

The New American Farm
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In a new book, "The End of Agriculture in the American Portfolio," economist Steven C. Blank envisions the coming *end of the American farm* – a future of agriculture undoubtedly shared by many in the conventional agricultural establishment. American agricultural production is destined to end, he argues, but this should be no cause for alarm. He contends that the end of American agricultural production is the result of a natural process that is making us all better off. He foresees a time in the not too distant future when the U.S. will import nearly all of its foodstuffs from other countries. Costs of land and labor in U.S. will be too high for American farmers to be competitive in food production. He argues that the inevitable creeping globalization of the food system is not some corporate conspiracy but is simply the sum of individual struggles of farmers and agribusiness in America and around the world who quite logically are pursuing their individual self interests to the benefit of society in general.

Blank's fundamental arguments are based on the premise that economic considerations ultimately will prevail over all others. He assumes that industrial agribusiness will replace family farms because they are "more efficient" and American agribusiness eventually will be displaced by even "more efficient" producers elsewhere in the global market. If these assumptions of economic theory were an accurate reflection of reality, then Blank's predictions would be reasonable. If the world, at some point in the future, completely abandons human rationality for some pseudo-economic reality, then Blank's predictions actually could come true. Admittedly, economics has become the dominant *religion* of our American society, and it is being rapidly spread around the world. But, people have not yet abandoned common sense – at least not completely. There is still hope that human rationality will prevail over the dogma of economics and there will be a future for farming America – that the twenty-first century will bring the emergence of the *new American farm*.

The Crisis in American Agriculture

American agriculture admittedly is in crisis. Until recently, the crisis had been a quiet one. No one wanted to talk about it. Thousands of farm families were being forced off the land, but we were being told by the agricultural establishment that their exodus was inevitable – in fact, was a sign of progress. Those who failed were simply the victims of their own inefficiency -- their inability to keep up with changing times, their inability to compete. But in fact, it's not inefficiency or resistance to change that is forcing families to leave their farms. It's our collective obsession with our short-run, economic self interests. It's our worship of markets as the only true arbitrators of value. It's our acceptance of corporate greed as the only road to true prosperity. The crisis in American agriculture is neither inevitable, nor is it a sign of progress.

With farm prices at record low levels for two years running, the agriculture establishment has begun to take notice. Congress has passed emergency farm legislation the past two years. But even now, the farm crisis is being blamed on such mundane things as "exceptionally good" global weather, problems in Pacific Rim financial markets, European trade restrictions, and an inadequate government "safety net." The crisis is a simple matter of supply and demand, they say. The only solutions they propose are to tinker with government policy or, better yet, to simply wait for markets to recover. The only alternatives farmers are being offered are to get big enough to be competitive, get a corporate contract to reduce risks, or get out of farming. But, getting big, giving in, or getting out are not the only alternatives.

The crisis in American agriculture is a chronic symptom of the type of agriculture we have been promoting in this country for the past fifty years -- an industrial agriculture. Reoccurring financial crises are the

consequence of our encouraging farmers to industrialize – to become more specialized, standardized and larger in scale so consumers can have more cheap food. We rationalize the displacement of family farmers in the process as "freeing people from the drudgery of farming" so they can find better jobs in town.

The promise of profits is the bait that keeps farmers on the technology treadmill. Farmers adopt new cost cutting and production enhancing technologies to increase profits, but the resulting increases in production cause prices to fall, eliminating profits of the early adopters and driving the laggards out of business. This technology treadmill has been driving farmers off the land for decades. Those remaining on the treadmill after each crisis must run faster and faster just to survive. But, the current crisis has an added dimension. The current crisis reflects a brazen attempt by the giant corporations to seize control of American agriculture, to move beyond specialization and standardization, to centralize command and control – to complete the industrialization of agriculture. This final stage of industrialization could well spell the end of the American farm.

Steven Blank contends that once American agriculture has become industrialized, it will respond even more efficiently to global markets – there will be no sentimental attachment of corporate producers to any particular farm, geographic region, or nation. If costs of land and labor are less in some country other than in America, as they almost certainly will be, then that's where America's food will be produced. Capital and management can be shifted easily from America to other countries around the globe – as we have seen in the production of other industrial goods.

