

Agriculture: A Legacy of Land and Peopleⁱ

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“The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation,” so Henry Thoreau wrote in his classic book, Walden.¹ Reflecting on life in America in the mid-nineteenth century, he continued, “Most men in this relatively free country, through mere ignorance and mistake, are so occupied with the factitious cares and superfluously coarse labors of life that the finer fruits cannot be plucked by them.” Thoreau could just as accurately have been describing twenty-first century American farmers. No other group within American society seems quite so resigned to a life of hopelessness and despair, as does the American farmer. As a Nebraska farm equipment dealer recently put it, “Farmers complain about not having enough money, even in good years. If it's raining, they complain; if the wind is blowing too much, they complain. It just seems like they're never happy.”² He was referring specifically to recent comments of farmers, following a year of record net farm incomes in 2004.

Perhaps, farmers would be happier today if their recent good fortunes had come from the marketplace. In fact, more than twenty percent of last year's net farm income came from government payments and nearly ten percent from sales of production carried over from previous years. In addition, farm exports were supported by the weakest U.S. dollar in years, and cattle prices were buoyed by the Canadian border being closed to beef imports. In fact, USDA economists recently projected that 2005 U.S. agricultural imports may exceed exports for the first time since the late '50s. A year of good crops and good prices are not going to make U.S. farmers more competitive with farmers in South America, China, and elsewhere, where farmers pay only a fraction of what U.S. farmers must pay for land and labor.

Most farmers know that something is fundamentally wrong in American agriculture, even if they don't understand what it is. Any increase in their profits is quickly passed on to their landlords through higher rental rates, at least for the more than half of all farming carried out on rented land. Agribusiness firms takes a large share of what's left, by raising prices on farm equipment, fertilizer, fuel and other inputs. In addition, more profit one year invariably means farmers will produce more the next year, meaning lower prices and less income to cover ever-higher costs of land, equipment, and production inputs. Farming is a never-ending battle for economic survival.

Over the past several decades, most farmers have not survived. The number of farms today is less than one-third of farm numbers of the 1930s. Today, the largest 10-percent of all farming operations (170,000 of America's 2.1 million farms) now produce more than 70-percent of all agricultural products and receive nearly 70-percent of all government subsidies. Small farmers seem to be holding their own, but the middle-class of farming is disappearing. The surviving mid-sized farmers increasingly are contract growers for giant agribusiness corporations, where

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corporations make the important decisions, take most of the risks, and thus, take all of the profit – leaving contract growers with little more than minimum wage incomes. Even those farmers who are surviving economically have sacrificed their quality of life. “Farming just isn't fun anymore,” is a commonplace comment in farming communities. It's not just a matter of lack of profitability. Many farmers no longer seem to feel they are a part of their community. Many seem to suffer from a sense of guilt, rooted in a lack of integrity and trust in their relationships with people, but also with their animals and with the land. Even the so-called successful farmers advise their children to leave the community and to get a good education, so they can do something other than farm for a living. As one Nebraska farmer put it, "Out here, the joke is that anyone who tries to get their kid to go into farming is encouraging a form of child abuse."³ For many, farming in America has become a life of despair.

Desperation may be defined as “a hopeless or reckless feeling; a readiness to run any risk.”⁴ Unlike the farm financial crisis of the 1980s, today's farm crisis is reflected in *quiet* desperation. In the ‘80s, feelings of hopelessness led to recklessness and a readiness to run any risk. The crisis of the ‘80s was punctuated by farmer's acts of desperation, including armed resistance to farm foreclosures and even murder and suicide. Today's crisis is more often characterized by a gradual resignation to a life without hope, a *quiet* desperation. Because of its quietness, the crisis goes largely unnoticed by the rest of society. Congress continues to approve large farm subsidies, on behalf of taxpayers, with the assurance that such programs are necessary to ensure an “abundant supply of safe and healthful food at a reasonable cost.” Taxpayers are led to believe that a high-tech, biotech, global agriculture in their best assurance of food security.

