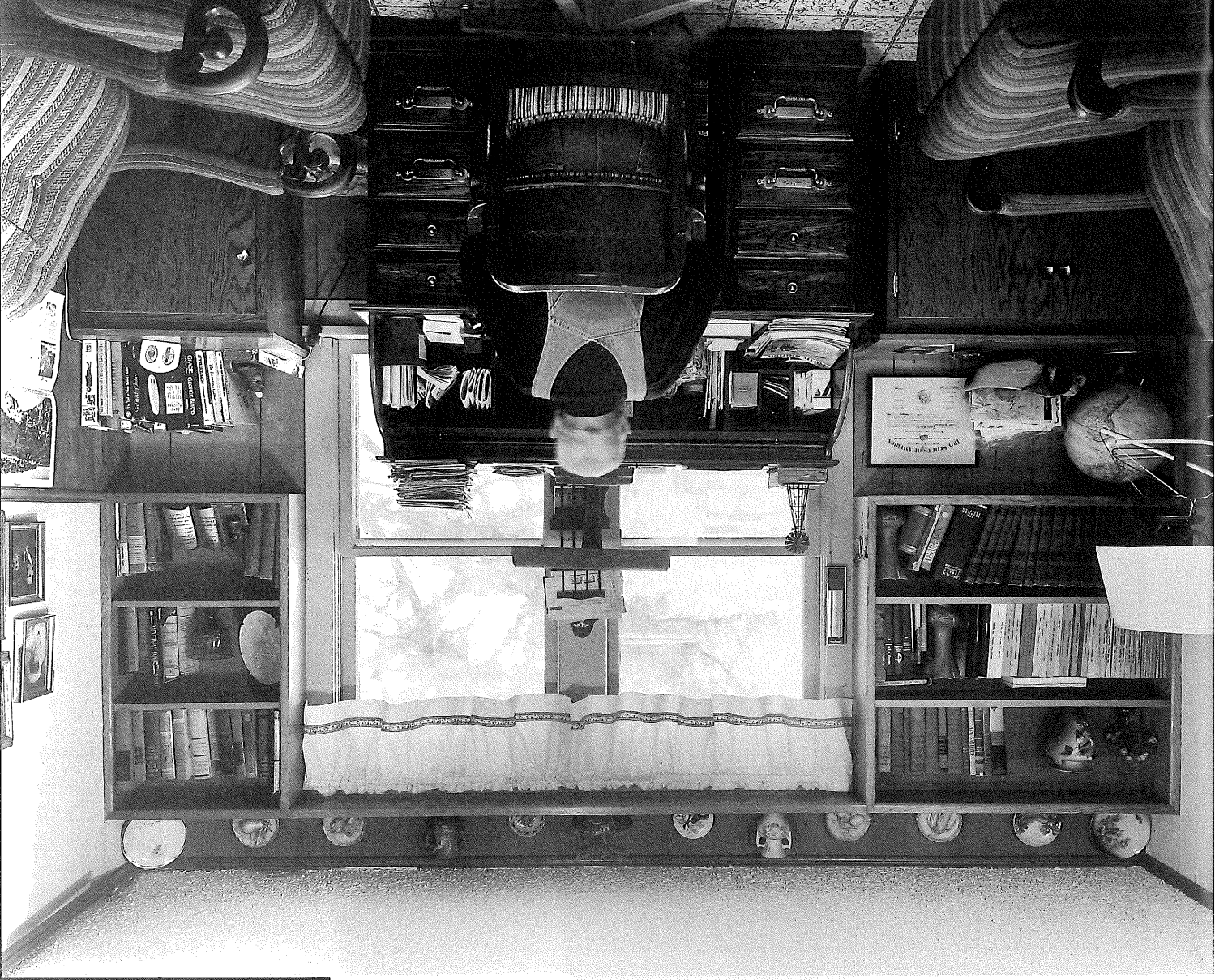


The Land Report

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Agrarianism
The first of three
special issues

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1994*

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Our Mission Statement

When people, land, and community are as one, all three members prosper; when they relate not as members but as competing interests, all three are exploited. By consulting nature as the source and measure of that membership, The Land Institute seeks to develop an agriculture that will save soil from being lost or poisoned while promoting a community life at once prosperous and enduring.

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STILL STANDING

BY WENDELL BERRY

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In 1930 a group of young men calling themselves "Twelve Southerners" published a book unique to American literature. Entitled *I'll Take My Stand*, the book contained an essay by each of the twelve. It will suffice here just to put down their names: John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, Frank Lawrence Owsley, John Gould Fletcher, Lyle H. Lanier, Allen Tate, Herman Clarence Nixon, Andrew Nelson Lytle, Robert Penn Warren, John Donald Wade, Henry Blue Kline, Stark Young. This group, also known as the Southern (or the Nashville or the Vanderbilt) Agrarians, grew out of the mutuality of a gathering of poets, the "Fugitives," who conversed and wrote in Nashville in the 1920s. Four of the Fugitives—Ransom, Davidson, Tate, and Warren—contributed essays to *I'll Take My Stand*.

John Crowe Ransom, in addition to his own essay, contributed an introduction, "A Statement of Principles," to which all of the twelve subscribed. Among the agreed-upon principles are the following:

The capitalization of the applied sciences has now become extravagant and uncritical. ...

The contribution that science can make to a labor is to render it easier by the help of a tool or a process, and to assure the laborer of his perfect economic security while he is engaged upon it. ... But the modern laborer has not exactly received this benefit under the industrial regime. His labor is hard, its tempo is fierce, and his employment is insecure.

... some economic evils follow in the wake of the machines. These are such as overproduction, unemployment, and a growing inequality in the distribution of wealth. But the remedies proposed by the apologists are always homeopathic. They expect the evils to disappear when we have bigger and better machines, and more of them.

We receive the illusion of having power over nature. ... The God of nature under these conditions is merely an amiable expression, a superfluity. ...

Art depends, in general, like religion, on a right attitude to nature. ...

We cannot recover our native humanism by adopting some standard of taste that is critical enough to question the contemporary arts but not critical enough to question the social and economic life which is their ground.

The twelve essays that follow this statement vary considerably in quality, in readability, and in what might be called their arguability. That surviving agrarians (and others too) may find them interesting, instructive, useful, and in some ways indispensable does not set them beyond the need for exacting criticism.

I wouldn't put the "Statement of Principles" beyond criticism, either. I have read it many times, inevitably bringing to it the privilege of hindsight, and in the light of that later knowledge, wishing to alter or clarify some of its sentences. It is nonetheless the supreme declaration of the book, as it ought to be. It has held up startlingly well. If I were to attempt to revise it, I would do so only with the consciousness that its main points are more obviously true now than they were in 1930. As it stands, I know of no criticism of industrial assumptions that can equal its clarity, economy, and eloquence.

That the "Statement of Principles" has never been widely read and discussed is a great misfortune for our country. But then, *I'll Take My Stand* is a misfortunate book. It is a book that called for a sequel; it was meant to have an influence and a practical result. Its tragedy, and ours, is that its challenge was never taken up. By the fall of 1931, as J. A. Bryant Jr. writes in *Twentieth Century Southern Literature*, its twelve authors "were compelled to acknowledge that *I'll Take My Stand* had been at best a shaky beginning for what the more ardent among them had hoped might be a crusade." They had hoped, as they said, to become "members of a national agrarian movement." That movement did not take place. What took place, instead, was the all-out industrialization of American agriculture, South and North.

The reputation and influence of the book has been reduced also because it was written during the era of segregation. None of the authors at that time had explicitly dissociated himself from racism, and at least one of them never did so. Donald Davidson was to the last a segregationist—which brings us, as readers, to trial, just as it does Davidson. We must decide whether to deal with this issue according to the rules of critical discourse. The enterprise of political correctness deals in the political merchandise of general categories, invoking judgment without trial, whereas critical discourse must try to deal intelligently with the fact that people who are wrong about one thing may be right about another. And in fact Donald Davidson the segregationist contributed to *I'll Take My Stand* an excellent essay on the meaning of the arts in an industrial society.

A further misfortune of that book was the migration of the most prominent of its authors to universities outside their region. Some of them proceeded to renounce or abandon their old allegiance to agrarian principles, and one who did so was the author of the "Statement of Principles," John Crowe Ransom. Writing in the *Kenyon Review* in 1945, Ransom dismissed the 1930 collaboration as "the agrarian nostalgia." He went on to say that:

without consenting to division of labor, and hence modern society, we should have not only no effective science, invention, and scholarship, but nothing to speak of in art, e.g., Reviews and contributions to Reviews, fine poems and their exegesis. ... The pure though always divided knowledges, and the physical gadgets and commodities, constitute our science, and are the guilty fruits; but the former are triumphs of muscular intellect, and the latter at best are clean and wholly at our service.

To me, it is impossible to compare the above passage with the sentences from the "Statement of Principles" quoted earlier and not feel that John Crowe Ransom's elegant mind had somehow taken leave of the practical world. These, the key sentences of his recantation, would seem merely credulous and silly except that they affirm the dependence of modern academic life upon the economy of industrialism, a dependence that still continues and grows worse.

And so we come, by a progression all too logical, to the greatest and most troubling misfortune of *I'll Take My Stand*: namely, that of the twelve authors, seven—Ransom, Davidson, Fletcher, Tate, Lytle, Warren, and Young—were or came to be well known as writers or poets or men of letters. Given only rationality and the ordinary meanings of words, a person would suppose that this literary prominence would have caused the agrarian principles of their book to be taken seriously by intelligent readers. But so straightforward an assumption overlooks the easy compatibility, acknowledged by Ransom, between the industrial economy and the modern university.

Nobody, of course, would have expected *I'll Take My Stand* to be taken seriously in the colleges of agriculture, where "agri-industry" was largely invented and where it has been for two generations a fanatically conventional "science." But the English departments, too, seem to have felt that something needed to be done to fend off the agrarianism of the Agrarians. Ransom's 1945 essay had simply told the truth. What would we do for "Reviews and contributions to Reviews, fine poems and their exegesis" (not to mention professorships, endowed chairs, sabbatical leaves, conferences,

grants and fellowships—all the "necessities" of the modern academic life) if it were not for the taxes and the charity of the industrialists? And so there followed a merely predictable anxiety to avoid acknowledging the least hint of practical or practicable truth in the Agrarians' attack upon industrialism and their defense of agrarianism.

