

Why Farming is Important in America¹

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I believe that to live and work on a good farm is pleasant as well as challenging; for I know the joys and discomforts of farm life and hold an inborn fondness for those associations, which even in the hours of discouragement, I cannot deny.

When I was a member of the Future Farmers of America, the FFA Creed began with the words: *I believe in the future of farming with a faith born not of words but of deeds.* I believed those words then and believe them now, however, I do not believe in the future of agriculture as we know it today, or have known it, for at least the last 40 years. I believe we are living through “the end of agriculture, as we remember it, in America,” which is the title for the presentation to follow mine on the program today. However, I suspect the following speaker and I may have very different visions for the “the future of farming in America.”

With some parts of the FFA Creed, I do not agree. I don't believe, for example, that the “achievements won by the present and past generations of farmers” hold much “promise of better days through better ways” – at least not the achievements of American agriculture over the past several decades. One era is dying and another is being born. If there is to be a future of farming in America, it will be with a new kind of farming – one very different from the American farms of the past fifty years.

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 designed 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.

Ever since the end World War II, we have been promoting the industrialization of American agriculture – specialization, standardization, and consolidation of control. For the past fifty years, farmers have been encouraged to specialize – first to specialize in livestock or crops, then in specific livestock species or crops, and finally in a specific

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phase of livestock or crop production. Farm policies and agricultural technologies were designed to encourage specialization for the sake of greater economic efficiency. 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 corporate takeover of agricultural production – in some cases through outright ownership, but in most cases through contract production. The basic arguments in favor of corporate agriculture is the claim that individual farmers simply are no longer large enough to gain access to the technologies, capital, and marketing systems needed 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 for farming in America we must create a “new American farm.”

My colleagues in Agricultural Economics tell us there is no cause for concern, even if America gets out of the business of producing food, Americans will still have plenty of food – and at an even lower cost. We will simply import our food from other countries of the world where it can be produced more efficiently because of lower costs for land and labor. In America, land will be worth more for residential development, and workers will have many better job opportunities, than in farming. The end of agriculture in America, quite simply, will reflect the workings of a “free market” economy. Ultimately, we will all be better off without a lot of farms in America – so they say.

So why should Americans question the continued industrialization and globalization of agriculture? The answer: because it no longer produces more benefits than costs. The economic benefits may still exceed the economic costs for investors, but the same is not true for society in general. The dwindling benefits of increased economic efficiency no longer go to consumers, or to individual farmers, but to corporate investors – in

terms of corporate profits and growth. And, the growing environmental and social costs of industrialization are not borne by corporate investors, but by society as a whole.

The only societal justifications for agricultural industrialization were to make food cheaper for consumers and to “free people from the drudgery of farming” so they could take better jobs in factories and offices. As farming became more efficient, agricultural production increased, prices of farm commodities declined, and consumer food prices fell, or at least increased slower than the prices of most other things. As farms grew larger, America could feed more people better with fewer people on the farm, freeing farmers to work in the factories and offices of a growing industrial economy. The industrial strategy was a big success. It did what it was designed to do. But, now the job is done.

Today, society certainly has nothing to gain from forcing more families off their farms. We have no good paying factory and office jobs begging for good workers. We have exported most of those jobs to other countries. Today, displaced farmers are far more likely to end up with a minimum wage job in some local fast food joint than in some high-paying, high-tech job in the city.

Today, American consumers, on average, spend only about a dime from each dollar of disposable income for food. From this dime, the American farmer gets less than a penny – the rest goes to pay for purchased inputs and for marketing services. In fact, we pay more to those who package and advertise our food than to the farmers who produce it. Consequently, we simply cannot make food much cheaper by making agriculture more “efficient.” If the farmer got nothing for his or her effort and investment, food could be no more than ten percent cheaper in the supermarket. With increasing corporate control of the global food system, it seems far more likely that further industrialization will lead to higher, not lower, food prices.

