

Painting A New Picture: The New American Farm¹

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We are witnesses to the end of an era in American agriculture – some go so far as to call it the “end of the American farm.” Agriculture, at least as we have known it, may well be coming to an end. This picture of the future may not seem very pretty, but it is a real possibility. This picture is not unique to Kentucky farms, to tobacco farms, or even to American farms. The same basic trends now dominate agriculture in all of the developed economies of the world. If there is to be a bright future for farming in America, or in Kentucky, we will have to paint a new picture – a picture of the “new American farm.”

Since the end of World War II, American agriculture has been dominated by the process of industrialization. The process actually began in the early 1900s, with the introduction of agricultural mechanization. However, most farms of the 1930s and early 1940s were not all that different from farms at the turn of the century. Horses were still the dominate source of farm power, livestock manure and crop rotations were still the recommended means of maintaining soil fertility and controlling pests, and thus, small, diversified family farms were still the norm. However, wartime technologies heralded a new era in agriculture. In the late 1940s, factories that had made tanks for the war started turning out tractors for farms. Factories that had been designed to make gun power started turning out cheap nitrogen fertilizers instead. And technologies developed for chemical warfare were redirected to the development of agriculture pesticides. With these new “tools,” agriculture could finally be industrialized – a farm could be made to run like a factory.

For at least the past fifty years in America, we have been promoting the industrialization of agriculture. Farmers were encouraged to specialize – first to specialize in livestock or crops, then in specific livestock species or crops, and finally in a specific phase of livestock or crop production. Farm policies and agricultural technologies were designed to encourage specialization. Increased mechanization, along with more sophisticated use of commercial fertilizers and pesticides, made the agricultural production process more controllable. Crops were irrigated and animals were brought indoors, into confinement, to remove the uncertainty of weather. Production processes could now be standardized, making field and feedlots work like “biological assembly lines.” Finally, through specialization and standardization, agricultural production was simplified, routinized, and mechanized so that land previously supporting many small farms could now be consolidated into larger and larger farming operations.

The final stage of industrialization is consolidation of control – in order to achieve the economic efficiencies from large-scale, specialized production. Over the past several decades, we have seen industrial consolidation in terms of ever-fewer farmers and ever-larger farms. Today, we see the final phase of agricultural consolidation, the

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corporate takeover of agricultural production – in some cases through outright ownership, but in most cases through contract production. Individually owned and operated family farms quite simply are no longer large enough to compete in an increasingly global agricultural economy.

If there is to be a future for farming in America, it must be in a new and different kind of American farm. America simply can't depend on corporate farming – even if contract farming were made an acceptable way of life, which rarely is the case today. As costs of land and labor in the U.S. continue to rise, as they almost certainly will, multinational corporations will simply move their farming operations to other countries. Strong residential demand for land and good off-farm employment opportunities ultimately will destroy the ability of America to compete in the race “to the bottom” – the race among countries to produce food at the lowest dollar and cent cost. If there is to be a future in farming in America it must be in a new type of farming – a “new American farm.”

This new type of farming will require a fundamentally different way of thinking about farming. The industrialization of agriculture is the physical manifestation of a “mechanistic” worldview. The mechanistic way of thinking about the world goes back more than 400 years, to the “age of enlightenment” and the “birth of science.” Rene Descartes, a Frenchman, suggested that the world worked like a “big complex machine” – specifically like a big clock – with many interrelated but separable parts. Sir Isaac Newton, an Englishman, built upon Descartes' ideas and developed many of the fundamental principles of modern mechanical physics.

At first, the then new principles of physics were used only in dealing with “dead things” – inanimate materials, such as water, minerals, gases – as Descartes had suggested was their appropriate use. Over time, however, scientists began to use the same principles to study and to manipulate “living things” – even “thinking things,” such as human beings. Today, modern science treats all things as if they were mechanistic, including living things -- plants, animals, and humans. Muscles and bones are nothing more than a complex system of levers and pulleys, the circulatory system a complicated plumbing system with pumps and valves, and the mind, a sophisticated computer with electrical circuits and connections.

