

*Unsettling*  
**IMAGES**



AUCTION, BISHOPVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA, 1987

*A Portrait of  
American Agriculture*

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Based in part on the exhibition  
*Manifest Destiny*,  
sponsored by the Light Factory and the Rural Advancement Fund

\$5.00

## **Southern Exposure**

Issue Editor: Bob Hall

Managing Editor: Eric Bates

Design: Jacob Roquet

Issue Consultant, Cover Photo:  
Robert Amberg

Editorial Intern: Michelle Saks

Circulation: Sharon Ugochukwu

Special thanks to: Page McCullough, Sally Gregory, Jennifer Cruise, David Cecelski, Kay Alexander, Will Coviello, Ellen Baer, Jim Overton, Jenny Warburg, Debbie Robertson, Richard Boyd.

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Spring Issue: Copyright © 1988, Institute for Southern Studies, 604 W. Chapel Hill Street, Durham, NC 27701.

*Southern Exposure* is published quarterly by the Institute for Southern Studies. Annual subscriptions are \$16 for individuals and \$20 for libraries and institutions.

*Southern Exposure* is indexed in *Alternative Press Index*, *The American Humanities Index*, and *Access: The Supplementary Index to Periodicals*. Address all editorial and subscription correspondence to *Southern Exposure*, P.O. Box 531, Durham, NC 27702. Second-class postage is paid at Durham, NC 27702 and additional offices. ISSN: 0146-809X. Post Office No. 053470.

POSTMASTER: Send form 3579 with address changes to *Southern Exposure*, P.O. Box 531, Durham, NC 27702.

**T**his edition of *Southern Exposure* draws heavily on the farm advocacy work of the Rural Advancement Fund, especially a photographic exhibition called "Manifest Destiny" and a citizens forum on agricultural issues held in honor of the organization's 50th anniversary. Like the settling of America through the doctrine of manifest destiny, the unsettling of the family farm is neither accident nor act of God. It is the result of purposeful policies that favor food wholesalers, cotton brokers, grain merchants, and financial middlemen over the individual producer.

Farmers of late have won significant credit relief measures that, if implemented, could ease their immediate financial burdens. But the Farm Crisis, as discovered and now lost by the mainstream media, is far from over. Even the Economic Research Section (ERS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, a fountain of cheery news for high-tech farming, admitted in late 1987 that "approximately 100,000 commercial-size farms [those with sales of \$40,000 or more] could face potential losses of an estimated \$6.3 billion" in the next year.

For the South, the forecast is particularly grim. "The Southern Plains, Delta, and Southeast are the only regions where the problem of potential loan defaults is getting worse," writes ERS economist Gregory Hanson. "The average size of loan loss per Southern farm stands to be the highest in the nation."

As members of the United Farmers Organization attest herein, regional distinctions pale compared to the larger problem. The crisis is national in scope and goes far beyond the need for debt restructuring; it goes to the heart of our images and attitudes about the people who till the earth and put food on our tables.

From plantation master Thomas Jefferson to hobby rancher Ronald Reagan, the yeoman farmer has been at once romanticized and villified. They are praised for their independence, their work ethic, their democratic instincts. Yet for more than a century, government policy has considered them expendable, like so many stick figures and country hicks — too dumb to know what's good for them, better unseen and removed from the centers of power and commerce.

Expendable farmers are the byproduct of a policy preoccupied with increasing productivity rather than sound land use, quality food, humane labor practices, and parity — the concept that farmers should receive enough to cover their production costs. Ponder the fate of Edna Harris (page 4). Even though she paid off her farm debts and netted just enough to support her family, a federal agent denied her request for a new production loan because her income-to-assets ratio didn't meet his image of "a well-managed farm." When she planted corn seed donated by Midwestern farmers, the state college experts warned it would fail because the seed didn't conform to their pretreated standard.

