

The year was 1928. A movie ticket was twenty-five cents and a Browning twelve gauge shotgun was around sixteen dollars. The economy was booming, both inside and outside of the city. Across the country, farmers were selling horses and oxen for one John Deere Model GP, steel wheels. For those second or third generation farmers, it was revolutionary. For them, it was the future; the dawning of a new, agricultural era. Back then, they never dreamed of drones or auto-steer, and they couldn't begin to fathom what their 140 acres of hand-sewn ground would become. Of course, those second-generation farmers never once considered how their own grandchildren might walk away from their tradition. After all, it was the family farm.

Before you can understand why we must save the family farm, you must know what a family farm is, and what we have to save them from. So, what *is* a family farm? In 1928, it was a two-story, Sears & Roebuck, farm house, a horse barn with a hay loft full of hay, and every able-bodied family member to serve as the employees. Today, the USDA says a family farms is, "... Any farm where the majority of the business is owned by the operator and individuals related to the operator." By those standards, 97% of America's farms are "family farms." What, then, are we saving the family farm from? The 2014 agricultural census tells us that less than 2% of Americans are affiliated with agriculture (USDA, 2014). The Denver Post reports that in Colorado, one acre of farmland is lost to development every two minutes (Bunch, 2016). The structure of society is experiencing a slow, steady upheaval, which decreases the number of people and amount of land available to agriculture. But, why should we save the family farm? As long as the people are fed, why should we care where that food comes from?

First and foremost, we must save the family farm because their demise is highly detrimental to rural America and small communities everywhere. Realistically, towns like Waco,

Bradshaw or Polk would cease to exist were it not for the support of their local family farms. Americans are forgetting their moral obligation to the very people that feed them. As a result of this, rural communities are declining in two specific areas: population and economy.

Family farms are vital to the survival of rural American communities. While Nebraska's population is at an all-time high, over 700 "Bible belt" communities have lost an average of 10% of their population. The loss of population has rural communities from North Dakota to Texas desperately trying to keep themselves on the map. In fact, times are so tough that Ellsworth County, Kansas began offering free 15,000 square foot plots of land to families who could be approved by a bank. Thoughts of the general population seems to be, "Why should we care?". Today, people are so taken by the idea of "social Darwinism" they fail to realize that small towns are entirely necessary. If small towns were to vanish, we would not only lose our biggest source of food production, but America's economy will inevitably crash (Gillham, 2010).

Constantly, agriculture is referred to as "the backbone of America". Time and time again, this has proved itself to be true. In 2014, agriculture and ag-related business contributed \$985 billion to the GDP. Within that \$985 billion, \$177.2 billion came from family farms alone. Also in 2014, family farms created 17.3 million full-and part-time job. Those numbers speak for themselves. Society cannot allow the family farm to fail, because farming is not just a farmer's livelihood, it is America's livelihood (USDA, 2014).

Secondly, family farms must survive because they are essential to America's integrity. American agriculture is perpetually associated with our heritage because, just like mine, many of your predecessors were farmers. Rich or poor, they all worked sunup to sundown to keep what they had. Those people certainly *did* know the joys and discomforts of agricultural life. Back

then, it was about more than the money they made or their “inborn fondness.” To do the work they did, they had to have a vision.

Who are those visionaries today? They’re the men and women who invented variable-rate and cloning technology, totally revolutionizing the farming industry. Incidentally, those visionaries also make up less than 2% of our nation’s population. And today, that two percent is an average of 58.3-years-old; almost retirement age (USDA, 2014). Who is going to take over the family farm? The task seems far too daunting and the kids aren't stepping up. Traditional farming is so unsteady that 330 farmers leave their land each week (Farm Aid, 2016). We must help the family farmers survive this transitional period. It is imperative that we save today’s farms if we care at all about tomorrow’s.

And finally, we must save the family farm because they feed the world in a safe way. Industrial farms are beneficial, as they mass produce food, causing food prices to drop. Industrial farming is known for its grandeur, more so than traditional farming. People seem to think that bigger is always better, therefore industrial farms are thought to be more efficient. But, that is not necessarily the case.

Industrial farms do lower food prices and bring to the table a plethora of other benefits. No one can deny how industrial farming benefits our society. However, some large-scale industrial farms can be detrimental to middle America. Industrial farms only create 9.44 jobs, displacing 27.9 jobs. Industrial farming puts small farmers out of business, which creates gaps in the agricultural market (Farm Aid, 2016). Additionally, family farms generally utilize safer farming methods. Industrial farms use monoculture, which means that the same crop is grown all season. This can result in a lack of nutrients, niche spaces, and weed infestations. From an

environmental standpoint, large-scale industrial farms have caused damage in the past, due to incidents regarding the overuse of pesticides and other growth stimulants (The Real Truth, 2016). Logically, we must save the family farm, so we can continue to eat well and live healthy lives.

The year is 2017. A movie ticket costs \$10, and a Browning twelve gauge shotgun is nearing \$1500. Today, farmers are being forced off of their land and the majority of the nation doesn't even know where their food is coming from. They're saying it's "revolutionary." They're saying it's "ingenuity." To our sixth and seventh generation farmers, it's the end of more than an era - it's the end of a tradition. Family farms are more than just food and money and jobs. Family farms are our heritage and a way of life that cannot be forgotten. We must fight for our local farmers, for people like my family. We must strengthen America's backbone, which spans far beyond city limits. We must believe in, as E.M. Tiffany said in 1928, "the life abundant, and enough honest wealth to help make it so--for others, as well as ourselves." We must *teach* people what we do, and *inspire* them to help us do it.

Thank you.

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