent upon white bread, the country, in effect, becomes hostage to an outside power. If the grain traders decided to cut

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off the shipment of wheat, or if the country no longer produced enough income to buy wheat, it could make for the seeds of a revolution.

One of the major ironies of the rural crisis in the United States is that an increasing number of farm people are going on food stamps and visiting food shelves. Many of the very people who produce a surplus of food for this country do not receive enough for their product to adequately feed their family.

The Bible speaks of feeding the hungry as a sign of the kingdom. "Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me'" (Matthew 25:34-35). Another biblical injunction speaks of caring for the earth. This connection will be explored in the following section.

#### **Environmentalists and Farmers Can Be Friends**

When God gave the original command to "...till and keep the earth" (Genesis 2:15b), he intended this injunction to be carried out by more than those who farm the land. The care of the earth becomes a responsibility of all people, for everyone depends upon the land to produce the food. Farm people are but caretakers of this valuable resource which must feed people in the generations to come.

The loss of family farms to corporate agriculture can be hard on the land. Insurance companies have foreclosed on thousands of acres of farmland in Missouri, Minnesota, and Iowa. In scores of instances, absentee landlords have destroyed conservation efforts which took years to develop.

Family farming, on the other hand, offers the best chance of good stewardship of natural resources and of preservation of the land for future generations. The level of intimacy in caring for the land disappears when it is seen only as an investment by an absentee landlord. In the next paragraphs, the connection again demonstrates that food and farming is everybody's business. Food consumers can not get along without food producers.

#### **If You Eat, You Are Involved in Agriculture**

The Bible sounds a warning against the exploitation of those who labor in the fields: "Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts" (James 5:4).

Farmers receive only 4¢ out of the United States food dollar. On the other hand, processing and packaging takes 21¢, wholesale and transport - 18¢, retail - 20¢, restaurants and vending machines - 9¢. Farm inputs cost 17¢ of the food dollar, while labor, interest, depreciation, and taxes cost 11¢.<sup>5</sup> Corn farmers receive less than the grocery store owner makes for redeeming the coupon from a box of breakfast cereal. It costs more to wrap a loaf of bread than the wheat farmer receives for the raw material which goes into the baked product. Even if farm commodity prices were to be increased 25 per cent, it would still be a small dent in the grocery bill.

Consumer advocate, Ralph Nader, told farmers at the 1985 gathering of the North Dakota Agricultural Association that farmers are much more concerned about society as a whole than would be corporate interests with their prime concern for the profit margin. Nader warned that, with increasing corporate control, prices would increase and quality would decline. The testimony of this respected consumer advocate can help those who eat to better appreciate the situation of those who produce the food.

## Rural America Is Becoming Like A Third World Country

An old saying has it that "sometimes people can not see the forest for the trees." I believe this is the case with the rural crisis. Most people generally know that there is something terribly wrong. Many suspect that the problem goes beyond individual farmers and ranchers. Others have a hunch that the crisis has to do with the way things work in a system. But most have a difficult time explaining the various characteristics.

Drawing a comparison of public policies toward Central America and rural America provokes some rather frightening conclusions. Food, farming, and justice forms the basis for the connection.

Much of my material comes from a travel seminar to Mexico, El Salvador, and Nicaragua I attended in January and February of 1985. This seminar was sponsored by the *Center for Global Service and Education*, a program of Augsburg College in Minneapolis, Minnesota. I have also drawn on my personal involvement with farm people who are actively working to bring about progressive social change. On the basis of these experiences I will compare Central America and rural America; show the global connection between them, and suggest an example for the possibility of change.

### Food, Farming, and Justice in Central America

The travel seminar to Central America opened my eyes to discover that cheap raw materials as a public policy characterizes much of food and farming in Central America. All of the other characteristics are closely related to this central trait. Allow me to share some snapshots of food and farming in Central America which illustrate these characteristics.

#### Cheap Raw Materials As A Public Policy

Juan Tijerino, a farmer from Nicaragua, asked the question, "Why is the United States so angry with our country?" He supplied his own answer:

Under former President Anastasio Somoza, many United States corporations did business in Nicaragua. They took the raw materials of wood, silver, beef, and cotton and decapitalized their earnings. Now after the revolution, the foreign corporations doing business must respect their workers' rights and must participate in the development of the country. They can no longer exploit the workers and the country for the sake of profit alone.

Juan states succinctly the primary reason for United States involvement in much of the Third World. It provides access to cheap raw materials.

#### Who Owes Whom? — The Debt Crisis

During the oil boom of the 1970's many of the large United States banks obtained huge sums of petroleum money. They had to invest it somewhere. What better place than in

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Third World countries like Mexico? This fostered expansionism which primarily benefited the consumer class of Mexico. By 1985, Mexico had accumulated a debt of \$96 billion. This averaged out to be \$1000 for every man, woman, and child in Mexico. The average labor rate was \$5.00 a day for those fortunate enough to find work.<sup>1</sup>

### **Concentration of Land Ownership**

While in El Salvador our travel group saw first hand how some of the best land is used to raise beef cattle. The wealthiest families have long controlled over half the farm land where they produce beef, sugar cane, and coffee. These farm products go to feed the wealthy or for export and not to feed the hungry. On the other hand, peasant farmers would try to scratch out a meager crop from patches of ground even on the sides of cliffs. Stories were told of how some farmers had been killed when they had fallen off embankments.

### **A Chemical Addiction (Exported)**

The export of dangerous pesticides to Third World countries presents a scandal of global proportions. For instance, DDT, which is banned in this country, is used in the production of fruits and vegetables in Mexico. The use of the chemical poses severe health hazards to Mexican farm workers. In addition, the harmful effects come back to haunt the people of the United States through the export of those food products to this country.<sup>2</sup>

### **Inappropriate Technology**

While in Cuernavaca, Mexico, I met Dr. Ramirez Genel, Secretary of Agriculture and Hydrolic Resources of the state of Morelos. He explained his view of food and farming in Mexico. He tried to impress his listeners by stating more than once his qualifications for the position. He had earned a doctorate degree from Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. But with his education he brought back to Mexico a style of agriculture which advocated bigger machinery, less labor, and more chemicals. He thought exports would be the answer. He wanted mandatory birth control.

Later we visited with a campesino (poor peasant farmer), who explained that the recommendations of the Secretary of Agriculture were entirely inappropriate. With a twinkle in his eye, he told of how he would pretend to listen to a departmental representative demonstrating the use of fertilizer. "If we would have used the recommended amount, our fields would have burned up," he said. He clearly saw the implications of what a more highly mechanized and capital intensive form of agriculture would present to him. He did not want to go into debt and to be forced off the land.

### **The Role of Government: On Whose Side?**

While in Nicaragua, our travel group had the opportunity to visit with the United States Consul in Managua, Bob Fretz. His perspective became quite clear. He opposed the Nicaraguan government's practice of setting a fair price on the farm products. He said that larger farms should be able to sell on the international markets rather than keeping the food in the country to feed the people. His chief example was a Texan farmer with a 30,000 acre sugar beet operation who left after the revolution and whose land was being redistributed in the land reform. Fretz reflected a United States public policy of wanting to have access to cheap raw materials in Third World countries. The Nicaraguan government did not want their country to be exploited by outside interests.



## **Food, Farming, and Justice in Rural America**

### **Cheap Raw Materials As A Public Policy**

In the first chapter, I told the story of cheap raw materials as a public policy in the United States. One illustration of this policy can be made in looking at the price of corn. Corn prices dropped below \$1.00 a bushel in 1986 for the first time in 15 years. The last time it went that low was in 1971 when corn was 94¢. The average cost of production in 1986 was approaching \$3.00. Corn sold on a cash basis hit a high of \$3.44 in 1974.<sup>3</sup>

Many people claim that increased exports are the answer. But in looking closely at the consequences to rural America, we discover that the export surge has brought increased risks to farmers: "...greater specialization of production on the farm; a quadrupling of farmers' indebtedness; greater market instability; and stress on storage and transport systems."<sup>4</sup> In his book, **Trading the Future**, James Wessell compares these results to an economy of a colony:

According to agricultural economist, Philip M. Raup, "we are creating a pattern of one-crop, export-based agricultural activity in the corn, soybean, wheat, and sorghum regions that is very similar to the type of a monocultural dependence formerly associated with colonialism. In an important and sobering sense, the grain belt of America is acquiring the characteristics of a colony." Nothing more characterizes the economy of a colony than boom and bust linked to fluctuating world market prices for primary exports. Also, in a colonized economy the rewards of production are captured primarily by the largest producers, as well as by commercial interests off the farm.<sup>5</sup>

Because of cheap raw materials as a public policy, rural America is becoming like a Third World country.

### **Who Owes Whom? — The Debt Crisis**

In rural America during the 1970's lending institutions eager to make loans approached farmers with easy money. "Get big or get out" became the commonly accepted advice.<sup>6</sup> A farm debt of \$12 billion in 1950 skyrocketed to \$227 billion by 1983.<sup>7</sup> This exceeds the combined debt of Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil. The massive farm debt—most of which is owed to outside lenders—acts as a tremendous drain of money from rural communities. The purchase of expensive farm inputs takes funds out of local hands. Many rural banks refuse to invest in local businesses since they are able to get a better return elsewhere.

### **Concentration of Land Ownership**

In the United States huge corporate livestock operations are being vertically integrated with processing companies, becoming a dominant factor in the livestock industry. Huge dairies now are expanding production, while family farmers can not survive low prices and milk taxes. Low commodity prices lead to larger farms and pave the way for corporate and investor exploitation of agriculture. Larger farms take advantage of speculation in farmland values. Their net worth is enhanced. They profit at the expense of smaller farmers who are in a weaker position because they do not have as much net worth to substitute for a poor cash flow.

Does the concentration of land ownership mean that farmers are achieving greater efficiency? In **Trading the Future**, James Wessell responds to that question:

Indeed, not one single economic analyst we've encountered in our research has claimed that the dramatic concentration of production during the last ten to

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fifteen years is either motivated by or results in greater efficiency. "Medium-sized family farms are as efficient as the large farms," concluded a 1980 summary USDA report. "About 80 percent of these farms likely have costs below the national average cost of production."<sup>8</sup>

Wessell goes on to explain that farms have increased in size because growth has been the only way to maintain their earning power in the midst of a declining profit margin per acre.<sup>9</sup>

### **A Chemical Addiction**

Much of agriculture in rural America is suffering from a chemical addiction, an acute dependency upon fertilizers and pesticides. This presents a danger to the food chain and ultimately to the sustained health of land and water. Government policy has favored larger farms which employ a capital intensive approach to the use of machinery, energy, and chemicals.<sup>10</sup> Overproduction has come about as a result. Other factors contributing to this chemical addiction include the influence of agribusiness, the orientation of research, and the availability of credit.

### **Inappropriate Technology**

The key here is a willingness to live within limits. In his book, *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture*, Wendell Berry challenges the philosophy of "bigger is better."<sup>11</sup>

To argue for a balance between people and their tools, between life and machinery, between biological and machine-produced energy, is to argue for restraint upon the use of machines. The arguments that rise out of the machine metaphor—arguments for cheapness, efficiency, labor-saving, economic growth, etc.—all point to infinite industrial growth and infinite energy consumption. The moral argument points to restraint; it is a conclusion that may be in some sense tragic, but there is no escaping it.<sup>12</sup>

Berry goes on to state that we have a choice to either live within these restraints or possibly not to live at all.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Role of Government: On Whose Side?**

Some people and even some national farm groups and organizations believe that government should get out of agriculture. I believe it is a myth to think that government can get out of agriculture. Even as early as 1623, the government was involved in agriculture. The town councils in New England hired a local shepherd to tend everyone's flock in common on the public green. There has always been some government involvement in agriculture and some limits to competition. Government will be involved in agriculture one way or another. Food and farming is too important to the security of any country. Government is the main driving force in determining how agriculture develops. The question is on whose side government will be involved. Will the government target the benefits to small- and moderate-sized farmers? Or will government influence the market in such a way so that the large farmers gain the most benefits?

The debate over the 1985 farm bill offered a historic moment to address the question of public policy as regards raw materials. Many argued that the price of farm products should be lowered in order to be more competitive in the world market. Some called for a higher price on farm products in order to keep family farmers on the land. Others worked to keep the subsidy system in place. The resultant legislation continued the sliding support scale Anne Kanten talked about in Chapter 1 under "The Decline of the Family Farm: How Has This Happened?" Government subsidies increased, while the prices farmers received for commodities decreased. Once again public policy favored cheap raw materials.

## **Food, Farming, and Justice: Making the Global Connection**

Cheap raw materials as a public policy stands as the central characteristic of food and farming in the United States and in much of Central America. All of the other characteristics come about as a result of this main trait. Credit replaces a fair price for the raw materials. Farming becomes more dependent upon the use of chemicals in order to increase production which, in turn, is supposed to make up for the low price. The cycle continues as overproduction pushes the prices even lower and makes for more dependence upon a capital intensive form of farming. Eventually, control over the land shifts into the hands of larger operators.

As I reflected upon this global connection, I was reminded of the statements made by two famous Americans. Thomas Jefferson wrote in a letter to James Madison in 1785 that "...it is not too soon to provide by every possible means that as few as possible shall be without a little portion of land. The small landowners are the most precious part of a state..."<sup>14</sup> Former Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis asserted that "we can have democracy in this country, or we can have wealth in the hands of the few; but we can not have both."<sup>15</sup> I came to realize more clearly the importance of wealth and the land being dispersed as widely as possible. Democracy itself is at stake.

## **Nicaragua Demonstrates the Possibility of Change**

### **The Agrarian Reform**

Food and farming stands at the heart of the revolution in Nicaragua. In order for people to eat, it is believed that farmers must receive a fair price. Nicaragua has tried to avoid the rigid ideologies of both the East and the West and to formulate its own pragmatic policy in order to insure fairness. In visiting with Salvador Lanza Quiros of the *Empresa Oscar Benavida Farm*, in the region of Matagalpa, we were told of the cooperative work which goes into agricultural policy:

There are six regions in our country. We sit down and figure out the cost of production. When we have figured that out, then we set a fair price on the farm product. Agriculture stands at the heart of the revolution. In order to have food sufficiency, we must pay farmers a fair and just price.

Members of the *Omar Torijos Rice Cooperative*, also in the region of Matagalpa, explained what the revolution has meant to them:

Before the revolution we lived in houses, but did not own the land. It was very marginal land. There was no way to get credit. The Agrarian Reform gave land to the peasants. In Nicaragua 80 per cent of the land is in private hands and cooperatives, while 20 per cent of the land is in state farms. Now we have credit lines opened to us to buy machinery and cattle.

They went on to tell how in one year they were able to restructure their debt on a pump when it filled with sand. Another year, when they experienced both a flood and a drought, the government forgave part of the debt.

Since the revolution in 1979, 85,000 campesinos have been given land. The theme of the Agrarian Reform is "land to whoever works it." The new landowners are expected to live on the land and to work their farms efficiently. In an irony of history, Nicaragua in 1986 offered land to displaced United States farmers. They would like North American

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farmers to come to Nicaragua to work the land, to reinvest their earnings in that country, and to share appropriate technology. The Nicaraguan Agrarian Reform poses a challenge to cheap raw materials as a public policy of the United States. If Nicaragua can maintain control over its own resources, it will provide an example of what is possible for other exploited peoples throughout the world. The United States effort to overthrow the duly elected government of Nicaragua through the funding of the counterrevolutionaries has nothing to do with keeping the Americas safe for democracy. It has everything to do with retaining an access to cheap raw materials.



*Nicaraguan farm people offer a witness of hope*

Hilbarto Samango, from CEPAD, (*Evangelical Committee for Aid to Development*), summed up the feelings of most Nicaraguans best when he said:

Please tell the mothers of sons in the United States not to send their sons to fight against us in Central America. We have fought one revolution. We do not want to fight another. How does the United States have the right to decide what is good for Nicaragua? That is the right of Nicaragua. We want to decide our own future.

Self-determination characterizes the thrust of the Agrarian Reform in Nicaragua.

### **Base Christian Communities**

There is a close correlation between Base Christian Communities and the Revolution. Base Christian Communities are small groups of people who study scripture from the perspective of justice and of the poor. They look at society from below. They provided the moral justification for calling into question the gross inequities under the dictator Anastasio Somoza. In the words of Piedad Tijerino, a farm woman, devout Roman Catholic, and a member of a Base Christian Community, "the revolution would not have been possible without the Base Christian Communities."

## **Part II**

# **Standing Up For The Family Farm**

"If there is one thing that rural people repeatedly request from the church today, it is a word of hope. This dare not be a word that simply ignores the crisis. It must be strong enough to help them deal with it."<sup>1</sup>

Bishop Darold Beekman  
Southwest Minnesota District  
The American Lutheran Church  
Willmar, Minnesota



*From the film "Country," ©MCMLXXXIV Buena Vista Distribution Co., Inc.*

***Caring holds people together***

### 3

## Caring On A Personal Level

“Bear one another's burdens  
and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

Galatians 6:2

Lyle Schmidt received a degree in animal science in 1969 and began farming with his wife, Kathy, in northern Kansas. Honored as *Jaycee Farmer of the Year*, he made \$35,000 his first year in the hog business. But by 1980, the Schmidts had filed for bankruptcy. Plagued by drought, high interest rates, and low hog prices, Lyle explains his first attempted solution: “I worked harder and expanded faster.” He goes on to explain, “When that failed, I tried to escape by staying in bed. Sometimes I drove my car all night.”