The English departments were unable to ignore the literary members of the twelve as writers. They were finally too prominent—and too readily available to the literary industries of poetry and exegesis—for dismissal. The problem was rather too neatly resolved by the New Criticism (formulated in part by Ransom and Warren), which proposed that the reader's attention should be focused upon "the text" of a work of literature to the exclusion of everything outside the text. This was, within limits, useful; all of us who came of age under the influence of the New Criticism are, within limits, indebted to it. But the New Criticism also afforded a way to take a writer's work seriously "as literature," questioning minutely *how* it says what it says, while ignoring or dismissing the question of whether or not what it says is true.

I'll Take My Stand thus began to be read as a literary "text." The authors, these readers held, did not mean to be saying anything political or practical or economic. They did not mean to be taken seriously, even by other agrarians. They really did not know what they were doing when they called themselves agrarians. Their agrarianism was merely symbolic or metaphorical, a kind of poetry, only literature. (Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail," so far as I know, has not yet been read in this way—though it *can* be; the Sermon on the Mount is read, by some, "as literature.") This making into literature, and literature alone, of a serious argument on a serious—and *still* serious—issue rests necessarily upon the assumption, which is well nigh universal among the academic intellectuals who are aware of the subject at all, that industrial agriculture has made not only agrarianism but every nonindustrial kind of agriculture obsolete.

I don't think anybody in particular can be blamed for this. The fault lies with the sort of organizational norms and conventions that have the power to exclude

1728

The soil we passed over this day was very good. Charming valleys bring forth like the land of Egypt. Grass grows as high as a man on horseback and the rivers roll down their waters to the sea as clear as crystal. Happy will be the people destined for so wholesome a situation, where they may live to the fullness of their days with much content and gaiety of heart.—Colonel William Byrd II, Surveying the Dan River Valley, Virginia.

knowledge and ideas even from institutions of higher learning. This exclusiveness may not be apparent from the point of view of the universities. It is certainly apparent, however, from the point of view of anybody whose eye is at all close to the ground—a person, let us say, in a country community who is thinking about the requirements of good farming and good soil stewardship, and who is concerned for the survival of our land and our remnant farm population. Such a person will see without much trouble that in all the talk about agrarians and agrarianism, agri-industry and agribusiness, what has been left out of account is the future of the land, of farmers, and thus of eating. Nonindustrial, land- and people-conserving ways of agriculture have simply been ignored, even though a great many such ways are still being successfully practiced in the United States right now.

But this critical willingness to read a serious and competent argument as a “text” or “only literature” is not only a way of ignoring issues; it is also a way of depriving literature of its moral or cultural or religious force. Writers can write only uselessly against evils if what they write is read “as literature,” which by definition can have no practical bearing on anything outside itself. All literature can by this means be reduced to the status of a literary exercise. Writers are removed from the necessary public conversation about matters of importance, are penned within the university like animals in a feedlot, while their work is learnedly treated as a subject for specialists. The history of the reading of *I’ll Take My Stand* is a pretty frightening example of the way the departmented university can influence public discourse and communal meaning.

And so the objections to any serious consideration of *I’ll Take My Stand* can readily be anticipated: it is a literary work and therefore irrelevant; some of its authors did not maintain the stand they took; some of its authors were then or were always racists. I believe that these objections are answerable, and I would like to answer them.

The first question to be disposed of is that of credentials: By what authority did the Twelve Southerners presume to speak of agrarianism, industrialism, econo-

my, or any other subject outside of books? They were, in truth, a group of writers, intellectuals, and teachers whose paramount experience was certainly not of the workaday world. However, at least three of them—Lytle, Lanier, and Owsley—had some direct acquaintance with farming. And all of them, I believe, grew up in circumstances that permitted observation of the countryside and rural life. Their knowledge of agriculture certainly was not as close or complete as one might wish, and yet they knew better, instinctively and by experience, than to make the great mistake of the industrialists and the present-day advocates of so-called global economy and global culture. That is, they never for a moment supposed that a homogeneous technology, methodology, and economy could be nondestructively applied to the world’s incalculable diversity of climates, topographies, soils, and social conditions.

The great contribution of *I’ll Take My Stand*, therefore, is in its astute and uncompromising regionalism. The Twelve Southerners were correct, and virtually alone at the time, in their insistence upon the importance of the local. Their thinking, which stood (and still stands) opposed to that of the agri-industrialists, conforms perfectly to the thinking of such agricultural scientists as Sir Albert Howard and Wes Jackson, whose guiding principle is that of harmony between local ways of farming and local ecosystems. An agriculture is good, thus, not by virtue of its universal applicability, but according to its ability to adapt to local conditions and needs. A culture is good according to its ability to provide good local solutions to local problems.

If the initiative of the Southern Agrarians had been supported by similar initiatives in other regions, composing their hoped-for “national agrarian movement,” then we might have saved much of tangible value and much knowledge that we have now lost. For the relevance of the “Statement of Principles” has been tragically proven by the sixty-eight years of history subsequent to its publication. In that brief time, we have virtually destroyed the farming population (all the races thereof) along with an enormous amount of farmland. In 1930, the year *I’ll Take My Stand* was published, there were about thirty million farmers in this country; at present there are about four million. The farming class

1777

Since the achievement of our independence he is the greatest patriot who stops the most gullies.—Patrick Henry, before the Virginia Assembly.

1797

We ruin the lands that are already cleared and either cut down more wood, if we have it, or emigrate into the western country. ... A half, a third, or even a fourth of what land we mangle, well wrought and properly dressed, would produce more than the whole under our system of management; yet such is the force of habit, that we cannot depart from it.—George Washington, in his Letters.



Greg Conniff, *Dane County, Wisconsin, 1995*

is now one of the most despised and most damaged American minorities and has very nearly ceased to exist. By the ruin of farmers and rural communities, by erosion, pollution, and various kinds of industrial and urban development, we have ominously degraded and reduced the long-term food-producing capacity of our country. We have done this by our adherence to the industrial principles that have been dominant since the Civil War. I—or any wakeful member of a country community—can show you the gullies, the empty houses, the collapsing barns in the countryside, and the dead main streets of country towns. The World Resources Institute estimates that the net operating income of a Pennsylvania corn and soybean farmer would be reduced by 55 percent if soil depreciation were to be considered a cost of production. You can think your way into the implications of that as far as you can bear to go.

Does it matter that all of the Twelve Southerners who took their stand in 1930 did not remain standing until the benediction? How *could* it matter? They did not invent the principles they stood on, nor were they the first to be anxious about the effects of industrialism.

I have known a good many agrarians who stood until they died on agrarian principles and who never had heard of any of the Twelve Southerners. The only pertinent (or interesting) question is about the correctness of the principles. Ransom's reversal of opinion on this matter was, in fact, strenuously disputed by several of his coauthors. Allen Tate, for one, wrote in 1952 that "I have not changed any of my views on Agrarianism since the appearance of *I'll Take My Stand*. ... I never thought of Agrarianism as a restoration of anything in the Old South; I saw it as something to be created, as I think it will in the long run be created as the result of a profound change ... in the moral and religious outlook of western man." And Lyle Lanier said in 1980, "I think it's fair to say that *I'll Take My Stand* is a gross understatement of the conditions we face today."

Is the "Statement of Principles" a racist document? I cannot see that it is. Is it racist by association, in the sense that some racists have subscribed to it? I suppose so, but in that case so are the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, and the Gospels. Are we going to disown our forebears

1845

If western land-spoilers knew how eastern land-skinners had skinned their land to death, they would not go on doing just the same thing. But they won't know, and, of course, won't do. ... This is the land of gullies.—Solon Robinson, writing of Mississippi.

1907

To skin and exhaust the land will result in undermining the days of our children.—Theodore Roosevelt, in a Message to Congress.



entirely because they were partly sinners? (Are we willing to stand judgment before our own descendants on the same terms?)

Is an agrarian society necessarily a racist society? I don't think so. In 1930 the most successful agrarian communities in the United States were probably those of the Midwest, which did not depend on the labor of any subject or oppressed race. At that time, moreover, the farmland of the Midwest was distributed more democratically, and was better farmed, than it has been under the dominance of industrial agriculture.

Has the industrialization of American agriculture been good for black people? It undoubtedly has permitted some blacks (like some whites) to make more money. Undoubtedly some, who in 1930 would have been hired hands or sharecroppers or small farmers, in 1997 are making "good money" or even "big money" in industry and the professions. But how much of this gain

is net is not clear. The costs certainly have been great. I don't know that we have asked, let alone answered, whether it is better to be a black small farmer in the South or homeless, addicted, or jailed—or dead—in San Francisco.

Ransom's "Statement of Principles" is correct in noticing that "a fresh labor-saving device introduced into an industry does not emancipate the laborers in that industry so much as it evicts them." An industrial economy *profits* from joblessness, which drives down the cost of labor. The chairman and CEO of General Electric made (in salary, bonuses, and stock options) \$30 million in 1996—his salary and bonuses having increased by about 20 percent over the preceding year. His main job at that time was to oppose his workers' demands for wage increases. To industrial conservatives, everybody (except their individual selves) is expendable. To industrial liberals, those expended are adequately compensated by welfare and politically correct terminology. But how much displacement and unemployment is "a good job" worth? Between 1920 and 1988 the number of farms owned by black American farmers declined from 916,000, totaling fifteen million acres, to 30,000, totaling about three million acres. The number of such farms in Mississippi declined from 164,000 in 1910 to fewer than 9,000 in 1980. I don't know what happened to those displaced black landowners, but who would like to assure me that they exchanged their farms for commensurate equity in the industrial system? No "liberal" of any consequence has spoken for those farmers or done anything to help them—and for the most ironic of reasons: because to have done so would have required helping white small farmers as well. And of course no "conservatives" have notably exerted themselves to help any farmer who could be described as "small." The reduction of the farm population (black and white) has been a joint project of industrial liberals and industrial conservatives. Is there any evidence that agriculture has been improved by this reduction? Not a shred. The only consequent improvement has been in the profit margins of Monsanto and other "agri-industrial" corporations—profits to a considerable extent extracted from the *farm*



Scott Jost, Wahaub Prairie, *The Land Institute*, 1996

1908

When our soils are gone, we, too, must go unless we find some way to feed on raw rock, or its equivalent. ... The key lies in due control of the water which falls on each acre. ... The solution ... essentially solves the whole train of problems running from farm to river and from crop production to navigation.—Thomas C. Chamberlin, before a White House Conference of Governors.

economy that has been almost customarily depressed for several decades.

