

Small Farms: The Foundation for Long-Run Food Security¹

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American agriculture is in the midst of a “great transition.” Agriculture as we have known it, with family farms and viable rural communities, is being rapidly transformed into an industrial agriculture, with factory farms and dying rural communities. Such times of change are times of great risks but also times of great opportunity. There are no guarantees of survival or success. But, an understanding of the forces of change can be quite helpful in coping with the risks of change and in realizing the opportunities. The forces driving change in American agriculture today are the continuing forces of industrialization.

The industrialization of agriculture is not a new phenomenon. The trend toward specialization, standardization, and consolidation – toward industrialization – began around the turn of the 20th century, with the mechanization of agriculture. However, the chemical technologies that emerged from World War II, particularly commercial fertilizers and pesticides, accelerated the industrialization process. Until recently, the most obvious consequence of this process had been larger farms, fewer farms, and fewer farm families. But, farmers and families, real people, were still making the decisions concerning what was produced, how it was produced, who it was produced for, and they considered how their decisions might affect the land and their neighbors. Until recently, the specialization, standardization, and consolidation of farming had been driven by the decisions of individual, family farmers. Farmers freely chose to adopt the new mechanical and chemical technologies, many of which were developed through publicly supported research, because they seemed to promise increased profits. These technologies invariably promised greater production efficiency, which would reduce cost per unit of production, leaving the farmer with a wider profit margin. Increased efficiency generally meant that each farmer could produce more than before, in fact, needed to produce more to justify the new technological investment and to realize the full benefit of the new technology.

However, the “early adopters” were the only farmers to realize increased profits. As more and more farmers adopted a new technology, a new kind of machine or agri-chemical, total production invariably increased, because each farmer now was compelled to produce more. The new technologies allowed farmers to reduce costs per unit, but only if they produced more units. With increased production, market prices invariably fell, leaving even the innovators no better off than before. The later adopters rarely had a chance to recoup their investment before prices fell and profits were gone. In cases where the government supported commodity prices, land prices rose instead, with the same net effect on profits. Eventually, technological adoption was motivated by survival rather than profits, and those farmers who adopted too late didn't survive.

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Some farmers had to fail so others could expand – could farm more land or produce more livestock – in order to realize the full benefits of the new technologies. In fact, prices invariably stayed low enough long enough to force enough farmers out of business to accommodate the new industrial technologies. And, after each “technological adjustment” was complete, there was always another round of technology waiting for adoption. Chronic crisis and continuing farm failures have been a necessary consequence of agricultural industrialization.

The current “corporatization” of agriculture is but the final stage of the industrialization process. As the new technologies have required larger and larger operations to justify the new investments, capital requirements have exceeded the credit capacity of all but the largest of individual farmers. Many farmers have formed family corporations to enhance their ability to raise investment capital. Increasingly, however, only the “publicly owned” corporations are able to meet the agricultural capital requirements of an increasingly industrial agriculture. Economists now proclaim corporate contracts as farmers' only means of gaining access to the technology, capital, and markets they will need to be competitive in the 21st century. Most of the land and basic production facilities are still owned by individual farmers and family corporations, but production increasingly is carried out under direction of giant agribusiness corporations.

The industrialization and corporatization of American agriculture has been supported by government policies – including government farm programs and publicly supported research and education programs. The overriding objective of such policies has been to increase the efficiency of agriculture for the ultimate benefit of consumers, in the form of lower food prices. The political rhetoric in support of family farming has continued; but government programs obviously have supported continued specialization, standardization, and consolidation, which have ensured the demise of the family farm.