Lyle began yelling at the children and admits that “at the depth of my depression, I physically abused Kathy. I did not care about anything anymore. I was too tired to face the situation. I would feel chest pains. One day my arm numbed.” Lyle did not have a heart attack. But he tells that the thought of being forced to move to the city would be like sentencing him to death: “I always believed I belonged on the farm.” Lyle now admits that pride kept him from reaching out for help: “I just could not bring myself to go talk to somebody about my problems. I didn't think anybody would understand.”

Fortunately for Lyle and Kathy, another couple in their congregation noticed that something was wrong and reached out to them. Kathy relates that “I do not know what we would have done without these friends from church showing a listening ear. We might have ended up divorced. Now our faith in people and in God has been restored.”

### Theological Background

#### A Sense of Place

In his book, *The Land*, Walter Brueggemann speaks of a sense of place.<sup>1</sup> The land is filled with symbolic meaning. Promises have been spoken, commitments have been made, and people have been remembered. Identities have been shaped, meanings have been discovered, and roots have been established.<sup>2</sup> People become attached to the land.

This sense of place helps us to understand why farming is more than a business. It is a way of life. Farm people are rooted in the land. They are connected to family, relatives, neighbors, friends, church, and the community. Oftentimes people will refer to a specific farm as “the old Smith place” even though the Smiths died 25 years ago. This sense of place characterizes family farming at its best. To be uprooted from the family farm, then, would mean to be torn away from that which has given purpose in life.

But family farmers are not the only ones for whom rootedness and connectedness are important. In fact, Brueggemann describes our nation as a people of strangers and sojourners who are looking for a place to call home.<sup>3</sup> The sense of displacement runs deep

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in the American experience. The existential promise of individual fulfillment has not come true. People are seeking desperately to be rooted and connected. For this reason, Brueggemann calls for a return to this central biblical theme of "the land."<sup>4</sup>

### **Individual Dignity and Respect**

People in distress can be helped to see that individual dignity and respect go beyond success and failure. We are created in the image of God and called to be partners in the ongoing creative process. This gives value to our lives. God continues to love his people in a gracious and merciful way even in the midst of a tragic turn of events.

It is important for the church not to be co-opted by popular psychology in speaking to people in distress. The Gospel offers a transcendent word to give identity and purpose. Through Baptism, God names his people, invites them to use the gifts given to them, and urges them to identify with those who experience the strains of financial, emotional, and personal difficulties.

Frequently farm people apologize for their life situation. The media often portrays country people as uncultured and backward. But E. W. Mueller, a long-time spokesperson on the rural and small town church, believes that rural people need not be embarrassed. He challenges people. "When somebody asks you where you are from, do not say 'a small town 40 miles north of Minneapolis.' Tell them the name of the town. If they have not heard of it, it is high time they did."<sup>5</sup>

### **Losing and Finding One's Life**

One of the miracles of the Christian experience is that, in losing one's life, life in its true measure is found. Through the pain of the rural crisis, many are finding this to be the case. Assumptions about life are being re-examined. Many are discovering a new appreciation for the gifts of God in the form of family, land, neighbors, community, and the church. These gifts are being held more highly and are being exercised more regularly.

### **To Whom Can I Be A Neighbor?**

The lawyer asks the wrong question of Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29) He desires to justify himself by establishing a criterion for those with whom he does not want to get involved. The lawyer is willing to love his neighbor but he does not want to get close to the wrong kind of neighbor. Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan to point out that the neighbor is the one who is in need of help. You are loved in order to show love to others. You are justified in order to seek justice.

Today it becomes more difficult to reach out to those who are experiencing distress in the rural crisis. If someone's barn burns down, others can help to rebuild it. If someone dies, people can bring over food. But to listen, to understand, and to empathize with someone in danger of losing the farm presents a challenge. Here is the opportunity for the church to be the church and to do the work it does best.

## **A Caring Response**

### **Becoming Aware of the Signs of Distress**

Families in trouble show signs of distress. The alert caring person will watch for these clues. Family members may gradually drop through the cracks, not attend church, avoid family or community gatherings, and place their noses to the grindstone. Others may become unusually outgoing. Their physical appearance may change, becoming unkempt or



radically different in style. School children may act out the problems experienced by the family. Whereas adults can cut themselves off from a great deal of social contact, children, through their school attendance, remain in public. Alcoholism may surface. Verbal and physical abuse may take place. A number of signs may indicate the danger of suicide. A person may talk of suicide, give away certain possessions, experience feelings of guilt, helplessness or anxiety, have difficulty sleeping or, in some cases, sleep excessively, and may show no concern for family or friends. All of the above can be symptoms of the deeper pain of farm families suffering economic hardship. People in distress need to know that someone cares enough to listen to them and to understand their reality.

### **Mutual Conversation and Consolation**

Martin Luther speaks of "mutual conversation and consolation" as part of the ministry of the word given to the priesthood of all believers. The apostle Paul's words to "bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2) gives the mandate for involving ourselves in the lives of others. The Christian faith experience provides us with the tools to care on the personal level. As those who walk in the shadow of the cross, we can dare to enter into another's pain and to understand their reality. We can empathize with them and offer our emotional support. As those who live with the view of the empty tomb, we can express hope in reminding people of the strengths and resources given by God.

Perhaps in conversation a person in distress will drop hints of difficulties. The observant conversationalist will pick up on these and draw out those pent-up emotions in a safe way. Many times this can be an opening to establish bonds of trust.

Often the man of the family will be reluctant to seek help because of society's expectations of the father as provider and of the husband as the strong one. Because of this, the woman frequently becomes the access point into the family. She will more likely ask for assistance for herself and the family and will be the source of emotional stability for the family. Given time, the man of the family may come around to accept understanding and support.

How you answer the question, "Who will stand up for the family farm?," will determine the way in which you show your caring. If you believe that the family farm is dying and that it should only be helped to die gracefully, then you will be interested only in a coping strategy for personal survival. For many families, leaving the farm unfortunately becomes the only alternative. But, if you are willing to show a tough love, you will give the farm family all the possible help you can for them to fight in order to stay on the farm. Such a vigorous stance grows out of a theology of hope and a ministry of love. We need more people who are willing to buck each other up to make a stand for the family farm.

### **Do Not Agonize, Organize**

While visiting in San Salvador, El Salvador, I had the opportunity to listen to representatives of the *Committee of the Mothers and the Families of the Politically Imprisoned, Disappeared, and Killed in El Salvador*. They told of their immense suffering at the hands of the repressive government. One of the members explained how the organization came to be: "We went to visit Archbishop Oscar Romero and told him what was happening. He told us to work together. 'One by one you will not accomplish anything,' he said. 'But together you will raise the voices of your husbands and children.'"

The courage of these women from a Third World country challenges us in this country to move beyond the holding strategies of "coping" and "surviving." In organizing, personal pain becomes transformed into social action. In order to truly care for people on a

personal level, we can point them beyond themselves and to others in a similar situation. Together people can accomplish more than the sum of their individual efforts.

### A Word to Pastors

At a conference on rural ministry, a dialogue began between pastors and farmers. One of the pastors asked, "What is it you (farmers) expect of us in terms of personal pastoral ministry?" One of the farmers replied, "I would like to be visited by my pastor once a year on my turf." This becomes the first part of the ministry of *pastoral conversation*. Farm people want to be known and accepted on their own terms. Many a pastor new to a rural setting has become frustrated that country folk do not stop in at the church office to talk over their problems. It just does not work that way. Regular parish visitation becomes a high priority. The scriptures witness to the ministry of Jesus which often took place along the way as he met people in their own surroundings. Pastoral conversation also can take place at gathering places of rural people in the community.

Having gained the trust and confidence of the people, the pastor stands in a much better position to help in the event of distress. A reluctance to ask for help frequently prevents farm people from seeking *pastoral counseling*. Therefore it most likely will be up to the pastor to take the initiative. Here again it is important to be aware of the pressures unique to farming which can result in personal, marital, and family problems. A pastor stands in a position to provide counseling and to mobilize the resources to support those in distress.

Bishop Darold Beekman offers some excellent suggestions on forgiveness and renewal in the *pastoral ministry of conversation, counseling, and preaching*:

It is at this point that the gospel can offer another posture, that of confession and absolution. The grace of baptism frees us to confess our own guilt, hostility, and alienation, and to have it absolved so that we are once again able to reach out to another in love. Such a gospel would make it possible for all of us to acknowledge that we have contributed to the present situation: farmers by their greed and covetousness, lenders for their frequent unwise counsel to expand and over-extend, politicians for enacting policies that have primarily favored the larger farmers and tax write-offs that have, in turn, encouraged unwise expansion and investment, consumers for their support of a 'cheap food policy,' land grant university researchers for focusing on big technology that further encouraged unwise expansion, churches for often remaining oblivious to the problem or hesitant to address the hard ethical questions, and leaders of farm organizations for failing to take the initiative to speak with a common voice—to mention only the more obvious. Instead of pointing fingers, a posture of confession around the throne of grace would seem more healing and life-giving. It would make it possible for us to deal with our guilt and empower us once again to stand together in addressing the issues that are so destructive to every segment of our rural community. It would help us once again open the lines of communication and dialogue that is so essential if we are to understand each other's needs in this situation and to work together in meeting them.<sup>6</sup>

The *worship life and teaching ministry* both offer ways in which to elevate awareness and to encourage action. Special emphasis services, such as *Soil Stewardship, Harvest Festival, Rural Concerns Sunday*, and others could be included in worship planning. The prayers of the church present an avenue to remember those who work and live on the land.

More reading and audiovisual materials are coming out all the time to use in special classes, adult forums, women's groups, and other teaching opportunities. A list of resources is provided at the back of this book.

## Hearing Of What Others Are Doing

You have read through the theological background for caring on a personal level. You have been given some suggestions for a caring response. A special word has been spoken to pastors. Now you ask yourself what you can do. In this section I would like you to hear about what others are doing. This is not meant to be exhaustive of what has been done. It is intended to be indicative of what is possible. As you hear about what others are doing, allow your imagination to come up with ways in which you can care on a personal level.

### **Help Our People Endure (HOPE)**

This is a true story of faith, courage, and caring. It is about Glenn and Sandy Simonson, people with roots planted deep in the rich and rolling earth of Jackson County, Wisconsin. Each grew up on a family farm, and when they married in 1961 it was only natural for them to look forward to a lifetime of farming. Over the next ten years their farm grew and so did their family, with the births of five children. Life was good, a satisfying blend of hard work, loving relationships and a future that beckoned with plenty of opportunity. But a series of events began to eat away at their dreams, first in bits and pieces, then in big chunks. A fire destroyed the barn....two children developed serious medical problems....a hired man fell off the silo and was killed....a pair of newly purchased cattle turned out to be diseased, and infected the rest of the herd....and in 1984 Glenn died in a farm accident.

Sandy Simonson has channeled this pain into energy for the formation of a project—Help Our People Endure (HOPE). This project is funded by Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin. Simonson brings rural people together to deal with the farm crisis affecting them. The one-evening program begins with the showing of a video, "Another Family Farm/Responding to the Farmer in Crisis." Then she asks participants to fill out a survey—anononymously—which zeroes in on problems and feelings. Typical responses? Frustration, pressure, anger, fatigue—and most of all, not enough money from the milk check to cover family and farming expenses. A "responsibility list" is distributed, and those who attend can commit to further activities such as joining a support group, helping to organize future meetings, or starting a Rural Ministry Fund in a congregation. An organizational meeting for those who wish to form a support group is generally held immediately following the HOPE meeting.

### **"Another Family Farm/Responding to the Farmer in Crisis"**

The Rural Ministries program and the Media Services Center of the American Lutheran Church produced a videotape examining the experience of a southwestern Minnesota farm family. "Another Family Farm/Responding to the Farmer in Crisis" brings viewers into an intimate family setting. It has accomplished a great deal in helping Lutheran people across the country to understand the vision and the hardship of farm families like this one. The program has been widely aired in congregations of various Lutheran denominations. It also has been aired on television stations in Ohio, Nebraska, and North Dakota, and has been used extensively by community groups that are not related to the church at all.

Chuck Kanten, who helped to produce the videotape, has served as head of the Office of Rural Ministry in the American Lutheran Church. Kanten, a lay person, comes from a

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farm background. He is a third generation farmer. His wife, Anne Kanten, is Assistant Commissioner of Agriculture for Minnesota. Their son, Kent, is now operating the family farm. Kanten described his duties in two words: affirmation and plight. Small congregations, many of them in rural areas, need to be affirmed for the work they are doing, often under difficult circumstances; and the church must develop a better understanding of the plight, particularly the economic plight, of the rural community.

### **Peer Listening Training**

How can a large social service agency be a partner on a local level with congregations facing the rural crisis? Lutheran Social Services (LSS) of Wisconsin may have one answer in the Peer Listening training effort.

Twenty-seven members of Roman Catholic, Methodist, and Lutheran congregations completed 12 hours of training as peer listeners through LSS. The pilot training effort took place in Grant, Crawford, Iowa, Green, and Lafayette counties, and the program expanded from there.

The peer listeners can go back to their communities and work in several ways with rural residents dealing with the farm crisis. They can become part of a formal program such as a Help Line. Or they can work informally at the request of a pastor or area person aware of their ability to help. They can become advocate-brokers for a particular family, helping with various needs from listening to application for public aid. The peer listeners also can set up groups of rural people supporting each other.

### **Rural Awareness Conference for Women**

Our Saviors Lutheran Church of Eau Claire, Wisconsin, hosted a *Rural Awareness Conference for Women*. The conference and the series of conferences which followed were developed by a member of the congregation, Carol Harsh, together with other women who recognized the complex nature of the current crisis in rural communities. They were designed to offer rural women an opportunity to come together to share experiences, to offer and receive support, and to gain new tools in the struggle to live the rural life.

Workshops at the conference dealt with personal and family stress, farm credit advocacy information, and lobbying on state and federal legislation. The emphasis of the meetings was not on hand holding, but on how rural women can act to protect and nurture their families through this crisis, and on how rural women can work together to win solutions.

### **You Can Be There for Your Neighbor**

The Brighton Conference Task Force on Drought Disaster, of the Iowa District of the American Lutheran Church, and the Iowa Inter-Faith Human Needs Council responded to the rural crisis with a project called *You Can Be There For Your Neighbor*. They made presentations to various groups throughout the area and distributed information packets they had put together. Items in the packets had been gathered around two themes. There were resources concerned with farm issues and resources concerned with family stress. The purpose of the project was to encourage people in the rural community in getting back to know the needs, cares, and prayers of their neighbors, and to see the crisis as an opportunity to listen, talk and help each other.

### **Farm Families Crisis Council**

The Interchurch Ministries of Nebraska has established a Farm Families Crisis Council. The council has set up a farm crisis hotline to assist Nebraska farmers under financial, legal, or emotional stress. The hotline has provided a valuable source for listening, advice, and referrals.

### **Urban Women Bring Quality Thrift Sale Clothes to the Country**

A women's Bible study group in Minneapolis, Minnesota, became aware of the rural crisis through a member's sister, who is a dairy farmer in west central Wisconsin. The group decided to put together a large summer garage sale in Connorsville, Wisconsin. The turnout of people needing the quality clothes at bargain prices was overwhelming. According to the organizer, Karen Nelson, "the hundreds of people who bought the clothing at nominal prices were so appreciative that we decided to do it again."

The women's Bible study group then bought, collected, and organized winter church and school quality clothes from the Twin Cities area. They compiled a substantial selection of infant through extra large adult clothes for a fall garage sale. The even bigger turnout for the fall sale convinced these urban women of the severity of the economic crisis in rural America. Karen Nelson summed up the feelings of her group. "We wanted to do this to show we care about what is happening to rural people."

### **Training for Seminarians**

Congregations need pastors who are equipped to minister to hurting people in the midst of the rural crisis. But many seminarians come from urban areas. They frequently receive their first call to a rural or small town church. They are unfamiliar with life in the country. The result can be a real culture shock. The seminaries of Luther Northwestern in St. Paul, Minnesota, Trinity in Columbus, Ohio, Wartburg in Dubuque, Iowa, and Gettysburg in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, have seen fit to provide special training for their students. This training presents an understanding of country life as well as insight into the unique ministry required of such a pastorate.

### **Project Isadore**

The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, launched Project Isadore in an effort to provide small no-interest loans and political training to farmers. It is named for St. Isadore, the Patron Saint of farmers. The project also includes rural issues education for urban and suburban parishes, and assistance to pastors of rural parishes in pastoral counseling of families in crisis.

