

Farming with Values that Last Family, Community, Land, and Faith¹

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When we were children, our parents, teachers, and others would ask us “What do you want to be?” When we grew up, we asked our children the same question, “What do you want to be?” The expected answer probably was, “I want to be a fireman, a doctor, a teacher, or a farmer.” Or maybe it was, “I want to be rich, I want to be important,” or by some other name, “I want to be successful.” My mother used to tell me and my brothers and sisters, “I just want you to grow up to amount to something.” But, how often do we hear, or even expect to hear, the real answer, “I just want to be happy?” Don't we all really “just want to be happy?” People at this conference may be different, but how often do Americans tell their children, “regardless of what you do in life, I just want you to be happy?” Isn't that really what we all want for our children, don't we “just want them to be happy?”

Too often, when we ask children, or adults, what they “want to be,” we expect them to tell us what they “want to do” or what they “want to achieve” – not what they really “want to be.” We expect them to answer by talking about what kind of work they want to do or what they expect to accomplish through that work, not the happiness they hope for, regardless of what they do or achieve. We have become a nation of workers, of achievers, of doers. We are not a nation of human “beings,” but instead, a nation of humans “doing.” And, by focusing on the doing, rather than the being, we have become a nation that has lost its happiness.

We Americans spend so much time and energy pursuing success that we have very little left for other people, or even for ourselves. Those of us who succeed in achieving wealth and recognition, often sacrifice family, friends, and other personal relationships in the process. We focus so intently on the economic bottom line that we lose sight of the line that separates caring from carelessness and right from wrong. We trade relationships and righteousness for success.

Those few who achieve success soon discover that neither wealth nor fame can ensure happiness. For those who work and strive for success there is never “enough money,” and never “enough recognition.” Success is always fleeting; it simply doesn't last. There is always someone wealthier or more famous to make us feel that we too need more – no matter how much we have achieved. However, most will never achieve wealth or fame, because both are defined by the few who achieve them and the many that do not. Most workers and strivers will live their lives believing if they had only been successful, they could have been happy – as Thoreau wrote, leading “lives of quiet desperation.”

In our pursuit of economic success, we Americans have lost sight of the real purpose of life's journey, which is happiness. We see this both in the lives of those who work in corporate offices and on factory assembly lines. We see it in the halls of Congress and in City Hall, in the

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government bureaucracies of Washington, DC and in administration of our local schools, in civic organizations, nonprofit organizations, and even in our churches. We also see it among entrepreneurs who operate small businesses and even among families who operate farms. In pursuing the economic and political values that bring fleeting success, we have lost sight of the enduring, lasting values that bring true happiness.

Historically, happiness has been widely accepted as the motive of all purposeful human activity. The drafters of the Declaration of Independence, for example, listed “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” among the inalienable rights of all people. Philosophers throughout the ages spent a lot of time thinking about happiness. The *hedonist* philosophers equated happiness to sensory pleasures – to individual, personal experiences. However, another group of philosophers, including Aristotle, used the word *eudaimonia* for happiness. *Eudaimonia* is inherently social in nature – it is realized by individuals, but only within the context of family, friendships, community, or society. Aristotle's happiness, social happiness, was a natural product of positive personal relationships.

Equally important, this “social happiness” was considered a “by-product” of actions taken not to achieve some sensory satisfaction, but instead, taken for their “own sake,” actions taken because they were “intrinsically good.” In essence, Aristotle and his followers believed that true happiness was not something to be pursued, but instead, was a naturally consequence of “righteous living.” So, happiness is not about doing, it is about being; it is not about achieving, instead it is about the relationships that result from right living.

In our pursuit of *hedonistic* economic success, we Americans have abandoned the social happiness of *eudaimonia* and we have suffered the inevitable consequences. For those who need statistical evidence, Robert Putnam's book Bowling Alone³ provides measure after measure verifying that America is becoming a nation of increasingly disconnected, unhappy people. For example, each decade since the 1960s, fewer Americans have voted in elections, belonged to organizations, participated in social activities, or even visited each other's homes. Most such measures of social connectedness or social capital have dropped by 30-50 percent since the late 1950s. And, as Americans have become disconnected, we have become a more contentious and less civil society, as evidenced by our spending more per capita each decade for lawyers, courts, law enforcement, and prisons.