This mechanistic world view led to the many marvels of today's world of science. It provided the conceptual foundation for the industrial era of human progress. Machines could duplicate, extend, and eventually replace the productive processes of nature. Factories could be built that would use machines, fossil energy, and human labor to transform various raw materials into useful finished products, such as nature uses plants and solar energy to transform minerals from the earth into food and fiber. People were no longer dependent on nature. They could “manufacture” the things they needed or wanted. They didn't have to wait for nature to provide them.

The industrial era brought many benefits. It removed much of the drudgery from day to day life, it challenged the then constant specter of starvation, and it suppressed diseases to extend human life. Few would willingly choose to return to a pre-industrial society. However, in the past few decades, we have begun to realize that treating “living” things as if they were “dead” has inherent negative consequences. In fact,

nearly every social ill of today can be traced to the emotional separation of people, to the destruction of family and community, or to domination of the masses by the few – all consequences of a specialized, centrally-controlled economy. Nearly every environmental problem of today is a consequence of separating people from the land, the earth, and then treating an inherently diverse and dynamic natural ecosystem as if it were a specialized, standardized, controllable manufacturing process. The economic problems that today confront individually owned and operated small businesses are all direct consequences of consolidation of economic power and control during the industrial era. And, nowhere are these social, ecological, and economic problems more evident than on American farms.

A farm is a living organism – soils, plants, animals, people, all are living, growing organs. The social, ecological, and economic problems of American agriculture today are all direct consequences of treating the soil, plants, animals, and people as if they were separable, replaceable, mechanistic parts of some sort of sophisticated “biological factory.” The current “biotech craze” in the scientific community is but the latest product of an outdated worldview that life is nothing more than a sophisticated mechanical process. A farm is a living organism. And, farmers are real live, breathing, thinking, caring, people. Solutions to the current problems of American agriculture will require new ways of thinking – a new “living” worldview.

Machines are manmade; they are designed to perform specific functions to achieve a specific purpose. They may be well maintained, but all machines eventually wear out. Worn out machines must be discarded and may or may not be replaced. Living things are born, germinate, hatch, or otherwise come to life. As they grow and mature, they learn to perform various functions to fulfill their purpose in life. They may be well nurtured, but all living things eventually die. Before they die, however, living things have the capacity to reproduce themselves.

Living things are “self-making” – they have the capacity to grow and reproduce; dead things cannot. Thus, living things are dynamic; they are ever changing. However, the pattern of a living thing, its DNA, remains unchanged throughout its life. A human is always a human through all stages of life – whether it's a bouncing baby, a strong mature adult, or a feeble “senior citizen,” it's the “same” human. However, if the various parts of our bodies were surgically separated and laid side by side on an operating table, our life, the essence of who we are, obviously would have been destroyed. A living organism is more than the “sum of its parts” – living organisms are inseparable, holistic. Dividing an elephant into a dozen pieces obviously doesn't result in a dozen little elephants.

Farms are living organisms; they are regenerative, dynamic, and holistic. They are not machines or factories. If there is to be a future for farming in America, our ways of thinking about farming must reflect their dynamic, regenerative, and holistic nature. We must have the courage and wisdom to abandon the old, mechanistic worldview and adopt new, organismic ways of thinking about farming.

The new American farm will require, and will help create, a new rural culture. Farms do not exist in isolation. They are connected not only by their reliance on off-farm inputs

and off-farm markets, but also by their connectedness with the places and people, which surround them. Just as plants, animals, and farmers are parts of holistic farming systems, farms in turn are parts of rural landscapes and rural communities. The past preoccupation of many farmers with production and profits was, in no small part, a reflection of an economically dominated, industrial rural culture. It has become the “conventional wisdom” in many rural communities that the most successful farmers are those who have managed to survive by mining the soil, degrading the environment, taking advantage of consumers, and competing with their neighbors. If there is to be a future in farming in America, we must paint a new picture of rural communities, of a more holistic, life-centered rural culture – one that values “quality of life” over “standard of living.”

