



# We are what we eat.

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A Report Approved by  
The 214th General Assembly (2002)  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

# We Are What We Eat

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*Approved by* The 214th General Assembly (2002)  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

*Developed by* Rural Ministry Office Evangelism and Church Development  
National Ministries Division of the General Assembly Counsel

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Dear Friends,

*The 214th General Assembly (2002) approved this report, "We Are What We Eat," that calls on the whole Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)—rural, suburban, and urban—to participate in the current agricultural revolution that is effecting everyone who produces and consumes food. The interdependence between food producer and consumer is significant, although it is a linkage we don't often acknowledge. Now, we have a unique opportunity to witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ through our daily food production and consumption decisions that will support sustainability, stewardship, compassion and community of all God's creation.*

*In approving this report, the 214th General Assembly added the following comment: "In as much as more than half of all PC(USA) congregations are rural, we commend the full text rationale [report], "We Are What We Eat" as a positive step toward revitalization of rural congregations, a priority identified for evangelism and church growth. We find the information offered in the full text rationale [report] to be an essential underpinning for the recommendations. We appreciate the spirit of the rationale [report] that avoids causing alienation in such a complex issue and recognizes the responsibility of all parties in the agricultural revolution. This report provides a means for the entire church to be a living witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ."*

*In exercise of its responsibility to witness to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in every dimension of life, the 214th General Assembly (2002) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has adopted this report. It is presented for the guidance and edification of the whole Christian church and the society to which it ministers. It will determine procedures and program for the entities and staff of the General Assembly. It is recommended for consideration and study by other governing bodies (sessions, presbyteries, and synods). It is commended to the free Christian conscience of all congregations and the members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for prayerful study, dialogue, and action.*

*How did the General Assembly become involved in this study? Back in 1998, a group of Presbyterian Women from rural communities in South Dakota discussed the effect that the current economic crisis was having in their lives. They envisioned that change could happen if the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) was willing to get involved in the issues that were causing the economic crisis. They took their vision to the Session of Hope Presbyterian Church in Keldron, a small church located in the open ranchland of western South Dakota. From there an overture to the General Assembly began to take shape that was supported by Session of Hope Presbyterian Church, recommended by the Presbytery of South Dakota and, subsequently, approved by the 211th General Assembly (1999). That General Assembly action led to this study, "We Are What We Eat."*

*We are indebted to the study group that worked diligently for two years preparing this study:*

*Fred Brust, farmer, Union Mills, Indiana  
Vernon Carroll, rancher, Cut Bank, Montana  
Ward Ernst, farmer, Stanford, Montana  
Peter Funch, executive, South Dakota Presbytery  
Grace and Jim Hargrave, dairy farmers, Madrid, New York  
Carolyn and Jerry Petik, ranchers, Meadow, South Dakota  
Richard Poppen, tentmaker pastor and farmer, DeSmet, South Dakota*

*Appreciation is extended to colleagues in the Evangelism and Church Development program area who supported the preparation of this report as well as colleagues in presbyteries, seminaries and other denominations who read and offered critiques of early drafts of the report.*

*With General Assembly's approval, this report is now part of our life. We are charged to become involved in these issues that affect all of us and, ultimately, half of the congregations of our denomination. By God's grace, we are called to make a difference!*



*Diana A. Stephen, Associate  
Rural Ministry Network*



*Peter A. Sulyok, Coordinator  
Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy*

*Reflections and feedback from the study of this document may be sent:  
Rural Ministry Network Office  
100 Witherspoon Street, Room M046  
Louisville, KY 40202-1396  
Phone: 1-888-728-7228, ext. 5232  
Fax: 502-569-8002  
Email: dstephen@ctr.pcusa.org*

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# We Are What We Eat

This report “We Are What We Eat” and the recommendations that follow are a final response to the following referral: Overture 99-8. *On Advocacy for Survival of Family Farmers, Ranchers, and Rural Communities—From the Presbytery of South Dakota* (Minutes, 1999, Part I, pp. 81, 581–82).

## I. Background

What shall we do for dinner today? Cook dinner? Go out to a fast food restaurant? Stop for take out from the supermarket? Each day many of us make decisions about the food we consume. But do we consider what goes into producing the food that comes to our table? Do we think about the farmers and ranchers who raise the grain, vegetables, fruit, and livestock, and the people who process the food? Are we aware of the persons who are hungry and unable to make such choices?

When the 211th General Assembly (1999) approved Overture 99-8 from the Presbytery of South Dakota entitled, “Survival of Family Farmers, Ranchers, and Rural Communities,” it called the church’s attention to these very people and processes. One segment of the overture directed the church to be an advocate on behalf of family farmers and ranchers. Another segment directed that a study be made as follows:

“Request the Advisory Committee on Social Witness and Policy, in consultation with Women’s Ministries program area, to study this crisis and to report its findings to the 212th General Assembly (2000), with particular attention to, “An Appeal to the President and Congress of the United States for a Morally Responsible United States Food Policy” (Minutes, PCUS, 1977, Part I, p. 181) and with special consideration for a variety of marketing alternatives for farm products and maintaining an effective public market information system.” (Minutes, 1999, Part I, p. 581)

The implementation of this segment of the overture was transferred from the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy to the Rural Ministry office of the National Ministries Division. A study group was formed comprised of farmers, ranchers, and a presbytery executive. Within the group were members of the Rural Ministry Advisory Committee and the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy. Staff support was provided by the Rural Ministry Office, Evangelism and Church Development, National Ministries Division of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

The study group recognized that the world is not experiencing “a farm crisis,” but “an agricultural revolution.” Monumental changes are occurring in agriculture and food production. They are revolutionary. In the United States, the

smaller, independently operated family farms and ranches are being forced out of business by the increasing power of agricultural corporations. These changes have created an environment conducive to the manipulation of biotechnology, commodity production and processing, marketing, and retailing. They have resulted in economic trauma for family farmers/ranchers and for rural communities.

Farming/ranching opportunities, in all probability, will never return to an earlier era.

Several questions framed the study group’s approach to this state of affairs: Why should the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) be interested in these changes? How might congregations and individuals respond? What can governing bodies do? By wrestling with these questions, the following theme statement evolved and guided the group’s work: “This study is a call for Christians as food consumers and producers to participate in and influence the global agricultural revolution.”

### **From this theme, this study considers:**

- God’s Call to God’s People
- The Current Situation
- New Horizons
- Resources

Special attention is given to women and families in response to the overture’s mandate, while recognizing that in farming and ranching, most often, the whole family is involved in the operations.

### **Note that this study**

- is a survey of concerns and issues, rather than an exhaustive analysis;
- is a call both to awareness of these concerns and to responsible decision making in our roles as food producers, consumers, stockholders, or board members;
- is confined to farm/ranch issues within the United States, although it recognizes the reverberations of decisions made by the U.S. government and/or U.S.-based multinational corporations on the world economy.

Revolutionary changes are occurring and we can, as Christians, participate in this revolution. Through baptism, we are called by God to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ and to work toward justice for all people. As people of God, we are required to be aware of issues affecting society and the need to be responsible stewards in our decision-making. This study calls Presbyterians to participate in and influence the outcome of the agricultural revolution that is sweeping the planet and to be guided by the values rooted in the Gospel of sustainability, stewardship, compassion, and community. Before surveying the present situation and looking toward new horizons, let us turn to Scripture to guide our considerations.

## II. God's Call To God's People

Both the Old and the New Testaments challenge contemporary attitudes toward environmental care and the production of food and fiber, and invite people to transform both their attitudes and behaviors. Whether we behold Joseph in Genesis 45 who, in glad reunion with his brothers, provides for their spiritual and physical welfare or Christ feeding the crowds as recorded in the Gospel According to Matthew (Matt. 14:13–21 and Matt. 15), we cannot ignore that the call to responsible use of the resources of God's creation is a spiritual task. It is neither wise nor consistent with Scripture to simply secularize food production, distribution, and consumption, nor is it consistent to secularize the care and conservation of resources. All of life is holy.

As Christians we seek the direction of the Incarnate Word of God made known to us in Jesus Christ. A reading of the Gospel of Matthew does not leave us with definitive agricultural solutions. It does not go into precise detail that allows the Christian to say, "These are the words of Christ about genetic engineering." But in wonderful and poignant broad strokes that reveal the judgment, grace and mercy of our Creator God, the Gospel does speak to us, and we can deduce the grace filled lives we are to lead in every aspect of life.

The Gospel illustrates the need to understand the context of our society as Jesus understood his quite varied culture. Jesus was not a farmer, but he lived in an arid, struggling land, a rural nation. He understood the daily life of the farmer, laborer, and fisherman. He knew the everyday life of the ones who toiled hard to provide enough food for family tables. He saw the essence of life in the basic physical elements necessary to support life. He saw good and bad characteristics of human nature in the ways people used the products of God's creation.

### A. Sustainability

When farmers and ranchers produce enough food, now and in the future, to meet both their families' needs and those of their local and even global communities, then they are engaged in sustainable agriculture. Sustainability requires people to use land and resources thoughtfully so they will be productive for future generations. Today, sustainability includes land use and grieves when farmland is surrendered to developers, who convert it to residential use to meet the demands of urban sprawl. Such conversion removes the land permanently from its productive state.

The concept of sustainability that was alive in Old and New Testament times has diminished over the years. Questions arise: How do we restore sustainable community so that people may live in communities based on God's justice? How

do we sustain a food production system that conserves the land and resources that God has given to us? A first step may be to look at sacredness and justice in food production, distribution, and consumption.

In the early 1970s, farmers were challenged to grow food from fencerow to fencerow (meaning, full and complete production capacity) and many met that challenge with the historical view that doing so was a moral and sacred responsibility. There was little doubt, from the biblical imperative to feed the hungry, that the profession of food production was akin and in lineage to the noble tasks of the prophets and priests, consistent with the responsibility of Joseph as he fed a hungry world from the granaries of Egypt (Genesis 47). Even if the vocation of food production did not pay as well or did not elevate one's social status, it was respected; it was a high calling. Farmers came to believe that they were an irreplaceable segment of human society, charged with the ethical imperative to produce food for a hungry world and to be good stewards of the land.

If we are to restore a sense of vocation that leads farmers to produce in ways that are sustainable, we need a renewed sense of vocation. Today, society considers food production as just another means of production alongside computer programming and auto manufacturing. The secularization of food production has turned farming, fishing, and ranching into jobs-for-profit, diminishing their special call and responsibility. Not only the food producers, but also the consumers, are in need of transformation to see all work as opportunities for ministry, and an integral segment in the whole of life.

In order to address current concerns of food production/consumption, it is wise to turn to the following wonderful examples in Scripture that point to the sacredness of food production. If such a transformation could take place, it would lead to justice and allow workers to be respected. It would result in farmers understanding their labor to be more than making a living. It would stop the borrowing against tomorrow's reserves for today's comfort and cutthroat competition would be eradicated. In Scripture we find such a vision in the book of Amos.

Amos, the eighth century B.C. prophet, was well versed in the just use of land and resources. He reminded the people of Israel that their God was one who acts in history. Israel had been greatly transgressing God's established covenant, and the God of history would not overlook their trespasses. Such a covenant established by God was not unconditional: it relied on a fundamental condition, namely the obedience of the people of God. Amos found a land dying from within, dying in large part because of social injustice perpetrated by the growing commercial class. In Amos 5 we read:

*Hear this word that I take up over you in lamentation, O house of Israel: . . . Therefore because you trample on the poor and take from them levies of grain, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not live in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine. For I know how many are your transgressions, and how great your sins—you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and push aside the needy in the gate. . . . Seek good and not evil, that you may live; . . .*  
(Amos 5:1, 11–12, 14a)

*And Amos reiterated in 8:4–6:*

*Hear this, you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land, saying, "When will the new moon be over, so that we may sell grain; and the sabbath, so that we may offer wheat for sale? We will make the ephah small and the shekel great, and practice deceit with false balances, buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling the sweepings of the wheat."*

Today we would do well to assess how we maintain sustainability in light of God's intention.

The corruption that Amos testified against had to do with the unfair treatment by those who dealt commercially with those who produced the fruit of the land. A business class had grown into a strong economic force. Old laws that demanded justice were disregarded. Amos proclaimed that the produce of the land must not be used as tools for personal profit at the expense of the less fortunate. No one should profit by means of a corrupt balance system. Weights must be universal and standard, and just standards must be applied universally to all aspects of life. Deceit, in the eyes of the prophet Amos, denied the Israelites their responsibility of proclaiming salvation history to the world. Deceit denied the mandate to care for community and to use the resources of creation faithfully. Amos was not afraid to warn the people that there would be retribution to pay by those knowingly denying the just requirements of their God. This retribution would be in the form of ". . . a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it" (Amos 8:11b–12).