At the signing of the new “Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002,” the President said, “The farm bill will strengthen the farm economy... will promote farmer independence, and preserve the farm way of life for generations.” These same kinds of claims have been made for every U.S. Farm Bill since the 1930s. Yet, the farm economy has continually floundered and American agriculture has limped from one crisis to the next. And now, independent family farmers are becoming a rarity. This new Farm Bill will not do any of the things promised. It simply continues the policies of the past, which subsidize wealthy landowners and the agribusiness corporations, at the expense of family farmers. The new Farm Bill won't promote farmer independence or preserve the farm way of life. It most certainly will not provide for either “farm security” or “food security,” nor will it improve the lives of people in rural America. With increasing corporate control of the food system, even those independent producers with lower cost than the contract producers are finding it difficult to compete. The corporations now control much of the new technology, particularly biotechnology, to which farmers can gain access only through contractual arrangements. Large corporate processors increasingly procure nearly all of their raw materials through contracts, thus denying market access, or at least denying competitive markets, to non-contract producers. The corporatization of agriculture is now driven much more by the quest for increased market share and greater market power than for increased production efficiency.

Family corporations are not all that different from individuals; their decisions reflect the basic values of the family. Even with “closely held” corporations, with few stockholders, decisions can still reflect the basic social and ethical values of the owners. However, once the number of stockholders becomes large, as in large publicly held corporations, and management is essentially separated from ownership, the motives for decision making become profits and growth. Most of the stock in such corporations is owned by mutual funds and pension funds, and the stockholders are concerned foremost, if not completely, with growth in the value of their investment. A corporately controlled agriculture is fundamentally different from the agriculture we have known in the past.

Americans are losing control over American agriculture. Increasingly, the decisions concerning what will be produced, how much will be produced, where it will be produced, how it will be produced, and who will produce it, are being made, not by American citizens, but by multinational corporations. The people who own the land and do the work may still be Americans, but someone else, somewhere else, is making the decisions. For the most part, contractual arrangements determine who makes the decisions, leaving “producers” as little more than landlords, tractor drivers, or hog house janitors, but certainly not with the traditional role of “farmer.”

The agribusiness corporations dictating the terms of these contracts are legal entities but they are not people. They have no families, no friends, no communities, and increasingly, no national citizenship. The people who work for these corporations are real people and are citizens of some nation – with families, friends, and communities. But, once corporate ownership is separated from management, as in the case of most publicly held corporations, the people within corporations have no choice but serve the economic needs of the corporation for profits and growth. The multinational agribusiness corporations that increasingly control American agriculture have stockholders scattered throughout the world, and thus, have no citizenship. Increasingly, the multinational corporations will find it more profitable to produce somewhere other than in America. Our land and labor costs are simply too high for America to compete with places such as South America, Australia, South Africa, or China in production of basic agricultural commodities – corn, soybeans, hogs, cattle, cotton, rice, etc. We have higher-paying employment opportunities for our labor and higher-valued residential uses for our land. Eventually, the agribusiness corporations, having no commitment to producing in America, simply will move their operations elsewhere – to somewhere that will give their stockholder a higher return on their investment.

In their struggle to stay competitive in global markets, American producers will feel compelled to accept contractual arrangements that result in the exploitation of both land and people. The industrialization of poultry and hog production, with large-scale confinement animal feeding operations, provides a prime example of such exploitation. These operations consistently pollute the rural environment with odors and waste, yield minimum returns at best for laborers and investors, and drive family farming operations out of business. Even so, they are becoming the only means by which producers can gain access to markets. The same basic trend is already well underway in dairy; and with genetic patenting and biotechnology, corporate control of crop production will soon follow.

Before corporate agriculture abandons America, they will have turned much of rural America into a “third-world” wasteland. Polluted streams and groundwater, abandoned waste lagoons, eroded and depleted topsoil, depleted aquifers, rural crime, a de-skilled workforce, and decaying rural communities; these will be the legacies of the corporatization of American agriculture. Americans will fight back with more environmental rules and regulations, but eventually, short-run economic considerations will prevail. Ultimately, however, the corporations will find it cheaper to produce food and fiber elsewhere in the world. And with a global, “free market” economy, there will be nothing to keep them from moving their agricultural operations elsewhere.

