

## **A Rare Spoken Perspective on Farming**

Farming has taken a few lumps the past few months with some bad press about techniques and care, but I'm afraid so much more is being overlooked. The important story about farming isn't being printed about in my opinion.

Every occupation has its challenges that are handled differently at times. Out of those challenges though, our character is tested and nurtured. I meet with a group of men every Friday morning, and the question of occupations came up as to whether certain types were better than others when it came to raising a family and living in community. I personally would put forth the presupposition that family-based businesses may have a unique advantage over those occupations that take the father and/or mother away from the family. Either can be doable but as you consider the health of the culture and family today compared to the past century or two, our recent critique of the family-based farm may be a timely one.

Agriculture is not dead despite the diminishing number of farms. It has simply been converted to an industrial base model versus a family base one, for better or for worse. I say the latter. Before the industrial revolution, ours was predominantly an agricultural economy, but more than that. The economy promoted a family vocation, not just the mother's or father's vocation away from the home. It generally took the family as a unit to make it work. We still see the success of this family vocation economy, especially in the Omish and Mennonite communities. I'm not saying we all need to return to such an economy, but the family vocation model with its benefits should be considered while critiquing our own occupations and lifestyles that may benefit from some adjustments.

Lets look at some of those benefits.

For 50 plus years, my grandfather and father always had animals and a garden to feed the family and the community at large with the Veggie Boutique on DeRuyter lake. With six sons full of energy, this was an ideal venue for keeping ourselves in shape and out of trouble (most of the time) while providing for the family. Today, some people work all day, then go to the fitness center. Giving us boys something to do physically where we could see the fruits of our labor and work with Dad, it provided a rewarding and positive experience. Doing that with the next older generation, Colonel & Iva Skeele, was priceless. Connecting the generations, be it work or otherwise, will always build stronger families and therefore communities.

There's a little farmer in all of us. Just drive through the suburbs and you will see the farmer ritually driving his \$1500 tractor mowing his .2 acres of lawn or meticulously shaving the shrubs and pruning flowers. Some say it's to keep up with the Jones. I think there is something about touching the earth that our creator has instilled within us that brings satisfaction to the soul. After all, our origins speak of coming from a couple of gardeners, Adam and Eve.

Growing up working on a small beef cattle farm and helping to grow 15 plus acres of vegetables, there were lessons in nature dealing with animals, natural food, soil, weather and seasons. Farm life exposes the family to the miracles, mysteries and blessings of the creation and it's Creator. Giving thanks at meal times took on a whole new meaning. Having to confront laws that govern the physical universe teaches you that there is something bigger than yourself. It's humbling.

We have all read reports about the nutritional value of our food decreasing year after year due to agribusiness techniques, fertilizers and soil erosion. Be it the 1000 head milking operation or the back yard gardener, growing fresh fruit, vegetable and meat adds up to healthier lives with more energy, fewer illnesses and medical bills, and less down time. All this benefits you and your family, while getting paid by spending less on groceries!

Spending less on food and medical bills keeps more money in your pocket but also helps one to be more resilient in tough economic times. In farming, you "grow" your wealth that can be sold or consumed to save some cash. If inflation rears it's ugly head in the near future as some suspect with debt spiraling out of control and **career politicians** continue to be irresponsible in management, those who "grow" their wealth will be better off if their own fiscal house is in order.

Lastly, a farm having space provides peace to the soul. It's amazing what city folk will pay to go on vacation to get away from it all. There is something about space, scenic views or a dark clear sky sparkling that brings tranquility putting our issues in perspective. A wise man once said, "Woe to those who add house to house...until there is no more room, so that you live alone in the midst of the land." (Is. 5:8)

Maybe this perspective will help bring a little bit of balance to the issues and benefits of farming. When we pray, eat, play, work or anything else as a family, everyone benefits in society.

We need to be careful about painting such a broad brush of criticism on farming or any industry due to a few isolated instances that happened on a huge industrialized base farm. The hired hands may not be as vested in the operation as most family based farmers are with their heart, soul, body and mind.

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