The food and fiber industry most certainly has a future, people will always need food, clothing, and shelter, and someone will provide them. But there will be no future of farming in American unless we challenge the conventional wisdom that food should be produced wherever on the globe it can be produced at the lowest cost and that "free markets" should be the final arbitrators of all value. In fact, there will be no future for farming anywhere – not true farming -- not unless we have the courage to challenge and disprove the conventional wisdom that farmers must get bigger, give in to corporate control, or get out. But there are better alternatives for farmers and for society, if we can find the courage to challenge the conventional economic wisdom that farmers must get bigger, give in to corporate control, or get out.

Challenging the Conventional Wisdom of Economics

Conventional wisdom in the U.S. seems to be that only *the market* is capable of doing things right. Anything that interferes with *the market*, the government, public attitudes, or cultural values, for example; by definition creates economic inefficiency and is bad for society. Few people are aware of the origin of this *belief*, and even fewer seem willing to challenge it. In fact, the few who dare to question *the market's* sanctity are quickly attacked by people in powerful places with obvious self-interest in perpetuating *the belief* -- including an army of economists.

Current belief in the sanctity of *the market* can be traced back to statements by Adam Smith, the father of contemporary economic theory, in his book, The Wealth of Nations. "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self love, and never talk to them of our necessities but of their advantages" (p. 7). Later, in reference to trade, Smith states, "he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention." "By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually (sic) than when he intends to promote it" (p. 199). These statements provided the foundation of the contemporary economic wisdom -- that pursuit of short run self-interests is transformed into achievement of the public good, as if by an *invisible hand*. The greatest societal good automatically results from the greatest individual greed.

But, Adam Smith didn't say that pursuit of maximum profits and growth by large, corporate organizations would result in the greatest benefit to society. The economy of Smith's day was quite different from today. In the late 1700s, most economic enterprises were small, family operations. For such operations, land, labor, capital, and management often resided in essentially the same entity, and farming was still the dominant occupation. Few enterprises were large enough to have any impact on the marketplace as a whole. Most market transactions were direct between buyer and seller -- there were few opportunities for deceptive sales practices. Trade was mostly in basic commodities -- every seller's wheat, bread, or shoes were pretty much the same as those offered for sale by other sellers. Under these conditions, profits were quickly competed away in highly competitive local markets.

There were few corporations in Smith's time, but he wrote about the dangers of monopolies and excess profits, -- "the price of a monopolist is upon every occasion the highest than can be got (p. 28)." He considered "joint stock companies," corporations, to be inherently irresponsible entities, and could think of only a handful of endeavors where publicly owned corporations could be justified (p. 341). Even those would require close public scrutiny and government control, he warned.

Human populations back then were small enough and technologies were sufficiently benign that people could have little permanent impact on their natural environment -- at least not on a global scale. Strong cultural, moral, and social values dictated the norms and standards of "acceptable" individual behavior. Smith could not conceive of a society in which the welfare of the poor and hungry would not matter, or where people in general would behave in unethical or immoral ways. "No society can surely be flourishing and happy, on which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable" (p 36).

In the environment within which conventional economics was born, in Smith's time, pursuit of self-interest might have served the interests of society reasonably well. But, the world has changed over the past 200 years. In fact, none of the important assumptions of truly competitive markets -- the prerequisite for efficient resource allocation by free markets -- are valid in the economy of today.

Today, giant corporations dominate almost every sector of local and global economies. Through mergers, joint ventures, and strategic alliances, corporations have formed "virtual" monopolies -- irresponsible entities that maximize profits "upon every occasion." Corporate profits today are far larger than any concept of "normal" profit envisioned in classical economics.

The basic economic resources of land, labor, capital, and management now reside in separate entities, sometimes divided even among nations. Labor and management are in continual conflict, and most corporate shareholders -- owners of mutual funds and pension funds -- are hardly conscious of how much of what companies they own. Land has become just another marketable commodity to be exploited and used up.