### **Rural Family Resettlement**

Lutheran Social Services in Wisconsin has started a resettlement effort for rural families. It is based on the very successful congregational resettlement effort used by Lutherans and others over the past 40 years. Instead of resettling refugees, however, congregations are being asked to find housing, a job, and some initial financial assistance for families who need to relocate because of loss of employment in rural areas. Most important, congregation sponsors will offer care and concern to help families to adjust to a new environment.

## **Other Suggestions for Action**

- Visit someone you think may be experiencing difficulties and offer to listen and to show them you care.
- Volunteer to be available to neighbors who are hurting.
- Contact your church and other community organizations to discuss how you can be supportive to farm families on the edge.
- Start an adult forum in your congregation in learning more about the rural crisis. Begin it with a viewing of the video, "Another Family Farm/Responding to the Farmer in Crisis."

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- Make your own bread and wine for Holy Communion as a reminder that these are fruits of the land prepared by those who farm the land.
- Set up a display in the narthex of your church on "Gifts from the Land" featuring breads, cereals, vegetables, fruit, milk, cheese, and other farm products.
- Have a congregational picnic at a local farm.
- Start a Rural Ministry Fund in your church.
- Attend or organize education and training events on issues related to the farm crisis. Offer to have such meetings at your church.
- Encourage the denominational offices to provide more programs and models which fit the strengths and limited resources of the small congregation.
- Have farm and rural people speak of their personal stories in a public setting in order to increase awareness and understanding.
- Work with the public school system to alert teachers to signs of distress and depression in children. Support school programs which create awareness of the problems.
- Provide information on sources of help available: legal and financial assistance, counseling, advocates, and hotlines.
- Encourage cooperation among local helping groups and agencies.
- Conduct media campaigns to create awareness of where individuals and families can go for confidential help.
- Be present at farm auctions to demonstrate support of those losing their livelihood.
- Go with farm families to lenders, especially if the relationship is quite tense. Help to mediate disputes between farmers and business people.
- Put troubled families in contact with others who have been through similar situations.
- If you are an urban person, visit a family farm. Next time you go to a grocery store, think of all the work which went into producing the food. When you say your table prayer at meals, include thanks for the farm people who produced the food.

## 4

# Building Community

"God has told you what is good; and what is it that the Lord asks of you? Only to act justly, to love loyalty, and to walk wisely before your God."

Micah 6:8 (New English Bible)

The rural crisis confronts us with a moral crisis. Who are we as people of faith? Who are we as people of this country? What kind of values inform our outlook on life? What principles guide our actions? How are we connected to the people around us? How are we responsible to each other? The ways in which we answer these questions reveal our moral character.

### Theological Background

Survivalism, individualism and judgmentalism are three stumbling blocks in the path of building community. These problem areas will be addressed in this theological background.

#### The Temptation to Abdicate Responsibility

The temptation to abdicate responsibility takes the form of an outlook called survivalism. Farm and rural people hear this message hammered at them in a thousand different ways. "Get big or get out." "Only so many are going to survive the current shakeout. With a little luck and lots of hard work, you can beat out your neighbor and be the one to make it."

The temptation becomes so seductive, does it not? "If you battle it out to the end and survive, you will be stronger for it." What happens then? Rural people are forced to migrate to the already crowded urban areas. Communities, schools, and churches are eroded away. Rural America becomes like Central America—a colony from which are extracted the raw materials as cheaply as possible.

This perspective portrays God as a distant watchmaker who sets the clock ticking and then watches from afar. This approach would have us bow down at the altar which has as its motto "Every man and every woman for themselves." It demands that more farmers must go. We ask the question, "How many more rural people must be sacrificed at this altar in order to appease the powers which be?" I believe it is time we call this for what it is—cannibalism. People are being devoured by each other in this battle to survive.

Community is replaced with competition as making for the highest good. But in the process the body becomes divided from the soul. Technology becomes divorced from nature. Producer and consumer are pitted against each other. The city is isolated from the country. In this battle for survival neither side triumphs over the other. Both end up exhausted.

### **We Do Not Need Any More Lone Rangers**

Farmers have been known for their independence. On the one hand this character trait is to be admired. Who else would work so long and so hard for such a low return on labor and investment except for the people whose very hearts and lives are tied up in the family farm? United States agriculture has long been a leading growth industry in this country.

But there is a trap in this appeal to independence. The promise of the American dream—that hard work, ingenuity, and endurance would be rewarded—is being exposed as a myth in the farming community. People are beginning to realize that something more pervasive than individual initiative is at stake here. Many of the best managers are being forced out of farming. The rural crisis functions as a system. This system is not providing the due rewards to these producers of raw materials.

Cain was the first lone ranger in asking of Abel, “am I my brother's keeper?” (Genesis 4:9b). This approach would have us respond with indifference to the people whose very way of life is being threatened. We do not need any more lone rangers. We need builders of community.

### **The Deadly Game of Blaming the Victim**

An easy way out of coming to terms with the rural crisis is to blame the victim. Along this line we are told that it is the farmers' own fault. They never should have gotten so big. They should have known better. They will have to learn their lesson the hard way.

Such a deadly game bears false witness against a group of people who, for the most part, acted on the best advice offered from all quarters. The advice to “get big or get out” could be heard from the Secretary of Agriculture on down. When this course of action turned out to be a debt trap, many would turn the tables and blame the victim.

The rural crisis simply can not be blamed on individual farmers thought to be poor managers who made bad business decisions. A policy of cheap raw materials has brought about a severe injustice to the very people who provide our food security.

## **Principles for Building Community**

Two very different perspectives are battling for our allegiance today. One is survivalism. This divides people up into competitive units. The other is building community. This preserves life lived in community.

The perspective of building community believes that life is meant to be lived in community. Living in community can be defined as a covenant of belonging in which people are held together by bonds of commitment. The individual finds highest fulfillment in community and not in isolation. In Egypt the people suffered in bondage. In the promised land the people were commanded to become a community where there would be no poor among them. The law was given to protect people living in community. The great commandment to love God and the neighbor became the mandate to build community. Poverty and injustice then became more than merely a personal tragedy. They became an attack upon the solidarity of a people.

This perspective asserts that compassion and justice are the twin responsibilities of life lived in community. “God has told you what is good; and what is it that the Lord asks of you? Only to act justly, to love loyalty, and to walk wisely before your God” (Micah 6:8 NEB). People come first. The blind allegiance to a dehumanizing system is contrary to the



call for compassion and justice. People of faith are invited to shape the structures of society to prevent inequities. This perspective believes that the law and the commandments call for a respect of the rights and needs of others.

This perspective of building community asserts that people are given the opportunity to exercise responsible stewardship over the earth. This stewardship is intended to be like that of a good king who protects the weak and the powerless and who gives voice to those who are not heard. This rejects the fatalism of immutable laws and looks for ways to make all of life serve basic human needs.

This perspective believes that land is a gift to all of humanity and that it is a vital, indispensable resource. Human beings have a fundamental right to share equally in the nourishment nature can provide. Subjecting agriculture to commodity speculation and controlling access to food politically denies a basic human right and is morally unacceptable. It becomes important to prevent the control of land from being gathered into the hands of the privileged few. Land and wealth is intended to be dispersed as widely as possible.

The perspective of building community also suggests that there is a need for a Second Bill of Rights. In the 200 years since the United States Constitution was written, many have come to realize that true individual freedom depends upon other rights which were not self-evident at the framing of the Constitution. People of conscience are invited to work for these rights in order that all the people of this country might live in a spirit of community:

- The right of every person to work that is useful and remunerative.
- The right to earn enough to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, and recreation.
- The right of every farm family to raise and sell products at a return which will provide a decent living.
- The right of every business person, large or small, to trade in an atmosphere of freedom from unfair competition and domination by monopolies at home and abroad.
- The right to adequate medical care and the opportunity to achieve and enjoy good health.
- The right to adequate protection from the economic fears of old age, sickness, accident, and unemployment.
- The right to a good education.
- The right to a world free from nuclear weapons and other means of indiscriminate warfare.
- The right of every person to an enduring, stable, and healthful environment.
- The right of all people to self-determination, and freedom from military, economic, and other forms of intervention.

## A Word to Pastors

### Challenging Ministry

The rural crisis presents a unique moment in the life of the church. As such it must be emphasized that rural parishes provide challenging ministry. Small churches deserve to be considered more than starter parishes for young pastors on the way up the ecclesiastical ladder or halfway houses for clergy easing into retirement.

Joni Wright, a member of Sveadahl Lutheran Parish in St. James, Minnesota, articulates the desire of many rural people to have a pastor who cares about the rural church:

I guess rural churches are going to have to start selling themselves to potential pastoral candidates, just as a town promotes itself to prospective new businesses looking into its resources and potential. I feel our rural church and farming community, like so many others, have much to be proud of. We aren't as big as a large city church, of course, but bigger may not always be better. I've heard that some people like larger churches because they won't be missed if they're absent. But if you like the idea of being missed, I believe you would like a small church.

We hear that general practitioners are needed in the medical field, since so many doctors now practice a specialty. In the ministry, a large church may need pastors who specialize in particular areas, such as youth and visitation. But what our parish and most other rural churches are looking for is a G.P. (general pastor). We need an ordained leader who also feels we're special, who will respond to our ad and be the answer to our prayers.<sup>1</sup>

Pastors are needed who understand the uniqueness of the small church in the rural setting and who take seriously such service as challenging ministry.

### Long-Term Ministry

Effective leadership in a community often comes only after the people have gotten to know a pastor over a length of time. In the midst of so much displacement and uprootedness in our country, pastors in long-term ministry can give witness to the importance of connectedness and belonging.

### Developing Leadership

One of the best pieces of work a pastor can do is to identify the people with leadership ability. Often pastors are accustomed to look for *blue-ribbon panel* people with impeccable reputations. Much of our best leadership does come from these fine people. But some of the hidden talents reside in people who have been overlooked by everybody else. They are the ones who feel the pain of the rural crisis, who empathize with others in distress, and who respond creatively. Rough edges and all, these are the people who can stand the test because they have been through the fire. We only have to remember that Jesus by-passed some of the supposedly elite people to choose some pretty scruffy characters including Peter the outspoken one, Matthew the tax collector, and Simon the Zealot. With encouragement, prodding, and guidance, Jesus transformed these ordinary people into powerful agents of change.

### Mobilizing People

Pastors also can play an important role in mobilizing people to action. Some individuals may be hesitant to take the risk for a new venture. But if the pastor can take the

initiative by being present with people, it can make a difference. Clergy do not have to do the work themselves but energize others to carry the momentum.

### **Working Together Ecumenically**

The rural crisis provides the opportunity for pastors and church members from all denominations to work together. Though separated by different congregations and church bodies, people can be united in a cause for the common good. A ministerial association offers clergy a way to strategize for action and to present a united front in the community.

## **Hearing Of What Others Are Doing**

The task of building community takes concrete form in a number of ways. This section offers some specific examples. In hearing of what others are doing, you are given the opportunity to think of how you can help to build community in your own sphere of influence.

### **Responding to a Bank Closing**

When the Story County State Bank in Story City, Iowa, was closed, (and subsequently reopened under new ownership), new light was shed on the irony of a situation where, in the midst of very rich central Iowa farm land, many farmers were going bankrupt. Realizing how a bank closing can shake the confidence of a town, the pastors quickly helped to organize a town meeting. Members of the community could ask questions of bank officials and get answers. The community could use the town meeting to pull together and make plans for dealing with the situation. Pastor Stephen Anenson of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Story City volunteered to be a part of a statewide response team which would be ready to help when other towns found that their bank had been closed.

### **Loaves and Fishes Community Food Bank**

Another irony exposed by the bank closing in Story City, Iowa, was that, in the midst of such abundant food production, some people did not have enough to eat. St. Petri Lutheran Church member, Roger Hermanson, initiated plans to start the *Loaves and Fishes Community Food Bank*. Community support grew quickly for the project. The pantry serves about 100 families in the town of Story City and the surrounding area.

### **Soup's On**

Rural families in Clayton, Wisconsin, have been meeting for *Soup's On* at Immanuel Lutheran Church. Pastor Dick Bruesehoff said *Soup's On* has served as a much needed social gathering for his rural congregation. The gatherings have provided families with an opportunity to talk, to share information, and "to know they're not the only ones going through this stuff," Bruesehoff says. He feels that getting people together in a social sense is an important function for a rural church.

One common topic during *Soup's On* is farming methods. The farmers are wrestling with big decisions on new methods and technologies, decisions which are important to the future of their farms. *Soup's On* allows them to share ideas. It also has resulted in a plan to pursue more information as a group by making a visit to a University of Wisconsin experimental farm at Ashland, Wisconsin.

### **Town and Country Crisis Council**

Emmanuel Lutheran Church of Seymour, Wisconsin, has spearheaded an effort to put together a *Town and Country Crisis Council*. The group started support groups and

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established a food pantry. They hosted a "Listening, Learning, and Helping" open forum and later repeated the information presented at the session through newspaper articles, advertisements, and bulletin inserts in every church. Pastor Al Peterson reported that the council worked on providing further training for area clergy. In addition, they showed a video, "The Rural Crisis Comes to the Schools," to all the teachers within their school district and made follow-up contacts.

### **Town Meetings**

Six rural congregations in the Northwood, North Dakota, area cooperated in a weekend country church festival. The purpose of this town meeting was to identify and celebrate ministry strengths in participating congregations, to gather information for ministry and mission development, to develop a strategy for appropriate response to mission opportunities, to share awareness of existing resources for small congregations, and to formulate recommendations for new resources to be developed.

### **Rural Clergy Go Door to Door**

The Ringgold County, Iowa, Ministerial Association organized visitations to alleviate the silent suffering and isolation faced by many farm families. Pairs of neighbors visited each rural home in the county. Publicity through newspapers and churches prepared rural people for the visits. Representatives of the Chamber of Commerce, Public Health nurses, Extension and County Social Services were invited to meet with the ministers. A packet of materials was assembled for each home, including information on stress and mental health, a county resource directory, and various other leaflets. Support activities continued, and similar programs were planned.

### **Exchanging Mission Letters**

Rural and urban congregations are finding they can learn from each other. Members of St. Paul Lutheran Church in rural Byron, Nebraska, and Pella Lutheran Church in urban Omaha have exchanged "mission letters" in which they describe to each other the unique aspects of their ministry. The Rev. Mark Seem of Pella believes that "this exchange of letters allowed members to gain a better understanding of the challenges and ministry opportunities of one another."

### **Rural Ministry Task Force Organizes a *Pick and Glean***

Church groups in southwest Wisconsin and in the Milwaukee, Wisconsin, area assisted local farm families through a *Pick and Glean*. These church people found this to be a rich and rewarding experience which established an ongoing relationship of trust and mutual assistance.

Heavy snows in the late fall prevented many Wisconsin farmers from getting their corn picked. Pete Hardin of the *Milkweed* dairy newspaper came up with the idea of volunteers picking the corn by hand. He presented it to the Rural Ministry Task Force of Wisconsin's Southern District of the American Lutheran Church. The task force took up the effort. People in the Hollandale area began gathering together and picking corn by hand for those in need of feed for their cattle.

The success of the Hollandale effort prompted much outside interest. Two other grassroots groups, *Friends of the Family Farm* and, later, *Project Isadore*, helped to coordinate an expanded effort. The two groups helped arrange for *Pick and Gleans* on over 30 farms.

### **Financial Grants By A Major Denomination**

The *Development Assistance Program* of the American Lutheran Church has directed significant grant monies to rural projects. The program, administered by the Office of

Church in Society, has been a source of funding for community efforts among groups at the margins of societal power, particularly projects that help community groups to help themselves by seeking systemic change. Projects funded include: a rural voter education project, support centers for rural people, a farmer/creditor mediation service, a family farm preservation project, and spiritual retreats for rural people.

The Division for Service and Mission in America of the American Lutheran Church has made money available to assist congregations in economically distressed rural areas. This program has been a source of funding for temporary financial aid, funding for a specific program, assistance for ministry adjustment, (e.g. merger, realignment, ecumenical ministry), long-term financial aid, and rural community economic development.

### **Base Christian Community in Coatetelco, Mexico**

In my visit to the village of Coatetelco, Mexico, I heard Ricardo Nabor explain how many of the people there had joined together in a cooperative effort:

I am a campesino (poor peasant farmer). We organized 28 families. We have made the farm land into irrigated land. We started 7 years ago. We have our own savings bank. We loan money to each other. We have barefoot doctors who care for the people in natural ways.

He went on to tell how the Base Christian Community gave them the moral impetus in order to form a cooperative:

Take the story of the Good Samaritan. How do we act like the people in the story? Sometimes our eyes are glued to the Bible and we do not see our neighbor. The first two knew the Word of God, but they had a dead faith. The other person knew he had to help the neighbor. We have to think about that. Why did they kill Jesus? Why do they call us Communists when we simply want to help each other? The Living Word enters into us today. They are still persecuting Christ. The temptation is to want more and more. There are Pilates today who would sentence Jesus. There are Judas's around also. We see them in our dioceses. Even some priests tell us there will be much land in heaven. Jesus' times have never ended. All people who oppress others are still alive. We read the Bible and act it out.