In the Gospel According to Matthew, Jesus tells that the new wine must not be put into old wineskins. Certainly Christ was new to the world in his day. His word and way, though foretold, were so fresh that no old system could adequately hold him or proclaim him. Today, genetic manipulation, multinational monopolies, food safety and security, land and water

conservation, rural economics, and international treaties combine to create circumstances that can no longer be dealt with through historic programs and policies. New food, fiber, and fuel policies must be developed in these revolutionary times. It is the responsibility of the Christian community to strive to make new policies consistent with biblical teachings. Policies governing food production, distribution, and consumption must support just and sustainable community among God's people.

Rural people and communities have suffered economic depression as a result of the changes brought about by the agricultural revolution. The church has no option but to be a partner with these people and communities as they rebuild to meet new challenges and opportunities. The challenge for Christians is to work toward the sustainability of our communities and environment using land and resources to support the needs of the community, for present and future generations.

### **B. Stewardship**

In the first two chapters of Genesis, God charges humankind to oversee and care for God's good creation. The song of the Psalmist proclaims the awesome beauty of God's creation. Responsibility and awe for God's creation resound through the Scriptures and cannot be ignored. The stewardship of the earth is a sacred task entrusted to human beings.

The person of faith looks after the well-being of brothers and sisters, and after the welfare of the land. The Old Testament teaches in Leviticus 25:4a "in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of complete rest for the land . . ." The writer gives a theological reason for the imperative, namely, it is ". . . a sabbath for the Lord, for the earth is the Lord's." A similar statement is also found in Exodus 23:10–11 where the command is meant for charitable care of the poor. In the New Testament, Jesus declares that "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). He also challenges us to resist the temptation to assemble great treasures on earth (Matt. 6:19). Each of these passages points to the fact that no one has the right to exhaust the land by inappropriate or excessive ways. The use of land and water, food and fiber shall not be manipulated in any way to make inordinate profits. We are answerable to God for the way that we use the land and its resources; ultimately, we do not actually own the land. It is God's and we are only stewards of it.

In 1957, representatives of Protestant, Roman Catholic and Jewish groups in our country issued this statement:

*Land is a very special kind of property. Ownership of land does not give an absolute right to use or abuse, nor is it devoid of special responsibilities. It is in fact a stewardship. It implies such land tenure and use as to enable the possessor to develop his personality, maintain a decent standard of living for family and fulfill social obligations. At the same time, the land steward has a duty to enrich the soil he tills and to hand it down to future generations as a thank offering to God, the giver, and as a loving inheritance to his children's children. (The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. II., Nashville, Tenn., Abingdon Press, 1953).*

As we participate in today's agricultural revolution, God calls us to rededicate ourselves to good stewardship of creation—God's gifts to us of land, air, water and life.

### **C. Compassion**

Scripture calls us to be compassionate, to enter into the pain and suffering of others and to work toward a just and loving local and global community. We often struggle with how to live justly in our complex economic system. Consumers are especially called to pay attention to this particular goal. There is ample evidence that Abraham, as a semi-nomadic herdsman, had garnered a reasonable amount of wealth (Genesis 13:2). Throughout various portions of Scripture, there is evidence that faithfulness is sometimes equated with wealth, that holiness is equated with prosperity, although much of this thought is challenged successfully in the book of Job. Abraham's faithfulness was not to obtain wealth; largely his concern was faithfulness to God and to his family. When Abraham separated from Lot, described in Genesis 13, his generosity in division of property is apparent, and his knowledge of what the land could maintain pointed toward appropriate stewardship. Abraham saw to the welfare of an extended family that was the scope of his community. He gave richly from his abundance.

When we turn to 1 Kings, we see that the concept of community reaches beyond the extended family of Abraham's time. In 1 Kings 17, God directs Elijah, in the midst of a drought, to venture beyond his immediate community to the town of Zarephath. God commands a widow living there to feed Elijah out of her poverty. Through this encounter, community and compassion are extended to people of different tribal groups and geographical areas. Biblical accounts record the continuing expansion of society's understanding of community.

Today, our concept of community is both local and global, extending throughout the world. Thus God's mandate to us is that we be compassionate—enter into the pain and suffering of

others—throughout the world. In 1966, Dr. Merton Sherman, professor of Hebrew and Old Testament at Huron College, said that "God is not opposed to wealth and comfort . . . as long as everyone has enough." That seems to be the predominant attitude of Scripture and remains a powerful comment for our day. The biblical imperatives for compassionate living and just behavior are mandates for right living in response to a saving God.



In Matthew 14:13–21, we read the story of Jesus feeding of more than 5,000 persons. While Jesus saw to it that the spiritual needs of the spiritually hungry were sated, he also saw to it that everyone's physical needs were met by providing enough to eat. The following Chapter 15 records another event that, in fact, may be the same one. In verse 32 we read, "Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, 'I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat; and I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the way.'" As the story continues, we discover that despite the disciples' concern that there might not be enough, no one was excluded. We believe the gospel speaks of our spiritual needs fulfilled in Christ. We need also to believe the gospel when it demonstrates a Savior committed to adequately fulfilling the physical needs of God's people in every place. In other words, food enough for all!

Finally, Christ's Great Commandment to us: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37–39). These exhortations demand a food policy based upon the love of God, self, and others.

### **D. Community**

It is clear, as we read the Old Testament, that dedication to a responsible life in community is consistent with faithful

worship of the God of history. A faithful community organizes life based on God's loving presence where compassion, stewardship, and sustainability are a way of life. The Book of Leviticus, in the 19th chapter, offers guidance in a number of areas:

- “Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy” (19:2.) A major demonstration of this holiness is through responsible community life.
- “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the Lord your God” (19:9).
- “You shall not render an unjust judgment” (19:15a.). “You shall not cheat in measuring length, weight, or quantity. You shall have honest balances, honest weights, an honest ephah [an ephah is a dry measure of approximately 37 quarts], and an honest hin [a hin is a wet measure between 1.6 and 1.8 gallons]: I am the Lord your God . . .” (19:35–36).
- “When you come into the land and plant all kind of trees for food, then you shall regard their fruit as forbidden; three years it shall be forbidden to you, it must not be eaten. In the fourth year all their fruit shall be set apart for rejoicing in the Lord. But in the fifth year you may eat of their fruit, that their yield may be increased for you: I am the Lord your God” (19:23–25).

In a simpler world, where hungry people lived next door or nearby, the call to compassion was easier to answer. In Isaiah, we note that community has broadened to include everyone when we read the chapter 55, “Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” In the New Testament we see another leap to broaden the concept of community as we read in Mark 7 the story of the Syrophenician woman who comes to Jesus for help. We are uncomfortable with Jesus' initial exclusive response to her plea for help. In the end, however, Jesus responds by including and helping her. In Acts 10:34 Peter proclaims: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears [God] and does what is right is acceptable to [God].” We have a gospel for all people; therefore, we have a call for universal compassion, care, and concern for God's people and God's world.

In Matthew 12: Jesus and his disciples pluck grain from the fields to feed themselves, even though it belonged to someone

else. The ancients had already established a food policy in which people who were hungry or those who were traveling were entitled to food, even if it stood in the field of another. That policy, in many ways, is more compassionate than those established by many contemporary societies. The argument raised by the Pharisees was not about whether Jesus and the disciples could or could not pluck or harvest the grain. The argument was over doing this on the Sabbath. Jesus expanded the concept by declaring that mercy must be extended, even on the Sabbath. Here's an intentional policy of compassionate stewardship in community.

This story reminds us of the people in the world who “pluck grain” every day for the benefit of multinational food producers and processors but who are unable to glean any benefits for themselves and often go to bed hungry. This situation is prevalent in many developing nations. Today, many rural families in the United States are experiencing hunger as a result of the economic crisis in rural communities.



In summary, Scripture speaks eloquently and challengingly for appropriate care of land, of production of natural resources of creation, and for those who harvest the land and sea. Such activity is a holy responsibility mandated by God. By being faithful to these scriptural imperatives and using the examples of right use of the physical elements necessary for life, we are led toward the development of right spiritual attitudes in vocation, community response, and care of God's world. We are empowered to ask questions such as: Does this policy development come from the heart of people who believe in the intrinsic value of every person? Does it come from the minds of those who view God as dynamically involved in every place and part of life? Does policy development come from those who confess a Savior who demands concern for the spiritual and physical well being of people? We as Christians need to add these faith perspectives to discussions, debates, and policy making occurring in legislatures, marketplace, and church governing bodies. We are called to participate fully in this agricultural revolution and to demand that God's love and justice be the foundation for our times.

Just as we have been reminded that Scripture calls us to

- responsible use of land and natural resources,
- compassionate living and just behavior among all of God's people,
- just and fair commercial transactions in the exchange of goods and services, it also requires us, as individuals and as congregations, to engage in prayer, study, and action related to these issues and concerns affecting the common good. An agricultural revolution is occurring today, and we are reminded by an old adage that "agriculture is everyone's bread and butter." Everyone who consumes food participates in the industry, that means each of us.

Do we consumers have a right and an obligation to be involved? Yes. Do we have a right to determine what we eat and the safeguards taken with our food? Yes. In order to participate, we food consumers, like food producers, have an obligation to put faith into action by studying the issues, making responsible choices, and prayerfully seeking God's wisdom and guidance along the way.

Finally, we need to remember that in 1996 more than 50 percent of the congregations of the PC(USA) reported that they were serving either rural or small towns. Of course, not every rural congregation serves an agriculturally based community. Many rural communities have an economy based on other extractive industries such as fishing, mining, or timbering. They, too, are experiencing/have experienced many of the dynamics that are occurring in farming areas today. When communities experience economic trauma, churches are ultimately affected. As Presbyterians we need to be concerned about these congregations because when one part of the Body suffers, we all suffer.



### III. The Current Situation

#### A. U.S. Food Policy

Let us give attention to the current situation regarding food production/consumption. It is assumed that the basic agricultural policy in the United States is that food will be safe, secure, abundant, available, and inexpensive. What does this policy mean to us? Here are five common assumptions:

- Safe food is grown in an environment free from inputs that would make the product unsafe for human consumption and free from harmful contaminants during the handling and processing phases. And instructions and safeguards for proper handling the food accompany the product when it is sold.
- Secure food supplies are accessible to all people in every nation. Many communities participate in food security programs to assure that safe food is available for everyone at cost-effective prices.
- An abundant food supply requires that the production of food for human consumption must be the primary priority for the use of available resources.
- Long-term availability of the food supply calls for the preservation of natural resources for future food production.
- Appropriately priced food allows food products to be available to all sectors of society while providing food producers a fair return for their labor and financial investment.

The average food consumer takes this agricultural policy for granted. Today, however, this policy is threatened by

- the growth and globalization of the food production industry, especially the extraordinary expansion of the fast food industry and its connections to the food producers;
- the multinational corporations that exert control "from seed to the grocer's shelf";
- the global industrialization of agriculture that enables food commodities to be raised in the least expensive setting, but often causing a loss to farmers both in this and other countries;
- the worldwide markets that enable food processing and retail corporations to purchase food commodities from sources outside the United States where health and safety measures governing food production and processing may be less than what is required in the United States;
- the food suppliers for multinational food producers may not be required to measure up to health and safety standards, even within the United States.

A vicious cycle has evolved: consumers are demanding food at a moment's notice and at cheap prices regardless of its nutritional value; multinational food producers, processors, and retailers are driven by these consumer demands; and consumer demands are shaped and influenced by advertising that is underwritten by these same multinational food producers, processors, and retailers.

Many of the changes in food production have happened without much notice by the average food consumer and these changes are unlikely to be reversed. Responsible Christians need to find ways to become aware of what's happening and to discover their role in this agricultural revolution. Religious communities can educate people concerning food production/consumption issues, suggest ways in which people can responsibly participate in and influence this agricultural revolution, and support organizations that advocate for family farmers/ranchers, food security, and agricultural workers.

Before taking a look at the current situation and exploring how today's agricultural policy is affecting society as a whole and the lives of individuals, let us look at some simple statistics that show us the relationship between food producers and consumers.

### **B. Farmer's Share**

Where does your food dollar go? In 1980, farmers received 31 cents of the food retail dollar; today that amount has decreased to 20 cents. The remaining 80 cents of the food retail dollar goes to non-farm expenses related to processing, marketing, distributing, and selling food.

At a family restaurant, breakfast comprised of 2 eggs, 2 strips of bacon, hash browns, 2 slices of bread, 2 pats of butter, and coffee will cost \$4.99. Of that amount, the farmers' share is less than 1/4 of the cost, \$1.25. The farmer who raises wheat that produces bread receives a mere 5 cents from a loaf of bread costing \$2.

What is wrong with this picture?

### **C. Family Farmers and Ranchers**

The mandates in Overture 99-8 to the General Assembly address concerns of family farmers and ranchers. What do we mean by a family farm or ranch? A family farm or ranch is defined not by the number of acres in operation, but as an agricultural production unit and a business in which the management, economic risk, and most of the labor (except in peak seasons) are provided by the family, and from which the family receives a significant part, though not necessarily the majority, of their income.

