

Let's Make PARITY Our National Policy

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This is George Naylor's Keystone Address to
Farmers Leading the Food Movement
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It's an honor and privilege to speak here at the Food Tank Summit. I've been a farmer and a farm activist for 40 years raising only non-GMO corn and soybeans on my family farm near Churdan, Iowa. Now I am transitioning half of my home farm to organic and starting an organic cider orchard with the help of my partner Patti Edwardson, who also sells fruits and vegetables at the Green County Farmers market. I'm not a prolific writer or speaker, but I try to be the proverbial Jack of All Trades, so I would suggest you read my chapter in the book called *Food Movements Unite!* published by Food First, and of course the sections in which I am featured in the seminal book, *The Omnivore's Dilemma* by Michael Pollen. Also look for the article I wrote on Huffington Post as a rebuttal to Jonathan's Foley's National Geographic article: "A Five Step Plan to Feed the World."

Many Food Theories

I've know so many wonderful people trying to rectify our food and agricultural systems through the years so that the words: healthy food, family farmer, and conservation actually meant something concrete. I've been thrilled so many times by the leadership of modern farmers who, like their ancestors, were trying to change policy or figure out a new market to stay in business. On the other hand, there have been many theories claiming to represent real change in our food



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Parity means state of being equal in status or pay.

and agricultural systems for the better, but in fact were not. These theories may have seemed logical, but in fact supported the status quo where all questions were boiled down to what is best for the individuals, sometimes including corporations. Of course, by an error of logic, the proposals were going to be good for all of us, especially providing cheap food for poor people and researchers had science to back them up. So I've learned in my 40 years of farming and farm activism that we need everybody and their ideas and actions to be part of the puzzle.

But most importantly
We need to be part of the SAME puzzle - the puzzle for democratic,

egalitarian social change that respects our ecological limits, rather than a puzzle that intentionally or unintentionally supports the status quo that only creates more and more problems for our democracy, our health and our environment. This will not only require a political revolution, but a revolution in how we think and how we unconsciously support the status quo.

I Came from the Future

When I had the privilege of representing the National Family Farm Coalition at meetings or trade agreement protests of the international movements of peasants, farmers, farm workers, fishers, called La Via Campesina, I would jokingly say that I came from the Future. I would describe the situation in my community of almost no remaining farmers, rural communities that have become rundown rural ghettos, the loss of biodiversity and soil erosion and water pollution - a virtual Silent Spring. Farmers in other countries were being told by their governments and scientists that the reason they could not make a living on their farms was that they farmed too few acres or hectares or fed too few head of livestock. They were being told they needed to get bigger, go into debt to buy the latest chemicals and seeds and machinery, invest in new export crops, and rent or buy more land or get out and move to the city.

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Being from the future, I could tell them with confidence that the prescription to their economic woes was exactly what led to the collapse of agricultural and rural communities back in the U.S. that I had just described. That prescription has failed miserably and is failing again in 2016. Back home in Iowa, most remaining farmers farm thousands of acres, and yet some have already been told by their bankers that there will be NO NEW LOANS to put in the next crop. Based on what I witnessed in the 1980's, I can say with confidence the next farm foreclosure crisis is just beginning.

Ownership of Land is 10%
The typical farmer owns probably only 10% of the land they farm, the rest is cash rented where the landlords often take the highest bid from the the biggest, most industrialized farmer. Farmers through the years have invested in bigger and bigger livestock facilities. A neighbor used to point to his empty silo and say it was his "Monument to Stupidity" just one of many farmer investments that became obsolete much faster than expected. Now almost all the pigs and chickens and even market cattle are owned by corporations and fed in giant feedlots and Confined Animal Feeding Operations or CAFO's as defined by the Clean Water Act. The millions of gallons of manure along with the fencerow- to fencerow farming of corn and soybeans mean Iowa's lakes and waterways become more polluted every year. Getting bigger, on matter how small a farmer you are or how big you are already clearly is no answer to a farmer's problem.

Farming without Farmers
When a big farmer is going broke, I often hear the sentiment, "Well do really feel sorry for them? They brought it on themselves." My



"A Monument to Stupidity"
An Empty Silo

Just one of the many farmer investments of that became obsolete much faster than expected.

answer to that is, "Well, we should all feel sorry for ourselves for losing one of our most precious institutions, the Family Farm." Farm depressions do not reverse farm consolidation, the land will continue to be farmed, but by some other farmer who pushes the pencil to pursue the inevitable answer of "getting bigger." In some cases, corporations are already doing the farming, and we are headed to a time of "Farming without Farmers" where the bottom line drives every decision. So today, I take my hat off to all the farmers we still have, small or large, produce or commodity farmers, and to those many young people who know there should be a place for them on the land producing healthy food for our people while taking care of Mother Earth.

Wolves in Sheep's Clothing

Sentimentality or a political campaign line like: "I Love Farmers" won't remedy our food and agricultural problems. Agribusinesses and other wolves in sheep's clothing use the same devices. We should all admire farmers who survive by being entrepreneurs, but to say: that

is only route to reform says that we don't really recognize the many contributions and responsibilities of ordinary farmers. Fortunately, some farmers are defying the odds by farming agroecologically or organically and are preserving the inherited wisdom and developing new methods and techniques we will all need when our society recognizes that we can provide healthy food and leave a beautiful planet for future generations. And likewise, simply telling people that they should change their diets - vote with their dollars- won't do the trick either. It is by belief that a recognition or how market forces effect farmers and consumer behavior demands policy solutions to achieve a sustainable future. So this, I think, is what we face: the issues are not healthy foods or water pollution, or decimated rural communities, etc, etc,

IT'S COMMODITIES, STUPID!

That means we need to decommoditize food, whether by policy or develop local markets like many farmers here today. I believe unless we recognize that industrialized agriculture depends on production and consumption of commodities, that our most basic assumptions of economic behavior actually assure the individual status quo, the big problems I mentioned will never be solved and we will be wringing our hands at future summits much like I've done for the past 40 years. The logic of commodity consumption and production is at root of most of our environmental and social problems. What percentage of our population is happy because we are paying \$2 per gallon for gasoline instead of \$4? Almost everyone! So our economists and politicians tell us "We want cheap gas, and WE should be happy about oil giants

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