As benefits of industrialization have declined, the social and ecological costs have grown. Today, the very technologies that support our large-scale, specialized system of farming, the systems through which we have achieved economies of scale, are now the primary sources of growing public concerns. Commercial fertilizers and pesticides -- essential elements in a specialized, industrialized agriculture -- have become a primary source of growing concerns for environmental degradation and food safety. Giant confinement animal feeding factories now foul the air and water of many rural communities. The widespread release of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) into the environment now threatens the genetic integrity of the entire natural ecosystem, of which we humans are a part. Industrialization has transformed agriculture, created for the fundamental purpose of converting solar energy to human-useful form, into a mechanized agriculture that now uses more non-renewable fossil energy than it captures in solar energy from the sun.

Industrial agriculture, inherently, is management *extensive*. It allows fewer farmers to farm more land by using more capital and less management per acre farmed or per unit of production. As farms have grown larger and more specialized, agriculturally

dependent rural communities have withered and died. Larger farms meant fewer farms and fewer farm families to support local schools, churches, public institutions, and retail businesses. In addition, larger farms tend to bypass local communities in purchasing production inputs and in marketing their products. It takes people, not just production, to sustain local communities. The fundamental purpose of agricultural industrialization, after all, was to make it possible for fewer farmers to produce more.

Concerns that are more recent include food quality, food safety, and food security. Americans once believed, as a matter of faith, that they had the highest quality, safest, most secure food supply in the world. The industry's preoccupation with manufacturing foods that "taste good," i.e. that are fortified with fats and sugar, and that "look good," i.e. are artificially shaped, colored, or ripened, has left little room for concern about nutrition and health. Widespread use of agri-chemicals, hormones, antibiotics, and artificial food additives has heightened concerns for food safety. And now, multinational corporate control of the global food supply threatens the food security of every nation, including America.

American farmers are beginning to realize that the current crisis in agriculture is not just another period of chronic oversupply, designed to squeeze a few thousand more farmers out of agriculture. Independent farmers cannot survive this crisis simply by getting bigger faster than their neighbors. We may not see thousands of farmers go bankrupt during the current crisis. Instead, we may emerge quietly from the current crisis with the surviving farmers as contract farmers – with American agriculture under corporate control. They simply will not be able to market their products without comprehensive production contracts, no matter how efficient they may be. Many farmers are beginning to realize that this is the end of the independent producer of agricultural commodities in America.

No one set about intentionally to destroy the ecological integrity, social responsibility, and now, the economic viability of American agriculture. We simply lost sight of the fact that the fundamental purpose of agriculture is not just to produce cheap food, but to meet the needs of people – as consumers, as producers, as members of communities, and as a human society. In our preoccupation with increasing economic efficiency to bring down the cost of food, we neglected to monitor what was happening to the overall quality of life of people. In our preoccupation with increasing production today, we neglected to monitor the agricultural legacy we were leaving for people of the future.

We simply let our faith in "free market" economics blind us to the social, ecological, and ethical consequences of our pursuit of individual, short run self-interests. We believed that our pursuit of individual self-interests would benefit society in general. We believed that Adam Smith's *invisible hand* of the "free market" economy would somehow transform our individual greed into societal good. We believed the economists. The economists' defense of the industrialization and corporatization of American agriculture are based on the widely respected theories of "competitive capitalism." However, the corporate consolidation of economic power has fundamentally transformed our current

economic system, bringing in doubt, if not outright invalidating, the fundamental principles that must support its defense.

Contemporary economics is based on the observations of a British economist, Adam Smith, in his landmark book, The Wealth of Nations, published in 1776. From Smith's observations, economists developed the fundamental assumptions, which underlie all "free market" economic thinking even today. These basic assumptions must hold in order for Smith's *invisible hand* of competition to transform individual greed into the greater good for society in general.

Markets must be economically competitive – meaning numbers of buyers and sellers so large that no single buyer or seller can have any noticeable effect on the overall market. In such markets, excess profits are quickly competed away, and the benefits of more efficient production thus are passed on to consumers. It must be easy for new sellers to enter markets that are profitable and easy for sellers to get out of unprofitable markets, so that producers are able to respond to consumers' changing wants and needs with changes in production. Consumers must have clear and accurate information concerning whether the things they buy will actually meet their wants and needs. And finally, the consumer must be sovereign – their tastes and preferences must reflect their basic values, untainted by persuasive outside influences. These characteristics were generally consistent with European society of the late 1700s, when Smith wrote his book. They remained sufficiently descriptive of the American economy to be useful until well into the twentieth century.