Quality of life is not just a matter of pursuing our economic self-interests – of earning income and accumulating wealth. Certainly, our quality of life is affected by our ability to meet our individual, physical and sensory needs – the essence of economic achievement. However, we humans are “social animals” – people need other people. Our quality of life is affected by the quality of our relationships with other people, within families and within communities – communities both of place and of interests. Our relationships have value, regardless of whether they result in anything of economic value. The value of love among people is truly priceless. People also are moral and ethical beings – we are spiritual, by nature. The quality of our life is affected by our sense of “right living.” We need to know that our lives have purpose and meaning – that we are living in harmony with some higher order of things.

Certainly, we benefit from being able to care for ourselves, to the extent that we are capable of doing so. The quality of our life is enhanced by economic sufficiency and security. However, the quality of our life is not diminished by our concerns for others. Caring for other people is not a sacrifice; it is a privilege. Our relationships with others, within families and communities, are important to our own quality of life. Neither is the quality of our life diminished by our concern for the natural environment. Stewardship, of the land, of the earth, is not a sacrifice; it is a privilege. Our relationship with the earth, with God's creation, helps give purpose and meaning to our lives. Caring for those of future generations is part of our purpose for being. The personal, the interpersonal, and the spiritual all are important dimensions of our quality of life. Our economic, ecological, and social relationships are all important to our well-being. The picture of the new American farm must be a part of a larger picture of a new rural culture, and a new human society.

The new American farm is emerging from our search for sustainability – for a way of farming that can meet our needs of the present, while leaving equal or better opportunities for those of the future. Sustainable agriculture probably is viewed by most people as an environmental issue. And in fact, many questions concerning sustainability do have their roots in the environmental movement. The concept of “sustainable agriculture” was first promoted in the public policy arena during the 1980s by the organic farming community – led by the Rodale Institute, a long-time advocate of environmental causes. So, it's only natural for people to relate sustainability with the environmental movement.

However, sustainable agriculture gained its initial credibility in the public policy arena as an economic issue. During the farm financial crisis of the 1980s, American farmers were caught in a financial squeeze between chronically depressed commodity prices and continually rising costs of production inputs – fertilizers, pesticides, fuels, etc. The organic farming community had been lobbying, without much success, to get the USDA to support research and education programs that would reduce, if not eliminate, farmers' reliance on commercial chemical inputs. A compromise between conventional farmers, who wanted to reduce input for economic reasons, and organic farmers, who wanted to reduce inputs, for philosophical reasons, resulted in the USDA's LISA (Low Input Sustainable Agriculture) research and education program.

The agribusiness community openly opposed the LISA program. They were not going to support any government program that might reduce the farmers' reliance on their products and decrease their profits. They used everything from making jokes about the LISA name, to raising the specter of mass starvation, to phony “research plots” using “no fertility or pest management” to represent LISA farming systems. In defense, the USDA changed the name of the program to Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) and shifted the focus from reducing inputs to long run sustainability.

The social dimension of sustainable agriculture rose to public awareness out of the SARE program. Sustainable agriculture was defined in the SARE legislation as systems of farming that, among other things, would “enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole.” In the legislative discussion, “quality of life” was defined to mean, to “increase income and employment -- especially self-employment -- opportunities in agricultural and rural communities and to strengthen the family farm system of agriculture, a system characterized by small and moderate sized farms which are principally owner operated” (Congressional Record 10/22/90:H11128). Thus, sustainable agriculture was defined to include social responsibility – to increase self-employment opportunities in rural communities and on owner-operated, small- and moderate-sized, family farms.