In 1930, according to the U.S. Census, a total of 6.3 million

farms existed in the United States. By 1950 the number decreased to 5.4 million; in 1980 to 2.2 million; and by 1998 to 2.1 million farms. By the 2000 census, a decision was made to eliminate farms from the information gathered. Now agricultural data is collected and compiled by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Economic information published by the USDA in 1997 indicated the following:

- Seventeen percent of all farms had sales over \$100,000 that account for 82 percent of crop and livestock sales, while 83 percent of all farms had sales of less than \$100,000.
- However, only 7 percent of all farms had sales in excess of \$250,000, which accounts for 60 percent of crop and livestock sales.
- Twenty-four percent of all farms had annual sales of under \$2,500.



These statistics tell us that there is a growing concentration of land and economic strength in a relatively small percentage of large farming operations.

Local statistics show that many family farms/ranches are going out of business. The relationship between farm product prices and farm income, farm debt and bankruptcies, forced land transfers and foreclosures, changes in the structure of agriculture, and tax policy continue to contribute to the loss of family farms/ranches. In addition, land values are increasingly based on a measure other than the capacity for production. Prices of land are increasing at the same time as commodity prices are decreasing. Farmers and ranchers indicate the need to gross \$200,000 annually simply to break even. Farms/ranches earning \$250,000 or less are considered small operations through the eyes of farmers/ranchers.

These statistics point to the need for off-farm income to

support both the farming/ranching operation and the farm/ranch family. Yet, in many rural communities, job opportunities are limited if they exist at all, and time spent in off-farm jobs takes away from the farm/ranch enterprise.

Farmers and ranchers who remain in business are facing a variety of issues, including the following:

- The increasing concentration of agricultural power held by large corporations creates an environment open to manipulation in farm production as well as agricultural research, food processing, marketing, and sales. This concentration of power decreases competition for farm family products and drives many family farmers out of business. This concentration of power results in agricultural decisions being made in corporate boardrooms rather than within the farming communities.
- The cost of farming has increased tremendously and is based on profitability. Farmers/ranchers have no voice in these costs. Since most companies are transnational, the cost to farmers in this and other countries is affected by global trade agreements and economic dynamics throughout the world. In order to be competitive, farmers must borrow large sums of capital for equipment, seed, and livestock. With sales revenues continually decreasing, family farmers are unable to reduce their debt or increase their borrowing. Banks in agricultural communities are increasingly being taken over by larger banking corporations so that decisions are no longer made within the context of the community, but in distant board rooms.
- It is increasingly difficult for people who want to farm to enter the field. A number of family farm coalitions have identified this as one of the most significant issues today. Capital is difficult to obtain and mentors are few.
- Markets within the United States have become uneven as a result of this concentration of agricultural power. A few corporations control packing and processing markets. Anti-monopoly legislation, including the Packers and Stockyards Act of 1921, is not being applied to agriculture and food processing/production. Market prices are not made public. Family farmers are not able to compete on this uneven playing field.
- The U.S. is one of the largest food exporters in the world. For the past number of years, agricultural trade has registered a surplus as compared with deficits experienced in non-agricultural trade. However, in 1998 agricultural trade decreased by 6.4 percent due to the volatility of the Asian markets and increased supplies of farm commodities. In the past exports included wheat, feed grain, and soybeans. In the 1990s, however, processed

foods, vegetable oil and meal, and consumer ready fresh fruits and vegetables increased and surpassed the traditional exports. Furthermore, a number of the larger agricultural corporations have invested in other countries, set up production, and are selling processed foods. These sales exceed the export of processed food in the U.S.

- The import of cheaper food products is increasing, putting farmers/ranchers out of business and subjecting the general public to food products that may not meet the criteria for health and safety of this country.

#### ***D. Racial Ethnic Farmers/Ranchers***

Racial/ethnic farmers and ranchers have suffered economic losses for a longer time than their white counterparts. For example, in 1910, 218,000 African American farmers owned, fully or partially, 15 million acres. By 1992 only 18,000 African Americans remained, owning 2.3 million acres.

African American and other minority farmers are less likely than white farmers to benefit from any positive changes in the rural/farm economy. The farm crises of the 1980s and 1990s forced many of them off the land. The small, African American farmer, once common in southern states, is now imperiled. According to the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Emergency Land Fund, if present land loss continues, there will be virtually no African American farmers by the end of the first decade of this century.

Surveys of Native American farmers suggest that their situation may be as bleak as that of African American farmers. This prediction is especially devastating given the fact that farming is the leading occupation among Native Americans living on reservation lands as well as for Native Americans living off the reservation.

During the Clinton administration, Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman restored the USDA's Office of Civil Rights. However, questions continue as to USDA's commitment to civil rights. For example, both African American farmers and Native American farmers charge the USDA with systematic racial discrimination and have filed class-action suits. Although a settlement was reached in 1999 between the African American farmers and USDA, the implementation of that settlement has not been fully realized and allegations of discriminatory practices continue to be voiced.

Asian Americans historically have been excluded from significant farm ownership. Prior to World War II, however, there were a number of Japanese American farmers. The detention of Japanese Americans during World War II forced a reduction in farm ownership that has never been restored. Today, many immigrants from Southeast Asian countries are settling in areas where meat-packing or poultry-processing

plants are located in order to gain employment (discussed later in this study).

The Hispanic populations in the United States are large and rapidly growing, representing 6.8 percent of the total population in 1980, 9.3 percent of the population in 1990, and 13 percent of the total population in 2000. According to the 1990 statistics, more than 2 million Hispanics live in rural areas, with more than 85 percent living in southern and western states. The vast majority of rural Hispanics are of Mexican descent. Many Hispanic people work as migrant or processing-plant workers (described later in this study). Some in the Hispanic community have been able to purchase small farms and settle in rural communities. In fact the largest number of new farmers are of Hispanic decent. These new farms are supported through families working together, pooling resources, and often raising specialty crops.

The 1997 Census of Agriculture, conducted by the USDA, reported that since 1978, farms operated by Hispanics increased 58 percent while total farms in the U.S. decreased 15 percent. Of the 27,717 farms operated by Hispanics, almost 17,500, or 68 percent, were fully owned, almost 7,000 were partially owned; and the remaining 3,217 were tenant farmers. The states with the greatest number of Hispanic-operated farms are Texas, California, New Mexico, Florida, Colorado, and Washington.

Interestingly, the average age of the Hispanic farmer is 53.6 years, representing less than a year difference from the average age of all farmers, 54.3 years. Thus, the concerns of the lack of younger, beginning farmers may be shared by all groups (USDA, "Quick Facts: Characteristics of Hispanic Farm Operators, from the Census of Agriculture," 2000).

The church can add its voice in supporting the full participation of racial ethnic farmers/ranchers in the agricultural systems of the economy of our nation and the global economic network. Congregations can discover racial ethnic farmers/ranchers in their area and learn from them ways in which to be supportive. Organizations such as the Rural Coalition and the Federation of Southern Cooperatives are strong advocates for racial ethnic farmers/ranchers and good sources for information. The church would do well to support these groups, keep informed about issues, and stand in solidarity with racial ethnic farmers/ranchers.

### **E. Beginning Farmers**

Forty-nine percent of U.S. farmers/ranchers are 55 years and older. As has been noted already, the average age of U.S. farmers/ranchers in 1997 was 54.3 years. Who will replace them when they are no longer able to work? This significant concern is being discussed in agricultural circles today. The

amount of capital required to enter this profession is prohibitive to many younger men and women. Financial institutions are controlled in distant boardrooms and not likely to take the lending risks required to get a person started. Many young people cannot envision a future in farming/ranching and are forced to leave the community. A few coalitions, such as the Center for Rural Affairs, are strong advocates for the beginning farmer/rancher and are calling on institutions and legislatures to provide the required resources. The church needs to join its voice with others if family farming/ranching is to be a viable profession in this world.



### **F. Agribusiness**

The concentration of agricultural corporate power, mentioned earlier in this study, is one of the significant concerns related to the survival of the family farmer and rancher. As this study evolved, the group stressed that multinational corporations are not inherently evil. However, corporations are made up of shareholders and boards of

directors who play a vital role in the food production/consumption industry. We may assume that a number of shareholders and members of boards of directors are members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). We know that Presbyterians purchase and consume food produced by these corporations. This study calls attention to the effects of this concentration of power and calls on Presbyterians to live out their faith as shareholders, board members, and food consumers.

This concentration of agricultural corporate power affects all of us—locally and globally—because transnational corporations are controlling food production, processing, and marketing. These corporations, like any other, are driven by the need to produce profits. The board of directors' goal is to maximize such profits in the most efficient way possible.

Con Agra, Cargill, Archer Daniels Midland, and Tyson/IBP are among the giants in the production, processing, and marketing of food.

Con Agra's business includes producing and processing turkeys, beef packing, cattle feed lots, and pork packing. As consumers we recognize Con Agra through the labels: Armour, Monfort, Swift, Butterball, Healthy Choice, Peter Pan Peanut Butter, Hunt's, and others.

Cargill's operation includes owning animal feed plants, elevator companies, flour milling, dry corn milling, wet corn milling, soybean crushing, as well as turkeys and pork packing plants. Since its acquisition of Continental Grains, Inc., Cargill is now one of the leaders in pork production and cattle feed lots.

Archer Daniels Midland's enterprise also includes producing and processing animal feed plants, elevator companies, flour milling, dry corn milling, wet corn milling, soybean crushing, plus ethanol production.

Tyson is one of the top producers of chickens while IBP was a leader among beef and pork packers. In 2001, Tyson acquired IBP to become what chairman and CEO, John Tyson, described as "... the world's leading protein provider." Revenues in 2002 are projected to be \$25 billion (9/28/01 Tyson News Release.) This is an example of how a merger of food producing corporate giants results in further concentration of power.

Other corporations, such as Monsanto, are active in the field of biotechnology. Genetic engineering and increased use of hormones and other additives in seeds, plants, and livestock result in a higher volume of production.

The effect on the physical well-being of people who consume food produced through such controlled, engineered processes is yet unknown. Cargill has increased its power by entering into an agreement with Monsanto

These corporations make up a global network. Food is produced as cash crops for export in countries where labor is cheap while the purchase of the food product in those same countries is often prohibitive for local consumers and limited to people with financial means. United States' trade agreements with other nations are often influenced by these same corporations. This leaves farmers in developing countries, who traditionally produced their food on their land, with either no control over their own land or diminished ability to produce food for their own table. Now farmland is controlled by transnational corporations and farm products are sent to wealthy nations, resulting in profits for the transnational corporations, leaving local people in economic despair.

This concentration of power also affects family farmers/ranchers in the U.S. in all three phases of agricultural production:

- Primary: Input resources (seed, fertilizer, chemicals, and equipment);
- Secondary: Production (the actual growing of food);
- Tertiary: Transportation, processing, and wholesale marketing of food.

Some corporations control a significant portion of one or more of the above-named phases, which is known as vertical integration. Corporate mergers further consolidate the transnational corporations, resulting in increased control and less viability for independent family farmers/ranchers. Control is exerted "from seed to grocer's shelf."

Before this increase in corporate power, the U.S. farmers/ranchers engaged in grain and livestock production as family businesses. They delivered their commodities to local markets where prices were published.

Now family farmers/ranchers go to markets where prices are not known and where grain and livestock move through a system controlled by persons in distant boardrooms, who have no acquaintance with their community and people. The playing field may be competitive, but it is no longer level. The concentration of power in agribusiness is forcing many farmers/ranchers out of business, while others continue as contract workers, "piece workers" for these large corporations.

The dairy industry, too, has been affected by corporate power. For a long time it was controlled through cooperatives, but that has changed in recent years. First of all, with the decline in the number of dairy farms, cooperatives are merging. In fact there is a new national cooperative, Dairy Farmers of America, with 22,000 participating farmers in 43 states. Secondly, dairy processing corporations are experiencing horizontal integration where larger corporations

are acquiring smaller ones. Today, Kraft (owned by Philip Morris) is the leading dairy processing company in the U.S. Suiza and Dean were gaining prominence. Now their strength is increasing as they merge. Dean/Suiza, Kroger, and Prairie Farms lead in fluid milk sales in the U.S.; Kraft (Philip Morris) leads in cheese processing; and Unilever, Pillsbury, Dreyers, and Blue Bell in ice cream production. Historical cooperatives like Land O' Lakes have had segments of their operations taken over by corporations, such as the Land O Lakes Upper Midwest fluid milk operation that was taken over by Dean. As a result of such changes, farmers no longer control the processing of dairy products. While Wisconsin has been known as the cheese capital of the U.S., that is shifting to California, Idaho, and New Mexico, where mega dairy farms are being located. In addition, imports of cheese and dairy ingredients have increased over recent years.

Large food retailers are entering into food processing contracts. Kroger, Safeway, and Walmart own and operate their own dairy operations. This change, in particular, causes dairy operations to focus on the retailers needs rather than those of dairy farmers.