Few Americans seem to realize that we are still as dependent on the land for our daily sustenance and survival as when all people were hunters and gathers. Our dependence is less direct and our connections more complex, but human life, as is all life, is still critically connected to life in the soil and to the farmers who help nurture life from the soil. The only real food security any nation has is in the organic matter of its soil and in the people who tend it. Yet, despite the importance of land to us individually, to our nation, and to humanity, the health and productivity of our farmland is routinely placed in peril. Farmland is at risk from soil erosion, agrochemical contamination, salinization, over-application of animal wastes, and a host of other threats posed by the industrialization of agriculture. But, it is also imperiled by poorly planned development, especially in urbanizing areas. A complex set of economic and political forces is driving the conversion of some of our best farmlands in the world into urban residential and commercial developments.

In the United States alone, between 1992 and 1997, more than 11 million acres of rural land were converted to residential and commercial use—and more than half of the land converted was agricultural land.⁵ On average, more than 1 million acres of U.S. farmland were developed each year during this period. This rate was more than 50-percent higher than the rate reported in the previous decade, and there is reason to believe that the rate of conversion has accelerated since 1997. While a million acres per year may seem small in relation to the 930 million acres of U.S. farmland, an acre lost to urbanization is an acre irretrievably lost from human food production.

In spite of our proclamations of personal independence, people are as dependent on each other as they are on the land. We depend on each other for life and for quality of life as much as when

people lived in clans, tribes, or agrarian communities, largely isolated from the rest of humanity. Our relationships have become less personal and our dependencies more complex and less clear, but few of us could prosper, or even survive for very long, without other people. Perhaps even more important, millions of us suffer a diminished quality of life, because we have lost our sense of *personal* connectedness to other people. Yet people everywhere continue to leave caring communities and accept urban isolation in their quest for greater individual wealth and general economic prosperity. And, we question why society seems less trusting, less civil, more abrasive, and more violent.

Most Americans apparently do not connect growing distrust, incivility, conflict, and violence with our growing lack of personal connectedness to each other and to the land. People have a basic understand of the importance of human culture; that patterns of behavior are passed from one generation to the next, with each generation learning and passing along their knowledge to the next. They understand that American is going through cultural change. However, in today's America, there is little understanding of the importance of the culture of agri-culture in shaping human culture; that today's culture is a reflection of yesterday's agriculture and that tomorrow's culture depends on the legacy left by today's agriculture. Little attention is given to the critical importance of the agricultural legacy of land and people. If we destroy the productivity of the land or have no one who knows how to nurture life from the land, there will be no future for humanity.

Today's American society was possibly only because of an increasingly productive agriculture, which allowed fewer farmers to provide better food to more people at a lower cost. People were freed from farming to work in the factories and offices of an industrializing society and cheaper food freed consumer income to purchase the things produced in those factories and offices. However, the industrial farming methods successfully employed to improve agricultural productivity had unintended consequences. Today, the continued specialization, standardization, consolidation of agriculture is destroying the biological culture of the land and the agri-culture of rural communities, and thus, is placing in peril the future of the nation and of humanity. The quiet desperation of today's farmers is in no small part a realization that they are incapable of passing on the essential legacy of agriculture, not just for future generations of farmers, but also, for future generations of Americans and of humanity.

Thankfully, farmers are not the only ones who realize that something is fundamentally wrong in American agriculture. Residents of many rural communities are voicing increasing concerns about the pollution of groundwater and streams with pesticides and fertilizers from specialized cropping systems and with manure runoff and spills from large-scale confinement animal feeding operations or CAFOs. Many people now know that agriculture has become the number one non-point source of stream pollution in the U.S.,⁶ and a growing “dead zone” in the Gulf of Mexico is attributed largely to agricultural pollution sources.⁷ The agricultural establishmentⁱⁱⁱ typically denies blame for these problems, but no one can reasonably deny the reality of growing public concerns regarding the negative ecological impacts of agricultural industrialization.