Producers and consumers have become disconnected, geographically and conceptually, as a consequence of industrialization. Consumers no longer have any personal knowledge of where their products come from or of who is involved in their production. They must rely on a complex set of standards, rules, and regulations for product information, and today's advertising consists of "disinformation" by design. Superficial product differentiation abounds -- through processing, packaging, advertising, and marketing gimmicks -- making price competition impotent if not impossible.

Human activities are no longer ecologically benign -- if they ever really were. The pressures of growing populations and rising per capita consumption are now depleting resources of the land far faster than they can be regenerated by nature. Wastes and contaminants from human activities are being generated at rates far in excess of the capacity of the natural environment to absorb and detoxify them. Fossil fuels, the engine of twentieth-century economic development, are being depleted at rates infinitely faster than they can ever be replenished. Human population pressures are destroying other biological species, upon which the survival of humanity may be ultimately dependent. The human species is now capable of destroying almost everything that makes up the biosphere we call Earth, including humanity itself.

The society of Smith's day was weak on economics – hunger, disease and early death were common -- but it had a strong cultural and ethical foundation. However, that social and ethical foundation has been seriously eroded over the past two centuries -- as glorification of greed has replaced enlightened self-interest.

Civil litigation and criminal prosecution seem to be the only constraints to the unethical and immoral pursuit of profit and growth. Corporations are inherently non-human entities – regardless of what the Supreme Court has said and regardless of the nature of their managers and stockholders. Corporations have no heart, they have no soul. Concerns of the affluent for today's poor seem to be limited to concerns that welfare benefits may be too high or that they will be mugged or robbed if the poor become too desperate. Smith's defense of the pursuit of self-interest must be reconsidered within the context of today's society – a society that is now strong on economics but weak on community and morality.

Contemporary economics has always been fundamentally incapable of dealing with *relationships* among people, or between people and their environment. This fact is freely admitted even in basic economics text books. In economics, a market is nothing more than a collection of independent individual consumers. Human institutions such as families, communities, nations and cultures have no economic relevance – other than as collections of individuals. Thus, one gains no economic well being from relationships -- from identifying with or being a part of any particular family, community, nation or culture. Believing, trusting, sharing, caring, and serving are but empty words to the economist. Economic values relate only to our narrow, short run self interest. Concepts such as faith, hope, and love are ignored -- they are just illusions of the human imagination.

Economics assumes that trade always takes place between two people or groups that are equally competent and capable of pursuing their own self-interest. Sometimes this is a valid assumption, but often it is not. Economics ignores the fact that the world is filled with people (and countries) who are inherently unequal in competence and capabilities. It ignores the fact that giant corporations are capable of totally dominating conditions of trade with smaller businesses or individuals. By their very nature, industrial corporations attempt to dominate in their *transactions* with all, including with the natural environment.

When trade occurs between the strong and the weak, particularly when motivated by profit as economists assume, the weak are invariably exploited by the strong. As long as the outcomes for strong and weak added together end up in a larger dollar and cent total, economics concludes that there have been gains from trade -- no matter that the weak are now even relatively weaker and more vulnerable and the strong are now even stronger and more dominant. To the economist, justice and equity are just empty words because they have no means to address them.

In economics theory, the environment is a passive entity, and thus, has no specific active relationship with people. The environment is always external, or outside, the economic system. The environment may be ignored, treated as an external constraint, or as something that is impacted by economic activity within. But, the environment is always treated as something separate and apart from people and the economy. In economics, we are separated from something that we obviously are a part of. The serenity we feel and beauty we see in nature is assumed to have no impact on our human well being. In economics, the sense of *rightness* that comes from our attempts to be good stewards of the earth's resources contributes nothing to our quality of life. It's economically irrational to want to leave as much and as good as we have today for the benefit of future generations.

In summary, contemporary economics is concerned totally and completely with pursuit of short run, self interests. Economics recognizes no unique social value – a community or a society is nothing more than a collection of individuals. Economics recognizes no unique spiritual values – and concern for the environment, at least for its sustainability, is fundamentally spiritual. Economist – and the industrial, corporate interests that now would raise economists to the priesthood – would cast out those of us who still believe that quality of life has social and spiritual dimensions that are just as important as our narrow economic self interests.