Today, however, none of these assumptions is valid – not even for agriculture, which was the last vestige of competitive capitalism in America. Today agricultural markets are dominated by a handful of large agribusiness corporations, certainly at every level other than the farm level, and increasingly even at the farm level. In addition, it is not easy to get into or out of any aspect of agriculture, and with rising capital requirements and now genetic patenting; it is becoming quite difficult even to get into or out of farming. Consumers don't get accurate, unbiased information concerning the products they buy, but instead get disinformation by design, disguised as advertising. Finally, consumers are no longer sovereigns. The food industry spends billions of dollars on advertising designed specifically to bend and shape consumers tastes and preferences to accommodate mass production and mass distribution, which enables corporate control of agriculture. There is no logical reason to believe that the corporate agriculture of today is evolving to meet the needs or wants of consumers. Such a system could produce lots of "cheap stuff," but there is no assurance that it would be producing the "right stuff."

In fact, we no longer have capitalism in America; we have "corporatism." Capitalism is based on private ownership of property by "individuals." But, most "private property" in the U.S. today is owned by corporations, not individuals. With capitalism, the ethics and morality of the people must serve as effective constraints to the pursuit of individual self-interest. Corporations are not people, and thus, have no ethics or morals. Once ownership is separated from management, through public stock offerings, the only

things a corporation values are profit and growth. The people who work for corporations may be fine, upstanding, moral people in their personal lives. But, if they want to keep their jobs, they must serve the economic interests of their stockholders. They must make profits and the corporation must grow. Real people have hopes and dreams for the future. People have hearts and souls. Corporations have neither. In order for capitalism to work for the good of society, for the good of *people*, individual *people* must make the economic decisions, not corporations.

Adam Smith's *invisible hand* of competitive capitalism has been *mangled* in the machinery of industrial corporatism, and is no longer capable of transforming self-interest into societal good. The American economy is moving away from market coordination toward a corporate version of “central planning.” The problems of the centrally planned economies of Eastern Europe were not merely a lack of sophistication in management and coordination. Central planning, by government or corporation, is simply a fundamentally “wrong-headed” way to try to allocate resources within an economy. The end of competitive capitalism in American agriculture means the end of the American farm, as we have known it. Multinational control of the global food system is simply a “wrong-headed” way to try to ensure the well-being of people.

Thankfully, a new kind of American farming is emerging to meet the challenges of corporate industrialization. This new kind of farming is not being developed by USDA, by the Land Grant Universities, or the major farm organizations. The agricultural establishment seems willing to bet the future of humanity on biotechnology – the latest tool of corporate industrialization. The new American farm is being created by farmers. Literally thousands of “new farmers,” all across the continent, are creating new and better ways to farm. These new ways of farming “promise better days through better ways” even though the “struggles of our former years” have fallen far short of their early promise.

These new farmers may call themselves organic, biodynamic, holistic, ecological, natural, practical, or just plain family farmers, but they are all farming by the basic principles of a “sustainable agriculture.” 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 is too many to count. But 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.

Many of these farmers may not identify themselves with the name “sustainable agriculture,” but their farming methods are, none the less, more sustainable than are the industrial methods that they all reject. They are creating farming systems that are more resistant, resilient, regenerative, and renewable, and thus, are sustainable over time. They are trying to make a good living from the land, but leave the land as good as they

found it. They are meeting the needs of themselves and of society in the present, while leaving equal or better opportunities for those of the future.

Sustainable agriculture is not a sacrifice, as some would like us to believe. These new American farmers pursue a *more enlightened* self-interest. They are not trying to maximize profit, but instead are seeking sufficient profit for a desirable quality of life. They recognize the importance of family and community, as well as income, in determining their overall wellbeing. They accept the responsibilities of stewardship, not as constraints to their selfishness, but instead, as opportunities to lead successful lives. Certainly, they need an income, to ensure their physical well-being. But, they recognize that we humans are a social species; we need relationships with other people for our emotional well-being. They recognize that we are a moral species; we need to live with purpose and meaning, in harmony with some “higher order of things,” for our spiritual well-being. They are creating farming systems that are ecologically sound and socially responsible, as well as economically viable, in pursuit of a *more enlightened* concept of quality of life.