In agriculture, industrialization has dispersed—and by increasing scale, destroyed the efficacy of—the labor force of farm families and farm neighborhoods. This has caused a seasonal labor-vacuum, which is now filled by the labor of Mexican and Central American migrants. Dependable statistics are not available, since these people typically are not found by census takers, but Rick Mines of the United States Department of Labor estimates that over the course of a year, 2.5 million seasonal or migrant workers are employed on this nation's farms at a yearly income of \$5000 to \$7500, and that three-quarters of these are foreign-born. These workers move from one temporary job to another, usually separated from their families, and doing hard work of a kind that modern-day Americans are taught to despise. They earn low wages; they have no connection to the communities in which they work; they have no hope of owning the land on which they work; they have no social or cultural ties to the people for whom they work. As they appear to be infinitely replaceable (more keep coming), they appear also to be infinitely expendable; they have not even the value, and the implied protections, of property. We ought to ask, I suppose, if this state of affairs is acceptable in a nation still somewhat proud of having freed its slaves. We should ask if this is an acceptable way to treat people anywhere, under any circumstances. But beyond those questions lie two others, equally serious: Is this the best way to farm? Is it the best way to keep eating?

It is a fact, unacknowledged but obvious, that for a long time agriculture has been understood by some and (ignorantly or not) accepted by many others as an industry deliberately exploitive not only of land and other natural resources but also of people. In the United States it has exploited black slaves and indentured servants, black and white sharecroppers or tenant farmers, small farmers and landowners, larger industrialized farmers, Mexican and other immigrant laborers. It has depended on people inured to hard work, difficult living conditions, and debt. The world is increasingly filled with people who cannot or will not feed themselves, who

therefore must be fed. Farming and land husbandry is therefore work that is not only necessary but increasingly urgent in its importance. And this vital work is so poorly paid that our own people—our own *young* people—do not want to do it or cannot afford to do it. It is work that increasingly we pay third-world immigrants or third-world residents to do for us, but that we pay nobody to do well.

The last dog, however, is not yet dead, and Allen Tate may turn out to have been a better prophet than John Crowe Ransom. Tate took his stand and remained standing, seeing correctly that a profound change was needed. Now, nearly seventy years after the publication of *I'll Take My Stand*, there is strong evidence that such a change has begun. The agrarian agenda is still in effect; it is well understood and supported by a large and rapidly increasing number of people. Scattered over these United States are hundreds of organizations, large and small, that are working regionally or locally for land conservation, better farming practices, community preservation, local marketing of food and other farm products, preservation of agricultural breeds and varieties, better standards of health, and so on. To name only a few of the most prominent of these, in the Northeast there is the Northeast Organic Farmers Association; in Minnesota, the Land Stewardship Project; in Iowa, the Seed Savers Exchange; in Kansas, The Land Institute; in Nebraska, the Center for Rural Affairs. In the Northwest there is Tilth; in my own state of Kentucky there are the Community Farm Alliance and the Commodity Growers Cooperative Association; in the South are the Rural Advancement Foundation, the Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, and the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy. Several of these have been in existence for twenty years or more.

Such organizations are alive and at work because a lot of people have decided quite consciously and competently, and without the help of their political leaders or appointed experts, that they do not want the world to be owned, all its standards set, and its future decided by a handful of global corporations. Several of the Twelve Southerners, were they alive today, would agree, and would be pleased.

1908

The noblest task that confronts us all today is to leave this country unspotted in honor, and unexhausted in resources. ... I conceive this task to partake of the highest spirit of patriotism.—Gifford Pinchot, *The World's Work*, May, 1908.

1911

The grass roots which formerly held the soil together are decayed and gone, and now when loosened by the plow the soil is easily drifted and blown away.—Dr. A. M. Ten Eyck, *Kansas*.



Terry Evans
Pete Ferrell's Ranch
Beaumont, Kansas
April 1997



Terry Evans
Matfield Green, Kansas
1998

Everything That Comes Around Goes Around

**Thoughts while contemplating a woodlot that
forty-four years ago was the highest-yielding
cornfield in the world.** *By Gene Logsdon*

Last year a nationally-renowned agricultural economist made a prediction on the radio that I have a hunch will embarrass him greatly if he lives long enough. (Perhaps all our attempts at predicting the future will embarrass us greatly if we live long enough.) He said that a continuation of larger and larger industrial grain farms and animal factories was "inevitable." It was obvious that inevitable also meant irreversible in his mind. He did not make this statement as his opinion, but as a fact, one that sentimental old agrarian cranks like me had better get used to.

I wonder if he would have made that prediction had he known the history of any one farm deeply or if he had known that the proprietors of the factory farms he was so arrogantly extolling in 1997 would be standing like bums in a soup line in 1998, waiting for huge government handouts to keep them financially afloat.

"Inevitable" is a word that probably ought to be stricken from the language of human behavior. History demonstrates, time and time again, that in agriculture, as in any economic activity, varying conditions of human economy may change the only inevitability. It is just as possible for farming to go from big to small in size as from small to big. To disperse into many units is as likely as to consolidate into a few. Nor is the supposed normal progression of land development from frontier to metropolis inevitable and irreversible. I need look no farther than right here in the fields of home to see that lesson written on the land. If Wyandot Chief War Pole, after whom the creek that runs through our farm is named, had been a conventional economist, he would have insisted, fifty years before the influx of white settlement, that the continuation of the Wyandots' highly-refined combination of farming and hunting was inevitable and the Delawares and Shawnees had better get used to it. But War Pole lived to see sheep ranching become the characteristic agricultural activity here as fast as the Wyandots could be shipped off to Kansas in the mid 1800s. War Pole's people and their ancestors had unwittingly prepared for the ranchers by creating with their annual fire ring hunts, extensive treeless prairie pastures ideal for sheep. My great-grandfather Charles Rall, coming here from Germany, went to work on the R.M. Taylor ranch that spread over much of the farmland I have roamed since childhood. Had there been agricultural economists in those days, I can just

hear them saying, with all the pomp and ceremony of their royal offices, that a continuation of huge sheep ranches was our "inevitable" future and hired hands from Germany better get used to it.

But within a generation, money was finding different pathways to follow. The sheep ranches rapidly became "obsolete" (in America obsolete means "something no longer as profitable as it used to be"), and farmers like my great-grandfather bought up the prairie along with the forests around it and converted it to more diversified, large livestock farms. So profitable was this kind of farming for awhile that my great-grandfather, by 1900, had consolidated some 2000 acres into his operation, and his was not the largest. Get big or get out, I can hear the economists boasting as if they had done it—a continuation of large grain and livestock farms was "inevitable." But great-grandfather's four sons inherited that land, broke it up into as many parcels, and eventually distributed it out to their numerous offspring in 160-acre family farms because that was the most "efficient" way to apply manpower for profitability at that time. By then agricultural economists were on the scene, having found a way to milk the tax rolls for their salaries, and they rallied to that redistribution of land with gusto, declaring its continuation not only inevitable, but a great victory for American free enterprise.

Not quite two generations later, after the Second World War, "free enterprise" began displacing these little farms with industrial cash grain operations headed *back* in size to about the acreage of great-grandfather's farm. The economists, once more displaying not a wit of historical sense, said, and say, that the continuation of this mega-factory farming is "inevitable."

I can gaze up Warpole Creek from my farm and see the once-forested valley that livestock farming kept in pasture for a hundred years. In that pasture rises a Hopewell Indian mound whose people would have been clearing this land and planting corn five hundred years before it grew back to forest and a thousand years before great-grandfather (or perhaps the Wyandots) cleared it again. When the sun slants low in the west, I can see great-uncle Albert's old dead furrows under the grass of the valley slopes facing the mound. He tried to

grow corn on these hillsides too, until he understood such land was better kept in pasture. He even tried to grow corn on the mound itself. Today this little valley, found not to be accessible enough for the monster machines of industrial grain farming (after a brief flirtation in that direction), is growing back to timber again!

Whose agrarian vision do you want to vote for? Reading what the highly-literate Wyandots said about their way of life here as they were forced to leave for Kansas in grief, I am convinced that they had effected not only the most ecological farming ever done here, but the happiest farmers. Of course the Hopewells' agrarianism might have been just as pleasant for awhile; there is no way to know because they did not leave a written record of their marvelous integration of farming and commerce and hunting-gathering, an economy that archaeologists say was so successful that it eventually (inevitably?) generated overpopulation and collapsed. But you can bet that right up until their decline began, maybe even after it started, those who passed for economists in the Hopewell villages stood atop their mounds and declared with immense bravado that a continuation of bigger and more elaborate earthworks was "inevitable."

Between the shift from great-grandfather's large livestock farms to his grandchildren's small family farms, something else happened that further reveals the sham of economic prediction that ignores the history of place. The corn and soybean fields that I can look out upon from my eastward windows today were for a time an airfield! It was known as "Rall Field" naturally enough. The year was 1930. The prophets of inevitability were all talking about how there would be a plane as well as a car in every garage someday.

My kinfolks' airport is remembered not because it violated the conventional theories of historical progression, but because of a humorous story that went with it. On Sundays, planes would fly in from Bucyrus and Marion and other towns in the area and take people for rides. The planes were mostly fragile, homemade affairs guaranteed to supply plenty of weekend excitement. The story goes that the owner-builder of one such plane, possibly not trusting the flimsy crate himself, hired a pilot to fly it from Bucyrus, where he kept it, to Rall

Field for an afternoon of rides. Arriving at the field before his plane got there, the budding airline executive noticed a dead furrow across the upper end of the landing strip. Though only a slight depression in the ground, it might spell disaster if the plane crossed over it during landing. So the first and only air traffic controller Mifflin Township has ever known straddled the worrisome little remnant of bygone agrarianism and as the plane hove into sight, began waving his hands and pointing down to the ground at the source of his consternation. However, the pilot interpreted the pantomime in just the opposite way. It seemed strange to him that his boss wanted the plane set down right in front of what looked like a dead furrow, but it was obvious from the increasing ferocity with which he waved that such was the case. Down he came, as close to the spot his screaming, purple-faced air traffic controller was pointing at. When the plane hit the furrow, it nosed over and crumpled up like a paper accordion, but the rate of speed was so slow that the pilot walked away unharmed.