The consolidation of power among large food retailers is eliminating many consumer options. Currently, Kroger, Albertson's, Walmart, Safeway, and Ahold USA (Stop and Shop) account for 42 percent of retail food sales, which is up from 24 percent in 1997. Increasingly, these companies have entered into agreements with food processing suppliers—Kroger with Excel (Cargill), Ahold USA with Suiza, Walmart with Tyson/IBP, Farmland, Smithfield. These suppliers provide the food retailer with case-ready food products. In 1993, food retailing was not significant for Walmart. Now they are the second largest retailer of food. These phenomena are not limited to the U.S. Food retailing, too, has become a global playing field.

At the present time, most consumers in the U.S. are unaware of these shifts in agricultural power. As this power continues to increase, there will be noticeable changes. Increased production of processed food results in more chemical additives being ingested into our bodies. The lack of country of origin labeling keeps consumers uninformed about chemical use in the country of origin used in the production of livestock or the growing of grains, vegetables, and fruits. Often, regulations controlling the use of chemicals is not as rigorous in other countries as in ours. As genetically modified commodities are increasingly used in food production, consumers are unaware of the source of the transferred gene that may result in allergic reactions. At the point when we wake up to these facts based on corporate decisions about food production it may be too late. As church people, we must begin to understand these issues and give voice to them before it is too late.



### **G. Agricultural Workers**

The food production sector of our economy is sustained significantly through the work of agricultural workers. Some workers harvest crops while others are employed in the meat and poultry processing plants. Many are racial ethnic people or immigrants from Mexico, Central America, or Southeast Asia. They are both documented and undocumented. From time to time, concern is expressed by the general public over the number of undocumented workers coming to the United States, but we cannot escape the reality that they are meeting a market demand. They do the work that many Americans won't do.

While we acknowledge that a number of farmers/ranchers provide just compensation and adequate living accommodations, we cannot deny that in many cases the working conditions, wages, living accommodations, and services for agricultural workers are substandard. As the church gives attention to concerns related to this agricultural revolution, it needs to include advocacy for just and fair wages and working conditions for everyone involved in the food production industries.

As noted earlier in this study, the Hispanic populations in the United States are large and rapidly growing. Many live in "colonias" along the U.S./Mexican border while others travel northward as migrant workers in one of the three "migrant streams" to the West Coast, Midwest, or East Coast. For example, there are migrant farm workers who spend part of the year in southern Texas then migrate northward to Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan, following the harvest of seasonal crops as they go.

Since migrants "come with the dust and are gone with the wind" they experience a number of interrelated problems: poverty, inadequate housing, poor sanitation, environmental hazards, inadequate health care, lack of educational opportunities and nonexistent child labor laws resulting in young children working side-by-side with parents in the fields. Those who live in "colonias"—densely populated communities on both sides of the U.S./Mexican border—are attracted to jobs

and better living conditions than may be found in other parts of Mexico. While living conditions may be better, they are far from acceptable: housing is inadequate; clean, potable water is not available; sanitation and environmental problems are horrendous (raw sewerage is dumped into the Rio Grande and mosquitoes transmit diseases). Health care, too, is a problem since 90 percent of the people are uninsured and Medicaid is available only for U.S. citizens. Jobs are lacking and poverty is rampant.

Working conditions in meat and poultry processing plants are not ordinarily included in farm worker discussions. However, discussions may need to be broadened to include all workers in the food production industries. Jobs in meat and poultry processing plants are exceedingly dangerous. Studies of these plants are providing evidence that many workers are severely injured and exploited. Processing equipment and technology, toxic emissions from processing, wet and slimy floors, repetitious tasks, and increasing processing line speed are contributing factors to serious injury. Such conditions often result in severe cuts, bruises, fractures, respiratory illnesses, muscular and skeletal disorders. At times, physicians are unwilling to certify that these injuries are work-related leaving workers without medical coverage. In fact, often the injury leaves the worker permanently disabled resulting in job termination. These situations are especially devastating for workers who are without “voice” and who are unable to participate in decisions related to their work environment.

Those who manage meat and poultry processing are also vulnerable to adverse conditions knowing that processing is dangerous, worker turnover is exceedingly high, and the company’s primary interest is increased profits.

How many of us, when we sit down to a meal of poultry or meat, realize the price that is paid by workers preparing the food for production and distribution in this country and throughout the globe? We need to advocate on behalf of the voiceless. Organizations such as The Rural Coalition and the National Farm Worker Ministry are reliable sources for information about current issues calling for advocacy by individuals and organizations, including churches.

Just as we need to advocate for improved working conditions for all agricultural workers, we also need to keep informed about contracts that have been successfully negotiated between workers and growers/employers. In cases where just contracts are signed and implemented, we need to support the particular food producer and worker.

Finally, we need to support farmers/ranchers who are under contract to work on behalf of the transnational corporations. Frequently contracts require the farmer/rancher to assume a large portion of liability. Farmers and ranchers need to be

protected against such liability that may impose significant financial expenditures.

### ***H. Women and Families***

As the farm economy continues to be depressed, women and families are especially affected. Farm women carry out a variety of roles. More than 165,000 farms are operated by women. Women who are spouses of farmers and ranchers carry a major responsibility for the farm/ranch operation. Increasingly, however, women are required to take off-farm jobs to supplement the family’s income. The off-farm job, of course, is in addition to the ongoing farm and family tasks. As the demand for off-farm jobs grows, children are left in day care or with other family members. As stress levels increase, spousal, child, and elder abuse increase.

“The Farmer’s Wife,” a documentary series, produced by David Sutherland, and aired on Public Television stations, provides a powerful glimpse into the life of a farm family showing the tremendous pressures upon them during these times of economic hardship.

Shelters for victims of abuse are not readily available in rural areas. Ordinarily, a victim of abuse needs transportation to a safe haven. Phone calls to shelters or service organizations are often toll-calls recorded on the phone bill, allowing the perpetrator access to this information. Some religious beliefs play a negative role, especially those that put a heavy literal emphasis on the biblical passages from Ephesians 5:22–24: “Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church... Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands.” Many women and their children are blamed for causing the abuse. Emphasis on pride as sin reinforces the subordination of women. Here, pastors, women’s organizations, and key lay leaders can play an important role in dispelling the myths surrounding these scriptural interpretations, affirming the role and sanctity of women and children, recognizing symptoms of abuse, and participating in training opportunities that will enhance their skills in ministering effectively with victims of abuse and with perpetrators. Scripture that provides affirmation of the partnership model will help dispel the myths such as Proverbs 31:10–31; Ephesians 5:25–33; and Galatians 3:25–29.

Sadly, decreased family income has caused many farm and ranch families not to have enough food for themselves. They are hungry. And without adequate income they are unable to repair their houses and farm buildings. Second Harvest reports that farmers and ranchers who have lost their farms and ranches and other low-income people living in rural



## *I. The Agricultural Revolution and Mental Health*

communities in South Dakota, Minnesota, North Dakota, and Oklahoma are resorting to food bank services in order to feed their families.

Women and families are challenged with family health-care decisions. Health-care providers have been consolidated in many rural regions, leaving other communities without services. The high cost of health care is another force driving people to off-farm employment so that they can participate in health insurance plans. People may be required to drive long distances to health-care providers, which can result in lost wages, expenses for child care, need for transportation (since public transportation is nonexistent in rural communities), and, at times, overnight accommodations near health-care facilities. The same needs arise for people seeking assistance from social service providers.

Some congregations find ways to collaborate with other churches and organizations in their community to sponsor projects that provide practical help to women and families. For example, some are providing a center for youth, others a child day care, while some are visiting the elderly and homebound. Another is setting up an infant seat-lending program, another is providing children with backpacks containing school supplies. A few groups have collaborated in bringing mental health or social service agencies to the community so that people do not have to travel for hours and lose wages. Churches can also provide brochures describing services available to victims of abuse and/or perpetrators by placing such brochures in discreet places such as on the top of the toilet tank in private rest room areas.

In our society, these issues of family, off-farm employment, child care, and health care continue to be focused on women. However, each of these issues will be better served by being addressed holistically and each member of the family—male, female, young, old—must participate and carry her/his share of the responsibility.

Today's global agricultural revolution and the resulting economic crises affects not only farmers and ranchers, but the whole rural sector: communities, families, churches, local businesses, and services. Banks fail, schools consolidate, churches close, health-care delivery consolidates, local and regional voluntary associations go under, local governments struggle, and families break up. One manifestation of these events is the dramatic increase in stress-related illnesses that take their toll on the whole community. Statistics indicate the problem today is potentially more serious than during the farm crisis of the 1980s. However, there continues to be a reluctance to face these concerns and address them. People who struggle are not always willing to seek the help that they need. We continue to live in a society that rewards stoicism during difficult times. This is an area in which churches and community organizations/agencies can play a helpful role.

Study after study documenting the effects of the 1980s farm crisis on individuals, families, and communities supports a direct link between the financial distress of farmers and a variety of mental and physical health problems. Constant financial pressure, the threat of losing farms/ranches that had been in families for generations, and feelings of personal failure and guilt take their toll.

While analyzing and comparing the 1980s crisis with today's agriculture revolution, professionals in the field also note differences between these two periods. While the 1980s were primarily a crisis with lenders, other factors need to be included in today's equation—such as unpredictable farm subsidies, impact from the global market and economy, absentee land ownership, fewer locally owned banks and consolidation of corporate power. Rural people in some areas, who lost farms in the 1980s and found employment in nearby plants, are now facing the closure of these plants and the resultant economic distress. In other areas, rural people who lose farms simply have no employment options.

While recognizing the differences between the crisis of the 1980s and today's situation, mental health assessments from the 1980s provide some valuable lessons. All too often, the view of rural communities as tightly knit and mutually supportive havens proves to be a myth. Many farm families in crisis are isolated—some withdraw out of shame or fear while others are simply abandoned by neighbors and local social institutions. Community institutions (e.g., churches and schools) are divided over issues and, too often, fail to take positive action. "Blaming the Victim" is a recurring problem as farmers and ranchers are blamed for their plight and characterized as bad managers, poor business decision makers, or too extravagant with their personal spending. The crisis

produces family conflict, both within farming and ranching families and between the farm family members and extended family members.

Farmers/ranchers who are working larger farms/ranches are under increasing mental health pressures as well. Production and time stress result in farmers/ranchers of larger operations losing the personal connections they experienced when operations were smaller.

Statistics from the agriculture sector indicate farmers and other rural residents have gone from having the best “mental health” to the worst. Rates of depression among farmers and rural residents increased in recent years and far outstripped their urban counterparts. Nebraska and Iowa studies during the 1980s found more than 20 percent of farmers and rural residents had evidence of depression. Alcohol abuse, child abuse, spousal abuse, divorce, suicide, and farm accidents climbed along with the stress. Children became troubled and acted out in various ways. Economic desperation also increased the potential for people becoming involved in hate groups and militia movements.

According to the National Association of Rural Mental Health, suicide statistics for 1995 from the National Center for Health Statistics indicate that the adult suicide rate in rural areas was 17.94 per 100,000 people compared with 14.91 per 100,000 people in urban areas. Other studies show that the rate is even higher in sparsely populated rural areas. Untreated mental illness is a major risk factor for suicide. Decreased access to mental health-care providers and rural isolation have been cited as contributing factors in suicides.

Taking the first step to seek mental-health services is often hard for independent, self-reliant, rural people. In small towns there is a fear that “everyone will know.” This reluctance, coupled with ignorance about services available, as well as recent cuts in services, creates an unbearable difficulty for rural people in need. Place these dynamics in the context of the agricultural revolution. Significant change is ongoing and no longer confined to a crisis situation. A series of events can coalesce and result in significant mental-health problems. For example, an economic crisis, a related business failure on Main Street, a shift in shopping allegiance to urban malls and national shopping chains, can result in a spiraling downward of an entire community of rural residents, not just the farm and ranch families.

Rural pastors (ministers of Word and Sacrament and commissioned lay pastors) are in a position to play a vital role here, especially if they are able to cooperate with community service organizations and mental-health providers.

Pastors, aware of the availability of mental-health services in their area, ought to inform the whole community of them.

While farmers and ranchers and their families are not likely to seek health services for depression and other problems, people in the community, such as hairdressers, barbers, bartenders, as well as pastors, often hear the personal stories that provide clues to a person’s situation. These “listeners” may benefit from knowing the availability of services.

Pastors and lay leaders, especially, will recognize that religious belief plays a significant role in today’s crisis. A good number of farmers and ranchers see failure as abandonment by God or God’s wrath come upon them. It is hoped that with the strength of the faith community, God’s loving presence can become real, supportive, and corrective.

Mental-health providers and related organizations might need to adapt services to the rural context. Training providers about rural culture and current dynamics should prove helpful. Agency staff and/or providers need to visit a family rather than expecting the people to come to them. Flexibility of time is also important rather than “regular office hours.” Twenty-four-hour hotlines are also useful.

Church governing bodies and other organizations provide care and support of pastors and health-care providers who serve rural churches and communities. Reaching out to people and communities in crisis requires extraordinary spiritual and emotional energy. Continuous demands often result in burn out. Spiritual retreats, outreach, support groups, and respite care may help alleviate pastoral and provider stress.