This is not a new or radical concept. In his early 1800s classic book, Democracy in America, Alex De Tocqueville examined the foundations of democracy. He believed that survival of the American Democracy was critically dependent on deeply rooted religious beliefs, which constrained early Americans in their pursuit of self-interests. He reasoned that if these strong religious beliefs were ever to erode, they would have to be replaced with a strong sense “that man serves himself in serving his fellow-creatures, and that his private interest is to do good.” He wrote of early Americans who believed strongly “that men ought to sacrifice themselves for their fellow-creatures... but, that such sacrifices are as necessary to him who imposes them upon himself as to him for whose sake they are made.” Tocqueville believed that “self-interests rightly understood,” an *enlightened* self-interest, would reflect the fact that people benefit from fulfilling their proper role in the larger society in ways that could never be linked directly to one's narrowly-defined, individual economic self-interest. The new American farmers epitomize Tocqueville's concept of “self interests rightly understood.”

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

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>)

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 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.

Why is this new way of farming important to America? Why should it matter to the rest of us, to the public, whether these new farmers fail or succeed? Of course, we all have

to eat, and being ensured of adequate food and fiber is no small concern. But, agriculture is “multifunctional” – farming performs many functions in addition to producing food and fiber. Some of the functions of agriculture are legitimate private market functions, such as providing food for those who are willing and able to pay the costs of production. But, there are adequate profit incentives to ensure that those who are willing and able to pay will be well fed, at least during the lifetimes of most of us here today. So why then should we be concerned about the future of farming?

The answer? Farming generates benefits for society in general, for which private market incentives are absent or inadequate. These functions are quite accurately labeled as “public” functions. Many “private” ventures result in “public” benefits, however, there are many functions of benefit to the public that private markets won't provide, or won't provide adequately to meet the needs of society in general. Even the most competitive of markets can't perform purely “public” functions.

The government is the legitimate mean by which we, collectively, provide “public” goods and services. For example, most of us willingly pay taxes so the government can provide for national defense, public education, interstate transportation, and many other services for which private incentives are inadequate to meet the needs of the nation. If we don't do these things together, through government, the nation will be a less desirable place to live, for all of us.

In general, “public goods and services” include those things to which we, as a nation, have agreed that all people should have “equal access,” regardless of their ability to pay. Markets won't provide things to people “equally,” but instead only in relation to our individual willingness and ability to pay. In fact, we are not all equally capable or economically productive, and thus, we are not all equally able to pay. Farming performs many of those legitimate “public” functions – functions that benefit us all, but for which we are not all able to pay.

Everyone has an equal right to enough food to survive, to grow, to mature, and to become a productive member of society. A corporately controlled, industrial agriculture will not provide adequate food for all – only for those who are willing and able to pay. Food equity is a legitimate public benefit that a sustainable agriculture can provide.

Everyone has an equal right to safe, healthful, nutritious food. The food we eat should nourish us, not make us sick, disrupt our immune systems, addict us, or fill our bodies with empty calories. A corporately controlled, industrial agriculture will not ensure the integrity of our food supply – it will continue to exploit consumers as it strives for ever-greater profits and growth. Food integrity is a legitimate public benefit that a sustainable agriculture can provide.

Everyone has an equal right to a secure food supply. No nation, including America, should be subject to political manipulation, coercion, or blackmail by any other nation because of their inability to provide for the food, clothing, and shelter needs of their people. With an industrial, global agriculture, controlled by multinational corporations,

no nation, including America, will have food security. The current corporate struggle to gain control of the global food system is about profits and growth, not about meeting the needs of people. Food security is a legitimate public benefit that a sustainable agriculture can provide.

Everyone, including those of future generations, has a right to a clean, productive natural environment. Every nation has a responsibility to protect its environment, and its people, from degradation and exploitation. A corporately controlled, industrial agriculture will continue to exploit our natural resources and environment. Self-interest economics is about finding the optimum way to “use things up,” not about conserving, regenerating, or sustaining. Ecological integrity is a legitimate public benefit that a sustainable agriculture can provide.

Maintaining a culture of stewardship is a legitimate public function, if we are to have a sustainable agriculture and a sustainable human society. As Wendell Berry, the Kentucky farmer, writer, and philosopher, wrote, “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.” A corporately controlled, industrial agriculture will not keep people on the land who love the land. A sustainable agriculture can and will.