Rall Field did not last nearly as long as the vision of an inevitable plane in every garage. Great-uncle Albert, applying his astute pencil stub to the daybook he kept handily in his bib overalls, calculated that corn and dairy cows on that land were more profitable than inevitable airplanes, at least for the time being. Today, he might have concluded that a golf course was more inevitable than dairy cows, except that other farmers not far away had already reached that conclusion. There are now more golf courses in our county per resident (24,000 population, four golf courses) than possibly anywhere in the nation. This "inevitability," however, was entirely missed by the economic prognosticators.

Many farms have strange tales to tell. The first officially recorded 300-bushel corn yield was grown by Lamar Ratcliff on his father's farm in Prentiss County, Mississippi (much to the chagrin of the cornbelt), back in 1955. How well I remember the excitement among us farmers. The farm magazine rhetoric flowed with the promise of mighty things to come. Soon 300-bushel corn would be common. And if Mississippi could do it, by hickory, Illinois and Iowa, with the help of more fertilizers and chemicals and hybrid vigor and technology,

Scott Jost, *Wahaub Prairie*, *The Land Institute*, 1996



yawn, yawn, would soon ring up 400-bushel yields. The word “inevitable” was flung around very loosely on that occasion too.

Today, forty-four years later, the field that grew the first 300-bushel corn is a woodlot again! Furthermore, yields of 300 bushels per acre were not achieved again for 20 years and then only in two or three isolated instances. Ironically, agronomic experimentation indicates that if 300-bushel yields ever do become “inevitable,” they will be a product of biointensively-managed, raised-bed garden plots, where extremely high yields of almost everything have been achieved in recent years. Imagine how much food the backyards of America alone could produce at such super yields (or even at average yields), putting the lie to the claim by the mega-food companies and their university hirelings that big business is the only and inevitable solution to the future of food production. We have been here before and know this lie. Way back in 1907, an economist in England, Prince Kropotkin, a forerunner of a new breed of ecological economists today, clearly demonstrated with pages of data how food and manufactories could be and were being produced just as abundantly and economically on small, dispersed farms as on the huge bonanza farms and large inhumane factories that greed was generating at that time. His book, *Fields, Factories, and Workshop*, correctly predicted the demise of the bonanza farms and the “farming out” by large factories of much of their manufacturing work to smaller, more efficient shops. Consolidation is not a synonym for efficiency.

That the current trend to consolidation in the food business will “inevitably” reverse itself is as justifiable a conclusion as assuming that a half dozen huge companies will “inevitably” monopolize and control the food supply. All over the “inevitably”-industrialized cash grain county I wander daily, small homesteads and garden farms are popping up. Some of them are merely urban homes in the country, but a surprising number are younger couples or retirees coming back to reclaim and use some of the land that mega-farming took away from their fathers and grandfathers. When farms go up for sale around here now, they are invariably split up into small parcels of five to 40 acres because there is such a

demand for such acreage. Young families with urban jobs can and will bid more for the small parcels than the mega-farmers can afford to pay, a reversal of a 30-year trend. The mega-farmers fume at the practice of selling farms in small parcels, forgetting how they said, in their day of breezily buying every farm that came up for sale, that this is just “the good ole’ American way.”

Why this new development in rural life receives little attention from the economists is beyond me. (Not really. The people spearheading this “forward to the land” movement do not want or ask for political or educational help and so, of course, the bureaucrats must pretend they don’t exist to save face.) My own family makes a good example. My parents raised nine children on a typical family farm of the ‘30s and ‘40s. Eight of us children live rural lives today much like our parents did, two of us heavily into commercial farming, but with other sources of income, and the rest of us dividing our time between other careers and small scale farming, sheep raising, orcharding, tree farming, and very serious subsistence gardening. Of our 29 children, 14 are married, and of that number, nine live rural lives as we do, and three of the five others tell me they will move forward to the land as soon as they save sufficient money to do so. Of the remaining 15 still in school or still single and trying to find their way, I am certain that at least half will eventually (inevitably?) take up our rural lifestyle. And we are outdone in this respect by other rural-rooted families in our neighborhood.

We “new” countrysiders express an allegiance to the same agrarian values that our parents and grandparents and great-grandparents honored. The only difference is in our way of expressing that allegiance and in the work we pursue to achieve it. We come back to rural life because we want some physical control over our lives. We want some income from the land, but also some from non-farm sources because we understand the folly of trying to make a decent financial income entirely from farming in today’s unstable economy. We want homes where our children can know meaningful work and learn something useful as they grow up. We want an alternative to chemicalized, hormonized, vaccinized, antibiotic-treated, irradiated factory food. We would like to establish home-based businesses when possible so

1915

We come out of the earth, and we have a right to the use of its materials; and there is no danger of crass materialism if we recognize the original materials as divine. ... We are not to look for our permanent civilization to rest on any species of robber economy.—Liberty Hyde Bailey, *The Holy Earth*.

1936

Is this the sort of country we want to leave behind us, to be our monument or history? Ravaged land, wasted forests, empty oil wells, and a people starved, stunted, ignorant and savage. Why do we do it? What strange insanity is driving us to destroy ourselves?—David Cushman Coyle, *Waste*.

that we do not have to put our children in daycare centers as parents who work away from home must often do. We want a different kind of educational environment for our children than what urban schools provide, private or public. Sometimes we homeschool our children. We want above all some home-based security not dependent entirely on the outside economy. We think the outside economy is going to hell.

What we are doing, in short, is finding ways, which the early farm organizations failed to do, to bring back to rural America the life and money that consolidated banking sucked out over two centuries of predatory colonization, a process that consolidated schooling legitimized. We are managing to join the best of urban life with the best of rural life in a new and admirable agrarianism. Steve Zender, editor of one of our local village newspapers, wrote a telltale anecdote in a book he published in 1998 in celebration of rural and village life, *The Big Things In Life Are The Little Things*. One of his reporters, Kate Orians, left a message on his office phone: "I'll bring my story over Sunday evening or afternoon. It just got too late today and the vet was here to take blood samples from the pigs." Zender laughs as he tells the story again. "It is wonderful to live in rural America where we have the best of both worlds," he says. "Futurists say that telecommunications will result in people fleeing the cities and moving to rural areas. It's already happening here and I hope it means that people will be able to provide for their families and do important work for their communities while still having time to garden and take care of pigs."

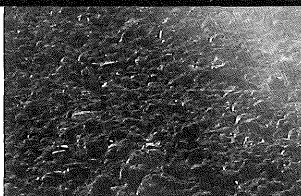
The most interesting and promising ideas in food production are showing up in this "new" agrarian society. While mainstream factory farming continues to cement itself financially into huge cumbersome operations that lose the flexibility to move quickly to take advantage of changes in consumer-driven markets, small scale farms are perfecting new/old practices like deep-bedding systems for hogs that are free of factory farm odor and pollution problems; organic dairies; meat, milk and egg production that relies on rotational pasture systems, not expensive chemicals or machinery; permanent, raised-bed vegetables where production per square foot is enormously increased with hand labor, not expensive

machinery; improved food plants from natural selection of open-pollinated varieties whose seed can be economically saved for the next year's crop, and so forth. The seminar that drew the largest attendance at a recent "Small Farm Conference" in Indiana was conducted by a farmer who is raising freshwater prawns in small ponds. The mindset of this farmer is as untraditional as his crop and this is another characteristic of the new agrarianism. Chip Planck, a successful, long-standing, commercial market gardener near Washington, D.C., used to be a professor of political science.

"Urban farming," which two decades ago would have struck the economic prophet of inevitability as an oxymoron (but not the prophet of the early 1900s when cities harbored hundreds of truck farms), is now growing in vigor again in the industrially-wasted innards of our metropolises. The highpriests of Monsanto and Cargill et al., in their mad attempt to control food "from seed to shelf," as they put it, might be surprised, even shocked, to learn that thriving community gardens in inner city Cleveland, Ohio, are using draft horses for cultivation. Surely the sight of grade school children gathered at the corner of East 30th Street and Cedar Avenue, watching Lake Farmpark's two mares plow gardens, and actually being allowed to hold on to the plow as it turned the furrows just as I could do 60 years ago, has the promise of some kind of noble revolution. It gives me the same feeling that came over me when the Berlin Wall was torn down.

Nor are the old agrarian virtues of ingenuity and common sense lost on urban farmers. In need of manure, these Clevelanders found out that the local zoo had plenty and was only too glad to give it away. "The only problem," says Kathleen O'Neill, one of the Extension workers who helps coordinate urban farming in the city, "was how to haul the stuff to the gardens." A pixie grin spreads over her face. "We found a solution. We got the National Guard boys to do it, instead of driving up and down the highways on their usual week-end 'maneuvers'."

Even the schools of economics are headed in a different direction than many of their conventional minds realize. New economic theories have reverence for historical evidence. One of the foremost spokespersons of



1939

The plain truth is that Americans, as a people, have never learned to love the land and to regard it as an enduring resource.—Hugh H. Bennett, *Soil Conservation*, Chapter I.

1940

I can see no reason for a conservation program if people have lost their knack with earth. I can see no reason for saving the streams to make the power to run the factories if the resultant industry reduces the status and destroys the heart of the individual. Such is not conservation, but the most frightful sort of dissipation.—E. B. White, *Harper's Magazine*, February, 1940.

this different philosophy of economics, John Ikerd at the University of Missouri, recently wrote a paper titled "The Coming Renaissance of Rural America."

Discussing change in food production cultures, he suggested the validity of the "universal cycle theory" which *Science* magazine recently included in its list of the top twenty scientific ideas of the 20th century. According to this theory, any observed trend is in fact just a phase of a cycle. "If we look back over past centuries and around the globe, we can find examples where control of land became concentrated in the hands of a few only to later become dispersed in control among the many," writes Ikerd. "The trend toward fewer and larger farms in the U.S. might be just a phase of a cycle that is nearing its end."

The ending of this cycle, as the ending of any cycle, will be sad, even tragic for those who do not see it coming and so do not change in time. The gigantic, high-investment food factories of today, like the ten, twenty, thirty and even seventy-five thousand acre bonanza farms at the turn of the 20th century, do not in fact have the flexibility *now* to respond fast enough to changes in market demand. If just 25 percent of the people in this country decided to become vegetarians, or if 40 percent decided to cut their consumption of meat significantly, which is entirely likely, the factory farm system irrevocably based on meat, corn and soybean meal is history. Like bonanza farms, like any dinosaur without its proper environment, such a system must decline. But in every other way than the financial welfare of the bonanza crowd, a swing back to a more distributive food production system will have many advantages for the common good, not the least of which would be an end (until the next cycle) of the food monopolies now being created. When the 75,000-acre Dalrymple bonanza farm was broken up and sold in the early 1900s, William Dalrymple had this to say: "My brother and I have decided to give up operating the farm and divide it into small farms. ... Big farms were once good for publicity.