## IV. New Horizons

### A. Introduction

What role can the church play in shaping the future? We are called to participate in and influence this agricultural revolution by breathing fresh life into the values of sustainability, stewardship, compassion, and community. To recap:

- Sustainability means that farmers and ranchers not only produce enough food for their families, but also for others in the community—locally and globally—and not only for the present, but for future generations.
- Stewardship means that producers and consumers are trustees of the land, water, air, plants, non-human creatures, and responsible for them in accordance with God’s just purposes.
- Compassion means that we enter into the pain and suffering of others and act for their well-being through a just and loving local and global community.
- Community means that people of the earth will

increasingly interact with each other strongly committed to the shared values of compassion, stewardship, and sustainability.

As people of God, we are called to be intelligent and responsible stewards in our decision-making. The United States frequently sets the economic stage for the world and needs to be held accountable for its actions by the citizens. The following are areas where we can increase our knowledge and awareness to be effective advocates for issues that will lead to a just community.

### ***B. Equitable Public Market System***

The need for an equitable public market system is at the heart of much of the farm economy debate. Price is a major motivational force for action and the singular control of production. Market price reporting has deteriorated in recent years to the detriment of family farmers and ranchers and the benefit of large corporations. Manipulation of markets has occurred because of a lack of open competitive bidding for inventories of commodities.

“Freedom to Farm” (the farm bill legislation approved by Congress in 1996) attempted to remove government price supports for farm commodities. It expected the marketplace to provide adequate support to farmers/ranchers. However, this did not happen. For instance, the government failed to promote exports that would have developed international markets. Furthermore, the lack of transitional promotion from price supports to marketplace support resulted in the federal

government having to provide financial support to farmers and ranchers in excess of what continuing farm commodity support would have required. Farmers/ranchers repeatedly plea for fair and decent prices and not government “handouts/bailouts.” Current conditions have caused competition within the agricultural community: region vs. region, nation vs. nation, one commodity vs. another commodity. For example, while farmers/ranchers in one area suffer from drought, farmers/ranchers in other areas who are blessed with adequate rains recognize that their revenues have increased because of the drought. Farmers in Australia are being told that farmers in North America are the root cause of the low commodity prices, while farmers in the U.S. are blaming their economic plight on Canadian and Mexican farmers. All farmers/ranchers have been adversely affected by the current economic condition of the world’s agricultural marketplace.

### ***C. Marketing Alternatives***

Some farmers and ranchers are opting for market alternatives rather than becoming contract producers for large corporations. In order to survive, farmers and ranchers need to capture a share of the marketing profits that are realized by corporations. This study will look at several options: cooperatives, niche farming, hobby farming, direct marketing/ links with urban/suburban consumers, bi-vocational farming, and alternative uses of agricultural commodities:



## **1. Cooperatives**

Cooperatives are as old as human history. The early Christian community was a cooperative of sorts (Acts 4:32). Through the ages, people with similar ideals and vision have worked together for the common good. Cooperatives have always been more than a means for securing better prices for the producer and consumer. They have been a means to ownership in businesses that individuals could never have started on their own. Members have an opportunity to share in ownership, manage the business, and benefit from the returns.

All co-ops are based on the concept of one member, one vote. Beyond this basic value, there are two types of co-ops: first, an open co-op where membership remains open to anyone who does business with that co-op; secondly, a closed co-op that requires an upfront investment for a specific purpose and normally includes an obligation by the stockholder to deliver a product to the co-op. When the money needed has been raised, the membership is closed. You cannot become a member of a closed co-op simply by doing business with that entity. Both open and closed co-ops are run by a board of directors who set policy and direction for the co-op, but hire a manager to oversee day-to-day business.

Co-ops may be organized “horizontally” to help with “farmgate” prices or they may be vertically integrated so that value may be added to the commodity before it is marketed.

Today, many feel that cooperatives have grown too large to be effective in helping farmers in local communities. There is a trend toward smaller, more locally based cooperatives as a processing and marketing tool for farmers, ranchers, and small businesses. An important aspect of these new cooperatives is that they are looking at niche markets where they can fill a consumer and producer need without having to compete directly with large corporations or regional cooperatives.

These newer cooperatives are market oriented, identifying markets through research and producing specifically for the targeted market. Production of processed products is expanded only to meet increasing demand compared with producing something and hoping that it will appeal to the market.

This new type cooperative has been supported by federal funds that guarantee loans for stock purchase, provide grant assistance to help defray some startup costs, help establish value-added market development resource centers as well as cooperative centers that offer technical assistance.

Examples of new-generation cooperatives include: Dakota Growers Pasta Cooperative, Spring Wheat Bakers, South Dakota Soybean Processors, North American Bison Cooperative, Iowa Turkey Growers Cooperative, U.S. Premium Beef and Corn Plus ethanol cooperative. Others, such as Pacific Coast Producers, have taken over ownership of processors that growers were formerly supplying.

One way this new trend might evolve is by having producer cooperatives sell to consumer cooperatives based with church entities. It is important to note that someone from the “outside,” so to speak, cannot come in and start a co-op. It must be organized around a group of informed, local participants who are willing to participate fully in its ownership and management. Congregations and local producers need to become aware of the concept and become informed as to what they would need to do to form such a group. Technical assistance is available through organizations such as National Farmers Union (national and state chapters), cooperative extension offices, Bank for Cooperatives.

## **2. Niche Farming**

As mentioned above, niche farming is part of a new trend intended to meet specific demands of consumers. As long as consumers continue to demand particular products, niche farming is appealing. Because this type of farming is dependent on the whims of consumers, it creates a volatile market system that may not be beneficial to the farmer/rancher over the long term.

## **3. Hobby Farming**

The term “hobby farming” is relatively new and describes a farm/ranch where the owners derive most of their income from other employment and farm as an avocation. Thus, it needs to be seen as a “hobby” rather than an economic base of support for a family and does not, ordinarily, contribute to the food production system that feeds the world’s population.

## **4. Direct Marketing Links With Urban/Suburban Consumers**

Earlier we spoke of one type of cooperative formed for marketing products. A traditional form of such marketing is the roadside farm stand. Farmers’ markets followed, which have had a resurgence in recent years as consumers endeavor to minimize purchases of processed foods.

Either through cooperatives or independent means, farmers/ranchers and consumers are linking together. The Internet provides a unique opportunity to acquire information about such connections and organizations are being formed that work specifically on such linkages. For example, the Rural Coalition sponsors a Super Market Coop and New Farms of Las Vegas, N.M., connects producers and consumers (see VI. Resource for information about contacting these organizations). These organizations are linking urban/suburban people and farmers/ranchers avoiding the cost of the “middle persons” and assuring food quality and safety.

In some circles, direct marketing is synonymous with “organic.” That may or may not be the case. Efforts to engage in direct marketing need to assure that the people with whom you engage are independently operated farms/ranches. With the increase in demand for “organic” products, many large food producing corporations are expanding to include the production of “organic” food products.

Participation in direct marketing opportunities is an area where churches and related organizations can be involved. At the very least, churches can encourage members to purchase locally grown products. Church parking lots can be offered as a site for farmers’ markets. Locally produced products can be purchased for meals served at churches or at meetings/events sponsored by governing bodies. Church-related colleges and conference centers might purchase locally grown food products through direct marketing. What if gatherings such as General Assembly, Presbyterian Women’s Gathering, Youth Triennium served locally produced food products and fair trade food products imported from other countries? The Presbyterian Coffee Project, launched in 2001 at the General Assembly, is an excellent example of responsible consumerism. If locally produced food products were regularly served by the governing bodies of the church, what a difference we could make! Think about the State of Mississippi with a population of 2,716,115, that’s a little less than the number of members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). If everyone in that state made such a commitment, their actions would be noticed. After all, that’s how recycling projects began. Keep in mind that this opportunity needs planning and managing and may be helped by organizations whose goal is to help expedite this type of linkage.

#### **5. Bi-Vocational Farming**

Increasingly, farmers and ranchers are required to pursue off-farm employment in order to support the farm/ranch enterprise as well as their families. While this pursuit is not optional, it contributes to the stress in the lives of people who are required to be available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week to fulfill the food production needs of this nation. Fair market practices and fair trade agreements would be giant steps toward providing farmers/ranchers adequate compensation from their primary vocational call.

#### **D. Alternative Uses of Agricultural Commodities**

A number of companies are using grain and vegetable products for fuel and building construction materials. In many cases, the unused portions of the corn or grain are used in the production of animal feed. Such efforts are reducing toxic emissions and deforestation, providing an alternative market for farmers, and recycling waste products.

#### **1. Ethanol**

This country is dependent on importing oil from other nations. Yet, we seem to be reluctant to seek alternatives to such dependency. Corn and grain can be converted into motor fuel additives or industrial alcohol. Two and a half gallons of fuel additives/industrial alcohol can be derived from one bushel of corn. Midwestern states are beginning to use such additives. We need to continue to advocate for the use of alternative fuels for our auto dependent society.

#### **2. Soy Diesel**

Soy oil is being used as a renewable source of fuel. In some cases, it is being used as a sole source of fuel but in most cases it is added to an alcohol base such as methanol or ethanol. Such use of vegetable oils will reduce our dependency on imported fuel, diminish the use of nonrenewable fuel sources, and lower toxic emissions. Seattle, Washington, and Fargo, North Dakota, are but two cities that have pilot projects utilizing a biofuel intended as a substitute for diesel.

#### **3. Heating Fuel**

Dry shelled corn is being utilized as a fuel burned in stoves designed for this particular renewable fuel source.

#### **4. Straw Bale Building**

Introduced in the late 1800s, straw bale construction is making a comeback. Dry straw from wheat, oats, barley, and rice is being baled and used in building construction. After being placed and covered with a mesh wire, it is coated with stucco or adobe. Such buildings are fire resistant, energy efficient, and more cost-effective. Several municipalities, including the City of Austin, have incorporated straw bale construction into their building codes.

#### **5. Straw Boards**

Several companies are using straw from wheat, barley, rice, canola, rye, and oats in the manufacturing of particleboard in place of wood fibers. The use of straw reduces deforestation, recycles a farm waste product, and provides formaldehyde-free material. Such boards are sold under product names: Goldboard, Wheatboard, Harvest Board.

Consumers can keep these alternative products in mind when they go to purchase fuel and building materials.

#### **E. Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs)**

Although the scope of this study does not include GMOs, it is difficult to avoid this topic that is so significant to food production and consumption. Great controversy surrounds these issues today. On the one hand, industry advocates for

genetic modification/engineering on the basis that it will deliver vaccines via food crops while alleviating world hunger. The American Medical Association affirms the safety of such food and states that additional labeling is unnecessary. On the other hand, consumer advocate groups and other organizations are not convinced of these arguments and are concerned about allergens, antibiotic resistance, toxicity, and decreased nutritional value. There are also significant questions about the lack of required rigorous testing of genetically modified food products.

Another concern focuses on the large corporations that hold the patents to genetically modified organisms. As patent holders, these corporations control the availability of food to sectors of the world's population. What responsibility are they exercising to provide healthy and cost-effective products?

Labeling is another issue that remains unresolved. In January 2000 at a global conference sponsored by the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, agreements were reached about labeling commodities (corn and soybeans) shipped between countries. However processed foods do not require such labeling. The GMO food destined for store shelves will only mention that the product "may contain" GMOs.

Consumers and several nations throughout the world have raised their voices and refused to purchase/import food products that have been genetically modified. Such actions have resulted in economic pressures causing food growers and food processing companies to revisit their strategies.

Critics believe that the alleviation of world hunger through the production of GMO food products is yet to be proven because issues concerning equitable distribution of food, especially in developing nations, are political rather than a question of supply.

Here again people of faith are called to be informed about the issues through reliable sources of information, to raise questions, and to make responsible choices. Be cautious about media hype or fear campaigns. Rather, choose credible sources of information.

### ***F. Rebuilding Rural Communities***

As new horizons are being pursued, rural communities are rebuilding and revitalizing. The church has a significant role to play in supporting the rebuilding of communities, in sharing models where communities and congregations are responding to the new day, and in advocating for public policy that supports economic development in these places.

### ***G. Public Policy***

Scriptures describe God's presence and activities throughout human history and God's call to people to work for peace and justice. Presbyterians are called to put their faith into action. One way that Presbyterians have traditionally acted is through advocacy, especially in the area of public policy, by writing to and visiting with members of Congress, state legislators, municipal government officials, and church governing body members/commissioners to encourage or support legislation that seeks fairness, justice, safety, and security related to food production/consumption. Lawmakers regularly remind us that handwritten letters are important to them (rather than duplicated form letters) and that the citizenry ought not to assume that others will carry the banner for particular concerns.

Lawmakers want to hear from their constituencies. Congregations and individuals may choose to participate through coalitions and organizations whose mission addresses concerns described in this study. Representatives of governing bodies (session, presbytery, synod, and General Assembly) may participate in rallies and speak in support of these concerns. Presbyterians do not have to go it alone. Find ways to partner with other denominations such as the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the United Methodist Church so that a stronger ecumenical voice may be heard.