Putnam also points out that our increasingly dysfunctional personal relationships have been associated with deteriorating physical and mental health, with a ten-fold increase in mental illness and a tripling and quadrupling of suicides among young adults and adolescents. Less serious, but far more common, incidents of “malaise” – headaches, indigestion, and sleeplessness – have shown patterns similar to those for mental illness. Between the late 1970s and late 1990s, each new generation, on average, are not only less healthy but also have indicated they are “less happy” than were those of previous generations.

Nowhere are the consequences of our self-centered, materialistic American lifestyle more evident than in the American food system. Americans want their food to be quick, convenient,

³ Putnam, Robert. 2000. *Bowling Alone*. Simon and Schuster, New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, and Singapore.

and cheap. We have accepted as an “article of faith” that our food should be cheap, and we boast that the average American spends just a bit more than a dime of each dollar of disposable income for food. In reality, we spend less than two cents of each dollar of income for food, because eight cents of each “food dime” goes to pay for processing, transportation, storage, packaging, advertising, etc. – not for food.

Eighty percent of the total value of food is value-added beyond the farm gate, but value added also means added cost. And, the vast majority of these added costs are associated with the various functions that make food quicker and easier to prepare or otherwise more convenient for the consumer. Most of the rest, such as costs of advertising and packaging, are spent to convince us of the wisdom of our preference for convenience.

A growing American addiction to quick and convenient food is evident in the increasing share of our food dollar spent at restaurants and other eating establishments – a share approaching half of total food purchases. And, “fast food” places, such as McDonalds, Taco Bell, and Pizza Hut, account for nearly half of all food consumed away from home. We want food eaten at home to be quick and easy to prepare, but increasingly we also want someone else to prepare our food for us.

But, quick and easy food comes at a high cost – a cost far exceeding the dollar and cent cost we pay at the supermarket or eating establishment. Erick Schlosser, in his recent best seller, Fast Food Nation⁴, addresses the cost of the American “love affair” with fast foods. He states, “fast food has triggered the homogenization of our society. Fast food has hastened the malling of our landscape, widening of the chasm between rich and poor, fueled an epidemic of obesity, and propelled the juggernaut of American cultural imperialism abroad.” He documents how quick food has lured us into choosing diets deficient in nearly everything except calories, supporting practices deceptive in every aspect from advertising to flavoring, and systems that degrade nearly everyone and everything involved in the process.

Our addiction to convenience also is wresting control of the food system from consumers, placing it instead into the hands of a few giant, transnational corporations. A handful of giant agribusiness firms, allied by various business arrangements, to form giant “global food clusters”⁵ now dominate food markets globally. By controlling the food system – the processing, storage, packaging, and distribution necessary to make food convenient for consumers – these firms are controlling the global food system. The market for food is no longer competitive, at least not in an economic sense, and thus, the food consumer is no longer king. The greatest cost of our addiction to convenience may well be the loss of control over our food.

The negative consequences of our quest for “cheap food,” are seen most clearly in the demise of family farms and the decay of rural communities. A competitive marketplace forced farmers to

⁴ Schlosser, Eric. 2001. *Fast Food Nation*. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston and New York, NY.

⁵ For summaries of global food consolidation studies, see articles by Mary Hendrickson and William Heffernan, in *Small Farm Today Magazine*, April 1999 and July 2001, also available on the Internet at <http://nfu.org/images/heffernan.pdf> and http://nfu.org/images/heffernan_1999.pdf

specialize, standardize, and consolidate – to industrialize their farming operations – in order to reduce costs of production and bring down the costs of food. The most obvious social consequences have been larger farms, fewer farms, and thus, fewer farm families. The number of farmers in the U.S. dropped from more than six million in the 1930s, to less than two million in 2000. Equally significant, today's farm families earn more than ninety percent of their total household income from off-farm sources, whereas farms in the 30s were mostly full-time family farms. America's farm families have fallen victim to a cheap food culture.