ⁱⁱⁱ The agricultural establishment includes agribusiness, the USDA, agricultural universities, commodity groups, and some general farm organizations, such as the Farm Bureau Federation.

The negative social and economic impacts industrialization have on rural communities also are sources of growing concern. As farms became larger, farm families became fewer, and fewer farm families meant not only fewer dollars spent on clothes, hardware, and haircuts in town, but also, fewer children in schools, fewer families in church, fewer people to volunteer for fire departments, for town council, and for other public services. Larger farms also typically by-pass their local communities when buying machinery, fuel, and production inputs and when selling their products. They can get a “better deal” by going straight to the manufacturer or processor. Today, the management, if not ownership, of even the largest farming operations is being consolidated under the control of giant multinational agribusiness corporations through comprehensive contractual arrangements. The agricultural establishment may argue that the abandonment of rural places is inevitable, but no one can reasonably deny that the demise of small and mid-sized family farms is destroying rural communities.

Most economists, like the agricultural establishment, seem unconcerned about the industrialization of American agriculture. To economists, it is a just a matter of farmers and corporations minimizing their costs of production. Consumers benefit from lower cost food and the farmers who are displaced ultimately find employment in urban areas, doing something in which they can compete in the global labor market. Many seem to believe that we still have too many farmers to allow efficient food production. They claim that many farmers have been able to survive only because of protectionist farm subsidies, and removing these subsidies will result in a more efficient allocation of resources. Higher profits for corporate investors and economic benefits for contract producers will more than offset losses in farm income, they say, leaving the agricultural economy stronger than before.

Unlike most economists, I believe there is something very wrong with what's happening in American agriculture today. It may make economic sense, but it just doesn't make common sense. Being an economist is no excuse for ignoring ecological and social reality. How can agriculture meet the food and fiber needs of a growing population if we destroy the natural productivity and regenerative capacity of the land? Economists generally assume that we will find substitutes for anything we use up and will fix any ecological or social problems we create; but these are simply beliefs with no logical, scientific support in fact. What is the *net* benefit of an agriculture that meets the physical needs of people but separates families, destroys communities, and diminishes the overall quality of life within society? How can it possibly be right or good to defile the earth, even if it is profitable to do so? Economists simply don't consider the social, psychological, or ethical consequences of the things people do to make money. Economics treats such things as social or ecological *externalities*, which may impose irrational limits and constraints on our legitimate pursuit of wealth. Economics credits no value to the legacy of agriculture, in terms of either land or people.

Obviously, I am not a typical economist, although I have been an economist for more than thirty-five years, serving on the faculties of four major U.S. universities. For nearly half of those years, I thought pretty much like most other neoclassical economists. I believed the market was always right, I believed that bigger was generally better, and I believed in the conventional wisdom of farming for the bottom line. I believed those who succeeded in the future would be those who viewed the farm as a business, not as a way of life. I thought that family farms were relics of the past and that the future of a farm depended solely on its economic bottom line.

However, my beliefs were shaken by the farm financial crisis of the 1980s, when many of the farmers who lost their farms had been doing the things we economists had recommended. In talking face to face with many of these farmers, these real people, I began to understand that a family farm is much more than a business. The true family farm is a part of the family and the family is a part of the farm; the two are inseparable. Losing a family farm is like losing a member of the family, or losing one's self; perhaps, that's why the thoughts of so many farmers turned to suicide at the prospect of losing their farms.

Equally important, I learned that many farmers were not in severe financial difficulty, even though all were feeling a financial squeeze at that time. Many farmers had not followed the advice of us so-called experts. They were not overly specialized; they had maintained some diversity of enterprises, and some enterprises were still profitable. They had minimized their dependence on costly chemical inputs and farm equipment, so their cost-price squeeze wasn't quite so tight. They had not bought land to expand their operations, so their debts were more manageable. The farmers we economists had branded as laggards – resisters of new technologies and new ideas – were at least coping with one of the most severe economic farm crises of the century.