Most of us are afflicted with our own distorted notions of agriculture. As long as our supermarket's shelves are well stocked, the troubles of the average farmer seem a distant tragedy. We ignore the fact that federal farm programs push farmers to get bigger or get out so larger profits can go to food processors like Ralston-Purina, RJR Nabisco, and Tyson Foods. Small farm advocates like the Rural Advancement Fund have protested this injustice for decades. We should have listened. Even the New Deal wound up promoting automated agriculture while abandoning hundreds of thousands of small landowners, tenant farmers, and sharecroppers. The cotton South withered and California agribusiness took root during the last farm depression. The outcome this time around could be worse.

Back then, the Southern Tenant Farmers Union organized the displaced and created a national fundraising campaign to dramatize their struggle. The annual National Sharecroppers Week, begun in 1937, soon attracted prominent supporters like Upton Sinclair, A. Philip Randolph, and Eleanor Roosevelt. In 1943 it became the National Sharecroppers Fund, which in turn set up the Rural Advancement Fund to operate tax-exempt programs. Over the years, NSF/RAF took up the cause of Louisiana sugarcane cutters, Mexican immigrants (which led to Cesar Chavez's UFW), Tennessee sharecroppers evicted for registering to vote, migrant children, and small farmers experimenting with organic farming.

In recent years, RAF (as the organization is now generally known) has launched a minority voter education program and a project to monitor the criminal justice system in rural counties, but its chief focus remains agriculture. It combines a grassroots organizing effort to save small farmers with an international research and advocacy program to preserve seed diversity and block the complete corporate takeover of world agriculture through biotechnology and genetic engineering.

It's time the rest of us realized that french fries come from potato farmers, not McDonald's, before it's too late. Family farmers don't want our nostalgic sympathy; they want us to evaluate the consequences of their demise and become selfish advocates for a better future.

— The editors

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# Plow Up A Storm

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## The UFO Story

*By Eric Bates    Photographs by Robert Amberg*

It had been two weeks since the president of the Farm Bureau had gone on the *Today* show and told Jane Pauley that the farm crisis was over, but it was still the topic of much conversation down at the Lowry Livestock Feed Mill in Harmony, North Carolina. Farmers gathered around the big black heater in the corner, next to shelves lined with boxes of cattle dusting powder and swine wormer and udder wash, and talked about what an outrage it was.

"Did you hear him?" said George McAuley, a local dairy farmer. "He said the farm crisis is over, that the farm has turned the corner."

Arnold Suther, another dairy farmer, let out a laugh. "Guess he hasn't seen milk prices lately."

"He's in the hip pocket of Reagan," McAuley said.

"They're all in the hip pocket of

Reagan," Suther said. Then he looked concerned. "Don't get us wrong," he added. "We're not anti-Farm Bureau. We just want the Farm Bureau to stand up on its hind legs and scream about how bad things are for the farmer. If the Farm Bureau wants a bill passed, it'll pass."

"So what?" Vic Crosby retired from farming a few years ago, but he still comes into the feed mill to talk with his neighbors. "They can take a bill that's been passed into law and put it through the bureaucracy and completely nullify it. You want something done, you got to do more than pass a law."

The farmers gathered at the feed mill know from painful experience that the farm crisis is far from over. One by one their friends and neighbors have lost their homes and their land. Nearly one out of every four farms in the state has disappeared since 1980, forced out of business

in a national upheaval that has wiped out an estimated 600,000 farms and 70 million acres of farmland nationwide. Most were modest, family farms saddled with enormous debts and struggling to survive in a market dominated by huge corporate farms and food processors. In all, federal figures show, more than one million people have been driven off their farms in the past seven years. Today, for the first time this century, fewer than five million Americans live on farms.

Contrary to what the Farm Bureau might say, things are not getting much better. In fact, government studies show that the potential for farmers defaulting on their loans is actually increasing in the South, and that farmers nationwide are likely to default on \$10 billion of loans in the next two years alone. Of the estimated 640,000 family farmers who remain, 120,000 will be forced to shut

down within two years, and another 200,000 are on the verge of collapse.

George McAuley and Arnold Suther and Vic Crosby and the other farmers at the feed mill know all this — and they are among the growing number of farmers who are organizing to put a stop to it. Across the country, farm groups have sprung up from the grassroots, groups like Groundswell in Minnesota, Iowa Farm Unity, the Dakota Resources Council, and the Kentucky Community Farmers Alliance.