If you need information about current legislation, contact the Presbyterian Washington Office or organizations such as the Center for Rural Affairs, Bread for the World, National Family Farm Coalition, National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture. See VI. Resource section of this study for information about contacting these groups.

Here are a few examples of issues that churches and individuals would do well to monitor:

- The 2002 Farm Bill, passed by the U.S. Congress in 2002, will set the stage for federal policy for the next 6 years.
- The need for a consistent, understandable, and stated U.S. food policy.
- Safe production, processing, handling, and marketing of food produced in the U.S.A. or in other nations.
- Accurate, understandable, and appropriate requirements related to weights, measures, and product information (labeling).
- Legal and moral business transactions, including the enforcement of existing laws.
- An inclusive economy that allows anyone with the will, means, and ability to compete for a place in the food production/consumption market, curtailing monopolistic activity of large market players done at the expense of others.

- Support for beginning farmers.
- Support for racial ethnic farmers, both beginning farmers and farmers who have lost their land.
- Support for the production of food by independent family farmers, ranchers, and fishers.
- Just and equitable food distribution in this country and throughout the world.
- Fair Trade principles that assure dignity and justice for people of all nations, especially where economies are agriculturally based.
- Workers' Rights for farm and plant processing workers: including the right to organize, the provision of a safe working environment, safe and healthful living conditions, and just and equitable contracts between farmers and transnational corporations.

## V. Role of Churches and Governing Bodies

We are in the throes of an agricultural revolution. We remember God's call to us through Scripture. We have reviewed the current situation and glimpsed at new horizons. Through the recommendations that accompany this report, we are urging the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)—its members and governing bodies—to participate in and influence this revolution. We are called to pray, to be aware of issues, and to discover ways to put our faith into action. We can make a difference, knowing that God's presence surrounds and empowers us during every step of the journey.



## VI. Resources

### A. Glossary

**Genetically Modified Organism:** The alteration and recombination of genetic material by technological means with applications in treating disease, enhancing desired plant and animal characteristics, and manufacturing biological products such as insulin.\*\*

**Globalization:** To make worldwide in scope or application.\*

**Horizontal Integration:** Merger or takeover between two or more companies with the same business activities.\*\*

**Industrialization of Agriculture:** Adoption of industrial methods of production with all the associated changes in lifestyle, transport, and other aspects of society.\*\*

**Multinational/Transnational Food Producer/Processor:** A large company that operates or has investments in several different countries.\*\*

**Packers and Stockyards Act of 1921:** Federal legislation enacted August 15, 1921, to assure effective competition and integrity in the marketing of livestock, meat, and poultry. Provides payment protection. Covers unlawful acts—unfair, deceptive, discriminatory, or monopolistic practices in the marketing of livestock, meat, and poultry. Enforcement is assigned to the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture and delegated to the Administrator of Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyard Administration.\*\*\*

**Value Added:** The amount by which the value of a product increases as it proceeds through the various states of its manufacture and distribution.\*\*

**Vertical Integration:** The merging of companies that are in the chain handling a single item from raw material production to retail.\*\*

\* Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary On-Line

\*\* Encarta World English Dictionary [On-Line]

\*\*\* Web Site of U.S.D.A. Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyard Administration: [www.usda.gov/gipsa](http://www.usda.gov/gipsa)

### B. Print Resources

Bhagat, Shantilal P. *"The Family Farm: Can It Be Saved?"* Elgin, Ill., Brethren Press, 1985.

Bhagat, Shantilal P., Ed., "God's Earth Our Home," a packet for congregational study and action on environmental and economic justice, available through Office of Environmental Justice, PC(USA), 100 Witherspoon Street, Room 3069, Louisville, KY 40202, 502-569-5809.

*"Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering."* Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Task Force on the Churches and Corporate Responsibility, Division of Mission in Canada, The United Church of Canada, 2000.

*"The Church: Responding to Rural America,"* report of the 203rd General Assembly (1991), [also includes *"Rural Community in Crisis: A Report to the*

*Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.),*" report of the 197th General Assembly (1985).] Available from PDS No. 305-91-400.

Couto, Richard A. *An American Challenge: A Report on Economic Trends and Social Issues in Appalachia.* Dubuque, Iowa, Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., 1994.

Davidson, Osha Gray. *Broken Heartland: Rise of the Rural Ghetto.* New York, N.Y. Doubleday, 1990; revised edition, University of Iowa Press, 1996.

*Encyclopedia of Rural America,* Gary A. Goreham, ed. Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 1997.

Flora, Cornelia Butler. *Rural Communities: Legacy and Change.* Boulder, Colo. Westview, 1992.

Geores, Carl. *Building Church and Community Ministries.* Published by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), National Ministries Division, Louisville, KY., and available from PDS No. 72-380-96-006.

Gilbert, Charlene, and Quinn Eli. *Homecoming: the Story of African-American Farmers.* Boston, Mass., Beacon Press, 2000.

Heffernan, Dr. William, et. al. *"Consolidation in the Food and Agriculture System"* Department of Rural Sociology, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri, 1999.

Heffernan, Dr. William, et. al. *"Consolidation in Food Retailing and Dairy: Implications for Farmers and Consumers in a Global Food System"* Department of Rural Sociology, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri, 2001.

Jung, L. Shannon, and Mary Agria. *Rural Congregational Studies: A Guide for Good Shepherds* Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1997.

Jung, L. Shannon, et. al. *Rural Ministry: The Shape of the Renewal to Come* Nashville, Tenn., Abingdon Press, 1998.

Lind, Christopher. *Something's Wrong Somewhere: Globalization, Community and the Moral Economy of the Farm Crisis.* Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada: Fernwood Publishing, 1995.

Norris, Kathleen. *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography.* New York, N.Y.: Ticknor and Fields, 1993.

*Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice, a report adopted by the 202nd General Assembly (1990), Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).* Available from Presbyterian Distribution Services, PDS #OGA-90-002.

Schlosser, Eric. *Fast Food Nation: the Dark Side of the All-American Meal.* New York, N.Y., Houghton Mifflin, 2001.

*“Seeds in the Wind: Models for Creative Rural Ministry,”* published by Evangelism and Church Development Ministry Unit, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 1992, available through PDS No. 305-92-402.

*“The Status of U.S. Agriculture,”* produced by the Commission on 21st Century Production Agriculture, published and available from the Commission on 21st Century Agriculture, c/o Office of the Chief Economist, Room 112-A, J.L. Whitten Federal Building, 1400 Independence Ave. SW, Washington, DC 20250-3810; fax: 202-690-4420.

Stephen, Diana A. *“Living the Vision—Rural Ministry: Church and Community,”* published by Mission Interpretation and Promotion for Evangelism and Church Development, Ministries of the General Assembly Council, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 2000, available through PDS No. 72-309-00-001.

*“A Time to Act: A Report of the USDA National Commission on Small Farms,”* January 1998, published and available from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250.

### C. Video Resources

*Building Church and Community Ministries* is a companion to the book of the same title by Carl Geores, a consultant at Princeton Theological Seminary, working with Field Education and Christianity and Society. The video is available from Princeton Theological Seminary, 64 Mercer Street, P.O. Box 821, Princeton, NJ 08542; (609) 921-8300, 90 minutes.

*Churches in Transition: Evangelism and Mission*, produced by Center for Theology and Land, 333 Wartburg Place, Dubuque, IA 52004, 319-589-0273; 26 minutes; \$10. This videotape addresses issues facing congregations serving rural communities that are undergoing economic dislocation and out migration. In the face of such realities, the congregations presented in this video continue to be a symbol of hope, but they have been required to make adjustments in terms of evangelism and mission understandings. A study guide for the videotape is also available.

*Death of a Dream: Farmhouses in the Heartland*, produced by John Whitehead, is a documentary presenting a photographic survey of Minnesota farmhouses as well as an overview of recent events in the farming economy. One hour. This video is not available to the general public. It has been aired on Public Television Stations across the country.

*The Farmer’s Wife*, co-produced by Donald Sutherland and Frontline, in association with the Independent Television Service and aired on Public Television Stations across the country in 1998. Three tapes, \$49.98. This video documents three years in the life of Juanita and Darrell Buschkoetter, a young farm couple living in Nebraska. It is a powerful presentation of the economic and emotional struggles experienced by their farm as a result of economic depression.

*From This Valley . . . On Defending the Family Farm*, produced by the Division of Church and Society, National Council of Churches of Christ, 1986; 18 minutes. An historical overview of agriculture is provided in this video, highlighting the mechanical, chemical, and biotechnical revolutions. It continues by discussing why churches need to defend the mid-size family farm. This video provides excellent orientation to the issues and can serve as a “discussion starter.”

*The Global Banquet: Politics of Food*, produced by Maryknoll World Productions, P.O. Box 308, Maryknoll, NY 10545-0308, 1-800-227-8523, www.maryknollworld.org; total of 50 minutes divided into two 25 minute segments. “This timely, provocative video explores the politics of global food security—a security threatened by the policies and practices of giant international food producers, trade and financial institutions, as well as governments here and abroad,” (quote from the discussion/study guide). A discussion and study guide is available.

*Harvest of Faith*, produced by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 1987; 27:10 minutes. This video focuses on the rural crisis of the 1980s, describing its history and effect on communities and families. There is profound description of how people’s faith and the support of the faith community were critical during this crisis. A segment of the video presents an interesting comparison of nurturing land and nurturing children who have disabilities.

*Reclaiming Our Rural Heritage: A Time to Act*. A fifty-five-minute video produced by and available from Catholic Charities, Diocese of Sioux City, Iowa, att: Marilyn Murphy, Box 1342, Sioux City, IA 51102; phone: 712-255-4346; fax: 712-255-5328. Cost \$10, includes shipping and handling. Allow two weeks for delivery. Video describing rural issues—especially the current farm crisis—and why the church should be involved.

*Stewards of Creation, Stewards of Hope*. A thirty-five-minute video produced by the North Dakota Conference of Churches. For more information about the video or to obtain a copy contact: North Dakota Conference of Churches, 227 West Broadway, Suite 2, Bismark, ND 58501, phone: 701-255-0604. The focus of this video is on stewardship of creation in the context of the late 1990s.

*The World Trade Organization: The Whole World: In Whose Hands?* A twenty-minute video produced by the Women’s Division, General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church. For more information call 1-800-305-9857. This video provides case studies, explanations, and questions regarding the World Trade Organization.

### D. Organizations

#### 1. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Links: <http://www.pcusa.org>

National Ministries Division:

Mission Responsibility Through Investment  
New Immigrant Ministries in the U.S.A.

Presbyterian Health, Education and Welfare Association  
Rural Ministry Office

Women's Ministries  
Washington Office

Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy

Worldwide Ministries Division:  
Self-Development of People  
Presbyterian Hunger Program  
Presbyterian Disaster Assistance

## **2. Educational Links**

[www.ruralministry.com](http://www.ruralministry.com)  
Center for Theology and Land, Dubuque, Iowa

<http://www.rsse.tamu.edu>  
Rural Social Science Education, Fargo, North Dakota

## **3. Church Related Links**

[www.ruralchurch.org](http://www.ruralchurch.org)  
Includes:  
• Church & Social Science Information Exchange (CHASSIE)  
• RFD +  
• Center for Rural Church Leadership  
• Rural Church Network

[www.bread.org](http://www.bread.org)  
Bread for the World, Washington, D.C.

[www.cam-web.org](http://www.cam-web.org)  
Coalition for Appalachian Ministries, Townsend, Tennessee

[www.ncrlc.com](http://www.ncrlc.com)  
National Catholic Rural Life Conference, Des Moines, Iowa

[www.nfwm.org](http://www.nfwm.org)  
National Farm Worker Ministry

New Farms, Las Vegas, New Mexico  
Phone: 505-425-8431

<http://www.showcase.netins.net/web/snprayer>  
Safety Net Prayer, Guttenberg, Iowa  
An avenue for God's people to respond to the growing concerns in rural ministry.

[www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org)  
Web of Creation  
Transforming faith-based communities for a sustainable and just world.

## **4. Community/People Organizations**

[www.newcomm.org](http://www.newcomm.org)  
Center for New Community, Oak Park, Illinois  
Faith-based organizing initiatives to revitalize rural congregations and communities for genuine social, economic, and political democracy.

[www.cfra.org](http://www.cfra.org)  
Center for Rural Affairs, Walthill, Nebraska

Dakota Rural Action, Brookings, South Dakota  
email: [action@dakotarural.org](mailto:action@dakotarural.org)

[www.federationsoutherncoop.com](http://www.federationsoutherncoop.com)  
Federation of Southern Cooperatives, East Point, Georgia  
Focus on African American farmers.

[www.iatp.org](http://www.iatp.org)  
Institute for Agriculture & Trade Policy

[www.sustainableagriculture.net](http://www.sustainableagriculture.net)  
National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture, Pine Bush, New York

[www.nffc.net](http://www.nffc.net)  
National Family Farm Coalition, Washington, D.C.