The social costs of cheap food have not been counted, but are nonetheless real and significant. Most displaced farmers didn't leave agriculture by choice. They were forced off the land by an American food culture and agricultural policies that gave priority to efficiency and costs over equity and justice. The “economic relocation” of farmers did not result from better off-farm employment opportunities, as economists would lead us to believe. American corporations have been downsizing and outsourcing for decades, eliminating the good paying factory and office jobs of the past. Displaced farmers have been forced to accept whatever employment they could find at whatever pay they were offered.

The social costs of economic dislocation have not been limited to farmers. Many rural communities were established as farming communities and have continued to exist only because they supported, and were supported by, farmers. Fewer farm families have meant fewer people to buy clothes, shoes, and groceries on Main Street, but also, fewer farm families to help support local schools, churches, and civic organizations. Today the corporatization of agriculture, the final stage of industrial consolidation of control, is pitting neighbor against neighbor, turning farmers into corporate hired hands, and ripping what's left of the rural social fabric to shreds. The social costs of agricultural industrialization, displaced farm families and dysfunctional rural communities, may go uncounted, but they are nonetheless real.

Ecological costs also are among the uncounted costs of America's quest for cheap food. The industrialization of agriculture began with the mechanization of agriculture around the turn of the last century, but was accelerated and sustained by the commercial fertilizers and pesticides that evolved from the military technologies of World War II. Only in the last third of the century would we begin to realize the negative ecological impacts of these industrial technologies – the pollution of streams and groundwater and depletion of organic matter and erosion of soils. By the end of the century, agriculture would be identified as the single largest non-point source of water pollution in the U.S. Still later, large-scale confinement animal operations would fill the air of many rural areas with a hazardous stench and turn livestock waste into a major point source of water pollution. These ecological costs of industrialization remain mostly uncounted, but they are nonetheless real.

It's time to stop and ask is this the kind of agriculture we want and the kind of society we want; is this who we really want to be? If the *hedonists* were right, then Americans should be the happiest people on earth. We would have the most friendly, most civil, least contentious society in the world. We would be the most healthy people, physically and mentally, and the most happy people in the world. Americans probably spend more money on themselves, for their own sensory pleasure, than has any people at any time in human history. But, our wealth has not brought us happiness. The evidence continues to grow that lasting happiness is to be found in

positive relationships, in family, community, and society, and in righteous living – in social happiness, not in the narrow pursuit of *hedonistic* self-interest. It's time to stop and ask, “What kind of people do we really want to be?”

When we find the courage to stop and ask this question, we must be prepared to accept the answer. It isn't particularly pleasant to suddenly realize that you are not, and are not even becoming, what you really want to be. I began to confront my personal reality when I confronted the reality of my work and the reality of my futile struggle for success. First, I began to realize that the farmers who I had been trying to help were not, and had little hope for becoming, what they wanted to be. In the process of addressing the reality of these farmers, I discovered my own. Somehow, we both had lost our way on the road to happiness.

My lifelong relationship with food and farming began by destiny, or accident of birth, but it has continued by choice. I was born and raised on a small dairy farm, and after deciding to leave the farming to my younger brother, I pursued an advanced education in agriculture. After receiving my Ph. D. in Agricultural Economics, I spent thirty years at four different universities as an extension agricultural economist – spending most of those years working with farmers. During the first half of my career, I was a pretty traditional, bottom-line, free-market economist. Farming was a business, not a way of life, and even on family farms, farms and the families had to be treated as distinct and separate entities. I was trying to help farmers make money – to make them successful, if not rich. Happiness was a personal matter that had no place in my vision of the economics of farming.