Over the past few years, Southern farmers have been especially active building a low-key, grassroots campaign to save family farms threatened with extinction. It has been a quiet fight: There have been no boycotts, no armed confrontation, no talk of forming an independent political party. Instead, there have been lots of late-night meetings and small-town organizing and slow, steady pressure on Congress.

McAuley, Suther, and Crosby all belong to the United Farmers Organization (UFO), a group formed four years ago by farmers in North and South Carolina determined to put a stop to farm foreclosures. News of the new organization spread quickly across the Southeast, and before long 1,500 farm families in 83 counties throughout the Carolinas had joined the UFO.

"One farmer by himself probably thinks he's the only one having trouble," Crosby said. "You don't share your troubles unless your back's up against the wall. Each farmer himself can't afford to go to Washington for a week to try to lobby, but a thousand of us can send one person up to do the job for us."

McAuley nodded. "They'll listen to three or four better than they'll listen to one. And you get a politician in a crowd of 20 angry farmers, he'll at least talk nice until he gets

MEMBERS OF THE UNITED FARMERS ORGANIZATION DISTRIBUTE DONATED SEED CORN TO HARD-HIT FELLOW FARMERS.



out of that crowd. Numbers are the only thing they listen to."

"Politicians understand numbers," Suther agreed. "One person doesn't mean nothin' to them."

#### THE NICKEL AUCTION

Farm activism in the South dates back well over a century to the early 1870s, when the Grange established itself as the first national farm organization. With more than a million members, the Grange dedicated itself to fighting the bank and railroad monopolies that had dominated farm life.

By 1887, however, the Grange had been virtually overshadowed by the Farmers Alliance, a young organization

Nebraska, from North Dakota and Georgia flocked to form the Populist Party in 1892, but by the turn of the century high freight costs and low prices for their goods had forced many farmers off their land and into the cities and factories to look for work. Many farmers who remained were forced into sharecropping, a second-class status that kept them in constant debt and perpetual poverty.

The defeat of the Populist movement set the tone for farm activism in this century. Farmers found themselves increasingly isolated from consumers, and their dwindling numbers made it difficult to organize effectively. Still, farmers continued to fight back. During the Great Depression members of the Farmers

Holiday Association took to the streets to demand parity — laws guaranteeing farmers prices equal to their cost of production. Farmers blocked roads to markets and dumped food on the pavement to protest unfair prices. They halted farm foreclosures by disarming deputies, and in Iowa they stormed a courthouse and nearly lynched a judge who refused to put a moratorium on foreclosures. Afterwards the state declared martial law, and foreclosures were conducted at bayonet point.

Vic Crosby grew up in Iowa during the Depression, and he remembers going to a

### Steps to The Farm Crisis

1. From the late 1960s to late 1970s, the future seems bright for U.S. farmers. When the value of the dollar falls in 1971, U.S. grain becomes a good buy abroad. In the next decade, farm exports jump from \$7.9 billion to \$43.7 billion.
2. Expansion becomes the buzzword of the decade. The U.S. government pushes farmers to plant "fence row to fence row" and encourages them to use the soaring value of their land to borrow heavily to buy more land and equipment.
3. In 1977, warning signals begin to appear. The bottom starts to fall out of overseas markets. Many countries become debtor nations and begin producing their own food to cut costs. Interest rates and inflation in the U.S. soar.
4. From 1981 to 1982, bumper crops overflow silos after the U.S. bans grain sales to the U.S.S.R. Farmers take on more debt to stay in business, but prices for farm goods fall below the cost of production.
5. From 1984 to 1986, high loan costs and falling prices for food and land combine with a series of devastating droughts to wipe out many farmers. Banks seize the land of those who can't repay their loans. In 1985 alone, an estimated 400,000 are forced to give up farming. As family farms close, profits continue to rise for lenders, large corporate farms, and giant food processors.

“nickel auction” where farmers put up a hangman’s noose and dared anyone to bid over a nickel for their neighbor’s farm. “No one bid more than a nickel, and the man got to keep his farm,” Crosby recalled. “There’s been a little of that kind of action this time around, but not so much as there was back then.”