I eventually concluded that we economists were simply out of touch with reality. We had been trying to transform farming into something that it was not and could not be. We had treated the farm as if it were simply a factory without a roof and fields and feedlots as if they were biological assembly lines. We had encouraged farmers to specialize, standardize, and consolidate, as if farming were a manufacturing process, simply transforming inputs into outputs. We had ignored the value of *culture* in agriculture, both the culture of the land and of people.

A farm is not a factory, plant and animal production are not mechanical processes, and thus, real farming is fundamentally different from working on an assembly line or managing a factory. Farming isn't just about minimizing costs or maximizing profits; it's about nurturing and caring for living things – plants, animals, people, and even the wild things of the fields and forests and living things in the soil. The family nurtures the farm and the farm nurtures the family, and the family nurtures, and is nurtured by, the biological and social community.

In farming, there are cultures of the land and people that must be nurtured and passed on from one generation to the next. The regenerative capacity of land and people is essential to the sustainability of human food production, and thus, of human life on earth. This capacity for regeneration is the legacy of agriculture. In our efforts to make American agriculture more efficient and productive, we had taken the culture out of agri-culture by transforming it into agri-business. In the process, we had destroyed the legacy of agriculture.

Webster defines culture as “integrated patterns of human behavior – including thoughts, speech, action, and artifacts – which depend on an ability to learn and to pass knowledge from one generation to the next.” Culture is a reflection of beliefs concerning what is important, relevant, and appropriate. In agri-culture, land is a sacred trust – something to be used, but also protected and nurtured, so it can be passed on to the next generation as healthy and productive as when it was passed to this generation from the last. In agri-business, land is a financial asset, to be cared

for only insofar as the expected economic payoff exceeds the investment, and to be sold to the highest bidder or discarded once it has been used up.

In agri-culture, farmers are stewards of earth, which means taking care of something for the benefit of others, even when no individual benefit accrues to the caretaker. In agri-culture, farmers are members of families, of communities, and of society, who benefit from positive relationships with other people, even when there is no individual economic benefit. In agri-business, farmers are executives. Executives are expected to manage land, labor, capital, and risks so as to maximize the individual, financial interest of the organization. Others, both of present and future generations, are expected to look out for their own self-interests. In agri-business, farmers attempt to salve their conscious with the popular illusion that markets will somehow transform their greed into good.

In agri-culture, farmers work in harmony with nature, nurturing the natural ability of plants and animals to capture and to transform solar energy into foods and fibers of usefulness and of value to people. In agri-culture, farmers work in harmony with their communities and society, trusting that they will be rewarded – economically, socially, and spiritually – for the diversity of benefits that farming provides to people. In agri-business, farmers work to conquer nature – to eliminate its pests and supplant its nutrients, divert its moisture, subvert its energy – to make nature conform to the preferences of people. In agri-business, people are consumers or laborers to be exploited for profits, not friends, neighbors, or fellow citizens to be valued for their inherent worth. In agri-business, people, like land, are to be cultivated as long as they are useful, and discarded when they are used up.

Agri-culture is built upon a legacy of land and people, handed down from past generations, and builds upon that legacy for the benefit of future generations. Agri-business extracts its benefits through the exploitation of land and people, whose productive capacities have been built over previous generations of investments. The tremendous productivity of agri-business is achieved by mining the resource legacy of agri-culture, but it leaves no legacy for the future. People are still as dependent upon the legacy of land as when we were all hunters and gatherers. And, without the legacy of agri-culture, there can be no legacy for human-culture.