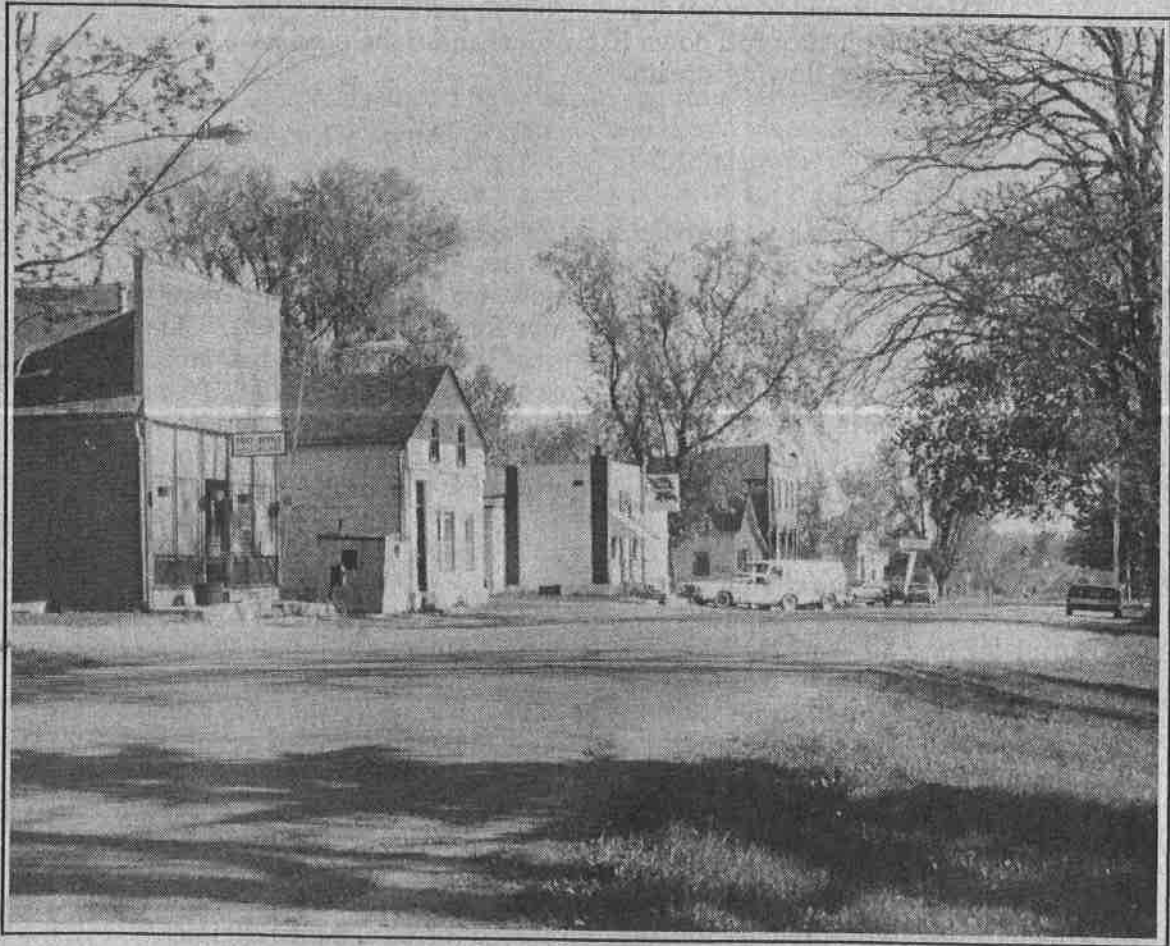
I realized that Ricardo Nabor had learned some of the secrets for building community. He drew strength from the reflection upon scriptures in the Base Christian Community. The cooperative they had established gained cohesiveness from working together for the common good. He saw the dangers from a supposedly more technological approach to agriculture. He intended to keep the use of finance, energy, and machinery to a manageable level.

### **Other Suggestions for Action**

- Invite your pastor and church leaders to take an active interest in the rural community. Provide opportunities for their involvement.
- Establish pulpit exchanges between pastors in urban and rural congregations.
- Have farmers in the congregation pledge to help each other by sharing corn and hay, machinery and labor.

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- The institutional church can provide continuing education for pastors in order to better equip them for community leadership.
- View the film, "Foreclosure," a short dramatic piece which depicts a farm foreclosure and "flashes back" to recreate a "penny auction" sale from the 1930's. Use this as a way to discuss community involvement.
- Organize a haylift or cornlift for people short of feed for cattle.
- Prevent the decapitalization of rural communities by doing your business in the local area.
- Establish a Rural Crisis Center to provide a crisis hotline, information and referral services, a speakers bureau, and an information clearinghouse.
- As members of congregations in rural areas, pool resources to enable new farming families to enter agriculture.
- Establish a community land trust through which church funds and those of other socially conscious investors would be used to place beginning farm families on the land, while offering the option of biblical expression of stewardship of the land.
- If there is no newspaper in your town or village, organize an effort to start a community publication.
- Intentionally work to attract people into rural communities.
- Help to promote and facilitate the direct marketing of farm products.
- Work to produce alternative sources of energy in the rural areas. Such sources could include wind power, solar, alcohol, gasahol, methane gas, and others.
- Work to get more commerce and industry to process and to distribute the raw materials in rural areas.
- Create economic revival in rural communities with cottage industries, cooperative business and service.



*We do not want to live in a colony in rural America.  
We want to live in a community in rural America.*

## Working In The Public Arena

"Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate;  
....But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness  
like an ever-flowing stream."

Amos 5:15a, 24

A staff person for a church-wide social services agency tells of the time he was presenting a seminar on how to deal with the pressures of farming. After the session was over, a farmer came up to him and said, "You know, we do not need any more workshops on stress management. What we need is a fair price for our farm products." At a *Bishop Listens to Rural Concerns* event, farmer after farmer spoke of how the real answers to the rural crisis must be found in the public arena. One speaker put it this way. "We appreciate the church's concern for individual people. But the church must move beyond holding hands. We have to address this rural crisis as a justice issue in the midst of an economic system. Producers should be rewarded fairly for the new wealth generated from the land."

A long-time leader in the *Town and Country Movement*, E. W. Mueller, offers a historical perspective for the church:

During the past 80 years, we have watched rural America adjust to change. It has been going through an aimless transition, brought about by economic forces. People need to reach some kind of consensus as to what they want rural America to be. In the drive for efficiency, the well-being of people has been overlooked. In the past, rural church leaders have been helped by the social sciences. It is high time that the church develop a theological approach to the development of rural America. What is evil is not the economic forces; what is evil is the nonuse of the religious forces. If the economic forces and the religious forces are to shape rural America so that people in rural America will enjoy quality community life, then economic forces and the religious forces need to be in tension. In the development of rural America, the church has made the mistake of countersigning the economic forces rather than counteracting the economic forces.<sup>1</sup>

Mueller's analysis calls for the church to step into the public arena. There is a crying need to hear a moral voice in the midst of this debate. The church dare not create a vacuum by its absence.

### Theological Background

#### Speaking Out For Fairness and Equity

*To Strive for Justice and Peace In All the Earth.* One of the important ways in which Christian people are called to live out the covenant of Baptism is to strive for justice and



peace in all the earth. Through the waters of Baptism you are justified in the sight of God and made to be at peace with him. Being justified, you are set free to seek justice. Being made at peace, you are set free to seek peace. The earth becomes the sphere in which you strive for justice and peace.

*The Prophethood Of All Believers.* The Reformation inspired the powerful catalyst for the priesthood of all believers. Martin Luther declared that believers are given the avenue of prayer to speak to God and the opportunity of mutual conversation and consolation to minister to each other. Now is the time to raise up the companion to this belief—the prophethood of all believers. Each believer is called to be a part of the prophetic ministry in order to speak out for fairness and equity.

The work of the prophethood of believers requires two activities. In his book, **The Prophetic Imagination**, Walter Brueggemann describes these as criticizing and energizing.<sup>2</sup> In the task of criticizing, the prophet exposes the numbness and deception brought about by the royal consciousness and articulates the suffering which it brings. Brueggemann points to the cross of Jesus as the

ultimate metaphor of prophetic criticism because it means an end of the old consciousness that brings death on everyone. The crucifixion articulates God's freedom, his strange justice, and his peculiar power. It is this freedom (read religion of God's freedom), justice (read economics of sharing), and power (read politics of justice) which break the power of the old age and bring it to death. Without the cross, prophetic imagination will likely be as strident and as destructive as that which it criticizes. The cross is the assurance that effective prophetic criticism is done not by an outsider but always by one who embraces the grief, enters into the death, and knows the pain of the criticized one.<sup>3</sup>

In the task of energizing, the prophet acts in the midst of the numbness and despair of the royal consciousness to bring about God's promise of newness. Brueggemann points to the resurrection of Christ as the

ultimate act of prophetic energizing in which a new history is initiated. It is a new history open to all but peculiarly received by the marginal victims of the old order. The fully energized Lord of the church is not some godly figure in the sky but the slain lamb who stood outside the royal domain and was punished for it.<sup>4</sup>

The purpose of this prophetic imagination is to make for an alternative consciousness. Jesus Christ has come to make all things new.

### **Calling Into Question Some Accepted Economic Dogmas**

*The Myth of the Free Market.* The free market has been accepted as economic dogma in our system. It has been used to justify cheap raw materials as a public policy. Profit has become more important than people. Procuring commodities for a cheap price has been given more value than preserving community with a quality life. As such, this policy has dealt a severe injustice to farmers in rural America, to peasants in Central America, and to people in the rest of the Third World. The free market dogma is a human construction and not a divine mandate.

For effective and equitable operation of a free market, three basic conditions must be met: 1) There must be a relatively large number of relatively small operators on both the selling and the buying sides of the bargain counter; 2) All parties involved must have full

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information regarding the conditions of supply and demand; 3) The suppliers must be able to get into and out of production rapidly in response to shifts in demand as reflected in shifts in price.

An in-depth look at agriculture will reveal that none of these conditions can be satisfied. In regards to the first condition, family farmers do not have a wide diversity of purchasers from which to choose when selling their farm products. Much of the processing industry is becoming vertically integrated. Mergers are commonplace. At the same time, more farmers are being forced off the land and leaving fewer in business. In response to the second condition, there is no way that individual farmers can obtain access to the same kind of information that is garnered in a very sophisticated manner by many of the processors of agricultural products. The book, **Merchants of Grain**, tells of how the huge grain companies are able to maneuver their way around in order to gain access to the markets. Secrecy is the key to their success.<sup>5</sup> Reading that book invites the conclusion that there is no such thing as a fair competition in a free market for the small- to moderate-sized farmer. In reply to the third condition, because of the long lead time required to grow crops, to establish orchards, and to raise cattle, a farmer can not get into and out of production quickly in response to supply and demand. Without government playing the role of mediator to insure a fair price in the marketplace, the individual farmer stands at a distinct disadvantage. With the steadily declining prices, one farmer joked with gallows humor, "the only freedom we have now is the freedom to go broke."

*The Myth of the Absolute Right to Unlimited Wealth.* Closely associated with the dogma of the free market is the common belief that an individual or business has the absolute right to accumulate as much wealth as initiative and ability will allow. Here again this must be seen as a human construction and not as a divine mandate. When the Old Testament people were liberated from bondage in Egypt, they were told to remember always the harsh treatment they had received at the hands of the Pharaohs. The same conditions were not to be repeated among the biblical people. They were to protect the stranger and the sojourner in their midst. They were not to place people in bondage by making them poor. But the people forgot the word of the Lord and asked to have a king like all the other nations. God warned them what a king would demand of them, but they insisted. It took only until the third king, Solomon, to reach a situation remarkably similar to that of life under the Pharaohs. Increased concentration of power and wealth brought with it harsher control of the people.

*The Myth of Big Brother Knows Best.* Concentration of wealth and power poses a danger to the freedom of people throughout the world. Under capitalism, as practiced in the United States of America, wealth and power increasingly are being concentrated in the hands of Big Business. Under statism, as practiced in the United Soviet Socialist Republic, the means of production and the control of people are concentrated in the hands of Big Government. In both systems, the legitimizing rationale is that "big brother knows best." But big brother does not want *justice*. Big brother wants *just us*.

## Four Spheres of Action in the Public Arena

What can the church say and do in the public arena? The church can make its most effective witness by focusing on four spheres of action. The church can address the price question by announcing that those who till the earth deserve a fair share of the fruits of the harvest and that workers are entitled to the due rewards for their labor. The church can address the debt issue by calling for an easing of this yoke of bondage and for a release from these chains of captivity. The church can address the survival of the family farm

question by affirming that God cares about the family farm. The church can address the subject of land stewardship by reminding people that the earth is provided as a gift from God and is meant to be conserved for future generations.

### **A Fair Share of the Fruits of the Harvest**

Amos was a farmer. He was called to be a prophet. Amos served as a farmer prophet at a time when the traditional rural culture was being transformed into an urban society with the center of power shifting to the marketplace.

Amos carried out the task of criticizing by denouncing the injustice in the marketplace. Amos announced the judgment for the practice of placing a person in bondage by foreclosing on the debt (Amos 2:6-7). The rich benefited at the expense of the poor, stored up great warehouses of what they had gained unjustly, and lived in luxurious winter and summer homes (Amos 3:10-15). The poor became oppressed, and those who oppressed practiced vain piety (Amos 4:1-5). Farmers were particularly victimized as they were forced to work for absentee landlords (Amos 5:11-12). Amos charged that the rich trampled on the needy. The rich grew impatient with the holy days when they would prefer to be buying and selling instead of observing a time of rest and worship (Amos 8:4-5). They practiced injustice in the marketplace by using false weights in measuring, by selling people into slavery for debt incurred, and by trading poor quality grain (Amos 8:5-6). Amos declared that God had become angry with such social injustice and hollow worship. God would deal out judgment for such exploitation of the poor.

Amos carried out the task of energizing by calling for fairness in the marketplace. When Amos announced the word to "establish justice in the gate" (Amos 5:15a), he intended that the people were to live out the true faith in the commerce and agriculture of the day. Business and farming could not be separated from the ethics of religion. To live with integrity in the sight of God was to deal with equity in financial affairs. In keeping with the witness of Amos and the tradition of scripture, I believe we can simply announce that those who till the earth deserve to share in the fruits of the harvest and that workers are entitled to the due rewards for their labor. We can make our witness felt in the public arena by insisting that both farm and labor people be treated with fairness and equity.

### **Forgive Us Our Debts**

The Old Testament people were called to remember the times of hard bondage in Egypt. God gave them the law and the prophets in order to protect life. One such gift was the Year of the Jubilee. This was inaugurated to remind the people that the land belonged to the Lord (Leviticus 25:23). People were granted stewardship of the land for a time (Leviticus 25:33). The people were strangers and sojourners on the land given as an inheritance. On every fiftieth year the leases were to expire, and everyone was to return to their family home (Leviticus 25:10). The land could not be sold in perpetuity, but it could be leased for farming (Leviticus 25:13-17,23). The Jubilee was intended to prevent the permanent yoke of indebtedness. Although there is no evidence that this Jubilee program was ever carried out, it stands as a powerful energizing symbol to prevent exploitation of those who work the land. As such, the Year of the Jubilee can enable us to look at an old problem in a new way.

Jesus used the symbol of the Year of the Jubilee in announcing "the acceptable year of the Lord."

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, and to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (Luke 4:18-19).

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As Jesus carried out this platform throughout his ministry, we discover that there are social implications to the declaration of the kingdom. Jesus encouraged trust in God as a proscription against anxiety (Luke 12:29-31). The merciless servant was urged to show grace in order to receive the graciousness of God (Matthew 18:23-25). The story of the dishonest steward invited a practice of the Jubilee by liberating others from debt as a sign of the kingdom (Luke 16:1-13).

When Jesus taught his disciples the *Our Father*, he included "and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matthew 6:12). The Lord's Prayer became a prayer of jubilee in keeping with Jesus' platform "to proclaim release to the captives" and "to set at liberty those who are oppressed" (Luke 4:18-19). The use of the "forgive us our debts" is not put forth here as a biblical proof for all debt restructuring proposals. Rather the "forgive us our debts" is held up as an energizing symbol to confront the farm debt crisis with greater determination and imagination.

#### **Who Cares About the Family Farm?**

In his Bible study, *A Good Land*, Dr. James Limburg recounts the story of Naboth's vineyard (1Kings 21:1-29).<sup>6</sup> He tells of how Naboth had carried out the family tradition in tending the vineyard. But King Ahab and Queen Jezebel coveted this plot of land because of its proximity to the royal palace. They conspired to wrest the land away from him by trumping up false charges and by having him sentenced to death. But God does not allow such a miscarriage of justice to go unnoticed. He brings punishment upon Ahab and Jezebel. Limburg concludes by asking, "who cares about the family farm?" He answers by affirming, "God does."<sup>7</sup>

The promise of land for a family came first to Abraham. He was promised land, descendants, and a great nation (Genesis 12:2,7). God chose a family through which to carry out his plan of salvation. He gave land to this family.