During the farm financial crisis of the 1980s, I was forced to confront the reality that the way of farming that I had been promoting led neither to success nor to happiness. Progressive farmers had borrowed heavily at record high interest rates to expand the size of their operations during the export driven economic boom years of the 1970s. So, many were caught with large debts that they couldn't pay when world commodity prices and the domestic economy fell into economic recession during the 1980s. Stories of farm failures and foreclosures sprinkled the national network news programs and an occasional suicide by a bankrupt farmer captured both local and national headlines. Farming for the economic bottom line had led to widespread financial and personal failure.

While setting across the table from more than a few struggling farm families during those times, I began to realize that what I had been trying to teach farmers over the years had contributed much more to their problems than it could ever contribute to the solutions for those problems. The farmers who had most closely followed the recommendations of their agricultural universities and government agencies were in the greatest financial difficulties. Farmers who had worked hardest for financial success were failing. There had to be a better way to farm than the way I learned in college and the way I had been promoting for the past fifteen years.

In my search for a better way to farm, I discovered the concepts and realities of sustainable agriculture. In my search for economic viability in farming, I discovered the concepts and realities of social responsibility and ecological integrity. In accepting the social and ethical values of community and land stewardship, I found the key to lasting economic value. In my

search for a better way to farm, I found a better way of life. In the principles and practices of sustainable agriculture, I found the road back to happiness.

A sustainable agriculture must be capable of meeting the needs of the present while leaving equal or better opportunities for the future. Thus, it must be capable of maintaining its productivity and usefulness to society over the long run, indefinitely. In the simplest terms, a sustainable agriculture is an agriculture that can last. However, persistence and durability are not necessarily the most important qualities of sustainability. Lasting value is a characteristic only of real value, true value – of values that also lead to happiness.

Food and farming systems that are built upon relationships of integrity, contribute to an equitable and just society, and thus, are socially responsible systems. Food and farming systems that meet our moral responsibility to future generations, leave a legacy of productive natural resources, and thus, are ecologically sound systems. But to be ecologically and socially sustainable, our food systems also must be economically viable. Economics inevitably determine who gets to make the decisions concerning the treatment of both land and people. If people and land are to be treated well, those who make the decisions must be able to afford to treat them well; their operations must be economically viable.

The essential dimensions of sustainability are identical to the essential dimensions of true happiness. Social responsibility is reflected in positive relationships among people, and thus, allows happiness to be realized by individuals within the context of family, friendships, community, through a recognition of connectedness within the whole of human society. Ecological integrity is reflected in stewardship, and thus, allows happiness to be realized by individuals through “right relationships” with the earth – through righteousness.

But, sustainability also requires that we recognize the legitimacy of sensory pleasures in contributing to human happiness. “Man does not live by bread alone,” but neither can “man live without bread.” Happiness comes from good friends and right living, but happiness also comes from good food, warm clothes, a dry place to sleep, and even from a car that will start on a cold winter morning. We will not achieve a sustainable society through the denial of individual self-interest, but instead, from keeping the individual, social, and ethical dimensions of self in harmony and balance. All three are essential to sustainability and to happiness – the body, the mind, and the soul, the physical, mental, and spiritual – in harmony and balance.

The spiritual dimension of sustainability seems to be the most difficult of the three to accept for most people, particularly academic and professional people. One of the most difficult and important decisions I made in my professional transition to sustainability, was the decision to proclaim openly the necessity of addressing the spiritual dimension of farming. In retrospect, I had no choice – ethically. Sustainability, ultimately and undeniably, is rooted in commitment to stewardship of nature and of society. True stewardship means to do something for others with no expectation of receiving anything individually or personally in return. Thus, true stewardship inevitably reflects a belief in some higher order of things, which we cannot change, and thus, with which we must conform if we are to live in peace and harmony. The rightness and wrongness of our thoughts and actions are defined in terms of harmony or disharmony with this order. Spirituality is belief in, and then the need to live in harmony with, this higher order.