These indeed are desperate times for agriculture and for American culture. At times, we may seem justified in having “hopeless or reckless feeling; a readiness to run any risk.” But, as Thoreau wrote, “It is a characteristic of wisdom not to do desperate things.” In other words, it is not wise to resign ourselves to living on the edge of hopelessness and despair. We need to confront the conventional wisdom of agri-business with the common sense of agri-culture. We need to confront ignorance with wisdom, and restore the land and people, and to reclaim the legacy of agri-culture.

Thankfully, the culture in agriculture is being reclaimed today by those who are responding to growing public concerns about the negative ecological, social, and economic consequences of agribusiness. In the process of developing an agriculture that is ecologically sound, socially just, and economically viable, we are rediscovering that the sustainability of agriculture depends upon the agri- but also on the culture. 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. A sustainable agriculture must always leave a legacy of healthy and productive land and people.

My first understanding of sustainable agriculture was that of a *balanced* approach to farming. “Balanced farming” was the name of a highly successful extension program back in the 1950s that had focused on balancing farm profitability, soil conservation, and family living. The program had been driven by the need to increase farm income, but without degrading the land or the quality of family life. Sustainable agriculture, on the other hand, was being driven more by the environmental concerns being raised by a profit-driven, industrialization of agriculture. But, the needs for farm income and for a desirable quality of farm and rural life were still there.

By the early ‘90s, people were beginning to understand that an agriculture that degraded the land and polluted the natural environment simply could not sustain its productivity over time. People were also beginning to understand that an agriculture that couldn't meet the needs of society – not just as consumers, but as farmers, rural residents, and people in general – would not be supported by society, and thus, was not sustainable. And, everyone still understood that agriculture had to be profitable, at least periodically, if farmers were to survive financially. So, farming sustainably was about finding balance and harmony among the ecological, economic, and social aspects of farming. It was about stewardship of the land and positive relationships among people.

Through my work with a new breed of farmers, I rediscovered the culture of agriculture. Over the past five years, I have had the privilege of speaking at about 35 different venues a year, and most of those were conferences attended by what I call *sustainable* farmers. In truth, we never know for sure whether a farming system is or isn't sustainable, but these farmers balance economic, ecological, and social considerations in their decisions. The new crop producers may label their products as organic, natural, biodynamic, holistic, ecological, or simply rely on being *local* as a market advantage. Producers of meat, milk, and eggs may further distinguish their products as humanely raised, hormone and antibiotic free, free-range, or grass-fed. These conferences range in size from a few dozen people to a few thousand, but there are at least six conferences in North America that average over 1200 attendees a year and several others draw 400-500 people. The larger of these conferences tend to draw a very high proportion of farmers. I never pass up an opportunity to visit with farmers wherever I go and most of what I know about sustainable farming today, I have learned from farmers.

The agri-culturists I have met along the way are very different from the agri-business producers with whom I had worked previously. First, they are much more diverse, with respect to age, gender, education, and income. Second, more families, including children, attend sustainable agriculture conferences, and the whole family participates, often as presenters and well as attendees. Third, these new farmers willingly share ideas and information; they are trying to help each other succeed. Perhaps because of the other differences, these new agriculturalists tend to be much more hopeful, if not optimistic, about the future than are most farmers today. These new farmers are on a new frontier of farming, and life is rarely easy for the pioneers on any frontier. They face many frustrations, and some failures, along the way, because no one really knows how to do what they are doing. But, more and more of these new agriculturalists

are finding ways to succeed. And, they define success not just in terms of profit, but in terms of quality of life, which includes social, ecological, and economic considerations.

I am not trying to shove the idea of sustainable agriculture down anyone's throat. It really doesn't matter what you call it. As long as the farm is sustainable, it will result in a more desirable quality of life, for farmers, farm families, and for society as a whole. It will leave a continuing legacy of healthy and productive land and people for generations of the future. You can call it practical farming, balanced farming, common sense farming, or agri-culture, if you don't like the sustainable label. Perhaps, the basic ideas would be clearer and more acceptable to the agricultural establishment if we referred to it as farming for the triple bottom line.