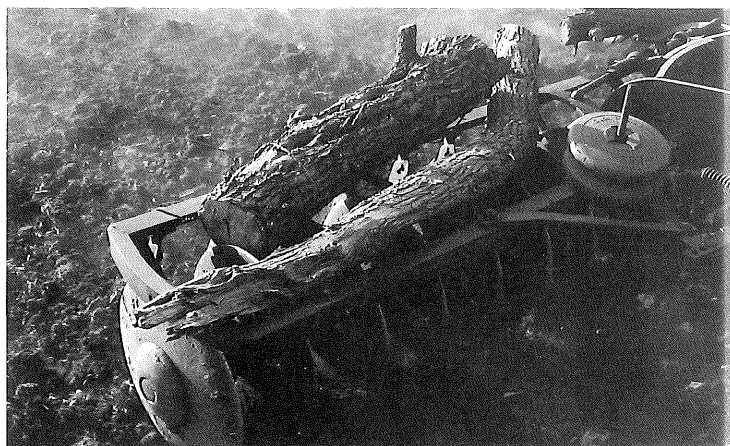


Scott Jost, Joe Smucker and Barb Goering's farm, near Goessel, Kansas, 1996

But economic conditions have changed. ... It will be better for the state, for the towns and cities ... to have a great many small farms in place of one big farm."

In any event, there is one consolation for old agrarian cranks like me. Even under continued factory farm economics, monopoly can't work very well in food production as long as enough people have access to land, even backyard land, to grow food for themselves and local customers. We may not be able to make cars in our backyards cheaper than the moguls of money can do it, but give us land, any land, even the industrially bombed-out rubble of inner cities, and we can compete with factory food. Hardly anything is simpler or cheaper to do than raise chickens and vegetables.

The problem I fear is that while we are condemned by the economics of money, greed, or changing markets, or weather patterns, to continue the inexorable cycles of small and large, boom and bust, consolidation and dispersal, the power of wealth solidified in the current cycle will try to stop the wheel of history from turning. Expect a vigorous effort on the part of the agribusiness oligarchy, in cahoots with a suppliant government, to prolong the bonanza farm consolidation of today as long as it can. Some of this futility will be justified to prevent a period of chaos in readjustment, just as the futile attempt to "save the family farm" of the last cycle was justified for a similar reason. But prolonging the end of the current cycle of consolidated power will be much more potentially dangerous because those being "helped" will not be family farmers, but the wealthy classes who need no help. Expect the power structure to continue the present policy of giving welfare capital shamelessly to the rich in the name of saving society from starvation. Expect it to continue to perpetuate propaganda that hides the collapsing bonanza economy, especially the health hazards of factory food. Expect it to continue legal favoritism to the food monopolies. Such efforts to stave off the end of the current cycle of consolidation will be the topic of my next essay—The Folly of Trying to Repress the Agrarian Impulse: Thoughts while watching weeds push up through the blacktop of a shopping center.







Terry Evans
Evie Mae sorting potatoes
Matfield Green, Kansas, 1996



"County Agent" (July 24, 1948) printed by permission of the

On Norman Rockwell's *The*

by Wes Jackson

The original of this print hangs in the lobby of the Nebraska Center for Continuing Education in Lincoln. Thousands of prints can be found in many local extension offices throughout the U.S. The painting appeared in the July 24, 1948, issue of the *Saturday Evening Post* and the article about the painting was entitled "Norman Rockwell Visits a County Agent."

Rockwell used real people as models, and in this case it was a real County Agent named Herald K. Rippey whose charge was Jay County, Indiana. A Nebraska 4-H Development Foundation pamphlet

written by Clarice Orr provides an interesting piece of history as follows:

Artist Rockwell followed County Agent Herald K. Rippey around Jay County, Indiana, and, according to the story, ended up "worn to a nubbin", but chock-full of farm cooking, tips on how to cull chickens and test soil and warm admiration for his subject."

Clint Hoover, director of the Nebraska Center Hotel, spotted Mr. and Mrs. Rippey, one summer day, standing in the lobby in front of the painting. Enroute home from a West Coast vacation, they stopped to



Norman Rockwell Family Trust. Copyright © 1948, the Norman Rockwell Family Trust.

County Agent

see the painting in its permanent home. Rippey reminisced about 4-H and his brush with fame with Norman Rockwell. Purdue's School of Agriculture had picked Herald Rippey as the county agent and Rippey selected the Don Steeds, an active 4-H family of Portland, Indiana.

When Mr. and Mrs. Rockwell arrived in Indiana, he was well pleased with the plans for the setting except for the barn—it was white and he wanted a red one. ...

... Although he planned for a spring scene on the canvas, preparations were actually done in the fall.

I finally asked the question:

**Are any of the children of
the kids in the painting
farming? The answer was
“no.”**

Faithful to detail, Rockwell changed the boy's winter cap to the proper spring attire. And after Rockwell's farmer neighbor reminded him that fall calves have heavier coats than spring calves, Rockwell repainted the calf.

For over a decade now, in various presentations around the country, I have shown a slide of the painting, asking audiences if they see anything wrong with this piece of nostalgia, this representation of the nearly gone agrarian world. What is clear, with a little study, is that expertise and youth are central while tradition and experience are peripheral. Norman Rockwell painted what was, at the time. He was also painting what got writ large in American agriculture. For most of us at that time it was probably unforeseen. For that matter, it might have been unforeseeable.

Time and again we're told that the current scale in the industrialization of agriculture was an inevitability or that economic determinism was at work or some such language. The efficiency in the time factor, which translates into how few people are necessary to produce our food on the land, is regarded as a virtue of sorts. A sign on Interstate 70 near the Manhattan, Kansas, exit—the exit which also leads to Kansas State University, our local land grant university—brags to the passerby that one Kansas farmer feeds 128 people plus you.

Back to the subjects in the Rockwell painting. What became of them? Mom and Dad and Grandpa must be gone, but where are the kids? I dialed the 219 area code, asked the operator for Portland, Indiana, and the number for any Rippey in the phone book. I dialed one of the offered numbers and a Mr. Rippey answered, a relative of the late county agent. From him I learned that the father in the painting, the one off to the left in the shadows with the cat on his shoulder, farmed to the end and was killed by a registered bull on his farm. He gave me the name of the dutiful 4-H girl holding the

Bringing the Lambs

by Donald McCaig

calf, the one with her 4-H record book displayed. Gama Sue Steed married Dale Fuller of Redkey, Indiana. I called Gama Sue. Both she and her sister, Sharon—the one with the sewing project—left the farm to marry and raise children. They never farmed. Brother Larry, the one with the poultry project, had farmed until he died in 1988. I finally asked the question: Are any of the children of the kids in the painting farming? The answer was “no.”

Just described is the complication one often encounters in a discussion of what has been lost with the decline of agrarianism in America. Nostalgia complicates the story, the desire for the stimulation urban life offers enters in. Lateral mobility which upward mobility makes possible comes into play. The wish for ease, the understandable push to make a farm more productive, the reliance on experts, the 200-year-old notion of progress, economics, fashion, trendiness, and more complicate any discussion.

Note: This issue represents a departure from previous *Land Reports* and, for the first time since The Land Institute began, I am editor. We have suspended the intern program for 1999 as a board appointed committee studies the shape of our educational offerings beginning in the year 2000. As a consequence, we will use this opportunity over this and the next two issues to explore the possibilities and necessity of agrarian thinking for town and country alike. (I don't apologize for emphasizing agrarianism, for, after all, the industrial mind currently dominates our culture in both town and country.) Much of the old familiar format will return in future issues, but for now count this one, at least, as a special issue of sorts.

Every morning, as soon as it's light enough to see without a flashlight, I go out with my sheepdog Gael to look for new lambs. It's frosty, and in the east the mountains are backlit red and there are a few stars and a three quarters moon hangs over the western horizon. Sometimes a jet contrail streaks overhead, fat and pinkish in the sunrise—early travelers, 30,000 feet over my head, reading the *Washington Post*, sipping their morning coffee.

Sheep are conservative creatures and most mornings we find them on the same hillside, strewn like groaning boulders. I tell Gael to wait while I slip in among them listening to the “uh-uh-uh” of a ewe talking to her new lamb. Sometimes I find a ewe having trouble but usually there'll be one, two, or three lambs tottering around Ma, trying to figure out which end has the milk on this, their first morning in the world. I scoop up the lambs and set off and most times Ma follows right behind, nickering anxiously. Gael checks out the birthplace hoping to locate a nice afterbirth for later consumption. Then she swings along behind the ewe.

Sometimes a ewe will panic and decide that the lambs dangling from my arms are not her idea of real lambs and she'll turn to run back to the birthplace, the last place she saw real lambs with their feet on the ground. It's Gael's job to keep her following me. Sometimes a first time Mama will balk and refuse to follow so I set the lambs down and Gael and I shoo the new sheep family along, patiently, patiently, until we get near the barn and the sheep families already inside bleat their welcome. It's still dark inside the barn.

Gael waits in the doorway while I sprinkle lime into a pen and bed it with fluffy straw. I close the gate on ewe and lambs and for the first time, I touch the ewe, grab her neck while I grope underneath and squirt a few squirts from each tit into the palm of my hand. I dip each lamb's navel in iodine, feed the ewe a leaf of our best alfalfa and a bucket of water. They always go for the water first. Birthing is thirsty work.

Sometimes Gael and I bring in one new mother, sometimes there's half a dozen and one day last week we fetched lambs from dawn 'till dark while my wife Anne eartagged and banded tails and gave medications. Dinner that night was a stew from the freezer and after dinner I laid down on the couch and stared at the NewsHour. Big doings in the big world. I do have opinions about those doings but for the life of me can't remember what they are. Gael is wiped out, curled up tight in her bed. Her front paws are twitching.

A Farming Community

by David Kline

The past two weeks have been busy with silo filling. The drought (half an inch of rain in July and three-tenths inch in August) dried off the corn much earlier than was expected and all of a sudden every farmer's crop, even the late planted corn, was ready to be cut. Since the seven neighbors that make up our crew also help outward into other filling rings, it took a lot of planning and date changing until everyone had their day set.