To those who deny their spirituality, a commitment to leave opportunities for future generations equal to or better than those of today makes no sense. There are no economic incentives for intergenerational equity – there is nothing in it for us, individually. We will not be alive in future generations and those of future generations are unable to reward us economically for resources we choose to leave for them rather than consume for our own gratification. There are no social incentives for intergenerational equity – there is nothing in it for anyone we know. We may not even have any descendants in those generations that will benefit most from our investments today in ecological integrity and social justice. Ultimately, our concerns for intergenerational equity, for long run sustainability, arise from our sense of moral and ethical responsibility for stewardship of the earth for the benefit of all of life for all times – from our spirituality.

Our belief in the rightness of sustainability arises from a realization that we are a part of a higher order that transcends “us” and transcends “now.” Our individual purpose in life is defined by our unique place and function within this higher order – through which our lives take on meaning. Our spirituality reflects our belief in this higher order, regardless of whether it arises from a belief in the laws of God or the law of nature. Lacking a sense of spirituality, true stewardship is irrational and sustainability is illogical. Thus, sustainable farming ultimately is a matter of ethics and morality – of spirituality.

As Americans, we must wake up to what is happening to agriculture, our farms, our food systems, and to our lives in general. In our preoccupation with getting food that is quick, convenient, and cheap, we have separated farm families from their farms. We have forced farmers to focus on the economic bottom line rather than the ethical line that separates right from wrong. We have coerced farmers into exploiting their land and each other in order to compete in an extractive global economy. We have encouraged farmers to follow science rather than their hearts, to adopt technologies that their commonsense told them were neither good for the land or the future of farming. We have taken the soul out of agriculture and spirituality out of farming.

And today, the corporations that increasingly control our food and farming are legal entities created for the purpose of assembling and accumulating capital. Corporations are not people. They are created by man, not God. Their sole purpose is to make profits and to grow. They have no families, no communities, no citizenship – they have no heart and have no soul. If American agriculture is to be sustainable, if it is to contribute to our happiness, our farms and food system must be controlled by real people – by families.

Thankfully, a new breed of American farmer is emerging to offer new hope for the future of family farms. While there are no “blueprints” for these *New American Farmers*⁶, 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 work with nature rather than try to control or conquer nature. They fit the farm to their land and climate

⁶ 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>)

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.

Second, these new farmers build relationships. They tend to have more direct contact with their customers than do conventional farmers. Most market their products directly to their customers through farmers markets, CSAs, or at other direct-marketing venues. They realize that we consumers value things differently because we have different needs and different tastes and preferences. They produce the things that their particular customers value most. 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 what 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 are helping restore viability to rural communities – socially and economically. They bring people together in positive, productive relationships that contribute to economic, ecological, and social well-being.

Finally, 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 be 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 find purpose and meaning in their life on the farm. 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 find happiness in farming.

There are literally thousands of these new family farmers, all across the continent and their numbers are growing day by day. They are on the frontier of a new and different kind of agriculture, an agriculture that is reclaiming the soul of agriculture and returning spirituality to farming. They are creating new and better ways to farm and to live. These new family farmers face struggles and hardships and there are failures along the way. Life is rarely easy on any new frontier. But thankfully, a growing number are finding ways to succeed.

You and I, as food consumers, can help these farmers succeed. Every day, each of us makes choices that affect the ecological, social, and economic sustainability of the food system. My life overall most certainly is not a shining example of sustainability. But over the past few years, my wife and I have joined a CSA, where we go to a farm each week to get our season's supply of organic vegetables. We buy all of our pork from a group of local farmers, who raise their hogs without hormones and routine antibiotics, under human conditions. We buy all of our chickens and turkeys within a couple of miles from our home, from a local grower of pastured poultry. We pick our own blueberries and buy apples from local growers, whenever we can get them. We seek out restaurants that buy locally and feature local farmers on their menus. It may take a bit of looking, but every year more of these new farmers, in more communities, by a greater variety of means, are making more food items available to local customers.

Over the years, I have had the rare privilege of meeting with literally thousands of these new sustainable farmers, and their customers, – at hundreds of conferences scattered all across the American continent. Today, there are at least five “sustainable agriculture” conferences in the U.S., which draw 1,200 to 2,500 people each year, the vast majority of which are farmers. The people who attend these conferences are very different from the people I used to see, and still occasionally see, at conventional commercial agricultural conferences. These sustainable farmers are a diverse group – all ages, all income and education levels, both genders, and all styles of dress and appearance. But, these new farmers share a commitment not only to sustainability, but also to the principles that constitute the theme of this conference.