Thus, sustainable agriculture is about environmental integrity, about economic viability, and about social responsibility, but ultimately, it's about people. The fundamental purpose of agriculture is to meet the needs of people – to tip the ecological balance in favor of humans relative to other species. However, agriculture is rooted in nature – in soil, air, water, plants, animals, and the other elements of natural ecosystems. The earth and everything upon the earth, including people, are parts of that living, natural ecosystem. And, according to the fundamental principles of ecology, if we attempt to tip the balance of nature in favor of humans too far or too fast, we will destroy the integrity of the ecosystems of which we ourselves are a part.

The three dimensions of sustainability are not a matter of formal definition or legal precedent, but are a matter of common sense. If the land loses its ability to produce, the farm will not be sustainable. If the farmer goes broke, the farm will not be sustainable. And if a system of farming fails to support society, it will not be supported by society, and thus, it will not be sustainable. The economic, ecological, and social dimensions of sustainability are like the three dimensions of a box. All are necessary but none is sufficient. 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.

Ultimately, sustainable farming is about enhancing the “quality of life” of people. The economic, social, and ecological dimensions of sustainable agriculture are analogous to the personal, interpersonal, and intergenerational dimensions of quality of life. A sustainable farm contributes to a desirable quality of life for farmers, for people in rural communities, for society in general, both for those of this generation and for all generations to come. A sustainable farm contributes to the physical, mental, and spiritual well-being of farmers, of people in rural communities and for society in general, both now and in the future. The new American farm is emerging from farmers' searching for a higher “quality of life.”

There are literally thousands of these new sustainable farmers, all across the continent, creating new and better ways to farm. They may call themselves organic, biodynamic, holistic, ecological, natural, practical, or just plain family farmers, but they are all farming by the basic principles of sustainability. At least three regional “sustainable agriculture” conferences in the U.S. regularly draw from 1200 to 1500 farmers each year. Several more conferences draw from 300-500 per year, and the number with 100-200 in attendance are too many to count. Perhaps more important, their numbers, their enthusiasm, and their optimism for the future seems to be growing each year. These farmers are on the frontier of a new and different kind of agriculture. Certainly, they face struggles and hardships and there are failures along the way. Life is rarely easy on any new frontier. But, a growing number are finding ways to succeed.

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 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.

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, rather than try to convince their customers to buy whatever they

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>)

produce. 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 bring people together in positive, productive relationships that contribute to their 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. For full-time farming families, the farm must return a net cash income. But for many, one or more members of the farm family works off the farm to earn the cash income needed to buy those things that can't be produced on the farms. So even if the farm just breaks even, it still may be making a major contribution to a highly desirable quality of life for the family.

For these farmers, 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. 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.

At the beginning of this new century, Kentucky has a unique opportunity to take a leading role in helping to create the “new American farm.” The past dependence of the state's farm economy on tobacco may provide now both the motive and the means for transforming Kentucky agriculture into a new, post-industrial farm economy. The loss of markets for America's tobacco farmers is different only in timing and magnitude from the pending loss of markets for American growers of soybeans, corn, wheat, cotton, peanuts, fruit, vegetables, cattle, hogs, poultry, and other such commodities. Increasingly over time, all such basic agricultural commodities will be grown in other parts of the world where land and labor costs are cheaper.

Technology and capital are now moved around the world in search of their highest returns on investment. Increasingly, multinational corporations will make the decisions regarding where tobacco is grown and who grows it, just as they do today for chickens,

hogs, many fruits and vegetables, and will do in the future for all basic agricultural commodities. Increasingly, those decisions will be to produce agricultural commodities somewhere other than in America. The current crisis in tobacco may force Kentucky farmers to confront the new realities of agriculture now, while many producers in other states continue to live in denial, perhaps, until it's too late.