We don't need a lot of data, facts, or figures to understand what is happening to American agriculture; it's just plain common sense. In making agriculture more efficient, we have chosen industrial technologies and methods, which have resulted in fewer, larger farming operations, and now, in corporate control of agriculture. In the process, we have lost both the security of our farms and the food security of our nation. These outcomes are the logical consequences of the objectives and strategies we have pursued. We have sacrificed our security for the sake of efficiency. It's not all that difficult to understand; it's just common sense.

Economists argue we need not be concerned about becoming dependent upon the rest of the world for our food. They suggest it is only logical that America moves beyond farming in the new global era of economic development, that we have higher valued uses for our land and labor resources. We will be even better fed at a lower cost, they say, because food can now be produced cheaper elsewhere in the world. But in times of crisis, a nation that can't feed itself is no more secure than is a nation that can't defend itself. Perhaps we won't abandon agriculture completely, but we could easily become as dependent on the rest of the world for our food as we are today for our oil. Perhaps, we can keep our food imports flowing, as we do for oil, but how large a military force will it take, how many “small wars” will we have to fight, and how many people will be killed.

Many consumers, members of the public, seem to agree with the economists. They don't see anything wrong with a corporately controlled, industrial agriculture, and they are not particularly concerned. As long as the corporations can give them food that is quick, convenient, and cheap, they are not going to ask too many questions. They aren't all that concerned about where their food comes from, who produces it, how it is produced, and what the consequences are for rural people and for the land. Many trust the competitive forces of a “global free market” economy to ensure that the needs of society are met.

However, a growing number of people are concerned about the corporate industrialization of agriculture. They are concerned about what it is doing to the lives of farm families who are losing control of land that has been in their families for generations. They are concerned about people in rural communities who have supported and been supported by those family farms. They are concerned about the low-pay and long hours in the food processing factories that have moved into some of these chronically depressed rural areas. They are concerned about the landfills, toxic waste dumps, and giant livestock feeding operations that pollute the once pristine rural environment with dangerous chemicals, biological wastes, and hazardous stench. They are concerned about the ability of the soil to continue to produce after the topsoil is eroded and it is saturated with chemicals and about the quality of water subjected to similar abuses. They are

concerned about the safety of their food and safety of the people who work to produce it. They are concerned about the negative impacts of an industrial agriculture on the people who farm the land, who live in rural areas, who eat the food. They are concerned about those of future generations who will still be as dependent upon the land for their sustenance, their very survival, as we are today. They are concerned about the sustainability of agriculture.

This growing concern for agricultural sustainability is raising some “common sense” questions about our food system. It asks, how can we equitably meet the needs of people in the present, while leaving equal or better opportunities for those of the future – not just how can we make food quick, convenient, and cheap? It asks, how can we develop an agriculture that is ecologically sound, economically viable, and socially responsible – not just how can we make agriculture more economically efficient? It asks, how can we ensure our long run food security – not just our current abundance? Sustainability asks how can we sustain a desirable quality of human life on this earth, individually, socially, and ethically – both for ourselves and for those of future generations?

Sustainable farming systems must be ecologically sound, economically viable, and socially responsible. All three are essential; more of one cannot offset a lack of either of the other two. The three dimensions of sustainability are not a part of some formal or legal definition, but instead, are a matter of common sense. If the land loses its ability to produce, the farm is not sustainable. If the farmer goes broke, the farm is not sustainable. And if a system of farming fails to support society, it will not be supported by society, and thus, is not sustainable. The economic, ecological, and social dimensions of sustainability are like the three dimensions of a box. All are necessary. A box that is lacking in height, width, or length, quite simply is not a box. A farming system that is lacking in ecological integrity, economic viability, or social responsibility, quite simply is not sustainable.

There is growing evidence that current concerns for the sustainability of agriculture are well founded – that a corporate industrial food system, in fact, is not sustainable. The threats to the natural environment and to the quality of life of farmers, rural residents, and members of society as a whole have continually risen as we have industrialized American agriculture. The same technologies that support our specialized, standardized, large-scale farming systems are now the primary sources of growing environmental degradation. Commercial fertilizers and pesticides – essential elements in a specialized, industrialized agriculture – have become a primary source of growing concerns for environmental degradation and food safety. And, industrialization has transformed agriculture, created for the fundamental purpose of converting solar energy to human-useful form, into a mechanized agriculture that uses more non-renewable fossil energy than it captures in solar energy from the sun.