Does this kind of economics really make sense as a guiding philosophy for America -- and as a model for the rest of human society? Do we actually believe that the greatest greed results in the greatest good? Or are we a society that is being shamed into doing things that don't make sense because we don't want to be publicly degraded and labeled naïve and unrealistic, as being economically illiterate and irrational?

Toward an Economics of Enlightened Self-interests

It's true, people will pursue their self-interest – it is an inherent aspect of being human. But, people, by nature, do not pursue only their narrow, individual self-interest. It is within the fundamental nature of people also to care about other people and to accept the responsibilities of humanity to take care of the earth. People are perfectly capable of rising above the *economics of greed* to an *economics of enlightenment*. An *invisible hand* can still translate the pursuit of self-interests into the greatest good for society, but only if each person pursues an *enlightened* self-interest – a self-interest that values relationships and stewardship as important dimensions of our individual well being.

Enlightened self-interests includes narrow self-interest (which focuses on individual possessions), but it also includes interests that are shared (which focuses on relationships, community, and social values) and interests that are purely altruistic (which focuses on interests one pursues only out of a sense of stewardship, ethics, or morality). All three – self-interests, shared-interests, and altruistic-interests -- contribute to one's well being or quality of life, but not in the same sense that greed might enhance one's material success. Each contributes to a more enlightened sense of quality of life, which explicitly recognizes that each individual is but a part of the whole of society, which in turn must conform to some higher order or code of natural laws.

The *economics of enlightenment* has its foundation in spirituality – the belief in a need to live in harmony with a higher order of things. Many seem to equate spirituality with religion, but religion is but the means by which some people practice their spirituality. Anyone who believes in the existence of a fundamental set of unchanging laws or principles, which underlie moral or ethical values, may be said to be spiritual. It makes no difference whether one's belief in God arises from their belief in fundamental laws of nature, including human nature, or one's respect for nature and other people arises from one's belief in God. Both reflect a belief in some higher order, which defines the larger whole of which humans are but a part.

Enlightened self interests are realized by living in harmony with this higher order. In the absence of spirituality, shared interests may be pursued for selfish motives. Some are willing to pay their share of the costs only if they expect to get more than their share of the benefits. In the absence of spirituality, ecological concerns may be addressed for purely selfish motives -- to protect one's self or family from harm. But enlightened self interests recognizes that shared-interests and altruistic interests are but different layers of one's self – that our individual self is inseparable from our social and ethical selves. We are enlightened when we recognize explicitly that our life is better when we not only care for ourselves, but also when we care for the well being others -- with no regard for what we may get in return. When enlightened, we recognize explicitly that our life is better when we conserve and protect the earth's resources for future generations -- with no regard for an earthly reward. Enlightened self interests recognizes explicitly that we have three different layers of self – the independent self, the interdependent self, and the ethical or moral self. Quality of life arises from harmony and balance among those three dimensions of self.

The Dalai Lama of Tibet puts it in slightly different terms, "If you think in a deeper way that you are going to be selfish, then be wisely selfish, not narrow-mindedly selfish. From that viewpoint, the key thing is the sense of universal responsibility, that is, the real source of strength, the real source of happiness. From that perspective, if in our generation we exploit every available thing, trees, water, mineral resources, or anything, without bothering about the next generation, about the future, that's our guilt, isn't it? So if we have a genuine sense of universal responsibility as the central motivation and principle, then from that direction our relations with the environment will be well balanced. Similarly with every aspect of relationships: our relations with our neighbors, our family neighbors and country neighbors, will be balanced from that direction" (p. 179).

The New American Farm

A new American agriculture is emerging under the conceptual umbrella of sustainable agriculture. The focus of the concept of sustainability is on intergenerational equity – to meet the needs of the present while leaving equal or better opportunities for the future. But, in order to fulfill this purpose, sustainable systems must be economically viable, ecologically sound, and socially responsible. Systems of farming that are lacking in any one of these dimensions quite simply are not sustainable over time.

Thus sustainable agriculture requires that farmers find balance and harmony among the economic, social, and ecological dimensions of their farming operations -- among self-interests, shared-interests, and altruistic interests. By pursuing their *enlightened* self interests, *the new American farmer* will help build a more sustainable agriculture and a more sustainable human society – *as if by an invisible hand*. In fact, sustainability demands that we pursue a new *economics of enlightenment*.