Kentucky's newly acquired tobacco settlement funds provide Kentucky farmers with the means of making the transition to a new post-industrial farm economy. The share of those funds allocated to the transformation of farming may or may not represent the farmers' fair share, but they constitute a far larger fund for agricultural transition than is available in any other state. It would be a tragedy if those funds were allowed to be squandered on programs that simply support and accelerate the industrialization of Kentucky agriculture. The opportunity to build a new farm economy will be lost if those funds are diverted to biotechnology, info-technologies, and other high-tech means of transforming farms into "biological factories."

The opportunity for a new rural economy will be lost if tobacco settlement funds are used to lure corporate investors, who invariably exploit both rural people and their natural environment, into rural areas. If such investments hold any promise for the future, which is highly unlikely, that promise will be realized by private investors in their pursuit of profits. Public funds should be restricted to use for initiatives from which the public will benefit, but for which private incentives are either absent or inadequate. The creation of a sustainable agriculture – for the benefit of farm families, rural communities, and society in general, for all generations of humanity – provides a prime example of legitimate public investment.

The development of a new, sustainable farm economy will require a very different approach from that of industrial, economic development. The stages of developing the new farm economy should be patterned after the "stages of life," not after the stages of building a factory. The stages of life include conception, birth, early development, growth, maturity, productivity, and regeneration before death – in an endless cycle.

The first stage in a "living systems" approach to development is to define the purpose of the process. The purpose expressed in the 2001 "draft" of "Kentucky's Long Term Comprehensive Plan for Agricultural Development" is "to preserve and enhance the social fabric of Kentucky while building a sustainable economic base rooted in local communities and local ecology." This statement would seem to provide a reasonable starting point for the development process – although, with dynamic living systems, the purpose must continually be reassessed. In "natural" living systems, such as humans, the purpose is defined at some "higher level" of organization – still, we humans must continually reassess "our perceptions" of the purpose for our life.

The "conception" of the development process occurs with the selection of a set of guiding principles. The principles, by which a process is carried out define the basic nature of the process, and thus, determine whether or not it can fulfill its initial purpose. Principles provide the conceptual DNA. The DNA of living things determines what they are -- plants, animals, insects, humans, etc. – but it also defines the uniqueness of each member of each living species. Likewise, principles define the basic nature of a

development process, industrial, sustainable, etc., as well as define the uniqueness of particular development initiatives.

The number and nature of guiding principles should be sufficient to ensure that, if followed, the purpose will be achieved. However, principles that are not necessary for achievement of the purpose should be omitted, to avoid unnecessary complexity and distraction. For example, the principles of sustainable development are ecological integrity, economic viability, and social responsibility. Any process which follows these principles will be sustainable, any process that does not, will not. The three principles are both necessary and sufficient.

The principles put forth in the CFA “Greenprint” for Kentucky's Agricultural Economy reflect a commitment to a grassroots process of community economic “self-development.” “Local economies are the foundation for a strong state economy.” “Political and economic democracies begin with local people who plan their own future.” “Fostering a ‘culture of learning,’ which places a premium on fresh, high quality food.” These are all statements of commitment to building a strong farm economy and strong rural communities from the “inside out” and from the “ground up.”

After conception comes birth and early development. The “living systems” approach assumes that development processes require different types of support during the early phases of development than will be required at later stages. Industrial developers prefer to bring “full grown” industries into their communities so they can immediately realize whatever benefits are to be achieved. However, these “outside” industries have no “natural ties” to the community – they didn't “grow up” there. They have no commitment to contribute to the community in any way that does not fulfill their short-run corporate economic objectives. Sustainable, grassroots development must come from local people – from people who are committed to the future of the community. Their ideas must be encouraged and nurtured; their initiatives must be supported, so eventually, their “infant” ventures will grow to maturity. And in the process, those who are new in the role of business and politics will grow to become community leaders with a commitment to helping others to grow and mature.