The book of Numbers speaks of how the land became divided among the families and tribes. The land was meant to be kept within those families as a way for God to provide for his people. God was looked to as the one who divided the land and gave it to whom he would. In order to do this, the land was passed on to the oldest son. One particular situation came up which illustrated God's priority to preserve the land in the family. A man named Zelophehad had five daughters, but no sons. The father urged Moses to make an exception to the rule in order to keep the land in the family. Moses consulted with God and agreed to do so (Numbers 27:1-11; 36:1-12).

God sent prophets to defend the land against the royal land grabbers. Micah exposed the exploitation by charging that "they covet fields and seize them; and houses and take them away; they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance. Therefore thus says the Lord: Behold against this family I am devising evil, from which you cannot remove your necks; and you shall not walk haughtily, for it will be an evil time" (Micah 2:2-3). Isaiah warns against the concentration of land ownership by saying "Woe to those who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is no more room, and you are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land. The Lord of hosts has sworn in my hearing; 'Surely many houses shall be desolate, large and beautiful houses without inhabitant'" (Isaiah 5:8-9). Micah and Isaiah stand in a long line of God's spokespersons who oppose the passing of the land from the many to the few.

#### **The Earth Is The Lord's**

Land stewardship has been a way in which the church has traditionally addressed the food and farming issue. "The earth is the Lord's" (Psalm 24:2). People on this earth are

but stewards of the land. The most basic command is to "till the land and keep it" (Genesis 2:15b).

The land is provided to produce all that is necessary for food, clothing, and shelter. In order to continue this, it must be conserved through the generations.

Sensitive church people need to be aware of the dilemma facing farmers: In being forced to gain the maximum yield from the soil, farmers are taking steps to push production to the limit. This becomes hard on the land, the animals, and people. Many farmers will admit that they are doing things to the land which they know are not right. But they are compelled to get as much as possible out of the land and the animals in order to stay on the farm. Because of this, stressing land stewardship without at the same time acknowledging the importance of farmers receiving a fair share of the fruits of the harvest comes across as moralistic. To speak the truly liberating word is to state that farmers need a fair price for their products in order to practice the kind of land stewardship which will conserve this valuable resource.

Probably the most inclusive vision for land stewardship comes from Dean Freudenberger in his book, *Will There Be Food For Tomorrow?* After outlining the world food crisis in detail, he suggests an ethical approach for a new agriculture. Freudenberger points to scripture for the foundation of a new ethic:

The overarching Old and New Testament theme expresses an interconnectedness in all of creation. The maintenance of these lines of interdependency and interconnectedness is the elemental precondition for the continued existence of the miraculous gift of life. In addition, biblical wisdom points to five basic themes:

1. Creation is God's, and it is filled with value and meaning to God.
2. Creation is a continuous process which provides for the necessities of life.
3. Life is a miraculous gift.
4. This gift is not at our disposal to do with it as we please.
5. In Christ we are empowered to make all things new.<sup>8</sup>

Building upon this new ethic, Freudenberger calls for a normative synthesis based upon the principles of justice, participation, and sustainability. The need for justice recognizes the obligation to future generations, to the poor and the oppressed, and to those often denied access to the land.<sup>9</sup> Citizens of this country must be allowed participation in the decision making process in order for justice to take place.<sup>10</sup> The principle of sustainability demonstrates the importance of long-range planning to make for a system of agriculture which renews the life-giving resources.<sup>11</sup>

American Indian spirituality also can speak to how we care for the earth. In 1854 Chief Seattle had these words to say:

So if we sell you our land, love it as we've loved it. Care for it as we've cared for it. Hold in your mind the memory of the land as it is when you take it. And with all your strength, with all your mind, with all your heart, preserve it for your children, and love it...as God loves us all.

American Indian spirituality serves as a further reminder that the true intent of land stewardship is to take care of the earth so that the earth will continue to take care of us.

## **A Word to Pastors**

### **The Test of Projected Retrospect**

Project yourself ahead to the year 2000. Imagine what the results of the rural crisis will be if nothing is done to turn it around. Then look back in retrospect to see what you might have done differently to provide active leadership during that critical time period. The test of projected retrospect serves as a useful tool for ethical decision making. It can help you to approach the rural crisis now with greater boldness.

### **Looking At Life From Below**

The rural crisis presents the occasion for gaining a new perspective in looking at life from below. This becomes a dilemma, for, in the words of Walter Brueggemann:

It is likely that our theological problem in the church is that our gospel is a story believed, shaped, and transmitted by the dispossessed; and we are now a church of possessions for whom the rhetoric of the dispossessed is irrelevant. And we are left to see if it is possible for us to embrace solidarity with the dispossessed.<sup>12</sup>

In the midst of the rural crisis, many people are living on the edge with the threat of being displaced from the land and of being deprived of their means of making a living. The challenge facing you is to embrace solidarity with the dispossessed.

### **Forgiveness As A Way Of Overcoming Fatalism**

The message of forgiveness can be proclaimed in a new way to those living under the law of fatalism. Under such a law, many rural people began to believe that the loss of land, the displacement of people, and the strain on community life carries the force of a divine order. They experience powerlessness in the face of such a formidable threat. A sense of guilt and a loss of hope often accompanies such passive resignation. Forgiveness can be announced in such a way as to declare that it is not God's will that people should be made poor. God wills to "provide me with food and clothing, home and family, daily work, and all I need from day to day" (Martin Luther in the explanation to the first article of the Apostles Creed). In Jesus Christ God comes "to proclaim release to the captives" (Luke 4:18b).

People can be helped to experience freedom from the law of fatalism and freedom for the life of responsibility. Bishop Desmond Tutu, the Nobel Peace Prize winner from South Africa, puts it this way: "It used to be that our people would walk with their heads down and a shuffle with their feet. In hearing the gospel, our people now walk with their heads held high and a bounce in their step."

### **Ask The Right Questions**

What is the proper role of pastors in the public arena? A good rule of thumb is to ask the right questions rather than expect to give all the right answers. Pastors can be of best service in raising the moral, ethical, and spiritual questions. When it comes to specific formulation of policy, pastors can not claim any divine mandate. Pastors, like everyone else, must rely on sound reason and good judgment.

True Christian unity comes in the confession of "Jesus is Lord." There will never be complete agreement on social issues. In venturing into the public arena, one does so with the freedom of being justified in order to seek justice as well as with the freedom of being human in order to admit personal limits.

### Acting As A Catalyst

Pastors can be catalysts for social change in the public arena. At certain times a number of ingredients are present for action. What is needed is the impetus to set the process in motion. Pastors can supply incentive for people to act out their convictions. People can be empowered to put into practice what they believe. Pastors are not expected to do the work for the people in the public arena. But pastors can act to energize people and to work *with* them in bringing about social change.

Here the question comes up: "What about the church and state issue?" One Lutheran statement describes the tension as "institutional separation and functional interaction."<sup>13</sup> In other words, it would be inappropriate simply to act as a messenger for a single ideology, platform, or party. There must be separation. But a pastor can offer something important in working together with those who are involved in the public arena. Here the pastor can bring the perspective of fairness and justice informed by the biblical message. That provides for the interaction.

### Hearing Of What Others Are Doing

Working in the public arena presents an opportunity to expand the horizon of involvement in standing up for the family farm. Much has been done already. Much remains to be accomplished. In hearing of what others are doing, you are invited to join together with people of good will in striving for justice and peace in all the earth.

### Congregation Members Rally Behind Farm Couple

Robert and Carol Hanson have struggled like many other farm families to hold onto their farm. But the Hansons received help when forty members of Grace Lutheran Church of Belgrade, Minnesota, and their pastor, the Rev. Kenneth Rust, went with them to the Federal Land Bank in an effort to stop the foreclosure action against them. Because of this negotiation, Robert and Carol Hanson continued to farm. Anne Kanten, an active layperson in the American Lutheran Church and also Minnesota's Assistant Commissioner of Agriculture, speaks of this instance. "It is going to take community support, as with the case of the Hanson's, in all the towns...to save our farm families."<sup>14</sup>

The community in which Chuck and Anne Kanten live, Milan, Minnesota, became the setting for the film, "Foreclosure," which tells the story of how neighbors came together to save a family farm during the depression. Some 350 residents took part in the acting or producing of the film. In the story, the people keep their bids low. At the end of the sale they give back the possessions and the land so that the family can stay on the farm.<sup>15</sup>

### A Dialogue Between Urban and Rural People

Rural Pontiac, Illinois, provided the site for a dialogue between urban and rural people. As a learning experience through direct contact, the event introduced the farm to some people for the first time, while offering others a chance to recapture their roots. Dave and Jeanne Rapp, members of St. Paul's Lutheran Church of Pontiac, took the leadership in organizing this matrix.

The weekend provided time with the host families, a Bible study, a video presentation and discussion on the *Business of Hunger*, a farm simulation game experience, a panel forum on "The Impact of the Rural Crisis," a Sunday morning worship service, and a potluck dinner with the congregation. The group made on-site visits to a grain farm, a dairy operation, a hog confinement, and a cooperative grain elevator. The various activities helped to give an in-depth understanding of the rural crisis.

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The participants shared some of the learning experiences as follows: the great scope of the problem; huge indebtedness; effect of multi-nationals on agriculture; the stress on agriculture-related people; high frustration level; a long, tough road ahead; a crisis of spirit as well as of economics; hopelessness and hope; and great faith.



*Urban people get a first-hand look at life on the farm*

The group also decided to take some further actions in order to create awareness on a broader level. They intended to tell their story in church publications, to make presentations to various church boards on the local and national levels, to offer a seminar at the district convention, to work on the possibilities for a simulation game, and to ask the bishop to send a letter to the congregations on the rural crisis.



### **Conference of Black Farmers and White Farmers**

Craig Adams, a dairy farmer from Glenwood City, Wisconsin, thinks it is important to make connections. He believes the church can play a vital role in making this happen. Together with Chuck Kanten of the Office of Rural Ministry from the American Lutheran Church (ALC) and Gene Sylvestre of the ALC Hunger Program, Craig helped to set up a conference between Black farmers and white farmers. Black farmers from the South, white farmers from the Midwest, and Black urban people who had migrated to the city from the country convened in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The conference served a double purpose: to bring Black and white farmers together for face-to-face discussion of common concerns and to build understanding of the farm crisis among urban people. The conference, entitled "Who Will Control the Land?," explored the theme of Black land loss.

"Black farmers can teach white farmers a thing or two about hanging on during tough times," said Federation of Southern Cooperatives member Fred Bennet, "but this crisis is really bigger than any one group of farmers." "We are robbing Americans of the wealth that comes from our farms, and in the end our whole economy will suffer. I think we can build this into a national movement for farmers," said Eddie Carthan, former mayor of Tchula, Mississippi, and a farmer.

### **Coalition Sponsors An Area Agricultural Center**

The Northwest Minnesota Coalition for Rural America has sponsored an Area Agricultural Information Center in Thief River Falls, Minnesota. The coalition is a nonprofit organization bringing together farm people, rural business people, clergy, human resource persons, and many others. The Coalition has two primary task forces: a Human Resource Committee and a Grassroots/Advocacy Leadership Committee. Both committees maintain separate funding and are administered by their own personnel. The Coalition meets monthly to address the needs of the entire Center.

The Area Agricultural Information Center is regionally designed to provide the human resources and rural leadership necessary to meet the immediate demands of the crisis and the long range needs of communities. It is designed to help people learn more about financial resources, debt restructuring, taxes, jobs, crisis and stress, legislative action, and how people can make it in difficult times. All of the services of the Center are free. The Roman Catholic Church and the American Lutheran Church are among those groups which have made past financial contributions to the Center.

### **Wisconsin Church Leaders Declare An Economic Emergency**

Wisconsin church leaders from ten denominations declared a designation of a state of economic emergency from December 2, 1985 to March 31, 1986. They asked people of all faiths to dedicate themselves to support rural people in crisis and challenge public institutions to assist in resolving this crisis. They commended those who had already initiated rural ministry efforts, and announced the formation of an ecumenical Farm Crisis Response Network to provide support and assistance to those efforts. In addition, they challenged state and federal agencies to expand their response to rural people in crisis including the Farm Credit System; the Farmers Home Administration; the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection; the Department of Health and Social Services; the University of Wisconsin; and the Department of Industry, Labor and Human Relations. Also, they challenged the Wisconsin Congressional Delegation, the Wisconsin Legislature, and the Governor of Wisconsin to immediately initiate a coordinated, carefully considered response to Wisconsin's farm debt crisis.

### **Popular Play Depicts Young Woman's Feeling for Her Farmland**

*Planting In The Dust* is a critically praised play which focuses on a young farm woman's feelings for her family's farmland. This one-act monologue by Nancy Paddock

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is offered throughout the Upper Midwest by the Land Stewardship Project, a nonprofit organization based in Stillwater, Minnesota.

Soil blowing in the wind raises an ethical dilemma for the young woman in *Planting In The Dust*. The play approaches problems of stewardship of the land through the eyes of Annie, who has returned to the farm her great-grandparents homesteaded. She recounts the history of her land which was protected by her grandparents after the Dust Bowl and then farmed fencerow to fencerow by her parents.

"The United States has been blessed more than any nation with an abundance of farmland. Yet as economic factors put increased pressure for production on soil and water, it becomes clear that all of us—farmers and urban dwellers alike—have a responsibility to protect these resources for generations to come," says Ron Kroese, director of the Land Stewardship Project.

"Unfortunately, as a nation, we have fallen short of that responsibility. Soil erosion threatens the long-term productivity of much land. Chemical misuse pollutes surface and ground water. Fragile lands that should remain in pasture or woodland are cleared for row crops," Kroese said.

For Annie, the struggle to restore her farm has brought her into close communion with it. "The land belongs to itself," she says. "If anything, we belong to it...as much as earthworms or complaints. We rise up awhile and sink back in. We borrow our lives from it."

### **FARM AID Concerts Benefit Distressed Farmers**

Singer Willie Nelson announced that the first donation from the 1985 FARM AID concert would go to help fund farm crisis hotlines and advocacy networks. In all, money from that event and from the 1986 benefit would be used in four areas: 1) legal action, such as funding class action suits, precedent cases, and legal education; 2) grassroots organizing for legislative proposals, direct action and protest, hotlines and advocacy; 3) public education to tell the truth about the farm crisis to all Americans and 4) direct relief to farm families.

### **Farmers, Labor Groups Rally at FmHA**

Farmers and labor people joined together in a rally at the Farmers' Home Administration finance office in St. Louis on September 11, 1986. Reverend Jesse Jackson was one of the speakers at the rally. He told the rally that, if big business takes over the farming industry, the price of farm products that we now get at reasonable prices will rise sharply. "So if you pick your cotton in the fields or if you pick your cotton from the shelves at Marshall Fields, we all have an interest in what happens to the small farmer."

Reverend Jesse Jackson went on to talk about the importance of unions. He asked, "Where did you pay your health insurance? Where did your retirement benefits come from? They came about because some people at some time came together and worked for them. They didn't just fall from the sky. They were made by human hands and they can be changed for better or worse by human hands. That's what unions are all about. On their worst days, unions work for better wages, benefits and job security. They are successful in direct proportion to the number of people who join and work shoulder to shoulder to achieve better conditions."

### **Project Self-Help and Awareness**

Project Self-Help and Awareness (PSA) was started by a dairy farmer, John Kinsman, of LaVelle, Wisconsin. PSA's basic project has been a child exchange program between

Black families in Mississippi and white families in Wisconsin. It is through this program that hearts and minds are opened in order to better understand one another and then truly to be able to help. In 1985, PSA began working to assist some Black farmers in Mississippi. Farm advocates Doug and Carol Harsh of Mondovi, Wisconsin, provided leadership training to a number of Black farmers in Mississippi. Carol Harsh shared her observations:

I knew that things would be bad down there, but I did not think they could be that much worse than up here. I was wrong. We traveled through Tunica County, one of the poorest counties in the U.S., and we stayed and worked with the people. We talked with families living in shacks that we would not keep our hogs in up here. Most of the Black farmers have FmHA loans. The stories are pretty familiar. They have to fight to get their loans and, if they get them, they never get enough to really do the job right.

PSA, through lots of letter writing, phone calls, and visits, started a Congressional investigation into the discriminatory practices of the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA). In their experiences they found the FmHA to be misusing discretion and violating regulations.

### **Humanitarian Assistance Project for Independent Agricultural Development in Nicaragua**

The Humanitarian Assistance Project for Independent Agriculture Development in Nicaragua (HAP-NICA) is a project of the New World Agricultural Group (NWAG) and the Guild House Campus Ministry in Ann Arbor, Michigan. HAP-NICA receives proposals for agricultural development projects from the Union of Small and Mid-size Farmers and Ranchers (UNAG), the Farmworkers Union (ATC), and the Higher Institute of Agricultural Science (ISCA) in Nicaragua. The projects are funded entirely by private contributions from individuals and groups in the United States and Canada. Support for these projects is a significant message of peace and solidarity from the people of North America.