Farmers, in general, presumably would not use chemicals in ways that destroy their health, poison their own food, or pollute their water supply. But, the sustainable farmer must be willing to make ecological investments that will benefit of others solely. Sustainability requires that we consider the health and well-being of those down wind and down stream as well as ourselves. Sustainability requires that we conserve non-renewable resources – soil, energy, clean air, and clean water -- for future generations. Thus, ecological sustainability is deeply rooted in a strong sense of stewardship – our responsibility to take care of things for the benefit of others.

Farmers, in general, recognize they must make investments of time and money in family, community and society in general -- they may expect personal rewards for these investments, but the rewards must be shared with others. However, many may make social investments out of self-interest, for purely selfish reasons – they expect their share of the benefits to exceed their share of the costs. But, sustainable farmers must be willing also to make social investments for purely altruistic reasons – investments from which they expect no direct benefit for themselves. They benefit only from fulfilling their ethical and moral responsibilities for other. Such investments are economically rational, only from the perspective of an *economics of enlightenment*.

The contemporary economic dimension is no less important than are the social and ecological dimensions in ensuring sustainability. A sustainable agriculture requires all three – an agriculture that is ecologically sound, socially responsible, and economically viable. Aldo Leopold, in his essay on land ethics, said we must consider the economics as well as the ethics and aesthetics. We cannot be expected to take care of others unless we are first able to take care of ourselves. Economic viability is necessary if a farmer is to maintain the authority to use the resources for which they are to be good stewards. Or to put it bluntly, if a farmer goes broke, they are not sustainable. Conflicts arise between economics and sustainability because too often economics is allowed to dominate everything else – including relationships and stewardship. Sustainability requires a measure of profitability, but short run profit maximization invariably leads to ecological degradation and social exploitation. Sustainability requires balance and harmony among between economics and the other two.

Farming sustainably is no simple task. But, thousands of farmers are already finding ways. They are finding ways to sustain a desirable quality of life for themselves and to support their local communities while being good stewards of the land and other natural environment. They may carry the label of organic, low-input, alternative, biodynamic, holistic, permaculture, or no label at all, but they are all pursuing common economic, ecological and social goals. By their actions, these farmers are defining a new kind of American farm.

These new American farmers are a diverse lot, but they share in common their pursuit of 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 relationships, of family and community, as well as

income, in determining their overall well being. They accept the responsibilities of ethics and stewardship, not as constraints to their selfishness, but instead, as opportunities to lead successful lives.

These farmers, these common people, are the architects of the New American Farm. These farmers, not the experts or the scientists, are the ones on the new frontier -- the explorers, the colonists, the revolutionaries, and the builders of a "New World." Life is difficult on the frontier because no one really knows how to do what these folks are trying to do -- they are creating the future. They are getting little help from the government, their universities, or the agricultural establishment. They are doing it pretty much on their own. They will continue to confront hardships, frustrations, and there will be some failures along the road. But, more and more of these *new American farmers* are finding ways to succeed.

There are no blue prints for the New American Farm. But a few fundamental principles are beginning to emerge. In general, the opportunities arise directly from exploiting the weaknesses of industrialization -- of specialization, standardization, and centralized decision making. The new American farm tends to rely instead on the advantages of diversity, flexibility, and decentralized networks of interdependent decision makers.

New American farmers focus on working with nature rather than against it. The natural resource base that ultimately must sustain productivity is inherently diverse. Industrial systems have had to *bend nature* -- to augment, supplement, alter, and force it -- to create an illusion of conformity out of diversity in order to meet the demands of large-scale, industrial production. The ecological problems arising from industrialization are symptoms of natural resources being used in ways that are inherently degrading to their productivity. Thus, industrialization has created tremendous opportunities for farmers who learn to utilize the inherently productive capacity of a diverse natural resource base, rather than wasting time and money trying to force nature to conform.