We filled ours yesterday forenoon. By eleven o'clock the bundles of corn in the three-acre field were cut and in the silo. After the teams were unhitched, put in the barn and fed, we washed up and ate dinner.

There is something about hard work, along with the cooler weather, that builds an appetite. But Elsie and the girls were well prepared for the hungry bunch—potatoes, corn, beef, cole slaw, sliced tomatoes and melons, along with several dandy desserts. Since we were finished early and had an early dinner, we sat around the table and visited for another hour before the neighbors inspanned their teams and went home.

All of the neighbors who helped us were Amish; however, as recently as three or four decades ago that wasn't the case. Then all neighbors, whether Catholic or Methodist or Quaker or Lutheran or Amish, needed and helped each other.

My parents married in January 1929 and moved to this neighborhood in February. The neighborhood was largely French Catholic, but also included some Protestant families along with a scattering of Amish families. This wide variation of religious beliefs did not hinder the families from working together. They needed each other and held a mutual love for the land. Not every art and skill needed for rural living was known by every person in the community, so the people who had the art or skill in their possession shared it with their neighbors.

Father died late last winter; he was 87. For 64 years he was a part of this community. He became ill last fall and after numerous tests, was diagnosed with cancer of the colon. During surgery in December the doctor found that the tumor was inoperable and a by-pass was performed instead.

Soon after Father regained consciousness, he asked

me, "Do the neighbors know about my illness? Do they ask how I'm coming along?" I assured him that they all knew and not a day passed that someone didn't stop by to ask how he was getting along and when he was coming home. Then I added, "Do you know why, Dad? It is because you gave yourself so selflessly to the community all these years. Maybe you aren't aware of it, but there is a saying 'You can't give yourself away'." We held each other and wept.

Father was one of those rare people who was in possession of many of the arts and skills needed in thriving rural communities. Besides being a farmer and husbandman, he was a thresherman (a title that also included silo filling, corn husking with the machine, fodder shredding, and clover hulling), a sawyer, an orchardist, his own mechanic, a carpenter (he could design and build anything from kitchen cabinets to mortise and tenon frame buildings), for a short time his own blacksmith, plumber, and even for awhile he white-washed our milking stable using the orchard sprayer. His stiff lime-covered coat still hangs from a spike on the shop wall. These talents he freely shared with his neighbors.

After a hospital stay of fifteen days, we brought Father home where, from a bed in the living room, he could look out across the familiar fields and neighborhood instead of gazing at shopping center roofs and parking lots.

Since we live on the home farm, I was at Father's bedside much of the time through his four month illness. When he felt up to it, we talked. Father kept a diary from 1941 through 1943 and then from 1949 to early 1959. I had never read his diaries, but now I got them out of his desk and read them—sometimes out loud to him. Yes, yes he remembers. And then he would begin reminiscing of how he started threshing for the neighbors. First for five neighbors who owned the threshing machine in partnership. Eventually the threshing ring included over twenty farms.

From reading the diaries I was astonished at the number of days Father spent helping neighbors. For example, one week in November of 1943 showed him at a different neighbor's farm every day.

- Monday: Husked corn at John Rothacker. (A Lutheran family)
- Tuesday: Helped Mrs. Miller. (her husband was in a mental institution)
- Wednesday: Helped Eli cut logs. (Amish)
- Thursday: Husked corn for Mrs. Dan Kaufman. (A widow)
- Friday: Husked corn for Clarence Besancon. (Catholic)
- Saturday: Husked corn for Levi Kuhns. (Conservative Mennonite)

Naturally, Father and the neighbors helping to do the work would eat the noon meal with the farm family where the work was done. He would often talk about the excellent cooks they encountered throughout the community. In the fall, once the sweet potatoes were ready, Pearl Stutz could prepare candied yams no one could match. And Mrs. Rothacker's home-cured hams were the finest in the neighborhood. It seemed every farmwife had one special dish she excelled in.

This all began to change soon after the Second World War when the mechanization of agriculture began to gain momentum. For awhile the Industrial Revolution may have helped build community, or at least didn't do a great deal to destroy it. For instance, the threshing machine and mechanical corn husker still needed the help of neighbors to operate efficiently. But as the war economy shifted to a peace economy, farmers were pressured to modernize and that meant buying bigger and more "efficient" tractors and machinery.

While the Amish resisted this pressure to change, and still do today, so did many of our other neighbors. One of the Catholic farmers, in the late 40s, had a farm auction and sold his farm rather than change to tractor farming. The Lutheran neighbor never cared for the "new" neighborless farming and still threshed until the late 50s, until it simply became unfashionable in his society to do so. With his leaving an art was lost. He was one of the best straw stackers in the neighborhood.

I believe it is safe to say that the machine became the great destroyer of community. What was a gradual process up to about 1950 suddenly became an abrupt, almost brutal process, akin to our little hound being grabbed by the huge jaws of the neighbor's Saint Bernard the other day while we were filling silo. There was no escape. (The hound did get away with only a few scars by ducking beneath my wagon.) Unfortunately, the acquisition of labor-saving farm machines often had far-reaching effects, even for the

Plain communities—greater than anyone anticipated, if anyone was ever anticipating the harm that could result from the changeover.

As the neighboring farmers, particularly the Catholics, began to change to more modern agriculture, fewer of their sons and daughters returned to the farm or the community when they graduated from college, as most of them did. Many went on to successful careers elsewhere. Also, their interests changed. In the past the holy days were always celebrated in the home or at the church with their neighbors and friends. Now there was a shift away to distant places. Likewise for recreation, the theme changed too from the farm to the city.

When most of the American farmers began using the grain combine, sometime during the decade of the 50s, second-hand threshing machines suddenly became cheap. Machines that cost nearly two thousand dollars in the 1940s now dropped to three or four hundred dollars. And the large twenty-farmer threshing rings disappeared almost overnight. Most were broken into four to six-farmer rings, which in some ways may have been to the farmer's advantage because it shortened the threshing season and thus lessened the likelihood of rain-damaged grains and straw.

The majority of Amish have attempted to preserve the working together of communities by restricting the use of certain machines on the farm. When the machine in question replaced the need for the help of neighbors, such as the grain combine instead of threshing or the forage chopper instead of silo filling, the church leaders said no, too much will be lost. Even the telephone in the home is rejected in favor of face-to-face communication. (The most conservative group of Amish in our community do not publish their deaths in the newspaper. They notify the neighbors, friends, and relatives in person.) In other words, when the issue is between self or community, community is chosen.

Not all the Amish have the sharing community view. A small number, even from the most conservative communities, have chosen not to be part of neighborhood threshing and silo filling. They can do it themselves and have become non-participants in the community. Interestingly, often along with this self-reliance comes a different religious view. If these individuals are ministers, their sermons change. There may even be a subtle down-playing of plain living. They see a need to point out the dangers of "Werksgerechtigkeit" (works righteousness). (This usually occurs at about the point where horse-traction is considered being replaced by fossil fuel traction.) A minister may grab the lapels of



Paula Chamlee
from the series *High Plains Farm*, 1996

his coat and emphasize that the plain coat will not get you to Heaven. Rarely in these sermons is any mention made of loving your neighbor as thyself. John 3:16 becomes the most often quoted verse. The focus is shifted toward the inward man.

It is not my intention to pass judgments. I am not merely an observer of what is happening to our and other rural communities, but I am a part of the community and as guilty as anyone for making wrong decisions and failing in fulfilling my commitments to the church, neighborhood, and community.

Our community has a broad spectrum of Plain and former Plain churches, perhaps twenty different denominations. As the pendulum swings from the ultra conservative to the ultra liberal, it is interesting to observe the views of the different churches on the importance of neighboring or community. For the one, it is crucial to their Christian beliefs to work and share together. Self is given for community. For the other, plain living has been discarded and their idea of community is to support the local basketball team and fire department (which the conservatives do too) and maybe carpooling to the Mall.

For an illustration of opposite views, I would like to give one example of two farmers. The one, from a church which may be shifting from "gemeinshaft" toward self, made the remark, "We'll cut all our oats and bale it for hay so that we won't have to help the neighbors thresh."

The other one, who was from a conservative church and in a neighborhood threshing ring where one of the farmers quit and went on his own, when he told me that his neighbor dropped out, had tears in his eyes. Not because he couldn't get his crops harvested, but that the blessing of helping his neighbor was taken away.

Last year in our autumn communion services, Dad, who was 87, and Jonas T., who was 90, washed each other's feet. First one and then the other bent over the wash tub and tenderly observed John 13:14. They were silently telling one another that even though they have attended the same church and lived in the same community and helped each other for over 63 years, "we still need each other." By the time spring communion came, both were in their graves.





Greg Conniff
Iowa County, Wisconsin, 1990



Greg Conniff
Dane County, Wisconsin, 1996

The Hog Wars

The destruction of a sub-culture

by Maurice Telleen

Like most Iowans, I go back a long way with hogs. They have been leading citizens of this state ever since the plow met the tall grass prairie and tile lines and drainage ditches dried up the sloughs. This changed the face of the land completely, into little squares of sections, townships, and counties with a court house and sale barn every 20 or 30 miles. Very good habitat for hogs.

One culture was destroyed to make way for another, an old story. There was an inevitability to it and, while what was created certainly wasn't perfect, you would have to say it functioned fairly well. Whatever its flaws, and they were considerable, it did sustain a much greater population than the hunter-gatherer model it replaced.

The culture, based on family farming, was called agriculture. That phrase—"family farming"—is a battle cry in the Hog War, the growing conflict between huge hog factories and independent farm-sized hog farmers. Both sides invoke it without defining it, to the point that it is almost useless except as cover in political campaigns.

Harold Breimyer, my favorite ag economist at the University of Missouri, knew what he meant when he used the expression. He defined it as:

an agriculture in which farmers and their families are owner-operators who buy and sell in the market, make the managerial decisions and take the associated risks. They are both laborer and boss, and they own some land. We do not require that they own all the land they farm, but lifetime tenancy is not family farming. Farming families must provide at least half the labor, the rest can be hired.

It is a social, as well as an economic, institution that denies servility. It was borne of refugees from Europe's serfdom where the tiller of fields and the tender of herds was lowest on the totem pole. Immigrants to the new nation wanted to be yeomen. They objected to re-establishing a class-stratified agriculture.