One such requested project was for a pig cooperative. This pig cooperative would use by-products from sugar cane, African oil palm, and the fishing industries located on the Atlantic Coast to help establish a sustainable pork industry, which was nonexistent in that part of Nicaragua. Traditionally the molasses (the principle by-product from sugar cane production) was exported to the U.S. But due to the May 1985 trade embargo imposed by the U.S., much of this valuable resource now goes to waste. The establishment of a pork industry on the Atlantic Coast would enable Nicaraguans to make wise use of the molasses and vegetable by-products from other industries in the region.

### **Other Suggestions For Action**

- Start an adult forum at your church to study food and farming as a justice issue.
- Volunteer your congregation for a *rural plunge* for urban people or for college and seminary students for two to three days.
- If you are involved in a social action group, help the members make the connection to food, farming, and justice.
- Become involved in a church wide rural concerns group on a local or state level.

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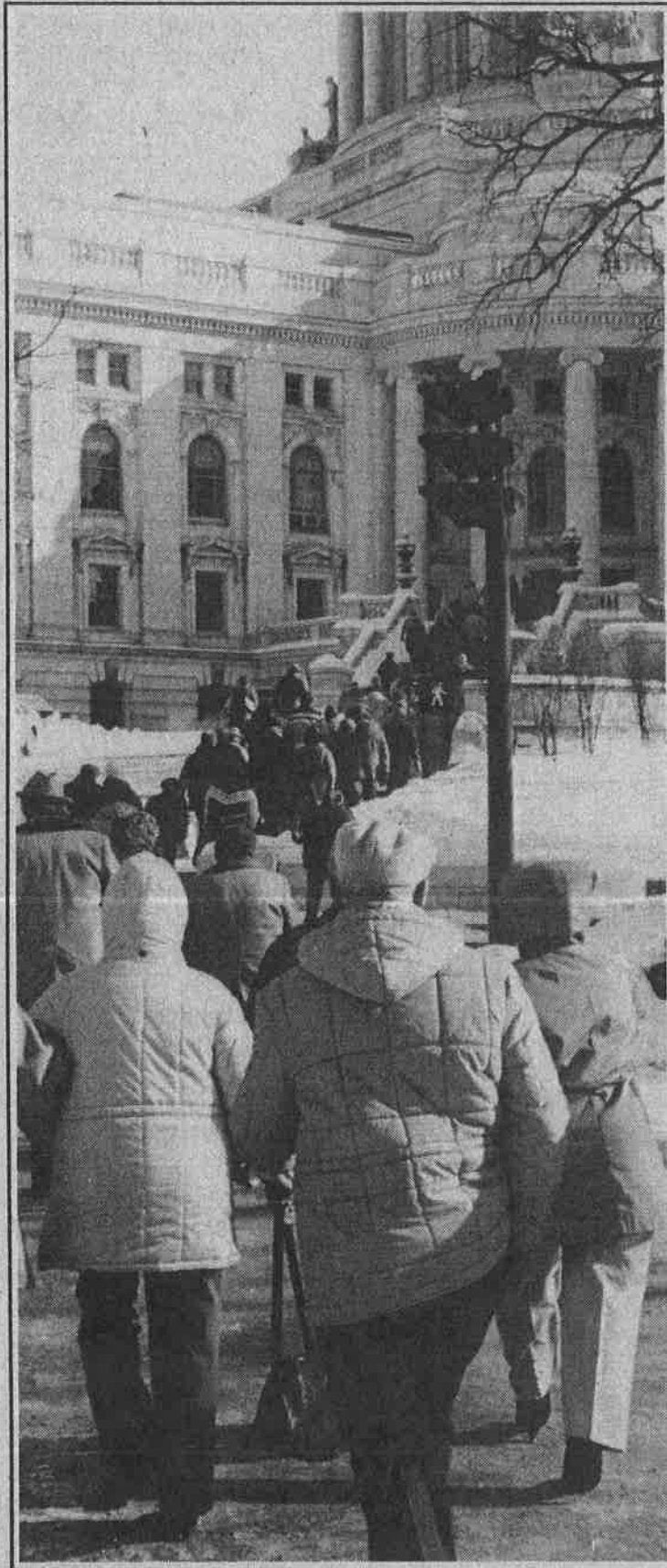
- Offer resolutions at church conventions as a way of elevating awareness of the rural crisis. Offer to put on a seminar for a more in-depth look.
- Convene regional consultations of farm and rural people.
- Ask your national church boards to strategize materials, events, and other resources which are appropriate for small, rural congregations.
- Church colleges can help their students to learn about the economy and sociology of rural America and the global and domestic food systems.
- Act to have church bodies withdraw some of their investments from multi-national corporations and to invest those funds in rural banks which are willing to work with farmers during this period of crisis and in small-scale enterprises which foster self-reliance.
- Insist that land grant colleges gear research more appropriate to small- and moderate-sized farms.
- Support, promote and help lead efforts to organize farm and rural families.
- Make a public witness by taking part in a peaceful, nonviolent rally to demonstrate the rural crisis and the need for real solutions.
- Become involved in a farm organization and/or a political party.
- Take on a voter registration effort in the rural areas.
- Identify potential political leaders and encourage them to run for office regardless of party.
- Co-sponsor candidates' nights in order to have public discussion and debate on the many issues related to the rural crisis.
- Work to elect candidates committed to working for justice and peace and dedicated to preserving the family farm.
- Lobby your elected representatives for legislation which will preserve a family farm system of agriculture.
- Establish farmer exchanges with other countries. Visit farmers in other parts of the world and host farmers from other nations.
- Sponsor an international forum on farm and food and land policies between church and farm leaders in the U.S., other developed nations, and the Third World nations.

**Part III**

**Shaping The Future  
In The Midst Of The Rural Crisis**

“On farms all over the country, even though a fool could see there is no future in it, the calves will be fed and the machinery will be readied, not for a dollar, but because the life is worth it. Many would have us believe the family farm is a thing of the past. But pay attention. We have only begun to fight back to stand up for the family farm.”

—A Wisconsin Dairy Farmer



***The formation of food and farming public policy is too important to be left in the hands of the "experts."***

## 6

# Understanding the Food and Farming Issues

Democracy means more than simply holding elections for public officials. The kind of participatory democracy envisioned by the authors of the Constitution is sadly lacking in our day. One of the reasons for this is the myth that somehow the formation of public policy is too complicated for ordinary citizens to understand and to influence and, therefore, must be entrusted to the experts.

What happens when food and farming public policy is shaped by the experts?

Wendell Berry has written an incisive review of modern agriculture in *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture*. Berry describes how the expert advice of orthodox agriculture has been destructive of healthy agriculture:

In the view of the experts, then, agriculture is not only not a concern of culture, but not even a concern of science, for they have abandoned interest in the health of farming communities on the one hand and in the health of the land on the other. They appear to have concluded that agriculture is purely a commercial concern; its purpose is to provide as much food as quickly and cheaply and with as few man-hours as possible and to be a market for machines and chemicals. It is, after all, agribusiness—not the land or the farming people—that now benefits most from agricultural research and that can promote humble academicians to highly remunerative and powerful positions in corporations and in the government.<sup>1</sup>

Berry goes on to cite the career of former Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz. While Dean of Agriculture at Purdue University, Butz sat on the boards of some of this country's largest corporations. As such he typifies how the land grant colleges, originally intended to bolster the small- and moderate-sized farmers, have better served the interests of big business. Eventually Butz was promoted to the nation's highest agricultural position where he declared that farmers should "get big or get out."<sup>2</sup>

An agricultural economist by the name of Kenneth Boulding is another one of those who has been instrumental in developing agricultural policy. He sums up his perspective in the following manner:

The only way I know to get toothpaste out of a tube is to squeeze, and the only way to get people out of agriculture is likewise to squeeze agriculture. If the toothpaste is thin, you don't have to squeeze very hard. On the other hand, if the toothpaste is thick you have to put real pressure on it. If you can't get people out of agriculture easily, you are going to have to do farmers severe injustice...<sup>3</sup>

This kind of expert advice has been followed for the last three decades in forcing farmers off the land.

We are given the opportunity and the responsibility to struggle against this kind of injustice and to work for fairness and equity. The formation of food and farming public policy is too important to be left in the hands of the "experts." In order to carry out such involvement, there must be a basic understanding of some of the food and farming issues. This chapter attempts to introduce four main issues and two additional ones.

## Four Main Issues

### Different Approaches to the Price Question

The central issue is that of price. What kind of price are farmers entitled to for their products? Various answers are given to this question.

One approach is called the *market clearing* policy. The most powerful proponents for this market clearing policy are the American Farm Bureau Federation, the national commodity promotion councils, (like the National Wheat Growers and the National Milk Producers Federation), the grain corporations, (like Cargill and Ralston-Purina), and an agribusiness trade association called the Farm Coalition Group. Supporters of this approach believe that farm prices need to be lowered in order to be competitive in the world market. They argue that increased exports would prop up the sagging farm economy. Along this line there should be free trade in the world market. Allow the market of supply and demand to set the price.

Critics counter by asserting that the United States has been dominating world food trade. It is able to set the world prices. For example, in 1985 the United States shipped 71% of the corn, 66% of the soybeans, and 35% of the wheat sold in the world export markets.

Critics also charge that the United States has been losing its shares of the world market since 1981. It is unlikely to recapture them due to the fact that other grain producing nations have vowed to maintain their market shares by subsidizing their farmers and by pricing their commodities below those of the United States, no matter what the cost. In addition, many Third World countries are attempting to become more self-sufficient in food production. Also, critics ask what good it does to increase export sales if farmers already are forced to sell at below cost of production.

Another approach is called the *subsidies* policy. The traditional chief proponent of the subsidies policy has been the National Farmers Union. Supporters of this approach believe that farmers should receive payments from the government to help make up for the low prices in the marketplace. These payments take two different forms. Price supports are designed to set a floor under the price which is paid by the purchasers of the raw materials. An income support provides supplemental funds from the government for the producers so as not to interfere with the market place.

Critics charge that this subsidies policy creates a dependency relationship. They contend that the support programs have acted as a ceiling, and not as a floor, for farm prices and actually have been used as a tool to lower farm prices. They also point to the increased cost of these programs to the federal government.

Another approach is that of *collective bargaining*. The traditional chief proponent of collective bargaining has been the National Farmers Organization. Supporters of this approach believe that farmers should use the same kind of leverage as organized labor in getting farmers to pool their products in order to negotiate for better prices. They point to



the Capper-Volsted Act as giving farmers the right to collective bargaining. Critics charge that, while it may be possible to affect small increases on a temporary basis, it has been impossible to raise farm prices substantially for a long term.

Another approach proposes a combination of *parity prices and supply management*. This proposal came about as a result of farmers, ranchers, and small town residents gathering in hundreds of local meetings throughout the United States during the winter of 1984-85. Proponents have grown to include a coalition of over 150 groups with strong support coming from trade unions, national Black organizations, and many key churches. Supporters of this approach believe that farmers should receive fair prices in the marketplace and not from the government. Subsidy payments would be eliminated, and the price-support loan rate for each commodity would be set at a level approximating the full cost of production for that product. In subsequent years the price floors gradually would be raised until they reach the level at which farmers' returns on equity and labor would be on a par with the rest of the economy. Supporters call for mandatory production controls, (subject to a producer referendum), in order to limit United States production of storable commodities to actual demand, including domestic consumption, export demand, humanitarian need, and strategic reserve requirements. They point to a 1985 Congressional Office of Technology Assessment which reviewed various scenarios for the future of agriculture. The study revealed that the only approach which increased the chances of survival for family sized operations was the *supply control* scenario.

Critics charge that higher prices for raw materials would mean the loss of export markets and the increase in food costs. They find it distasteful to control production and fear increased government involvement in establishing supply management. They object to a dramatic departure from recent agricultural programs. They point to the possible loss of markets and jobs for agribusiness with the decreased production of raw materials.

### **What Are We Going to Do With All This Debt?**

There are two different approaches to providing relief from debt. The first is called an interest buy-down. A state government would resell federally guaranteed Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) loans to private investors, benefiting farmer borrowers by lower interest rates and giving investors a higher return than Treasury notes. For instance, if the farm loans were issued at 13 percent interest and Treasury notes at 7 percent, there would be a gap of 6 percent. In the proposed refinancing, the investor would be given a return of 2 percent above the Treasury note interest rate, the farmer a refinanced rate of 10 percent, and the bank 1 percent in service fees.

The second approach reflects a belief that something must be done to keep family farmers on the land until prices return to fair levels. Proponents would like to see a temporary moratorium on forced liquidations by government lenders. They would also like to see current debt be rescheduled at much lower interest rates with much longer repayment schedules. In addition, they would like to see the use of debt write-off where appropriate, lower interest rates, protection for unsecured creditors, and the expansion of the Farm Ownership program to reschedule all debt needing renegotiation. They would also like to see mediation programs to help borrowers and creditors voluntarily arrive at agreements on how to restructure debt.

### **Can the Family Farm Be Saved?**

Numerous proposals have been made to save the family farm. One proposal would remove some of the major factors fueling corporate investment and farm land expansion by eliminating tax dodges; prohibiting corporate investment, and restricting speculation in farmland. Another proposal would enact a progressive land tax in which the more land owned the more taxes owed. Some would like to see property tax reform in order to tax on

the ability to pay rather than the amount of land owned. Another proposal would target the benefits to family farmers. Each producer would have a single acreage base comprised of acres on which any of the designated commodities were grown in any of the last four years. Each producer would be required to set aside 15% of this acreage base, but in times of surplus, giant operators would be required to set aside a progressively higher percentage of their base (a disincentive to conglomerate and tax-loss ventures).

### **Conservation of Land and Water Resources**

One proposal suggests that locally-approved conservation practices be required on all set-aside land. In addition, farmers could participate in a National Conservation Reserve allowing for the voluntary, long-term retirement of fragile land. Another proposal would make prohibitions against plowing up fragile land. Still another proposal would be made for better protection of scarce ground-water resources. On the local level, county and city governments could zone certain land for agricultural use in order to protect the land from non-farm development.

## **Two Additional Issues**

### **Appropriate Technology**

Technology in agriculture, as in many other fields, unfortunately has been racing ahead of attempts to subject it to ethical scrutiny. The common advice of "bigger is better" has encouraged an agriculture dependent upon finance, machinery, and energy. The benefits of increased production must be measured up against the acute indebtedness of farm people, the displacement of people labor from farming, the increased use of finite energy sources, and the pollution of the soil, water, and air. Recently increased attention has been focused on bio-technology and genetic engineering. Many of the same dangers must be taken into account. Also the question of health risks deserves to be raised. In all of these areas, the following questions can be asked: Is this technology appropriate or inappropriate? Does it serve the common good? Can the risks be justified? Does it benefit the large mass of people or only those who would profit from selling the technology? How does it fit in with the delicate balance of the ecosystem? What effect would it have on the supply and demand of raw materials in the marketplace? What would be the impact on the family farm system of agriculture?

### **The Role of Governmental Food Assistance**

The role of food assistance is closely tied into the public policy debate around food and farming. Many would prefer to see such aid continue to be a means of creating dependency relationships with other countries and thereby keep markets open for the large corporate processors. Others would like to see increased funding for humanitarian food aid in order to fulfill food requirements for needy countries and that additional emphasis be placed on helping needy nations develop food self-sufficiency. They urge strong support for domestic food assistance. They believe every American has a right to a nutritious diet and that the Food Stamp program, the Women, Infants, and Children Program, and other elderly and child nutrition programs should provide adequate assistance to eligible needy families and individuals.

## **Watching Out For The Extremist Groups**

Almost in parallel to the rural crisis, a disturbing phenomenon has happened. A number of extremist, anti-democratic groups and individuals of the far right have been concentrating a rash of activities in the Midwestern and Southern farm regions. Some,

such as Roderick Elliot of the National Agricultural Press Association, offer unsound advice to debt-ridden farmers. Others, such as the Posse Comitatus, have encouraged violent confrontation with law enforcement officials in foreclosure cases. Another older group, the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, disseminates propaganda accusing Jews of stealing land from America's farmers, identifying Jews as the international bankers conspiring to gain control, and pointing to the Federal Reserve System as the source of economic woes.

Farmers experiencing despair sometimes grab at anything which offers an answer. They are psychologically and emotionally prey to the anti-democratic groups which provide bogus legal practices, simplistic answers, and conspiracy theories which will supposedly solve farmers' very serious difficulties. The problem needs to be attacked at its roots: farmers' economic problems and isolation. Part of the answer will have to come in the form of public policy which allows farmers to make a decent living. The other part of the answer lies in carrying out education activities which expose the bigotry and exploitation of these extremist groups.