[www.nfu.org](http://www.nfu.org)  
National Farmers Union, Denver, Colorado

[www.rcalf.com](http://www.rcalf.com)  
R-Calf, Billings, Montana

[www.ruralco.org](http://www.ruralco.org)  
Rural Coalition, Washington, D.C.

[www.fnctc.com](http://www.fnctc.com)  
SHAUN  
Provides professional counseling and peer support to farmers, farm workers, and their families who experience an agriculturally related death or disability.

[www.smallfarms.com](http://www.smallfarms.com)  
Small Farms.com, Ahulua, Hawaii  
A marketing service that matches food producers and customers throughout the U.S.A.

[www.worc.org](http://www.worc.org)  
Western Organization of Resource Councils, Billings, Montana

## **5. Government Links**

[www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov)  
U.S. Department of Agriculture

## Appendix A

The report “We Are What We Eat”, and the recommendations are a final response to the following referral: Overture 99-8. On Advocacy for Survival of Family Farmers, Ranchers, and Rural Communities—From the Presbytery of South Dakota (Minutes, 1999, Part I, pp. 81, 581–82).

3. Request the Advisory Committee on Social Witness and Policy, in consultation with Women’s Ministries program area, to study this crisis and to report its findings to the 212th General Assembly (2000), with particular attention to, “An Appeal to the President and Congress of the United States for a Morally Responsible United States Food Policy” (Minutes, PCUS, 1977, Part I, p. 181) and with special consideration for a variety of marketing alternatives for farm products and maintaining an effective public market information system. (Minutes, 1999, Part I, p. 581)

What shall we do for dinner today? Cook? Go out to a fast food restaurant? Stop for takeout from the supermarket? These decisions take thirty seconds if we are a consumer or up to an hour if we cook for a family, but these quick decisions that we make as consumers affect the lives of farmers and ranchers in this nation and around the world. The world is in the throes of an agricultural revolution, which is described more completely in the study. Major changes in agriculture are occurring and will be ongoing. The current situation is no longer confined to a crisis; the world is experiencing an agricultural revolution. The study reminds us, who are food consumers as well as producers, of God’s call through Scripture. The study reviews the current situation and envisions new horizons. Each of us in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)—members and governing bodies—needs to discover ways in which to actively participate in this revolution, by becoming educated about the issues and by influencing the outcome. Agriculture is everyone’s bread and butter; all who produce and/or consume food have a stake in this issue.

### **The preparation of the study was guided by the following goals:**

- To capture the attention of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) about issues concerning food production and consumption,
- To call Presbyterians to responsible decision making as food producers and consumers,
- To provide a survey of issues affecting food production/consumption, rather than an in-depth analysis,

- To look at new horizons,
- To recommend ways in which governing bodies can respond to these issues so that family farmers, ranchers, rural communities and, ultimately, rural congregations may be strengthened.

### **Issues addressed in the study:**

- U.S. Food Policy
- Family Farmers and Ranchers
- Racial Ethnic Farmers
- Beginning Farmers
- Agribusiness
- Agricultural Workers
- Women and Families
- Mental Health Issues
- New Horizons:
  - Equitable Public Market System
  - Marketing Alternatives: Cooperatives, niche farming, hobby farming, direct marketing, bi-vocational farmers/ranchers,
  - Alternative uses of corn and grain
  - Genetically modified organisms
  - Public policy.

### **The recommendations:**

- are addressed to the church-at-large and specifically to entities of the General Assembly Council;
- seek to raise the awareness of individuals, congregations, and governing bodies in concerns related to food production/consumption;
- call on individuals, congregations, and governing bodies to participate in the agricultural revolution effecting the whole world;
- intentionally minimize the need for new funds for implementation in light of the current budget crisis.

### **The preparation of the study included:**

- the formation of a study group composed of farmers, ranchers, and an executive presbyter charging them with the preparation of the study;
- three face-to-face meetings of the study group held in Minneapolis, Minn., Louisville, Ky., and Meadow, S.D.;
- the assistance of staff of the Rural Ministry Office, Evangelism and Church Development, National Ministries Division;
- a preliminary critique of the study by a variety of readers, a number of whom are engaged in rural ministry.

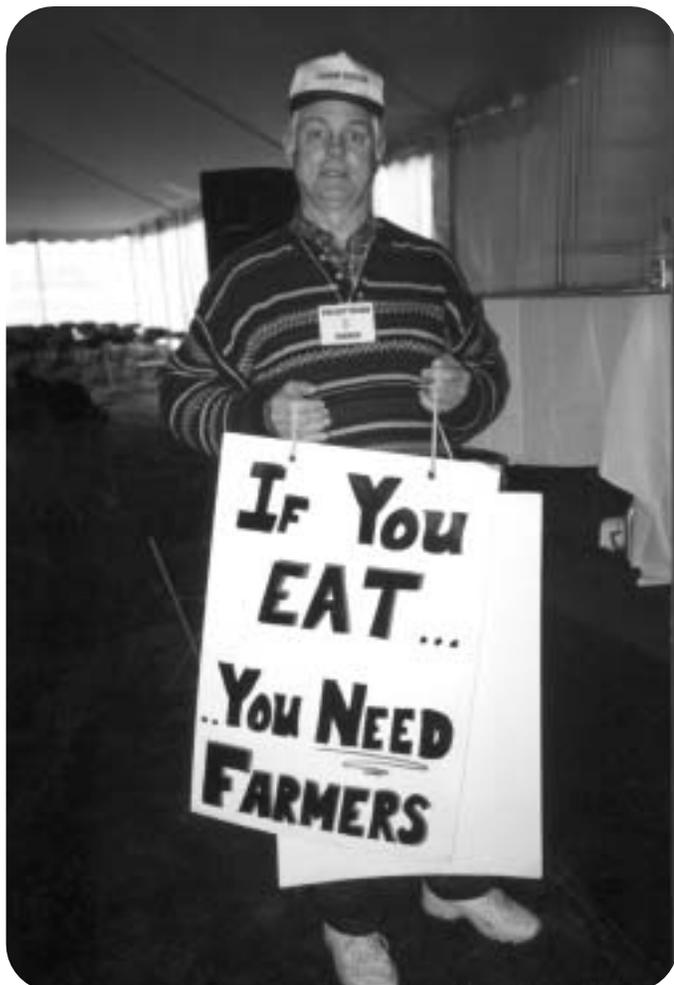
# Recommendations

*Approved by the 214th General Assembly (2002)*

**A** *Urge all members and governing bodies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to influence the agricultural revolution described in this study by doing the following:*

1. Pray for farmers/ranchers throughout the world, farm and agricultural workers, rural churches and communities, directors and employees of transnational corporations, lawmakers, and for each of us as we make choices related to the food we produce, process, and consume.

2. **Become aware** of issues that affect rural communities, farmers, and ranchers who may be our next door or far away neighbor, knowing that these issues affect all of us including many congregations in the PC(USA). Invite farmers and ranchers to meet with us so that we may learn firsthand about these issues.



3. Put faith into action, by

**a. Witnessing:** to be present with farmers, ranchers, and lawmakers, and to speak up as a witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ by

(1) **contacting** legislators, noting your connection with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and urging support of legislation that benefits family owned/operated farms and ranches, assures fair food distribution systems, and promotes safety in the world's food supply,

(2) **encouraging** rural congregations and presbyteries to provide safe places for discussion of the issues that so often divide communities, congregations, and families,

(3) **advocating** with multinational corporations, as shareholder and/or board member and/or food consumer, on behalf of family farmers/ranchers.

**b. Networking:** find partners in this effort—other churches, urban/suburban/rural communities, coalitions and other organizations—so that information may be shared and stronger voices expressed by supporting organizations that are working on family agriculture issues, including but not limited to: Center for Rural Affairs, National Family Farms Coalition, Western Organization of Resource Councils, National Farmers Union, Federation of Southern Cooperatives, DairyLea Cooperative.

**c. Participating:** get involved by

(1) **demonstrating** solidarity with family farmers/ranchers at local rallies or meetings and by encouraging governing body representatives to speak at such events in support of the issues,

(2) **actively supporting** the development and implementation of policies, within the church, marketplace, and governmental legislative bodies, that will strengthen family farmers so that they, too, might enjoy a safe, healthy and abundant life,

(3) **advocating** for just and fair wages and working conditions for everyone involved in the food production industries,

(4) **supporting** the full participation of racial ethnic farmers/ranchers in the agricultural systems of the economy of our nation and the global economic network,

(5) **discovering** racial ethnic farmers/ranchers in our areas and learning from them ways in which to be supportive,

(6) **providing** care and support for rural pastors and health-care providers ministering in rural communities to help alleviate stress and burnout,

(7) distributing in church buildings and at church sponsored events information related to domestic violence, describing services available to victims and/or perpetrators.

**d. Supporting:** practice good stewardship in the daily food choices we make, help the oppressed have a voice, and contribute time, talents, and financial resources by

- (1) purchasing, preparing, and serving locally produced food products for meals sponsored by governing bodies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.),
- (2) offering churches as sites for a farmers' market and promoting the existence of farmers' markets within your community and region,
- (3) promoting stores in the community that sell food products raised by local, independent family farmers/ranchers, and/or locally sponsored cooperatives.

4. Urge rural presbyteries, congregations, and communities to apply for General Assembly financial resources from sources such as, but not limited to, the following: Presbyterian Hunger Program, Self-Development of People, Presbyterian Women's Creative Ministries Offerings (Thank Offering including Health Ministries and Birthday Offering), Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, Mission Program Grants (specialized ministry), and Grants for Rebuilding Rural Community Life.

**B** *Urge rural pastors (ministers of Word and Sacrament and commissioned lay pastors) to give particular leadership in the areas of health and wholeness by doing the following:*

1. Be informed of the availability of mental health services in their area and cooperate with these services and other community organizations and health providers.
2. Listen and observe carefully for signs of depression and other types of stress among rural people.
3. Convey the message of God's love and presence in the midst of economic upheaval and work to eradicate perceptions that economic failure is a sign of God's wrath and/or abandonment.
4. Urge mental health providers and related organizations to adapt services to the rural context by training providers about rural culture and the current dynamics occurring in rural communities.

**C** *Direct the General Assembly Council (GAC) to do the following:*

1. Direct the Rural Ministry Office, National Ministries Division, to

- a.** coordinate the implementation of all recommendations in this report through regular contact with presbyteries and GAC entity offices,
- b.** continue the grant program, "Grants for Rebuilding Rural Community Life," in support of changing rural communities,
- c.** inform rural churches, organizations, and governing bodies of General Assembly resources available to them and encourage proposals for funding,
- d.** keep the church-at-large informed about rural issues (print, on-line, video) and developments related to the agricultural revolution, food production/consumption issues, providing suggested actions,
- e.** continue to participate in ecumenical/interfaith groups, such as but not limited to, the Rural Church Network and Agricultural Missions, Inc., to give voice to issues evolving from this agricultural revolution,
- f.** continue to support organizations working on family agriculture issues, including but not limited to: Center for Rural Affairs, National Family Farms Coalition, Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture, Western Organization of Resource Councils, National Farmers Union, Federation of Southern Cooperatives, DairyLea Cooperative, and National Farm Workers Ministry.

2. Direct the Racial Ethnic program area, Environmental Justice, and the Rural Ministry office to work collaboratively in advocating for the concerns of racial ethnic farmers and ranchers, and supporting organizations such as but not limited to the Rural Coalition and the Federation of Southern Cooperatives that provide particular advocacy for racial ethnic farmers/ranchers.

3. Direct the Presbyterian Washington Office to

- a.** continue its advocacy and education in areas of public policy regarding hunger concerns related to economic and food production issues,
- b.** alert Presbyterians about upcoming public policy related to the agricultural revolution and food production/consumption,
- c.** encourage members of the PC(USA) to contact legislators urging support of the family farmer/ranchers, farm and processing plant workers, and equitable world trade policy.

4. Direct Women's Ministries to identify food production/consumption issues as a priority in their mission and education programs, particularly as it affects rural women.

5. Direct the Presbyterian Hunger Program, Worldwide Ministries Division, and the Rural Ministry office to continue its collaborations and affirm the work they have done together.

6. Direct the Presbyterian Health, Education, and Welfare Association's Network on Serious Mental Illness, in collaboration with the Health Ministries office, to include rural mental health issues as part of its ongoing agenda.

7. Direct the Presbyterian Health, Education, and Welfare Association's Network on Presbyterians Against Domestic Violence, together with Women's Ministries, Presbyterian Men, and Family Ministries, to include issues affecting rural families as part of their ongoing agenda.



8. Direct Mission Responsibility Through Investment to continue work on the directives of Overture 00-89, scheduled for reporting to the 215th General Assembly (2003) by

- a. **studying**, in consultation with the Rural Ministry Advisory Committee, the impact of multinational corporations on the decline of rural communities and their social fabric,
- b. **advising** trustees and foundations of the church's governing bodies about any shareholder resolutions that could have either a deleterious or positive impact on rural communities and, where possible, to take action on such resolutions in support of family farmers and ranchers,
- c. **advocating** within the multinational corporation systems on behalf of rural community vitality and stability, and in behalf of family farmers and ranchers.