These new farmers are committed to family, as evidenced by the large number of whole families that attend and participate in their various gatherings. They are true family farmers, in that their farms and their family are inseparable – they are parts of the same thing, the same whole. Even if the “family” is an individual, or two or more related or unrelated individuals, they are still family farmers in that the “family” is inseparable from the land. The family has personal, caring relationships with each other, with their neighbors, and with the land. The farm and family are interconnected, not just economically, but also emotionally and spiritually.

These new farmers are committed to community. They are building new communities of interest, through active involvement in their various grass-roots organizations. The people who belong to sustainable agricultural organizations are not just business associates; they are friends, often “best friends.” In many organizations, a hug is a more common greeting than a handshake. In their communities of place, many of these new farmers are treated with some distrust and suspicion. However, they continue to try to help others around them to see the possibilities of a better life, not just through words, but through acts of true neighborliness.

These new farmers are committed to the land. To many of these farmers, stewardship of the earth is a sacred trust. The resources of the earth are not theirs to “use up,” but instead, theirs to conserve, to care for, and to pass on to the next generation as good as or better than they found them. The earth is a “sacramental commons” – a physical manifestation of its Creator, created for the benefit of all people, of all living things, of all times. To show disrespect to the creation is to show disrespect for the Creator. The sustainable farmers commitment to the land is not just

about sustaining productivity and profits, or even maintaining a pleasant place to live, but instead, is the essence of their being.

Finally, these new farmers are people of faith. Their faith in the basic goodness of other people gives them the courage to form the relationships of integrity and trust with other people that are necessary to help build healthy, productive families and communities. Their faith in the ultimate bounty of nature gives them the confidence to rely on working in harmony with nature, rather than trying to conquer nature, as a means of sustaining humanity. And, their faith in a “higher order of things,” in God, gives purpose and meaning to their relationships for each other and to their relationship with the earth. Sustainable farmers must be a people of faith.

These new American farmers are lighting the path back to happiness for the rest of us. As a nation, we have been working harder, making more money, and buying more “stuff,” but we have become a nation of increasingly disconnected, unhappy people. But, the happiness I see in the eyes of these new farm families, at conferences all across the continent, continually rekindles my hope not just for the future of American agriculture but also for the future of America.

To regain our lost sense of happiness, Americans must make time in our busy lives to restore broken relationships and find new purpose and meaning in our lives. We must renew our commitment to caring relationships with other people, to our families and our communities, and be willing to invest the time and effort to make them work. We must renew our commitment to stewardship of the earth, not as a matter of private benefit or even public interest, but because it is the right thing to do and the right way to live. We must learn to live in faith – faith in the goodness of people, faith in the bounty of the earth, and faith in that which transcends people and earth, in God.

In our growing commitments to family, community, land, and faith, we will reap the inevitable rewards of positive relationships and right living – we will find happiness. Sustainability, in farming and in life, asks that we do for others, as we would have them do for us – others, both of this generation and all generations to come. It applies the Golden Rule within and across generations. The Golden Rule is not just a religious concept, but is a part of nearly every enduring philosophy of all times. It is a prescription for happiness. Benjamin Franklin, in his later years, wrote that such commandments are not good for us because they are commanded, but rather are commanded because they are good for us – they allow us to be happy.

In the book of Amos in the Bible, God chastens the Israelites for their selfishness and religious hypocrisy with the commandment, “Let justice roll down like water and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (Amos 5:24).” This admonition was a not pronouncement of punishment; it was a prescription for right relationships. Today, the justice and righteousness that must guide sustainable farming and sustainable living do not represent sacrifices; instead, they represent a fundamentally better way to farm and a better way to live. Sustainable farming and sustainable living are about finding ways “to be happy.”