These new American farmers utilize practices such as management intensive grazing, integrated crop and livestock farming, diverse crop rotations, cover crops, and inter-cropping. They manage their land and labor resources to harvest solar energy, to utilize the productivity of nature, and thus, are able to reduce their reliance on external purchases inputs. They are able to reduce costs and increase profits while protecting the natural environment and supporting their local communities.

New American farmers focus on value rather than costs. They realize that each of us values things differently, as consumers, because we have different needs and different tastes and preferences. Industrial methods are efficient only if large numbers of us are willing to settle for the same basic goods and services -- so they can be mass produced. So, industrialization has to treat us as if we're all pretty much the same. Customers have to be persuaded, coerced, and bribed to buy the same basic things rather than the things they really want. That's why we pay more for packaging and advertising of food than we pay to the farmers who produce the food. The industrial system creates tremendous untapped opportunities for farmers who can tailor their products to conform to unique needs and preferences of individual customers, rather than try to bend the preferences of customers to conform to their products.

New American farmers market in the niches. They market direct to customers through farmers markets, roadside stands, CSAs, home delivery, or by customer pick-up at the farm. They use everything from the Internet to word of mouth to advertise their services. They market to people who care where their food comes from and how it is produced -- locally grown, organic, humanely raised, hormone and antibiotic free, etc. They are often able to avoid some or all of the processing, transportation, packaging and marketing costs that make up 80 percent of the total cost of mass marketed foods. They increase value, reduce costs, and increase profits while protecting the environment and helping to build stronger local communities.

New American farmers focus on what *they* can do best. They realize that we are all different -- as producers as well as consumers. We have widely diverse skills, abilities, and aptitudes. Industrialization has had to "bend people" -- train, bribe, and coerce them -- to make people behave as coordinated parts

of one big machine rather than as fundamentally different human beings. Many social problems of today are symptoms of people being used by industrial systems in ways that are inherently degrading to our uniquely human productive capacities. Thus, industrialization has left tremendous untapped economic opportunities for farmers and others who can use their unique capacities to be productive rather than attempt to conform to systems of production that just don't fit.

New American farmers may produce grass finished beef, pastured pork, free range or pastured poultry, heirloom varieties of fruits and vegetables, dairy or milk goats, edible flowers, decorative gourds, or dozens of other products that many label as agricultural "alternatives." They find markets for the things they want to grow and are able to grow well rather than produce for markets where they can't compete. Or they may produce fairly common commodities by means that are uniquely suited to their talents. Their products are better, their costs are less, and their life is better because they are doing the things that they do best.

In general, new American farmers focus on creating value through uniqueness -- among consumers, among producers, and within nature. They link people with purpose and place. By linking their unique productive capacities with unique sets of natural resources to serve the needs and wants of unique groups of customers they create unique systems of meeting human needs that cannot be industrialized. The more unique their combinations of person, purpose, and place, the more sustainable will be the value to customers and producers alike. The sameness of industrialization creates opportunities for unique farmers who can create unique linkages with both resources and customers.

Critics argue that these new farm opportunities are limited. On the contrary, there is no limit to the diversity among people nor diversity within nature. There are as many niche markets as there are people. The question is one of how many different markets it is logical to serve, not how many different niche markets exist. Likewise, there are as many differences in production capabilities as there are producers, and as many different niches in nature as there are fields or places to produce.

Some question whether a sufficient number of people who are both willing and able to learn can be found to farm in these new ways. Admittedly, the new American farm will require a lot more knowledge, understanding, and thinking that does farming by industrial standards. However, any future occupation which offers an opportunity for a decent living will require the use of one's mind. The days when someone could earn a good living by the sweat of their brow are in the past. The industrial era is over. There will be plenty of innovative, creative, hard working people to operate the new American farms, once their promise for a more desirable quality of life -- economically, socially, and ethically -- becomes widely known.

Others question whether people can afford to pay farmers the full costs of meeting their food and fiber needs without exploiting either the natural or human resource base for agriculture. However, today's consumer, on average, spends only a dime of each dollar for food -- from which the farmer gets only one penny. Thus, most consumers can afford to pay farmers to produce the food they really want and need rather than settle for something less, particularly if that something less degrades the social and ecological systems from which consumers also much derive their quality of life.