The immigrants wanted to leave that kind of feudalism behind, build something better, and they managed to pull it off. Breimyer both knew *what* it was and *why* it



was—that it had social as well as economic origins and consequences, that it included community concerns as well as private economic concerns and they were linked.

There have been some strange claimants to family farming in this hog war. It is almost as though Henry Ford were to have asserted that he was just running one hell of a big garage/blacksmith shop when those Model T's and A's were jumping off the assembly line like rabbits out of a fence row. Some of the family farming claims in the Hog War have been almost that absurd. (One of the largest hog conglomerates in the nation calls itself Murphy Family Farms.)

What remains of that family farming culture has been savaged by this industrialization of hog production. Like most wars, it did not come out of the blue. Poultry has preceded it. Horses and mules had preceded poultry. One might say these revolutions were inevitable, too, just as the European farmer replaced the native American hunter-gatherer; however, that is not necessarily so. All these steps or modifications from homesteading the virgin prairie to the Hog Wars have been aided, abetted, and propelled by public policy. The results have always been hailed as progress and the ben-

efits widely heralded, generally in terms of economic measurement. And in every case, the losses have been dismissed as acceptable or inevitable or collateral damage in pursuit of a greater good. Many of the gains were important in both a social and economic sense; others weren't. Many of the losses were acceptable in both a social and economic sense, and others weren't.

Because of industrial successes such as Ford, we have been conditioned to accept that bigger is better because it is more efficient ... in every case. Breimyer again disagrees, stating that "taxes are the progenitor of much bigness in farming. Big farms, including the newest entrant [he said this in 1982], the large confined hog-operations are highly influenced by tax law."

So that is what this Hog War is about ... public policy both in Iowa and elsewhere, which should be about the greatest long term (sustainable) good to the most people at the least cost in terms of economic losses, environmental damage, and social dislocations.

Breimyer is right. Most of the carrots and the sticks will be found in the tax laws. That is the only way to make the walk square with the talk. The dry old tax laws are where a country really decides what kind of place it wants to be ... not in the rhetoric.

A good starting point is with the recognition that the economy, spoken of with awe and reverence, is not like a cold front out of Canada. Furthermore, purely economic measurements are often inadequate when dealing with cultural (as in agricultural) problems; that knowledge is always incomplete and consequences are always manifold.

Since this is a War let's tally up the likely gains and losses:

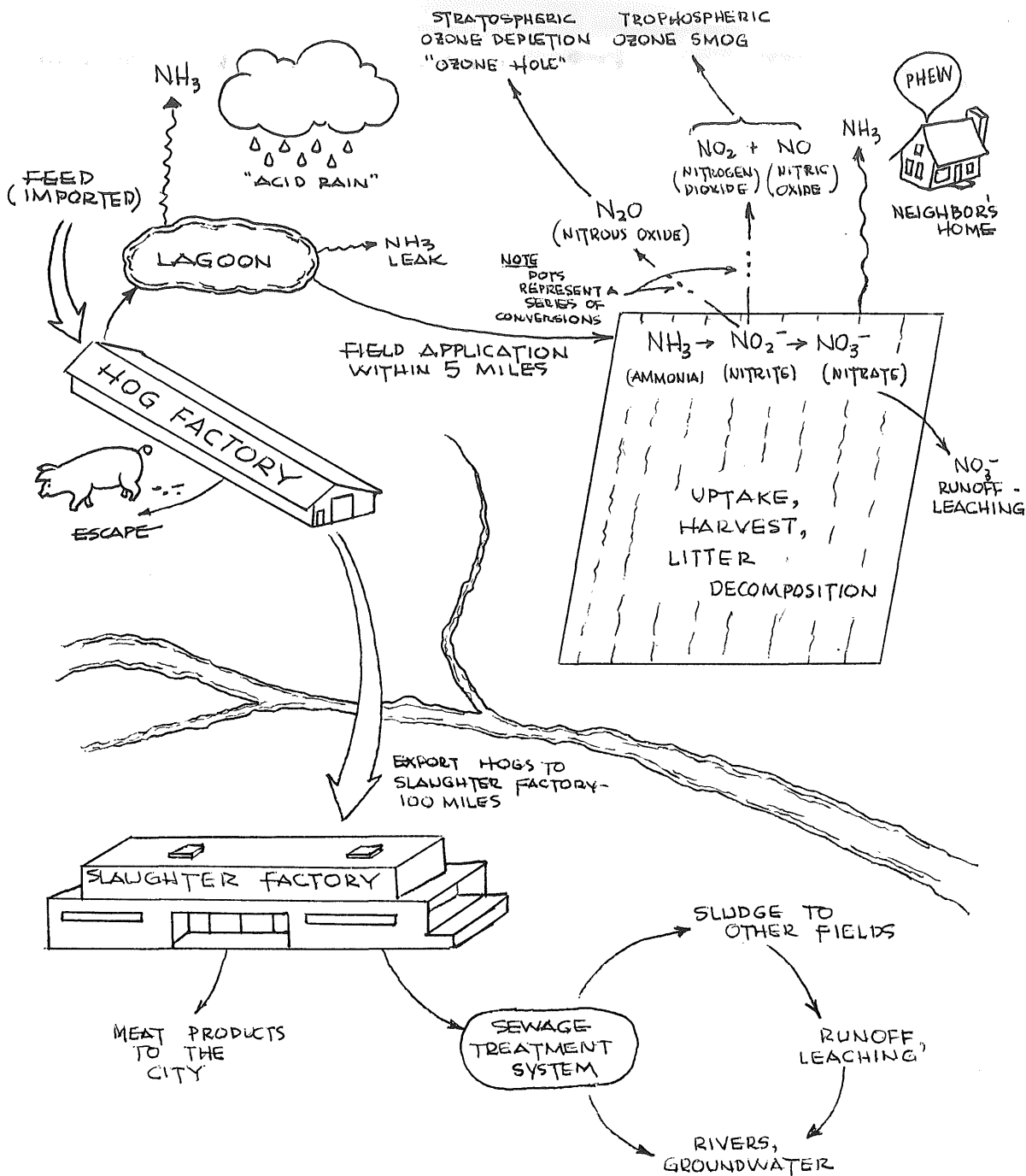
EFFICIENCY: *This is the Golden Calf itself.* Iowa has about as many hogs as it did a generation ago, but the number of farms with hogs has declined from 41,000 to 18,000 (and falling fast) in the last decade, and there was a substantial decline prior to that decade. This is a toboggan ride that is nowhere near over if present trends continue. The big operations are apparently "efficient" in the narrow sense of the word. At least they are successful at driving others from the field. This is not an "adjustment," this is Sherman's March through Georgia—to continue with the war metaphor.

PRODUCT: I expect there has been considerable standardization of product via genetics and a controlled habitat. Purebred breeders had already made great strides in producing a lean hog. That genetic base is now much smaller as the grass roots breeder has diminished and some breeds have almost vanished. This is another case of collateral damage but ... "don't worry" we are told.

Well, that was easy. It is a pretty open and shut case, isn't it? Looks like with a relative handful of producers we can all eat pork chops as enthusiastically as

Scott Jost, *Walking in dust, Harvey County, Kansas, 1996*





Laura Jackson with Bob Pinkall, *The Hog Factory Farm: Farm of the future? For how long?*

Lil Abner did and be pretty sure that they will be neither too fat nor too lean, but just right and relatively cheap, too. Another triumph for the industrialization of agriculture. And the beauty of it is that few Americans will ever have to meet a hog as long as they live. How civilized. How lovely.

But it must not be that simple for we find ourselves in the midst of a war. So what does the "other side" have to offer as an excuse for resisting such a splendid outcome?

1. The brood sow has offered relatively low cost access into farming for beginning farmers in Iowa since the plow met the prairie. I suspect that the sow has put more young farmers on their feet and on the road to farm ownership than any other single thing in this state.

Litters (rather than singles or twins), rapid generation turnover, and multiple farrowings during the year, offer a buffer to the ups and downs of the market. Moreover, their adaptability to a wide variety of buildings and management systems, combined with their omnivorous appetites allows them to grow well on everything from acorns to alfalfa as well as corn. In terms of a modest investment and quick payback, they have been wonderful vehicles of entrepreneurship. We will simply have to schedule more seminars on entrepreneurship (to replace the sow). They can be worked in around the "How to handle stress" seminars. Maybe offer two for one.

2. When a hog producer is forced out of business, it may take the form of ending his whole farming career (if hogs were the mainstay) or reducing the diversity of

his operation. Either way, it has a ripple effect through his own community. What is lost is the multiplier effect of dollars spent, and respent, "at home."

So the success of Sherman's March to the Sea (in the hog business) is also impacting on our beleaguered rural communities. The victorious army is further sapping the vitality of small farm towns as it depopulates the countryside. It is enough to make a hog weep. Also people.

3. Then, there is the question of the stink. It takes your breath away. A few counties in North Central Iowa smell so bad at times that I don't know how people can continue to live there ... and this is another phase of the War, a war that has cast property rights in a new light and pitted neighbor against neighbor. It is a little like Northern Ireland except here the reason is blowing in the wind rather than bred in the bone. We even had a protest march led by monks from the New Melleray Abbey up in Northeast Iowa, objecting to a proposed 1300 sow unit nearby. That would be 26,000 little pigs every year. It was estimated that it would produce a mere two million gallons of liquid manure a year. The monastery, an Iowa treasure with 10,000 visitors annually—a wonderful place—was praying for a miracle to keep the proposed setup from being built.

In September our state Supreme Court, by a vote of 7-0, gave "our side" reason for hope by striking down a state law that had shielded farm operators from lawsuits aimed at the odor of large hog confinement units. A large insurance company (Farm Bureau) promptly responded that this was just awful—a below the belt hit that would devastate agriculture. When a big insurance company reverts to using "agriculture" instead of "agribusiness," you know they are serious!

4. But, Wait HO, the Cavalry arrives! Our land grant school (Iowa State University) at Ames is riding to the rescue. They are working on the odor problem, but it is more than the stink. Things sometimes stink for a good cause—rotten eggs, for example. Masking the smell of ammonia and hydrogen sulfide does not remove the health hazards they pose, it does not transform them into rose petals and apple blossoms.

In addition to the air pollution, which is inescapable to any transient visitor, is the hazard to our streams and underground water table. You can almost depend on another big fish kill story someplace in the state every couple of months, as the sad tale of one manure lagoon leak or spill follows another. Fish die. Somebody counts them. A fine is levied. We are brothers to the fish.