The long run food security of America ultimately depends on the sustainability of its agriculture. Once a nation depletes or destroys the productivity of its agricultural base – its soils, its irrigation aquifers, its biological diversity, its agricultural knowledge base, its farming culture – its food supply is no longer secure. If such a nation is strong militarily, it must be willing to go to war to ensure its food supplies. If such a nation is weak militarily, it is continually subject to “blackmail” from food producing nations. A nation without sufficient agricultural resources is more vulnerable than a nation without sufficient energy resources. People can live without gasoline but not without food. A nation that allows its agricultural resources to be exploited for

short-run economic gains is more foolish than a nation that exploits its energy reserves to ensure the wealth of its leaders. Fossil fuels are non-renewable, and thus, eventually will be depleted. It's just a matter of when. Agricultural resources, on the other hand, are regenerative and renewable – if they are nurtured, cared for, and conserved. The long run security of any nation depends on its willingness and ability to ensure the sustainability of its food and farming systems.

No one set about intentionally to destroy the ecological integrity, social responsibility, or economic viability of American agriculture. We simply lost sight of the fundamental purpose of agriculture, to meet the needs of people – as consumers, as producers, as members of rural communities, and of society. In our preoccupation with making agriculture more productive, we have taken the thinking out of farming; we have degraded the occupation of farming, and diminished the intellectual, social, and economic rewards of being a farmer. In our preoccupation with increasing economic efficiency, to bring down the cost of food, we neglected to monitor what was happening to the overall quality of life of people. In our preoccupation with increasing production today, we neglected to monitor the ecological legacy we were leaving those of future generations. In our preoccupation with remaining economically competitive in a global economy, we have sacrificed our long run food security. We don't need a lot of data, facts, or figures to understand what has happened to American agriculture; it's just plain common sense.

Thankfully, a new breed of American farmer has emerged to develop a new and better paradigm for farming. They have emerged in response to growing concerns about the negative ecological and social impacts of the corporate industrial model of agriculture. These new farmers are concerned about the ecological, social, and economic sustainability of agriculture. However, the success of this new type of farming also has important implications for food safety, food quality, food security, and our overall quality of life for all of society.

While there are no “blueprints” for the *New American Farm*³, some basic characteristics are emerging. First, these farmers see themselves as stewards of the earth. They are committed to caring for the land and protecting the natural environment. They have a deep sense of respect and commitment to caring for the land. They work with nature rather than try to control or conquer nature. They fit the farm to their land and climate rather than try to bend nature to fit the way they might prefer to farm. Their farming operations tend to be more diversified than are conventional farms – because nature is diverse. Diversity may mean a variety of crop and animal enterprises, crop rotations and cover crops, or managed livestock grazing systems, depending on the type of farm. By managing diversity, these new farmers are able to reduce their dependence on pesticides, fertilizers, and other commercial inputs that squeeze farm profits and threaten the environment. Their farms are more economically viable, as well as more ecologically sound, because they farm in harmony with nature.

3 For 50 real life examples, see “The New American Farmer – Profiles in Agricultural Innovation,” the SARE Program, USDA, Washington DC. (\$10 US – call: 802-656-0484 or e-mail: sanpubs@uvm.edu , also available free on line at <http://www.sare.org/newfarmer>)

Second, these new farmers build relationships. They tend to have more direct contact with their customers than do conventional farmers. Most either market their products direct to customers or market through agents who represent them with their customers. They realize that as consumers each of us value things differently because we have different needs and different tastes and preferences. They produce the things that their customers value most. They have a strong sense of respect for people, an appreciation for the value of human relationships. They are not trying to take advantage of their customers to make quick profits; they are trying to create long-term relationships. They market to people who care where their food comes from and how it is produced – locally grown, organic, natural, humanely raised, hormone and antibiotic free, etc. – and, they receive premium prices by producing foods their customers value. Their farms are more profitable as well as more ecologically sound and socially responsible.