Building a new, more sustainable agriculture is a legitimate “public” function. The new American farmers will likely succeed, ultimately, with or without the help of government. However, the \$20 billion or so the government now spends each year on farm programs promoting agricultural industrialization could be far better spent to support the transition to a more sustainable agriculture.

This is not a radical idea. The Europeans currently support the concept of a “multifunctional” agriculture in their international trade negotiations. They argue that government has a responsibility to ensure that a nation's agriculture can continue to provide public, as well as private, benefits to the citizens of all nations. They support free trade, only so long as it does not result in exploitation of the land or the people. They support a “sustainable free market.”

Willard Cochrane, a nationally respected University of Minnesota economist, with national public policy experience extending back to the Kennedy era, has proposed a National Sustainable Farm Program as a replacement for the current commodity-based government subsidies. Farming is important to America, and it is important to us all that our farms remain sustainable. Government programs were used to support the industrialization of agriculture, and we can now redirect those government programs to ensure that our agriculture will be sustainable. There are important public benefits to be derived from a more sustainable agriculture, and thus, it is legitimate to use public dollars to support the transition.

Finally, why is farming important to Americans – personally, individually? The answer: because a sustainable agriculture is a metaphor for sustainable living. The consequences and alternatives for corporate industrialization and sustainability are the same for society in general as for agriculture. But, our overall economy and society in general are extremely complex systems and the relationships are not quite so clear.

All of life depends on a healthy natural environment – water, air, sunlight, soil, and diversity of living species – not just for agriculture but also for all life, including human life. Industrial systems of economic development degrade the ability of the natural environment to support life in general, just as they degrade the natural productivity of farms. Industrial systems threaten human health and quality of life, just as they degrade the health and quality of the natural ecosystems of farms. The linkages between cause and effect are just easier to see in agriculture.

Human civilizations depend upon healthy human relationships. Industrial systems, in facilitating specialization, separate people from each other. Complex systems of markets separate buyers from sellers, consumers from producers, and corporate investors from managers. Relationships become defined by laws, rules, regulations, and contracts. Profits and growth take precedent over personal relationships and social responsibility. Exploitation of workers, consumers, and taxpayers becomes routine business practice. The degradation of American society is no different in concept from the demise of our family farms and the ecological, economic and social decay of our rural communities. The linkages between cause and effect are just easier to see in agriculture.

The quality of human life depends on our living lives of purpose and meaning. Purpose and meaning must come from somewhere beyond – from our connectedness with “some higher order of things.” This “higher order” or “higher power” is the ultimate source of ethics and morality. If we are to be an ethical and moral society, we must learn to live in harmony with the fundamental laws of nature, including human nature. A sustainable agriculture is built on an ethical foundation of friendship and stewardship – a *more enlightened* concept of self-interest. A sustainable democracy, as Tocqueville warned, must be built on a similar foundation of “self-interest, rightly understood.”

Thus, the new American farmers, who are finding ways to farm more sustainably, are creating a metaphor of a more sustainable human society. As a society, we must stop exploiting our natural environment. We must look again to the timeless principle of diversity in finding new means of sustaining human progress, economically and socially, while maintaining the health and integrity of our natural environment – not just in agriculture but all across society. As a society, we must stop exploiting each other. We must focus on providing people with the things they need and truly value rather than coercing and bribing people to buy ever more “cheap stuff” – not just in agriculture but all across society. We must not allow our pursuit of short-run, economic self-interest to diminish our overall quality of life – neither in agriculture nor elsewhere in society. We must seek and find balance and harmony among the economic, ecological, and social –

to find balance and harmony among the personal, interpersonal, and spiritual dimensions of our lives.

Returning to the FFA Creed, “I believe in the future of farming in America, with a faith born not of words but of deeds.” But, I believe the deeds that hold promise for the future of farming are the day-to-day deeds of the thousands of “new American farmers.” I believe that this new kind of agriculture “can and will hold true to the best traditions of our national life.” And, I believe that “we” – you and I – “can exert an influence in our homes and communities, which will stand solid for our parts in that inspiring task.”

I believe that we can, and must, help create a new kind of agriculture that will sustain a high “quality of life” for farmers and society, both for this generation and for all generations to come. That’s why farming is important to America.