### **Learning To Be Politically Influential**

Democracy means more than simply holding elections. The only real answer to bringing about needed reforms is a return to participatory democracy. Informed citizens then take hold of the opportunity and the responsibility to affect positive social change. We have all been told to vote on election day and to write letters to our representatives. These actions are important to do. But a whole new level of involvement awaits those who commit themselves to stand up for the family farm.

The League of Women Voters offers some cardinal rules on how to be politically influential. These include the following: Start early in the life of an official and early on the legislative calendar. Find friends with whom to build coalitions. Obtain media coverage. Be knowledgeable about the issues. Be patient and persistent. Use rational, not emotional, arguments. Use good manners. Exercise good timing in catching an official to talk.

The model of the Civil Rights Movement offers the boldest witness for people of conscience to stand up for the family farm. The philosophy of peaceful, nonviolent public pressure presents a framework from which to work. Their example of raising social tension may be the only way to gain the necessary leverage needed for bringing about greater fairness and justice in the system.



*From the film "Country" ©MCMLXXXIV Buena Vista Distribution Co., Inc.*

***The Family Farm Is Not For Sale!***

## Living Out A Vision For A Just Future

We live in the midst of a crisis in rural America. There are two ways to look at a crisis. One way is to see the crisis as a threat. The bottom line of the threat comes when those who farm the land can no longer afford to own the land, and those who own the land do not farm the land.

The crisis in rural America also presents another side. It provides an opportunity. We stand at a unique moment in history. We can shape our future for better or for worse. This can be our finest hour. Or it can be our worst hour. It all depends on how we respond to the opportunity this crisis poses.

In our recent history the voice of a Black Baptist preacher rang out loud and clear. He spoke with and for a minority people. This people had been forced to come to this country to work on the land. They were displaced from their native people and brought to a foreign place. They were not permitted to share in the fruits of the earth. They were denied the due rewards of their labor. Their families were torn apart. Their dignity was robbed. In this foreign land, the prosperity of an entire country was built on their backs. They faced a threat to their survival. They were discriminated against, denied their civil rights, and deprived of their fair share in the economic arena.

At the time, many of us, as people of the land, had a difficult time comprehending the passion and conviction of Martin Luther King, Jr. We could not quite understand him when he asked for dignity and respect for his people. We did not fully appreciate his call for certain rights supposedly guaranteed by the Constitution. We did not quite see the connection when he insisted that Black people be given a parity with the rest of the population. We did not quite catch onto his demand that there be a balance in the social, political, and economic arenas. We wondered what motivated them to rally together, to take to the streets, to become organized, and to do direct actions.

But since that time, conditions have changed for people of the land, have they not? Many of the things Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke then are what people of conscience are speaking now. Martin Luther King, Jr. and many Black people of this country captured the attention and conscience of this nation. They stood at a unique moment in history. They spoke loudly and clearly for fairness and equity. They won many of their demands in the social, economic, and political arenas.

I believe that we, as people of the land, stand at another unique moment in history. Our day provides an opportunity to address the conscience and will of this country. Food and farming has become the justice issue which will determine our course as well. It becomes something worth working for with passion and conviction.

One of Martin Luther King's most famous speeches was "I Have A Dream." This speech expressed his vision for Black people and for all people of this land. Like Martin Luther King, Jr., we, too, can possess a dream which inspires us and motivates us.

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I have a dream, and I hope you do, too. I hope you have a vision which guides your life, broadens your perspective, and propels you to care on a personal level, to build community, and to work in the public arena.

I have a dream. In this dream people will be captured by the vision of the prophets to act justly, to love loyalty, and to walk wisely before your God.

I have a dream. In this dream people will love their neighbors as themselves. People will answer the question asked of Cain long ago by responding, "Yes, I am my brother's and my sister's keeper."

I have a dream. In this dream people will preserve and enhance life lived in community. The bonds which tie us together will be strengthened. People in both rural and urban areas will build the networks which keep neighborhoods, towns, cities, states, and the nation strong.

I have a dream. In this dream people will come to acknowledge the land as a gift from God and as the source of all life. The most basic command is to make the land to produce and to conserve it for future generations.

I have a dream. In this dream people will respect those who farm the land. Those who farm the land produce the food which feeds us all.

I have a dream. In this dream those who till the earth will share in the fruits of the harvest. The workers will receive the due rewards of their labor. Farm people and working people will live on a par with the rest of the population. The economy will function with equity and balance.

I have a dream. In this dream the people of the land will be given relief from the heavy yoke of indebtedness. Farm people will be allowed to remain on and to work at their farms.

I have a dream. In this dream people will recognize the danger of the concentration of wealth and land ownership. Priority will be given to small- and moderate-sized farms.

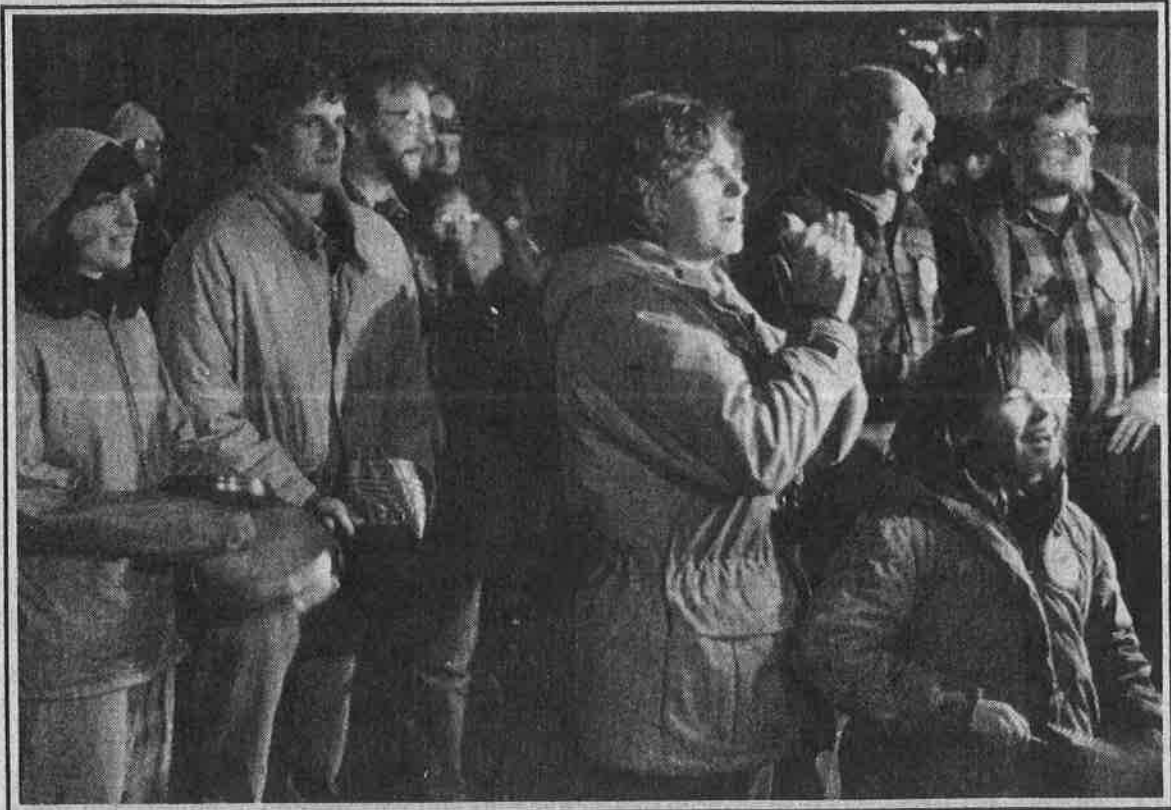
I have a dream. In this dream the hungry will be fed, and no one should have to suffer from lack of food.

I have a dream. In this dream our country will recognize the importance of other countries, especially in the Third World, to achieve food self-reliance. The survival of farm people in other countries is tied to the survival of farm people in this country. Food will not be used as a weapon.

I have a dream. In this dream we will keep people on the land. In fact, people who so desire will be encouraged to return to the land. We do not want to live in a colony in rural America. We want to live in a community in rural America.

I have a dream. In this dream the desire for fairness and justice will permeate throughout all the sectors of our population. Those in positions of leadership and power will use their moral authority as mediators of fairness and justice for all people of this land. They will inspire and lead this country to live in a spirit of community.

This dream I give to you. For this dream does not belong to anyone alone. It belongs to all of us. Allow this vision to fill your imagination, capture your attention, and control your will. Make this vision to guide your actions, empower your living, and bring you together with other people. Permit this vision to propel you to care on a personal level, to build community, and to work in the public arena. Inspire, energize, and motivate others with this vision. You are given a unique moment in history to live as people of conscience and to make for fairness and justice in this land.



**WHO WILL STAND UP FOR THE FAMILY FARM?**

# Notes

## Chapter 1 Food and Farming Is Everybody's Business

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3. Ibid.
4. James Wessel with Mort Hantman, *Trading the Future: Farm Exports and the Concentration of Economic Power in Our Food System* (San Francisco, CA: Institute for Food and Development Policy, 1983), p. 168.
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## Chapter 2 Rural America Is Becoming Like A Third World Country

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2. The November 1986 issue of *Mother Jones* magazine provides a lengthy investigation and report on this export of dangerous chemicals to Mexican farm operations.
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7. Carol Hodne, "U.S. Depression, Farm-Led and Farm-Fed," *The North American Farmer*, June 27, 1984, p. 8.
8. Wessel, p. 50.
9. Ibid.
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11. Berry, p. 94.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Thomas Jefferson. This is a quote which has burned itself into my memory, but for which I have no direct source.
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2. Ibid., p. 5.
3. Ibid., p. 3.
4. Ibid., p. 3.
5. E. W. Mueller, *The Lutheran Herald*. (April 28, 1959), p. 6.
6. Darold H. Beekmann, "Ministry Among The People Of The Land in the '80s," *Word and World*, VI (St. Paul, MN: Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary, 1986), p. 14.



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1. Joni Wright, "Wanted: Pastors for Rural Churches," *The Lutheran* (Philadelphia, PA: Lutheran Church in America, September 18, 1985), p. 32.

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2. Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1982), p. 13.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
5. Dan Morgan, *Merchants of Grain* (New York, N.Y.: Penguin Books, 1980), p. 17.
6. James Limburg, *A Good Land* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1981), p. 15.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
8. C. Dean Freudenberger, *Food for Tomorrow?* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), p. 92.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
12. Walter Brueggemann, *The Land* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1977), p. 194.
13. For a more complete discussion see "The Nature of the Church and Its Relationship With Government." Adopted by the Tenth (1980) General Convention of the American Lutheran Church as a Statement of Policy and Practice. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1980).
14. Wilmar Thorkelson, "On The Front Line," *The Lutheran Standard*, (August 5, 1983), p. 12.
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**Chapter 6 Understanding the Food and Farming Issues**

1. Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture* (New York: Avon Books, 1978), p. 88.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
3. Kenneth Boulding, *American Agriculture News* (March 27, 1974), p. 4.

# Discussion Guide

## Introduction

- 1.) Read 1 Kings 21:1-29. What does this passage have to say about the relationship of land and power?
- 2.) What do you think of when you hear the term, "family farm?"
- 3.) What reasons would you give for preserving a family farm system of agriculture?
- 4.) What are the signs of despair you see in the midst of the rural crisis? What are the signs of hope you see in the midst of the rural crisis?
- 5.) What do you think should be the church's stance in response to the rural crisis?

## Part I Facing Up To The Rural Crisis

### Chapter 1 Food and Farming Is Everybody's Business

- 1.) Read 1 Corinthians 12. How does Paul's analogy of the body of Christ speak to the relationship of farm people and nonfarm people? Of rural people and urban people?
- 2.) How has the rural crisis affected you? Your congregation? Your community?
- 3.) What evidence of the rural crisis do you see on the state level? On the national level?
- 4.) The author contends that conscious government policy has played a major role in creating the rural crisis? Do you agree or disagree? Explain.
- 5.) What reasons do you have for standing up for the family farm?

### Chapter 2 Rural America Is Becoming Like a Third World Country

- 1.) Read the book of Micah. What kind of a message do you think Micah would bring to this country today?
- 2.) The author contends that cheap raw materials as a public policy characterizes what is happening in Central America and in rural America. Do you agree or disagree? Explain.
- 3.) How would you explain the threat to participatory democracy posed by each of the following: cheap raw materials as a public policy, debt crisis, concentration of land ownership, a chemical addiction, inappropriate technology and the role of government?
- 4.) What role do you think government should play?
- 5.) What are the forces which work against social change? What potential for social change do you see?

## **Part II Standing Up For The Family Farm**

### **Chapter 3 Caring On A Personal Level**

- 1.) Read Matthew 19:16- 30. What does this passage have to say about involving yourself in the lives of other people by caring on a personal level?
- 2.) What kinds of pressures do farmers and rural people face? How are these unique? In what ways are they similar to those faced by nonfarm and urban people?
- 3.) What kinds of abilities need to be developed in order to care on a personal level?
- 4.) Have a role play in which a man and a woman play the parts of Lyle and Kathy Schmidt. Have another man and a woman play the parts of a concerned neighbor couple who stop in to visit the Schmidt's. Have the rest of the group give their response to the role play. Perhaps you could take turns in the role play until each group member has gotten a chance.
- 5.) What can you do to care on a personal level?

### **Chapter 4 Building Community**

- 1.) Read Deuteronomy 10:12-22 and Galatians 5. What do these passages have to say about the importance of building community?
- 2.) What evidences do you see of the survivalism outlook? What can be done to overcome the stumbling block of individualism? How can you help to break down judgmental attitudes?
- 3.) How would you say the various suggestions in the Second Bill of Rights relate to food, farming, and justice?
- 4.) Do a role play in which you hold a town meeting. Determine what the central focus of the meeting will be. What contributions would each of you want to make to the town meeting? What actions would you like to see come out of the meeting?
- 5.) What can you do to help build community?

### **Chapter 5 Working In the Public Arena**

- 1.) Read Psalm 72, Leviticus 25, Psalm 105 and Psalm 104. In what ways do each of the passages inform your thinking about government, debt, the family farm, and land stewardship, respectively?
- 2.) What do you think it means to be a part of the prophethood of believers?
- 3.) The author contends that the church can do its best work in the public arena by focusing on four spheres of action—fair share, debt relief, family farm, and land stewardship. Do you agree or disagree? Explain.

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- 4.) Have a role play in which you participate in a meeting of farm people, peace activists, hunger advocates, labor people, environmentalists, and consumers. Plan how you would carry out a rally on "Farm the Land, Not Arm the Land."
- 5.) What can you do to work in the public arena?

**Part III Shaping the Future In the Midst of the Rural Crisis**

**Chapter 6 Understanding the Food and Farming Issues**

- 1.) Read the book of Amos. How does the study of this prophet inform your understanding of food and farming issues?
- 2.) How is it possible to have participatory democracy in our country? What role should experts be expected to play in the formation of food and farming public policy?
- 3.) If you or your group were placed in charge of writing a bill to address the price issue, what would such a bill look like?
- 4.) What do you think should be done with all this farm debt?
- 5.) Discuss which policy actions you think would best preserve a family farm system of agriculture? Which policy actions would make for good land stewardship?

**Chapter 7 Living Out A Vision for a Just Future**

- 1.) Read Luke 4:16-30. What does this passage have to say about the importance of living out a vision?
- 2.) What power in our midst is available for growth and change?
- 3.) In what what specific activities do you feel especially called?
- 4.) How can you support persons and/or activities engaged in the vision?
- 5.) How do you intend to live out a vision of standing up for the family farm?

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### Third World Countries

(The following Food First books are available from Institute for Food and Development Policy, 1885 Mission Street, San Francisco, CA 94103. The Institute is a nonprofit research and education center which works to identify the root causes of hunger and food problems in the United States and around the world and to educate the public as well as policymakers about those problems.)

- Now We Can Speak: A Journey through the New Nicaragua.* Francis Moore Lappé and Joseph Collins.

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*What Difference Could a Revolution Make? Food and Farming in the New Nicaragua.* Joseph Collins and Francis Moore Lappé.

*Trading the Future: Farm Exports and the Concentration of Economic Power in Our Food System.* James Wessel with Mort Hantman.

*Food First: Beyond the Myth of Scarcity.* Francis Moore Lappé and Joseph Collins.

*What Can We Do?* William Valentine and Francis Moore Lappé.

*Aid as Obstacle: Twenty Questions about our Foreign Aid and the Hungry.* Francis Moore Lappé, Joseph Collins, David Kinley.

*Circle of Poison: Pesticides and People in a Hungry World.* David Weir and Mark Schapiro.

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*Farm Foreclosure Prevention and Reorganization.* National Business Institute, Inc. 1729 Westgate Road, Eau Claire, WI 54703.

*Farmers Guide to FmHA.* Minnesota Legal Services Coalition, 908 Minnesota Building, St. Paul, MN 55101. 1986.

Higby, Annette. *FmHA Farm Loan Handbook.* Center for Rural Affairs, Box 405, Walthill, Nebraska 68067. 1983.