These new farmers challenge the stereotype of the farmer as a fiercely independent competitor. They freely share information and encouragement. They form partnerships and cooperatives to buy equipment, to process and market their products, to do together the things that they can't do as well alone. They are not trying to drive each other out of business; they are trying to help each other succeed. They refuse to exploit each other for short run gain; they are trying to build long-term relationships. They buy locally and market locally. They bring people together in positive, productive relationships that contribute to their economic, ecological, and social well-being. They value people, for personal as well as economic reasons, and want to build and maintain good human relationships.

Third, to these new farmers, farming is as much a way of life as a way to make a living. They are “quality of life” farmers. To them, the farm is a good place to live – a healthy environment, a good place to raise a family, and a good way to become a part of a caring community. Many of these farms create economic benefits worth tens of thousands of dollars, in addition to any reported net farm income. Their “quality of life” objectives are at least as important as the economic objectives in carrying out their farming operations. Their farming operations reflect the things they like to do, the things they believe in, and the things they have a passion for, as much as the things that might yield profits. They are connected spiritually through a sense of purpose and meaning for their lives. However, for many, their products are better and their costs are less because by following their passion they end up doing what they do best. Most new farmers are able to earn a decent income, but more important, they have a higher quality of life because they are living a life that they love.

Finally, new American farms tend to be independently owned and operated, smaller family farms. Without farmers on the land, who care about the land and are able to take care of the land, making decisions about how the land is used, agriculture cannot be sustained. A corporately controlled, large-scale, industrial agriculture quite simply is not sustainable – in America or anywhere. In addition to being independently owned and operated, new American farms also tend to be among America's smaller farms. They are not necessarily the smallest, as the smallest farms tend to be hobby farms, retirement farms, and rural residences. But, neither are sustainable farms typical among America's larger farms.

Sustainable farming is a product of balance, or harmony, among the ecological, economic, and social dimensions of a farming system. A smaller farm lacking this harmony is less likely to be

sustainable than a larger farm that is more in harmony. But there are sound, logical reasons to believe that the necessary balance and harmony will be easier to achieve with a larger number of smaller farms than with a smaller number of large farms.

Nature is inherently diverse. Geographic regions are different, watersheds are different, farms are different, and fields on the same farm are even different. Industrial agriculture treats fields, farms, watersheds and even regions as if they were all pretty much the same. Certainly, industrial systems can be fine-tuned a bit here and there to make production practices of one region fit another. Each state has a bit different set of best management practices, and some further adjustments are made from farm to farm and field to field. But, the fundamental systems of conventional production are all pretty much the same.

The same breeds and varieties, fertilizers and feeds, pesticides and antibiotics, machinery and equipment, and business and marketing strategies are used across fields, farms, and watersheds, in all regions of the country. The goal of research is to find universal solutions to common problems -- to find ways to twist, bend, and force nature to conform to some universal production and distribution process. Industrial, large-scale mass production requires this type of uniformity. Biotechnology is but the latest in a long string of futile efforts to force uniformity upon nature.

But nature is diverse. Large-scale production creates inherent conflicts with this diverse nature – and inherently threatens sustainability. Farms that conform to their ecological niches avoid such conflicts. Some ecological niches may be large, but most are quite small. Current concerns for agricultural sustainability are based on strong and growing evidence that most farms have already outgrown their ecological niches and could be more sustainable if they were smaller. Sustainable farms must also be of a size consistent with their markets. Conventional wisdom is that most markets are mass markets, and thus, farms must be large – or if not, must market collectively. The conventional wisdom is wrong. Markets are made up of individual consumers, and as consumers – as people – we are all different. We don't all want the same things. In fact, each of us actually prefers something just a little bit different, and thus, values the same things a bit differently.