The triple bottom line is a business concept that first came to widespread attention in corporate management circles in the late 1990s and has since gained in popularity among businesses of all types.⁸ Managing for a triple bottom line suggests managing for balance among the economic, environmental, and social dimensions of business performance, rather than maximizing profits or growth. Triple bottom line managers recognize that businesses lacking social and ecological integrity are not economically viable over the long run; their costs eventually increase and customer loyalty declines. So they focus on conserving non-renewable resources and protecting the environment, and on being a good neighbor and good corporate citizen, as means of maintaining long run profitability.

In many situations, they find that paying more attention to social and ecological performance can actually improve economic performance, even in the short run. They may find ways to transform wastes into economic inputs and to increase production while using fewer costly, non-renewable resources.⁹ They may also find ways to reduce labor costs and create new markets by developing and maintaining better relationships with their workers, their customers, and others in the communities in which they operate.¹⁰ In general, they improve their efficiency in converting ecological and social resources into economic advantages.

However, triple bottom line management has its legitimate skeptics. Businesses have always claimed to be good neighbors and good corporate citizens, but such claims have rarely been allowed to take precedent over maximizing corporate profits.¹¹ Even Monsanto and DuPont, for example, have “sustainable agriculture” programs. In such cases, the triple bottom line becomes little more than a public relations gimmick. On the other hand, there are clear exceptions to this strategy of deception, such as Ray Anderson, of Interface Inc., a large carpet manufacturer. Anderson travels the country proclaiming the benefits of triple bottom line management and provides his corporate financial records as compelling evidence that even a large publicly owned corporation can be profitable as well as socially and ecologically responsible.¹² In the food business, Paul Dolan, former CEO of Fetzer, the sixth largest winery in the U.S., is a prime example of a triple bottom line manager.¹³ New Season Markets in Portland, OR, a locally owned, five-store modern supermarket chain managed by Brian Rother, provides another example of a food business managed for triple-bottom-line.¹⁴

However, the true triple bottom line manager, large or small, must be willing to give as high a priority to being a good neighbor and being a good steward of nature as on being a profitable business. At times, this means that profits will be less than if the manager had been willing to

pollute a little more or exploit a little more to cut costs or increase sales. The true triple bottom line manager must realize that his or her advantage and uniqueness is in the integrity of the business – in its commitment to good citizenship and stewardship – not in short run economic efficiency. If that integrity is ever compromised for the sake of efficiency, the uniqueness is lost and the market advantage is gone. True triple bottom line management requires a faith that valuing right relationships is the right strategy to succeed in business, as it is in life.

Nowhere is the potential for success in sustainable, triple bottom line farming greater than in urbanizing areas. Sustainable farming does not threaten the health and productivity of the land or the health and environment of its neighbors. Instead, sustainability depends on the natural productivity of the land and the support of the community for its productivity and profitability. Sustainable agriculture is a land-friendly, people-friendly approach to farming. It provides a means of building positive relationships of respect and trust between farmers and their new neighbors in urbanizing areas. With the triple bottom approach, farms and residential developments can coexist, and even build new thriving rural communities, by sharing the same spaces for farming and development.

Farms can be good places to live and raise a family, both on and around. Thus, productive farmland might well take the place of green belts or golf courses in urban residential developments, with residences clustered in the more aesthetic, less productive ridges, draws, and wooded fringes. Individual residential lots might include a share of the farmland, with the farmland held by the community in common. The former farmer-landowner could realize the full economic value from the land for development, while retaining the privilege of farming the land on behalf of his or her new community members. Residents could be afforded many of the amenities of life on a family farm, without having to learn to do the farming. Permanent land-use restrictions could be placed on such developments to prevent future reversion of the farmland to more-intensive residential development.