Although the UFO hasn’t relied on the confrontations of the past, it owes much to the structure of earlier farm organizations. Like its predecessors, the UFO is a grassroots group built on a network of county chapters. It is also one of the few interracial farm groups in the South since the Populist movement with both blacks and women holding prominent leadership roles.

If the UFO has inherited the organizing legacy of earlier farm activists, it is also heir to many of their economic and political goals. Today, many of the issues are the same as those raised by the Farmers Alliance 100 years ago. The UFO has called for a halt to farm foreclosures, a fair price to cover the cost of production, and sweeping credit relief for farmers forced to borrow heavily to survive.

At the federal level, the UFO has already won legislation that protects family farmers who are deeply in debt and that permits borrowers to serve on local loan appeals committees. Now, the group is fighting for new laws that would replace federal farm subsidies with fair market prices and require borrowers and lenders to try and resolve their loan disputes through state mediation.

The UFO actually got its start with a telephone hotline organized by the Rural Advancement Fund (RAF), a farm advocacy group that grew out of the Great Depression. RAF began the hotline to give information and immediate relief to farmers struggling to survive. One of the first farmers to call was Edna Harris.

#### LENDER OF LAST RESORT

There is little about Edna Harris to suggest the stereotype of a hardened political activist. A great-grandmother at 61, she has lived on a North Carolina farm in the foothills of the Blue Ridge

EDNA HARRIS: “THE FARMER DOESN’T WANT MORE CREDIT, BUT EQUITY FOR WHAT WE HAVE TO OFFER.”



Mountains since her father moved the family from West Virginia nearly 50 years ago. When he left to build barracks at Ft. Bragg shortly before World War II, Edna was 13 years old. She raised her brother and two sisters on her own until she finished school.

Edna eventually married and began sharecropping tobacco with her husband Lonnie. A federal loan enabled them to buy a small plot of land in 1964. The loans kept coming, and like other small farmers, Edna and Lonnie heeded the national push to grow, grow, grow. They built a hog parlor and bought more land and planted from fence row to fence row. And, like other small farmers, Edna and Lonnie nearly lost everything when overseas markets dried up and prices began falling in the late 1970s. To make matters worse, Lonnie had a heart attack in 1979 and has been disabled ever since, leaving Edna to run the farm.

From 1981 to 1984 Harris borrowed \$106,000 from the Farmer’s Home Administration (FmHA) — the federal

lender of last resort for farmers — just to pay the costs of operating the farm. “We paid every penny back, and we were not delinquent with any payments ever,” she says. After paying off the loans each year, “maybe you’d have \$8,000 or \$9,000 left for the family to live on.”

Then, in 1984, a FmHA official visited the farm and told Harris he was turning down their application for another loan. Even though she owed no money, he called her a “poor manager.”

“That was a blow below the belt,” Harris said. “That’s the term

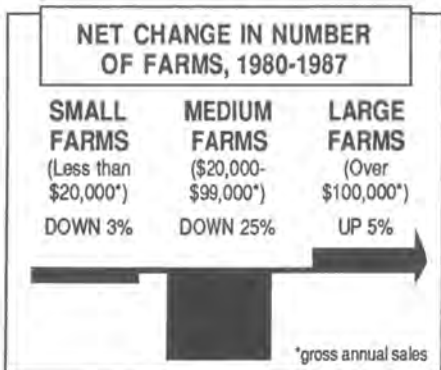
FmHA supervisors pin on everybody they want shut down. He knew that if we couldn’t get operating money for the next year we wouldn’t be able to live. He told us to sell some of our land, and we did, but it wasn’t enough.”

That was when Harris saw a magazine article about the RAF hotline. “It said don’t panic — call. So I did. It was a North Carolina number. If it hadn’t of been, I couldn’t have called.”

RAF helped Harris appeal her loan application all the way to the FmHA in Washington, and she began to talk to her neighbors about joining the newly-organized UFO. In 1985, 65 farmers attended a meeting in Iredell County, and nine joined the organization that night. The FmHA began to threaten farmers who joined, and one official told Edna’s neighbors that he would help them get loan money to buy her farm.