**D** *Direct the General Assembly Moderator and Stated Clerk to communicate with all congregations concerning the continuing interest in and position of the PC(USA) related to the agricultural revolution and the food production/consumption issues, calling upon presbyteries to participate fully in this revolution.*

**E** *Reaffirm prior General Assembly actions: "An Appeal to the President and the Congress of the United States for a Morally Responsible U.S. Food Policy," adopted by the 117th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (1977); "Rural Community in Crisis: A Report from Rural America to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)," adopted by the 197th General Assembly (1985); "The Church Responding to Rural America," a report approved by the 203rd General Assembly (1991); "Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice," a policy statement approved by the 202nd General Assembly (1990); and "Hope for a Global Future," approved by the 208th General Assembly (1996).*

**F** *Direct Presbyterian Women and the Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns to identify food production/consumption issues as a priority in their mission and education programs, particularly as it affects rural women.*

**G** *Requests "Horizons," the magazine of Presbyterian Women, to include articles, book reviews, and public policy issues related to food production/consumption.*

**H** *Direct the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy to include in its study on genetic research and cloning a section about the effects of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) related to food production/consumption.*

**I** *Request seminaries to provide opportunities for contextual preparation for ministry in rural areas through internships, experiential "immersion" experiences in rural regions, clinical pastoral education, and that such opportunities be linked with biblical and theological studies.*

## Purpose of this Guide

“We Are What We Eat,” a report approved by the 214th General Assembly (2002), responds to an Overture approved by an earlier General Assembly that addressed issues related to the economic crisis that has affected many rural communities. This report is addressed to the whole church—urban, suburban, or rural—because everyone who consumes food has a stake in these issues.

Now congregations have the opportunity and challenge of deciding how to study this report and implement the recommendations. This study guide provides a framework for planning study sessions and mission activities. As you work with this study guide, keep the report, “We Are What We Eat,” on hand since it is the basis for the study. Read the report and refer to it as you plan the study sessions.

## Audience for the Study

The primary audience for this study is the congregation. Since everyone who consumes food has a stake in these issues, involve everyone—children, youth and adults—in the study and activities.

Groups within the congregation, such as Presbyterian Women, Presbyterian Men, youth, may choose to set aside time for their own particular study of this report. This guide may also prove helpful to such groups as they plan.

A congregation may collaborate with other congregations in the community or presbytery to broaden the participation in these study sessions.

Presbyteries, too, are urged to study these issues during the educational opportunity portion of the presbytery meeting or during a presbytery-sponsored mission/education event. Select items from these suggestions and adapt them for the particular event.

## Preparing for the Study

### ***Approaching the study:***

Congregations are encouraged to explore the concerns raised in “We Are What We Eat” through worship, study, and mission action. The themes of the report are: stewardship, sustainability, compassion and community. Leaders are encouraged to set the stage for this experience as the study series is announced by affirming that we are all part of God’s creation. God invites each of us to care for the creation and personify God’s love and justice in the world. This invitation is a blessing and privilege as well as a responsibility.

The approach to this study is holistic. First, biblical foundations are explored, followed by a study of issues/concerns/new horizons, and finally the preparation of a plan for mission action. These three areas are inter-related. As you move from one area to the next, include a time to recall the group’s earlier work. As you engage in mission activities, allow time to reflect on the connections among the mission activity, Bible study, and issues study.

### ***Setting for the study:***

This study can be incorporated into the on-going schedule of educational and mission events that are a regular part of congregational life. Or the congregation may want to set aside a particular period of time for this study such as:

- Education/mission opportunity following the worship service
- Church Family Nights
- Church Retreat

Plan a simple meal—at least during one session—serving locally produced products and identifying the source of the food products: name of farm/ranch, farmers’ market, neighborhood grocery.

### ***Scheduling study sessions:***

Set aside a particular period of time to study, “We Are What We Eat.” The time of spring planting and fall harvesting offer natural opportunities for such study.

Rural Life Sunday, one of the special days on the Presbyterian Program Calendar, provides another opportunity for recognizing concerns of rural congregations and communities.

Time allocation for this study is left to the planners so that the sessions might fit into the overall schedule of education/mission opportunities. A minimum of three sessions are recommended which will allow at least one session for each of the three areas: Bible study, issues study, and preparation of a mission action plan. Additional sessions for any or all of these three areas will be useful if the congregation's schedule allows for them.

During the overall period of time when the study is underway, consider incorporating the themes of the study—sustainability, stewardship, compassion and community—into the regular worship service. This will help to augment and support the study.

### ***Featured Guests:***

Hearing a person's story is an effective method of teaching/learning. Consider inviting people from the congregation or community who are involved in food production, distribution, promotion, marketing and consumption. Those whose stories will enhance this study might include: farmer, rancher, farm worker, food processing plant worker and/or manager, member of a co-op, staff of multinational food corporation, county extension agent, staff of local food pantries, staff of food lunch programs, health care provider, nutritionist, Hunger Action Enabler, food wholesaler, neighborhood grocer, farmers' market participants, food pantry staff, school lunch director. If an international visitor is itinerating in your presbytery, he/she would provide a unique opportunity to learn about the global impact of our choices.

Hearing from two people with differing perspectives will demonstrate the complexities of issues related to food production/consumption.

### ***Participant assignments:***

Encourage participants in the study to read "We Are What We Eat" in advance of the first session. Assign advance reading of the Biblical passages that will be considered during the Bible study session(s).

### ***Worship suggestions:***

During the period of study and mission activity, the worship service will serve to support and augment the study by incorporating the study themes of stewardship, sustainability, compassion, and community.

Prayers of Confession may include the admission of our failure to be responsible stewards of God's creation and our lack of awareness of our responsibility in making daily decisions as food producers/consumers.

During this study period, be attentive to special needs in rural communities—local, regional, national, global—and incorporate these special concerns into the prayers of the people.

If a "Minute for Mission" is a regular part of worship, consider inviting a church member or someone from the community to speak about their particular involvement in issues related to food production/consumption (see "Featured Participants" for suggestions).

Praying for farmers/ranchers and rural churches is always fitting. Presbytery may be helpful in preparing a list of rural churches so that focused prayer may be offered.

## **Bible Study**

Bible study provides the foundation for the study of the issues described in the report and, ultimately, for the mission action in which the congregation will engage. As you prepare for Bible study, study the first section of the report, "God's Call to God's People," pages 5 thru 9, and read the cited texts. Note that the themes of stewardship, sustainability, compassion, and community are highlighted in this section and are carried throughout the report.

Depending on the time allocated for Bible study, planners may select several passages from the cited texts to highlight during this study. Assign participants advance reading of the selected passages.

Continue to refer to these passages throughout the study of issues and during the time of mission activities. Ask the participants if the study of issues and/or engagement in mission activities resulted in a new understanding of the biblical passages. You may want to record some of the highlights of the bible study on newsprint, for instance, so that you can display them in future sessions.

Here are a variety of questions to evoke discussion during the bible study session(s):

- What is stewardship and what role does it play our life: at home, at work/school, at church, in the community?
- In what ways is our congregation practicing good stewardship of God's creation?
- In what ways does our understanding of stewardship help us make choices about food production and consumption?
- How do our food purchasing choices impact farmers/ranchers in this country and around the globe
- What do these particular scriptures say to us today in our study of "We Are What We Eat"?

## Study of Issues/Concerns/ New Horizons

The purpose of this segment of study is to become informed of issues and new horizons before engaging in mission action.

Assign participants to review the sections, “The Current Situation” and “New Horizons” in “We Are What We Eat” prior to the study session.

Begin by recalling some of the highlights from the Bible study session(s).

Here again, Featured Guests may be invited to participate in the study session(s).

Offer discussion guidelines, especially if you anticipate opposing views within the group or among Featured Guests, such as:

- Allowing speakers to offer their particular perspective on issues;
- Encouraging questions to gain additional information or to clarify information;
- Respecting differing perspectives/opinions and persuasive arguments;
- Discouraging personal criticism or judgmental statements;
- Allowing everyone to participate.

Following are sample questions to stimulate discussion of issues related to food production/consumption. Keep in mind that agriculture is everyone’s bread and butter!

### **Sample Discussion Questions for Food Consumers:**

- What changes have occurred over the past 5-10 years in our individual food purchasing habits? Do we prepare meals “from scratch” or do we purchase food already prepared? Do we preserve food products for future use? In what ways has our society been affected by these changes (health issues, school lunch and snack programs, hunger)?
- In what ways are we connected with local, family operated farms and ranches that produce food products? How might these links be strengthened?
- In what ways are we engaged in food production as individuals, in our churches, in our communities? How do we use/distribute the food products that we grow?
- In what ways do we express our solidarity with small family farmers/ranchers? How might our expressions be strengthened?

### **Sample Discussion Questions for Food Producers:**

- In what ways do we practice stewardship of God’s creation? Are there ways in which our stewardship might be expanded/strengthened?
- In what ways does the congregation and other governing bodies communicate with other churches in the presbytery/synod in order to raise awareness of issues affecting rural communities?
- How might we establish/strengthen links with food consumers, especially in urban areas? How might we collaborate with other churches, governing bodies, organizations to establish/strengthen such links?
- How might we seek/strengthen support from urban and suburban communities in our quest for God’s love and justice?

### **Sample Discussion Questions for Everyone:**

- What are the issues affecting food consumption/production in our community, region, nation, world?
- In what ways do we become informed about and involved in such issues? How does this involvement support the mission of our congregation?
- How might we live out the interdependence of food producers/consumers and work together seeking God’s justice in our local, regional, national and global communities? How might we live out the interdependence among urban, suburban, and rural communities related to food production/consumption?

## Mission Action

Once the congregation is rooted in Biblical understandings and informed about the issues, it will be prepared to propose specific action plans to carry out its mission in the areas of food production/consumption. Why is a plan necessary? Rarely do mission activities simply happen. A congregation needs to be intentional about its mission activities—what will be done, when, by whom. Of course, planners and leaders will want to leave some room for the working of the Spirit.

Review the recommendations contained in “We Are What We Eat” prior to this session and note the variety of activities for individuals, congregations, and other governing bodies including:

- Praying,
- Advocating for public policy and church policy,
- Utilizing the church facility for discussion groups or as a farmers’ market site,
- Advocating for corporate responsibility,
- Supporting organizations that share common concerns,
- Supporting efforts to end family violence,
- Supporting and caring for rural pastors,
- Promoting and purchasing locally grown food products,

Highlight those that you are currently doing or may wish to expand. Choose activities that you would like to pursue. In addition to those that are comfortable and appealing, choose one or two that will “stretch” you beyond your comfort zone.

If people in the congregation are unfamiliar with growing food products, you may want to consider:

- Visiting a farm/ranch,
- Visiting a museum that demonstrates farming/ranching,
- Growing vegetables in the church or community garden or simply in containers. Beans, tomatoes, and herbs do well in containers.
- Participating in a community garden,
- Utilizing a section of the church property for a community garden.

Remember to involve every age group and consider intergenerational activities as well.

Decide on the mission activities in which the congregation will engage. Note the ministry team or committee or person who will coordinate the activity and schedule a time in which it will be carried out.

As suggested earlier in this study guide, mission activities are enhanced when a time is offered to reflect on the connections among the mission activity, the Bible study, and issues study. Have the activities changed the participants’ understandings of the scripture passages and/or issues? In what ways will this activity change the life of the participant or congregation?

## What Happens Next?

As this study and mission activities conclude, participants may want to consider ways in which the congregation will stay connected with the concerns. Here are several suggestions:

- The group may recommend to the Session specific action such as: purchasing and using locally produced food for church-sponsored meals; participating in the Presbyterian Coffee Project through the purchase and sale of Equal Exchange coffee,
- The group may recommend to the Session further exploration of the links between food production/consumption and local/global hunger issues. Presbytery’s Hunger Action Enabler will be a good resource for this next step,
- The group may urge the Session to convey similar recommendations to the Presbytery, through Presbytery’s Hunger and/or Peacemaking Committees, to broaden the effect of these mission commitments,
- If the congregation and/or presbytery are in partnership with a church overseas, the group may suggest the incorporation of food production/consumption issues in that mission arena,
- Throughout the year, the group may monitor legislation before local, state and federal governments and encourage the congregation to contact legislators to support legislation benefiting farmers, ranchers and food safety,
- Throughout the year the group may give special attention to needs or opportunities in rural communities: local, regional, national, and global, and incorporate these special needs into worship as may be appropriate.

## Conclusion & Blessing

We trust that this study has enhanced your knowledge about issues affecting rural communities and has strengthened your connections with God’s magnificent creation. We pray that your commitments will not end with the conclusion of this study but will continue as you go out in the world witnessing to the Good News of Jesus Christ and working for a world where God’s love and justice reign.