It has even produced some unusual "bad news-good news" scenarios. A spill of 420,000 gallons oozed into a creek in Hamilton County (right in the heart of the big stink area). It was the biggest of the year, at least up to that time—that was the bad news. The good news was

that the number of dead fish was far less than it would have been had there not been an earlier spill in 1996, as the fish population had not really recovered from that one.

So there you have it—Total War ... as people like Sherman understood it. And as with war, it has long term effects on people and places. A whole generation of young men and women have been scalded themselves like a butcher hog by this experience. Believe me, they are not going to be hog farmers. They have been told for some time that the small independent producer cannot make it. That they are anachronisms.

To carry the war analogy a bit further, some of the "facts" that influence smaller producers to quit can be credited to the Ministry of Propaganda (Dr. Goebbles, not Gen. Sherman, in this case). Unfortunately, it turns out that it may well be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

So we come full cycle with the metaphors. If the great percentage of our pork needs are going to be met by mega-producers or producers under contract to the giants, the fate of the independent is about as promising as that of the Plains Indian after the slaughter of the buffalo, but with a little different twist. In that case, we destroyed the means of maintaining a culture. In this case, we are destroying the skills and mind set of the people of the culture and retaining the buffalo. Or, in this case, the hog.

Destroying cultures (even sub-cultures like hog farming, horse farming, and mother's flock of hens) is a serious business. It should be a felony, not a misdemeanor. Not only is it serious, it is careless. It violates the first rule of tinkering ... "to save the pieces," or at least most of them.

I've tried very hard to think of a hopeful note on which to end this report from the front, but I've failed. I think our cause is just, but our chances are slim. There is something about the temper of the times that places a blind faith in bigness and a contempt for the messy sort of efficiency that once had our pork supply in so many more hands, supporting, in part, virtually every farm, town, and city in this state. There is a rough kind of biblical efficiency in having livestock out gleaning harvested fields, something that is far less commonplace now. It made you feel frugal just to watch.

We don't go south in the winter. We don't have to. We can feel like Georgians right here. And they say Sherman is just over the next hill. Sometimes we can smell his artillery.

The Land Institute's Natural Systems Agriculture Advisory Team

Our Natural Systems Agriculture Advisory Team is comprised of 80 scientists and practitioners in ecology, agriculture, and policy who are willing to endorse our work, to discuss its need and potential benefits to national policy, to assist in articulating its feasibility to funders, to critique the research program, and to offer suggestions as the work unfolds.

David O. Hall has been a professor of Biology at King's College London since 1974. Born in East London, South Africa, in 1935, he was educated at Kearnsey College and the University of Natal, South Africa; studied agriculture, receiving a M.Sc. at the University of California, Los Angeles, in subtropical horticulture, 1959; and a Ph.D. at the University of California, Berkeley, in plant physiology, 1963.

Hall began his career as a fellow at John Hopkins University School of Medicine, Baltimore, in physiological chemistry, 1963-64. He served as a lecturer in plant science and then a reader in biology at King's College, London, 1964-74, before becoming full professor in 1974. He has lectured in more than 45 countries on the research topics of biomass, bioproductivity and climate change, photosynthesis, clean production of energy and chemicals, solar energy through biology, and iron-sulphur proteins. He has authored over 400 articles and 12 books, and in 1979 received the best paper award in *Solar Energy Journal*. Hall also serves as a consultant to industry, governments in the UK and abroad, and numerous international organizations.

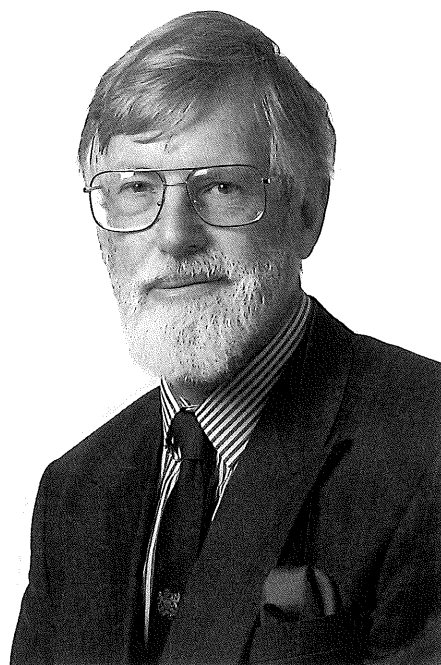
In 1998 Hall received the Linneborn Prize for Achievements in Biomass Development and the UK Solar Energy Society Award.

Ghillean Tolmie Prance has been Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, since 1988. Born in 1937 in Suffolk, England, he was educated at Malvern College, Worcestershire, and Keble College, Oxford, where he obtained a B.A. in Botany, 1960, and a D. Phil. in 1963 for his "Taxonomic Study of Chrysobalanaceae."

He began his career with The New York Botanical Garden in 1963 as a research assistant, subsequently becoming B. A. Krukoff Curator of Amazonian Botany, Director and then Vice-President of Research, and finally Senior Vice President for Science in 1981. He also set up the Garden's Institute of Economic Botany of which he was the first Director 1981-1988.



Prof. David Hall
at nitrogen
biofertilizer rice
trial at Tamil Nadu
Agricultural
University,
Coimbatore,
S. India.



Sir Ghillean
Prance

Sir Ghillean was trained as a plant taxonomist and has spent over eight years on field work and botanical exploration in Amazonian Brazil. He has a world-wide interest in the sustainable development of rainforest ecosystems and conservation generally, as well as being the author of fourteen books and editor of a further eleven; he has published over 320 papers of both scientific and general interest on plant systematics, plant ecology, ethnobotany and conservation.

In addition to his various duties at The New York Botanical Garden, Sir Ghillean was the founding director of graduate studies at the Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas da Amazonia (INPA) in Manaus, Brazil, where he set up programs in botany, ecology, entomology and ichthyology. He is an adjunct Professor of the City University of New York and a Visiting Professor at the University of Reading; he was Visiting Professor in Tropical Studies at the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies of Yale University. He is a Fellow of the Linnean Society of London and President, 1997-2000; Fellow of The Royal Geographical Society, the Explorers Club, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He has previously served as President of the Association of Tropical Biology, the American Association of Plant Taxonomists, and the Systematics Association.

Sir Ghillean holds several honorary doctorates and numerous honors. He was knighted in July 1995. Sir Ghillean and his wife, Ann, have two married daughters.

About the authors...

by Wes Jackson

Gene Logsdon is the author of sixteen books, including *The Contrary Farmer* and *A Contrary Farmer's Invitation to Gardening*, hundreds of magazine articles, and a weekly newspaper column. He writes and farms near Upper Sandusky, Ohio, where he lives with his family. (From the dust jacket of *You Can Go Home Again*, Indiana University Press, 1998). Gene and his wife Carol are also long-time friends and Friends of The Land.

David Kline was born on the family farm where he has lived for more than fifty years. With his wife and children, and the help of his neighbors and horses, he practices diversified sustainable farming and is a member of the Amish community around Fredericksburg, Ohio. He is the author of *Great Possessions: An Amish Farmer's Journal*. (From the dust jacket of *Scratching the Woodchuck*, University of Georgia Press, 1997). David and Elsie Kline are also long-time friends.

Maurice Telleen and his wife Jeannine live in Waverly, Iowa. Until recently, they owned and published *The Draft Horse Journal*. Wendell Berry dedicated his very great book, *The Unsettling of America* to Maury Telleen. Long-time friends, long-time Friends of The Land.

Many years of writing have won **Wendell Berry** the affection of a broad public. He is beloved for his quiet, steady explorations of nature, his emphasis on finding good work to do in the world, and his faith in the solace of family, memory, and community. His poetry is always poised and unceasingly spiritual; its power lies in the strength of the truths revealed. An essayist, novelist, and poet, Berry is the author of more than thirty books. He has received numerous awards, including most recently the T. S. Eliot Award, the John Hay Award, the Lyndhurst Prize, and the Aiken-Taylor Award for Poetry from *The Sewanee Review*. He lives and works with his wife, Tanya Berry, in Kentucky. (From the dust jacket of his recent book *A Timbered Choir*, Counterpoint Press, 1998). Beyond all of that both he and Tanya have been indispensable friends and Friends of The Land for nearly 19 years.

Timeline items are from *The Land* Vol. 1, No. 1, 1941.

About the photographers...

Photographers for this Land Report are **Paula Chamlee**, **Greg Conniff**, and **Terry Evans**. Contributing artist and graphic designer is **Scott Jost**.

These contributors—Paula, Greg, and Scott—were invited because they are first of all strong visual artists and also because their sensibilities lie with the land and the rural landscape and culture—the beauty and value of those things. —*Terry Evans*

The Land Institute Board of Directors Update

Paul Johnson, a member of The Land Institute Board of Directors since 1997, was appointed Director of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources in January. According to Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack, the four new officials—including Johnson—will be instrumental in “ensuring the security of Iowa’s families, and improving the quality of life for all Iowans.” An Iowa farmer and former State Representative, he previously served as Chief of the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service. Gov. Vilsack said Johnson is “known as the architect of environmental legislation, including Iowa’s Groundwater Protection Act.”

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Presented by The Land Institute, Salina, Kansas, May 29-31, 1998

Qty.	Session Title	Speaker(s)
Saturday, May 30		
___	S1 The Inevitable Fusion: Aldo Leopold's Path Toward a Land Ethic	Curt Meine
___	S2.1 Reflections on Our Father and His Work	Nina Bradley, Carl Leopold, Estella Leopold
___	S2.2 Reflections on Our Father and His Work (continued)	Nina Bradley, Carl Leopold, Estella Leopold
___	S3 Leopold and Environmental Citizenship	Susan Flader
Sunday, May 31		
___	SU1 Climbing Leopold's Mountain	Strachan Donnelley
___	SU2 The Leopold Legacy and The Land Institute	Adam Rome
___	SU3 The Earth Declares the Glory	Mary Mackey
___	SU4 Translating the Leopold Legacy to Iowa Agriculture	Dennis Keeney
___	SU5 Leopold and the Natural Resources Conservation Service	Paul Johnson
___	SU6 Natural Systems Agriculture Update	Wes Jackson, Don Worster, David Van Tassel, Ted Lefroy



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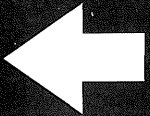
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