Mass markets are created by lumping together a lot of people who are willing to accept the same basic thing – even though they might not prefer them. If mass markets can be created, the food system can be industrialized, and dollar and cent food costs will be lower. The lower price is a bribe to consumers to accept something other than what they actually would prefer. Typically, they must be coerced as well as bribed to accept what the industrial system has to offer. That's why Americans spend more for advertising and packaging of food than they pay the farmer to produce it. It costs more to convince people to buy industrial food products than it does to produce them.

Eighty cents of each dollar spent for food goes for processing, transportation, packaging, advertising, and other marketing services. Another ten cents goes to cover the costs of purchased inputs – fertilizers, pesticides, fuel, etc. Farmers currently get only about ten cents of each food dollar, on average, for their contribution to the production process. One key to economic sustainability of small farms is to capture a larger share of the consumers' food dollar by performing some, and bypassing others, of these marketing services. By tailoring their

production to consumer niche markets, and selling more directly to consumers, small farmers have an opportunity to make more profits without becoming big farmers.

The conventional wisdom is that niche-marketing opportunities are limited and can support only a handful of farmers. Again, the conventional wisdom is wrong. Since all people want something slightly different, the ultimate in niche marketing would be to give every individual precisely what they want. All consumer markets are made up of individuals – totally, not just in part. Thus, all markets in total are made up of niche markets. The question is not how many niches exist, but instead how many different niches does it make sense to serve? The relevant answer, at least at present, is that more than enough market niches exist to support as many small farmers as might choose to direct-market to consumers. A lack of niche markets need not place a lower limit on the size of farms. The number of farms can be as many and their size as small as needed to accommodate the ecological niches of nature.

The most compelling argument in support of sustainable farms being smaller is that sustainable farms must be more “intensively” managed. Wendell Berry puts it most succinctly in his book, What are People For, “...if agriculture is to remain productive, it must preserve the land and the fertility and ecological health of the land; the land, that is, must be used well. A further requirement, therefore, is that if the land is to be used well, the people who use it must know it well, must be highly motivated to use it well, must know how to use it well, must have time to use it well, and must be able to afford to use it well.” Intensive management is possible only if farmers have an intensive relationship with the land – if they know it, care about it, know how to care for it, take time to care for it, and can afford to care for it – only if they love it. And, one farmer can only love so much land.

Industrialization degrades and destroys the relationship between the farmer and the land. Industrialization is management “extensive.” Specialization, standardization, and centralization allow each farmer to cover more land, supervise more workers, and handle more dollars. Industrial management is “extensive” in that each manager is able to manage more resources. Extensive management makes it possible for each farmer to make more profits in total, even if profits per unit of production are less. But, as the attention of each farmer is spread over more land, more laborers, and more capital, each acre of land, each worker, and each dollar receives less personal attention. The relationship of the farmer with the land, and with the people of the land, is weakened. If the large farmer no longer knows the land, no longer cares about it, forgets how to care for it, doesn't have time to care for it, or can't afford to care about it, how well will the land be used? How can it remain productive? How can a large farm be sustainable? A small farm can be managed “intensively.” Intensive management allows a farmer to manage less land, using less labor, while handling fewer dollars. By managing fewer resources more intensively, the farmer is able to make more profit per unit of output, and thus, make more total profits – even if total production or output is less. As the farmer has more time and attention to give to each acre of land, each worker, and each dollar, the farmer's relationship to the land and the people of the land is strengthened. The small farmer has an opportunity to know the land, to care about it, to learn how to care for it, has time to care for it, and can afford to care about it. The land on a small farm can be used well and it can remain productive. A small farm can be sustainable.

The fundamental purpose of farming is to harvest solar energy – to transform sunlight into food and fiber for human use. It might seem that even God favors the larger farmer because a large farm covers more space, thus, catching more sunshine and rain. But, God also has given us a choice of making either wise or foolish use of the gifts of nature with which we are entrusted. Our industrial agriculture currently uses more energy from fossil fuels than it captures in solar energy from the sun. This can hardly be deemed wise and efficient use. But as a consequence, a small farmer can be more economically, socially, and ecologically viable than a large farm, simply by being a more effective harvester of the solar energy. In essence, a more intensive manager is a better harvester of the sun.