In other situations, high-density residences could be clustered in less-desirable farming areas, creating small but efficient urban areas surrounded of open farmland. Developers of the urban centers could be required to buy development rights from the surrounding areas, leaving productive farmland to be farmed while creating desirable places for people to live. Potential positive solutions to farming and living in an increasingly crowded world are endless. The key is the pursuit of harmony through sustainability in farming and living, which requires ecological integrity and social responsibility, to ensure economic viability for all concerned. Mutual respect and consideration arises from the realization that caring for neighbors and caring for the earth, as we care for ourselves, is simply a more desirable way to work and to live.

Sustainable farming and sustainable living, people living in harmony with each other and with the land, would be a highly desirable way of life, a way of life that parents would be proud to pass on their children. Thus, respect for the land and respect for people would again become an important part of agriculture and American culture, a legacy of healthy, productive land and people, to be passed from one generation to the next.

This vision of sustainable farming communities may seem idealistic, but these concepts are not radical or new. They have been used in Europe for centuries, where farmland surrounds small

villages where even the farmers live. These so-called “cluster housing developments” have been very popular in rural areas, particularly in the eastern United States. Surveys have shown that residents generally rate them very highly as places to live, and they have maintained their property values well.¹⁵ A new breed of agri-culturists could not only save farmland from industrial degradation and urbanization, but also could save existing rural communities and help build healthy new communities in urbanizing areas. Farmers on the urban fringe need to break free of their quite desperation of rising land prices and complaining neighbors and open their eyes to new opportunities through new ways of farming.

Perhaps the odds are against restoring sustainable to farming or reclaiming the cultural legacy of agriculture. However, these things are still worthy of our best thoughts and efforts. There certainly seems little reason for optimism, but there most certainly is reason for hope. Hope is not the certainty or even the expectation, but instead, the *possibility* that something good can happen. In the words of Vaclav Havel, the philosopher, reformer, and past Czech president:

Hope is not the same as joy when things are going well, or willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously headed for early success, but rather, an ability to work for something to succeed. Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It's not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out. It is this hope, above all, that gives us strength to live and to continually try new things, even in conditions that seem hopeless.

Life is too precious to permit its devaluation by living pointlessly, emptily, without meaning, without love and, finally, without hope.¹⁶

Things may seem desperate in agriculture today, and success at best may seem difficult and distant. But still, there is hope. As long as farmers have the courage and ability to be good stewards, good neighbors, and good citizens, there is hope. Caring for the land and caring for other people, as we care for ourselves, has always made sense, and in this common sense of the rightness of caring, there is hope. It is this hope that gives farmers the ability to continue to learn how to work in harmony with the land and with people, and to pass on their knowledge on to farmers of the future. In this continuing culture of agriculture, in this legacy of land and people, there is hope.

And finally, regardless of the challenges and difficulties, life is simply too precious to permit its devaluation by living pointlessly, emptily, without meaning, without faith, without love, and finally, without hope.

End Notes

- ¹ Henry David Thoreau. 1854. *Walden*, republished by Signet Classic, New American Library, Penguin Putnam Inc., New York, NY. (p 5).
- ² Timothy Egan. 2004. New York Times, December 22. As quoted in Al Kerbs' Agribusiness Examiner, Everett, WA, avkrebs@earthlink.net
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- ⁴ World Book Dictionary, 2002 Standard Edition.
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- ¹² Ray Anderson. 1998. Mid-Course Correction: Toward a Sustainable Enterprise: The Interface Model. Chelsea Green Publishers, White River Junction, VT.
- ¹³ The Fetzer Environmental philosophy at http://www.fetzer.com/about/stor_envi.html
- ¹⁴ New Seasons Market website, <http://www.newseasonsmarket.com>
- ¹⁵ Ohio State University Fact Sheet, Cluster Development. Community Development, 700 Ackerman Road, Columbus, OH 43202-1578, CDFS-1270-99 <<http://ohioline.osu.edu/cd-fact/1270.html>>
- ¹⁶ Vaclav Havel. 1990. Disturbing the Peace. First vintage edition, 1991. Vintage Books, Random House inc. New York, NY. (chapter 5).