Levitas, Daniel. *Farm Crisis Manual.* Washington, D.C.: Rural America. 1983.

*Resources for Farmers.* Rural Concerns Committee, Peace and Justice Commission, St. Thomas Aquinas Church and Catholic Student Center, 221 Lincoln Way, Ames, Iowa 50010.

Williams, Roger. *Neighbor to Neighbor: Complete Do-It-Yourself Guide for Organizing A Support Group.* Farm Crisis Response Network. Black Earth, WI 53515.

Gall, Donald A. *Rural America - Life and Issues.* New York: The Pilgrim Press. (Directory of Organizations).



## Audiovisual Resources on Agriculture and Farming

*(The following are available from Augsburg Publishing House, Audiovisual Department, 426 South Fifth Street, Box 1209, Minneapolis, MN 55440.)*

*Dairy Queens.* Three women farmers from Minnesota—Anne Kanten, Patty Kakac, and Alice Tripp—share their purpose, struggle, and hope for the survival of the family farm in the U.S. economic and political system. (Film-27 minutes.)

*The Edge of Survival.* Publicly and privately funded development projects in Ecuador, Brazil, and India are studied for their success or failure in building communal responsibility. Interviews with Mother Teresa and former Secretary of Agriculture Bob Bergland. (Film-58 minutes.)

*Exclude Me, America.* A documentary portrait of Dom Helder Camara of Brazil, known internationally as an advocate of human rights and critic of social injustice. His dynamic personality merges political activism with contemplative faith as he speaks out on the causes of global oppression. (Film-46 minutes.)

*Growing Dollars.* Study of the phenomenon of "agribusiness," the creation of huge multinational corporations which are revolutionizing the world's agricultural systems—for better or for worse. (Film-30 minutes.)

*Hungry for Profit.* Agribusiness practices in Philippines, Brazil, Mexico, Dominican Republic, Senegal, and Costa Rica show connections between food exports and hunger/poverty. (Film-85 minutes, two reels.)

*Another Family Farm/Responding to the Farmer in Crisis.* The story of a family forced by economic factors to leave their farm. Focuses on response to the farmer in crisis. (Videotape—first part 26 minutes, second part 19 minutes.)

*A Light in Humboldt Park.* The story of effective work done by a new congregation in a dangerous Chicago neighborhood. Has implications for both urban and rural; all are called to mission. (Videotape-24 minutes.)

*Merchants of Grain.* A 1983 Canadian Broadcasting Corporation documentary based on the book by Dan Morgan looks at how five family-owned companies control the global food supply. (Videotape-57 minutes.)

*(The following five audio cassettes of the American Lutheran Church (ALC) radio programs, Scan, are available from the ALC Media Services Center, 1568 Eustis Street, St. Paul, MN 55108.)*

"Stewardship of the Land." No. 333. "Loss of the Family Farm." No. 611. "The Strength of Rural Women." No. 612. "A Groundswell of Concern." No. 613. "Justice for Farmers." No. 614.

*(The following are other audiovisual resources on agriculture and farming.)*

*Country.* A moving depiction of a Midwest farm family's resiliency as it suffers the stress of impending foreclosure. (Videotape available at most video rental outlets.)

*The Crisis of Yankee Agriculture.* Examines problems of small farmers trying to survive near heavily populated area. Also points to hazards of depending on food shipped long distances in the future. (Film-28 minutes. Cambridge Media Resources, 36 Shepart St., Cambridge, MA 02138.)

*Down on the Farm.* A look at the dilemma of American agriculture, examining why farmers, agricultural scientists, and policy makers are all caught in a system that pits the short-term need for profit against the long-term needs of the land. (Videotape-60 minutes. Available from Center for Rural Affairs, P.O. Box 405, Walthill, NE 68067.)

*Enough to Share.* A documentary about practical idealism, faith, and hard work in a portrait of Koinonia Farm, the 1500-acre farm in Sumter County, Georgia, where some 100 members, employees, and volunteers live in a simple lifestyle based on New Testament concepts of sharing and nonviolence. (Film-28 minutes. Available from EcuFilm, 810 Twelfth Avenue South, Nashville, TN 37203.)

*Farming With Nature.* Story of rejuvenation of worn-out soil in Missouri by one family's efforts over two generations. (Film-35minutes. Churchill Films, 662 N. Robertson Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90069.)

*Food First.* Visually positive and powerful portrayal demonstrates that the cause of hunger is not scarcity but the increasing concentration of control over food producing resources. (Slideshow/filmstrip. Institute for Food and Development Policy, 1885 Mission Street, San Francisco, CA 94103.)

*Foreclosure.* Drawing from the history and experience of Milan, MN, the film uses local talent to dramatize the plight of rural communities faced with farm foreclosures. (Film-20 minutes. Available from Community Access to Media, 2524 Hennepin Avenue, Minneapolis, MN 55405.)

*Four-In-One:* "Farm Town;" a MacNeil Lehrer report on the farm crisis; an NBC report called "Harvest of Tears;" and an NBC youth feature, "Bitter Harvest." (Four-part videotape. Northwest Iowa Mental Health Center at Spencer, Iowa 51301.)

*The Gift of Land: A Biblical Response To A Threatened World.* A series of five colored filmstrips and a study guide by C. Dean Freudenberger. (Available from Teleketics, Franciscan Communications, 1229 S. Santee, Los Angeles, CA 90015.)

*In A Land of Plenty.* The film explores food production and distribution and hunger through encounters with a share-cropper, farmers, and a local church. (Film-20 minutes, audio cassette-30 minutes. National Sharecroppers Fund/Rural Advancement Fund, 2124 Commonwealth Avenue, Charlotte, North Carolina 28205.)

*The Morality of Agriculture,* Anne Kanten, Deputy Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Agriculture. (Audio or video cassette. Wisconsin Rural Development Center, Inc., P.O. Box 504, Black Earth, WI)

*The Rural Church Pulling Together.* Prepared by the Southern Wisconsin District (The American Lutheran Church) Rural Ministry Task Force showing what local congregations can do. (Videotape. Available from United Christian Resource Center, 750 Windsor St., Suite 106, Sun Prairie, WI 53590.)

*The Rural Crisis Comes to School.* Shows how children and teens are affected by the rural crisis and how teachers and counselors in some schools are attempting to help them. (Videotape. Cooperative Extension Service of Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa 50011.)

*Theology of the Land,* Joseph Sittler, Professor Emeritus, University of Chicago. (Audio or video cassette. Wisconsin Rural Development Center, Inc., P.O. Box 504, Black Earth, WI 53515.)

## Audiovisual Resources on Central America

*(The following are available from Augsburg Audiovisual Department.)*

*Americas In Transition.* Narrated by Ed Asner; discusses U.S. government intervention, especially military, in Latin America in the interest of U.S.-based multinational corporations. (Film-30 minutes.)

*El Salvador: Seeds of Liberty.* In a land where few are rich and power rests in the hands of the military, the church has taken the side of the poor—even at the risk of martyrdom. Interviews with military, government, and religious leaders in the U.S. and El Salvador probe the origins of this conflict. (Film-30 minutes.)

*Thank God and the Revolution.* The church has played a key role in Nicaragua, both in the overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship and in the rebuilding of the country after years of underdevelopment and devastating civil war. (Film-50 minutes.)

*!Basta Ya!* Powerful portrayal of the daily life of rural and urban Central American women; looks at women active in opposition movements and why women's liberation is an essential part of revolutionary change; examines the role of U.S. corporations and the traumatic effects of war. (Slide presentation, 30 minutes, audio cassette.)

*Through Our Eyes: North Americans in Nicaragua.* Five U.S. citizens living in Nicaragua speak of their experiences there, providing a challenging perspective to official U.S. policy toward Nicaragua. Leader's guide. (Slide presentation, 140 slides, audio cassette, 22 minutes.)

*(The following video cassettes were made at various National Rural Ministry Conferences at Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa. These can be obtained from Wartburg Media Services, 333 Wartburg Place, Dubuque, Iowa 52001.)*

*Changing Vocation of Rural Women* — Grace Link

*Development and Rural Values* — Marty Strange

*How Can Churches Help: Please?* — Saylor, Frazier, Hagaman

*How Can Churches Help, Maybe?* — Governor Link, Bishops David Brown and Roy Gilbertson

*Perspectives on Remember the Land* — J. Qualben and E. W. Mueller

*Rural Ministry and Its Potential* — Victor Edlenko

*Rural Churches: Crutch or Catalyst?* — Bishops Elmo Algrimson, A. C. Schumacher, Darold Beekman

*Rural Ministry: Global Connections* — Dr. George Johnson

*Rural Ministry Keynote I* — Governor Arthur Link

*Rural Ministry Keynote II* — Bishop Roy Gilbertson

*Rural Ministry Keynote III* — Rachel Conrad Wahlberg

*Rural Ministry Reflections* — E. W. Mueller

*Small Church, Small Town, Small Farm Together* — Marty Strange

# Organizations

## Church Related Organizations

**Alternatives**, 1124 Main St. P.O. Box 1707, Forest Park, GA 30050. Provides ideas for lifestyle changes along the lines of Christian values.

**Bread for the World**, 32 Union Sq. E., New York, N.Y. 10003. A Christian citizens' movement which seeks to influence federal policy on hunger and food concerns, including U.S. farm policy, food aid, grain reserves, and international development. Membership includes helpful monthly newsletter and background materials.

**Center for Community Organization and Area Development (CENCOAD)**, 2118 South Summit Ave., Sioux Falls, S.D. 51705. Assists citizens and groups in tri-state area (South Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa) with education and support for developing quality community life. Established by Augustana College.

**Commission on Religion in Appalachia (CORA)**, 864 Weisbarger Road NW, Knoxville, Tenn. 37919. Interdenominational group concerned with the problems and future of the Appalachian region.

**Interreligious Taskforce on U.S. Food Policy**, 110 Maryland Ave. NE, Washington, D.C. 20002. Cooperative effort of national Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, and ecumenical agencies. Monitors legislative and administrative developments on all aspects of food policy, including U.S. agriculture, international development assistance, and domestic food programs. Publications include *Hunger and Food Policy Notes*. Annual membership brings hunger and food policy *Action Alerts*.

**Joint Religious Legislative Coalition**, 122 Franklin, Minneapolis, MN 55404. An ecumenical action organization. Works on proposing and promoting social justice legislation.

**National Catholic Rural Life Conference**, 4625 NW Beaver Drive, Des Moines, Iowa 50322. Publishes monthly *Catholic Rural Life* and *Washington Memorandum*, a newsletter offering updates on government policies affecting rural life, farming, and the land. Many Catholic dioceses have rural life offices also.

**Wisconsin Rural Development Center, Inc.**, P.O. Box 504, Black Earth, WI 53515. Publishes *Action Letter*. Works through local congregations to organize support and action groups.

## General Farm Organizations

**American Agriculture Movement**, 308 Second Street. SE, Washington, D.C. 20003. Farm organization which developed from the 1978 farm strike and the movement to enact 100% of parity at the federal level.

**American Farm Bureau Federation**, 425 13th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20006. Federation of state farm bureaus. Members include farmers and agribusiness firms. The weekly publication is *Farm Bureau News*.

**National Farmers Organization**, 485 L'Enfant Plaza SW, Washington, D.C. 20024. Concentrates on marketing problems and techniques to promote sales of owner-operators' farm products. The weekly publication is *The National NFO Reporter*.

**National Farmers Union**, 1012 14th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20005. Promotes welfare of owner-operator farms. Concerned with developing purchasing power of the world's poor. Organizations in 30 states with own newsletters. *The Washington Letter* appears weekly.

**National Grange**, 1616 H St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20006. Family-oriented fraternal farm organization which seeks to improve economic well-being of rural people, serving as a legislative force in state and federal capitals, and providing educational programs.

**North American Farm Alliance**, P.O. Box 176, Ames, Iowa 50010. Coalition of grassroots farm groups. The bi-monthly publication is *The North American Farmer*.

**U.S. Farmers Association**, Box 496, Hampton, Iowa 50441. Believes farm problem is inter-related with all other struggles for economic, social and political justice. Monthly publication is *U.S. Farm News*.

### Federal Government

**House Agriculture Committee, Subcommittee on Family Farms, Rural Development, and Special Studies**, 1301 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515.

**Senate Agriculture Committee, Subcommittee on Rural Development**, 322 Russell Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510.

**U.S. Department of Agriculture**, 14th St. and Independence Ave. SW, Washington D.C. 20250.

### Other Organizations

**American Farm Land Trust**, 1717 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington D.C. 20036. An organization to keep American farm land for agricultural production.

**Agricultural Marketing Project**, 2606 Westwood Drive, Nashville, Tenn. 37204. Works with direct marketing and appropriate technology for smaller farmers in the Southeast.

**Center for Global Service and Education**, Augsburg College, 731 21st Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55454. Offers a number of domestic and international programs designed to expand a world view and to deepen an understanding of issues related to global justice and human liberation.

**Center for Rural Affairs**, Box 405, Walthill, Neb. 68067. Nonprofit organization concerned with strengthening rural communities and smaller farm operations. Publishes general newsletter (bimonthly), *Small Farm Advocate* (quarterly newsletter), and *New Land Review* (monthly paper).

**Community Access to Media**, 2524 Hennepin Avenue #6, Minneapolis, MN 55405. Educational effort to inform people about the rural crisis through use of various media.

**Earthwork**, 3410 19th St., San Francisco, Calif. 94110. A center for the study of land and food. Offers films, publications, and consulting and training services.

**Emergency Land Fund**, 836 Beecher St. SW, Atlanta, Georgia 30310. Seeks to prevent loss of land by small farmers, particularly Blacks in the South. Consults on farm management in field offices in Alabama and Mississippi: legal services, financial assistance, tax help.

**Family Farm Organizing Project**, P.O. Box 363, Davis, California. The project was organized by the California Association of Family Farmers (CAFF) in January 1983 to serve as a unifying voice and unifying force for small- to modest-scale family farmers throughout California.

**Farm Labor Organizing Committee**, 714-1/2 South St. Clair, Toledo, Ohio 43609. This is a union of migrant and seasonal workers who harvest the vegetable and fruit crop in northwestern Ohio and southern Michigan.

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**Federation of Southern Cooperatives and Land Assistance Fund**, 100 Edgewood Ave. SE, Atlanta, Georgia 30303. An association which can provide information about land loss among Black farmers in the South. The group has a Revolving Loan Fund to save land at forced sales and provide capital for cooperative development.

**Food and Agricultural Policy Work Group, Task Force on Interfaith Action for Economic Justice**, 110 Maryland Ave. NE, Washington, D.C. 20002. Priorities of the work group are the structure of agriculture, stewardship of resources, and food self-reliance and security. Information from the work group is published as *Economic Justice Prepares*.

**Institute for Food and Development Policy**, 1885 Mission St., San Francisco, CA 94103. Nonprofit research and education center which works to identify the root causes of hunger and food problems in the United States and around the world and to educate the public as well as policymakers about those problems.

**International Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture**, 1701 University Ave. S.E., Minneapolis, MN 55414. Organizational purpose is to eliminate hunger through programs which promote nutritious, organic food without cancer-causing chemicals, conserving soil and water and supporting socially just and economically viable agricultural systems.

**Land Stewardship Project**, 512 West Elm St., Stillwater, MN 55082. Organizational purpose is to raise public awareness about farm land topsoil loss because of erosion due to lack of conservation practices.

**National Association of Conservation Districts**, League City, Texas 77573. Provides worship resources for Soil Stewardship services.

**National Organization of Raw Materials, Publications**, 16039 Prairie Villa Street S.W., Tenino, WA 98589. Their literature and audiovisual resources help to show the essential role of raw materials income in national prosperity.

**National Family Farm Coalition**, 815 15th St. NW, Room 624, Washington, D.C. 20005. Coordinates information and public education around the issues of the Family Farm Development Act.

**National Land for People**, 2348 N. Cornelia, Fresno, Calif. 93711. Advocacy group concerned with the struggle of small farmers for control of land and water resources, especially in California and the West. Membership includes monthly publication *Land, Food, People*.

**National Rural Center**, 1828 L St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20036. Nonprofit organization concerned about rural poverty and participation in decision making by all rural people. Develops policy alternatives for rural community. Newsletter (rural health and public transportation), issue reports, and telephone inquiries are free.

**National Sharecroppers Fund**, 2128 Commonwealth Ave., Charlotte, N.C. 28205. Works for passage of national legislation to benefit small farmers and agricultural workers. Supports efforts of farm workers to organize and seeks to end their exclusion from benefits of social legislation.

**Rural America, Inc.** 1346 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20036. National membership organization concerned with the full scope of rural problems. Promotes program of policy-oriented research and public information. Publication: *Rural America* (bi-monthly).

**Small Farm Energy Project**, Box 736, Hartington, Neb. 68739. National research and demonstration project to assist small farmers in low-cost alternative energy systems. Seeks to expand demonstrations beyond Nebraska. Information services (literature, bibliographies) available free.