The ultimate strategy for valuing uniqueness is through personal relationships. Each personal relationship is different from all others. Many consumers are alienated from current mass marketing systems not only because they don't meet their specific needs, but because they have lost faith in the impersonal system of mass production for mass markets. They do not believe large corporations monitored by big government will really protect the natural environment or fulfill important social responsibilities. They trust neither corporate or government assurances that foods in the supermarkets are safe and healthful. They feel more personally secure and socially responsible when they support local and regional food systems rather than rely on international markets dominated by the multinational corporations. In other words, they want to know their farmer -- personally.

The most secure markets for the new American farm will be those based on personal relationships. Producers who develop personal relationships with their customers need not see other producers as their competitors. They can collaborate rather than compete. No two people are alike, thus, no two producers are likely to be viewed as close competitors in the minds of their *relationship* customers. Fortunately, meaningful relationships can only be spread so thin. Thus, there will be natural constraints, or limits to growth, in relationship markets. The necessity of maintaining personal relationships offsets the natural tendency to get bigger, and thus, helps farmers to resist the lure of the industrial treadmill. Local and regional markets will be developed and sustained over time by people who prefer to deal with people they know.

It's Mainly Up to Us

There may well be no future in farming in America, in the sense that we have known it in the past. But, that need not mean the end of the American farm. A new American farm is struggling to emerge under the conceptual umbrella of sustainable agriculture. It's success or failure, and the sustainability of American agriculture, is mainly up to us. We can sit by and pray that Adam Smith's invisible hand is still able to transform greed into good. We can allow the American farmer become a thing of the past and rely on the rest of the world for our food and fiber. Or we can choose to pursue our enlightened self-interests, we can demand for society a new economics of sustainability, and we can help build the new American farm.

Contemporary economic thinking is out of date and old fashioned. It's based on assumptions of 200 years ago that no longer reflect reality. Small family farms and businesses, caring communities, loving families, nations with integrity, cultures with values – these things will never be outdated. We have no ethical or moral obligation to accept economics as the final arbitrator of all things. Economics alone should not determine who gets a job and who doesn't, who stays in business and who doesn't, what we do in communities and what we don't, where food is produced and where it is not, whether or not we trade, or of anything else. We don't have to abandon "good" things from the past just because something "more economically efficient" comes along. We don't have to accept "bad" things in the future just because they are "more economically efficient" than some "good" alternative. We can choose what we want to keep from the past and what we want to accept in the future. *The market* is not God – no matter what the economic priests would lead us to believe. Economics is a creation of people. We simply cannot turn loose the thing we created for our benefit and allow it to exploit the very people it was designed to serve. It just doesn't make any sense.

Common sense demands that we rethink and directly challenge the fundamental principles that underlie conventional economic thinking – line by line, row by row, from the ground up. There is a crisis in American Agriculture. It's a chronic crisis – a consequence of the industrialization of agriculture in the pursuit of short run economic self interests. The root cause of this crisis is the same as the root cause of ecological degradation and of social and moral decay – a society that blindly accepts the economic bottom line as if it were the word of God. Industrialization, if left unbridled, ultimately will spell the end of the independent American farm. Globalization, if left unbridled, could crush the whole of American Agriculture.

But, we don't have to submit to the industrialization of agriculture, we don't have to submit to the globalization of our food systems, and we don't have to worship the *false idol* of economic greed. Corporations were created to serve people, not the other way around. Trade among people should be carried out in ways that make all parties better off – that degrade neither people nor the natural resource base. Trade is not really free unless both parties are free not to trade. The economy is a creation of people to meet the needs of people, not the other way around. We can simply refuse to become the slaves of these institutions that were created to serve the public good.

There is a positive alternative to contemporary economics -- an economics of enlightenment. And there are positive alternatives to agricultural industrialization arising from the sustainable agriculture movement. There are thousands of farmers creating dozens of models for the new American farm. But, the very real

possibility of the end of America agriculture should sound a warning to us all. The time to choose between the economics of greed and the economics of enlightenment is at hand. The time to choose between an industrial agriculture and a sustainable agriculture is at hand. The time to choose between the *end of the American farm* and the *new American farm* is at hand. God grant us wisdom that we might choose wisely.

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