Some ecosystems and farming systems are easier to manage effectively than are others, and thus, require less attention per unit of resources to manage sustainably. Those requiring less intensive management can be larger without sacrificing sustainability. For example, a sustainable wheat/forage/cattle farm may be far larger than a sustainable vegetable/berry/poultry farm. But the sustainable wheat/forage/cattle farm is likely to be far smaller than the typical specialized wheat farm, forage farm, or cattle ranch. And the sustainable vegetable/berry/poultry farm is likely to be far smaller than the typical specialized vegetable farm, berry farm, or poultry operation.

Sustainable farms need not be small in terms of acres farmed or total production, but they will need to be managed intensively. And intensively managed farms will be smaller than will otherwise similar farms that are managed extensively. Neither land nor people can be sustained unless they are given the attention, care, and affection they need to survive, thrive, and prosper, that attention, care, and affection can be more easily given on a smaller than larger farm. We can encourage a transition from large to small farms by redirecting farm policy toward issues of long run security – toward making it both possible and profitable for family farmers to make a decent living on a small farm. It's absurd to argue that current farm policies ensure food security, while those policies subsidize the very systems of production and corporations that are placing our food security at risk. We at least need to quit subsidizing the corporatization of agriculture. Ultimately, however, the survival and success of America's small family farmers will depend on the farmers, not on the government or industry. Family farmers cannot preserve their independence by becoming increasingly dependent upon the government. Farmers cannot preserve a farm way of life by becoming “hired hands” for agribusiness corporations. A farm is secure only when the farmer's economic and social relationships are relationships of choice, not relationships of necessity. Once the survival of a farm becomes dependent on a contractor, a banker, a lawyer, or the government, there is no farm security. A nation is secure only when it is able to feed itself in a time of crises. Once the nation becomes dependent on multinational corporations for its food, there is no national security.

In fact, the long run food security of the nation rests in the hands of these new family farmers who have broken away from the global industrial food system and have developed relationship markets with local customers. During some future global crisis, we may well be forced to rely on farmers in our local area or region for our very survival. If so, we will need even more farmers on the land who know how to work with nature to produce more without relying on costly commercial inputs. If so, we will need even more farmers who have developed direct relationships with their neighbors and their customers – who have created value, as well as

reduced costs by marketing more directly to local customers. We will need even more farmers who care about the land, care about people, and care about their country. And farmers who are capable of supplying local markets, for the most part, operate small family farms.

Can America depend on these new family farmers? We can if we make it possible for them to remain true family farmers, sustainable farmers, instead of forcing them to exploit the land, their customers, and each other in vain attempts for economic survival. These new farmers are real people. Unlike multinational corporations, they have hearts, they have souls, and they have families, communities, and citizenship. They are not going to quit farming and move away from their family and friends, just because they could make more money elsewhere. They are rooted in the place where they grew up, where they have family, and would like their children to “take root” in those places as well. They are Americans. They love this country. They are not going to renounce their citizenship and leave this country just because they could make more profit farming in some other country. And the vast majority of these new farmers are on America's small farms.

What can the rest of us do to help? We can buy more of our food at our local farmers' markets. We can join a Community Supported Agriculture group. We can seek out and encourage local farmers who are willing to sell direct to customers. We can encourage local grocers and restaurateurs to buy from local farmers at every possible opportunity and patronize those who do so. And, we can encourage our friends, neighbors, and professional associates to buy local as well. We can become involved in local and national political issues that affect local farmers' access to land, markets, capital, and appropriate technology. But equally important, we can do everything in our power to support the new American farmers. Ultimately, our food is no more secure than are our relationships with each other and our relationships with the land. And for most of us, our relationship with land is through these new sustainable farmers, and most of these farmers are on America's small farms.