The stages of birth and early development should focus on the creation and dissemination of knowledge – on empowering people to solve their own problems and to realize their unique opportunities. The “food” for the “early development of knowledge” is “information.” And, the type of information provided must be appropriate for “living processes.” Sustainable farming, for example, requires a fundamentally different approach to research and education than does industrial agriculture. Public institutions must be redirected to creating and disseminating information and technologies appropriate for Kentucky's new farm economy. Public policies should provide “protection” for the process, at least during the stages of “early development.” Public policies must be redesigned or redirected, as appropriate, to nurture Kentucky's new farm economy. Public policies for Kentucky's new approach to sustainable, community self-development must be fundamentally different from the industrial development policies of the past.

The developmental stages of growth, productivity, and maturity, in a living process, require little more than encouragement. Access to financing, appropriate marketing infrastructure, accommodative laws, and facilitating regulations are a few examples of the types of encouragement that local agricultural entrepreneurs need to grow, develop, and become mature, productive members of their communities and of society. The key to success in the “living systems” approach to development is to focus on people rather than production and profits. Once people have achieved a desirable quality of life – economically, socially, and spiritually – they will be committed to the well-being of others, both today and in the future.

Mature members of “living communities” will accept the social responsibilities of caring for others as a privilege, not as a sacrifice. Mature members of “living communities” will accept the responsibilities of stewardship of nature, as a privilege, not as a sacrifice. Mature members of “living communities” will accept their responsibilities to “regenerate” their community, not to abandon it. They will participate with others in the process of “conception and birth” of the new ideas needed to sustain new generations of people. They will contribute to the “early development and growth” of others who will grow and mature to fulfill their responsibilities in the future. They will help care for the “aged and dying” of the community, because they will know at some future time their work too will be done.

Finally, the key ingredients of a successful “living systems” approach to development are the same as the key ingredients of a successful life – faith, hope, and love. Those who successfully pursue truly sustainable approaches to development must have a fundamental faith in people, a faith in nature, and faith in some “higher order of things,” in God, to give purpose and meaning to their life.

People who succeed in sustainable development also must be people of hope. Hope is not the expectation that something good is destined to happen, or even that the odds favor something good, but rather, that something good is possible. It is this “possibility” of something good that gives us the courage to challenge the conventional wisdom, to denounce the status quo, to try new and different things, because we hope to achieve something better.

The final ingredient to success in sustainable development is love. No one, in my opinion, expresses the very practical connection between sustainability and love better than Wendell Berry – although, he doesn't specifically use the word. In his book of essays, What Are People For? he writes, “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.” In essence, he is saying, if agriculture is to be sustainable, we must have people on the land who love the land.

Applying that same concept of love to rural communities, “if our rural communities are to remain viable, they must preserve the productivity of rural people, their physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being; rural people, that is, must be treated well. A further

requirement is that if people are to treat each other well, they must know each other well, must be motivated to treat each other well, must have time to treat each other well, and must be able to afford to treat each other well. If our rural communities are to be sustainable, we must have people in rural communities who love each other.

Agriculture as we have known it in the past is coming to an end. If there is to be a future in farming, we must paint a new picture of agriculture – we must create the “new American farm.” The new American farm will require new ways of thinking. We must replace the old mechanistic worldview and industrial model of development with a new “living” worldview and a new sustainable model of development. Thousands of farmers all across America are already creating the new American farm, but Kentucky has a unique opportunity to help paint this new picture and create a new farm economy. But, the people of Kentucky must have the wisdom and vision to create a new future and the courage to challenge the outdated, industrial approach to economic development.

The new vision must focus on life, because farms and communities are living organisms – not machines or factories. The new vision must focus on sustainability – economic viability, ecological integrity, and social responsibility. The new vision must focus on a more desirable quality of life for people – economically, socially, and ecologically. The new approach must be a grass roots approach to community self-development – not industrial development. The new approach to development must be based on the stages of development of living systems, from birth, to maturity, to regeneration.

But most important the new picture of rural America must be painted with faith, hope, and love. All three are important in painting the picture of the new farm economy, but the greatest of these is love – of the land, of each other, and of God. The picture of the new farm economy, ultimately, must be a picture painted with love.