Then came the drought of 1986 — a disaster that proved to be a turning point for the new organization. There was no rain, none. Little farms were wiped out, and even big combines began to close. “The UFO said we should start at the grassroots” — Harris says the word the way she says *soil* or *earth*, as if it were a part of nature — “and where would the grassroots be but in the county? So we went to the county commissioners and got them to pass a moratorium on farm foreclosures.”

When Midwest farmers came to the aid of their Southern counterparts, Harris helped direct a haylift that distributed 30,000 bales of hay and \$23,000 to farmers



in her area. "We kindly united and helped one another," she recalled. "We got hay and seed corn and gave it to those who needed it. If it hadn't been for that corn, there would be a lot of us that would've been completely wiped out in 1987."

The haylift drew more farmers into the UFO and proved that they could unite with other farmers to fend for themselves. "We didn't just work with ourselves," Harris said. "We kept on working our way right on up the ladder to Washing-

ton, D.C. We organized. We organized in committees, and we set out to get legislation that would help the family farmers."

#### "ONE COMMON BOND"

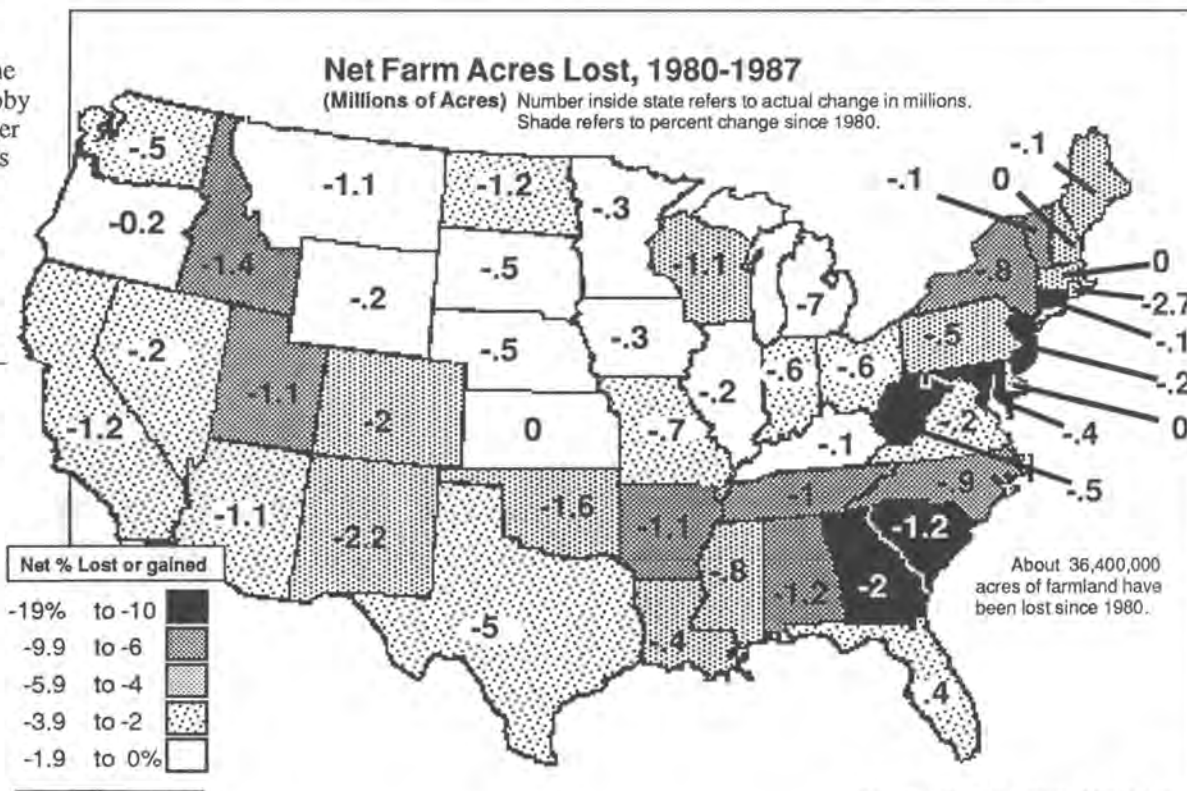
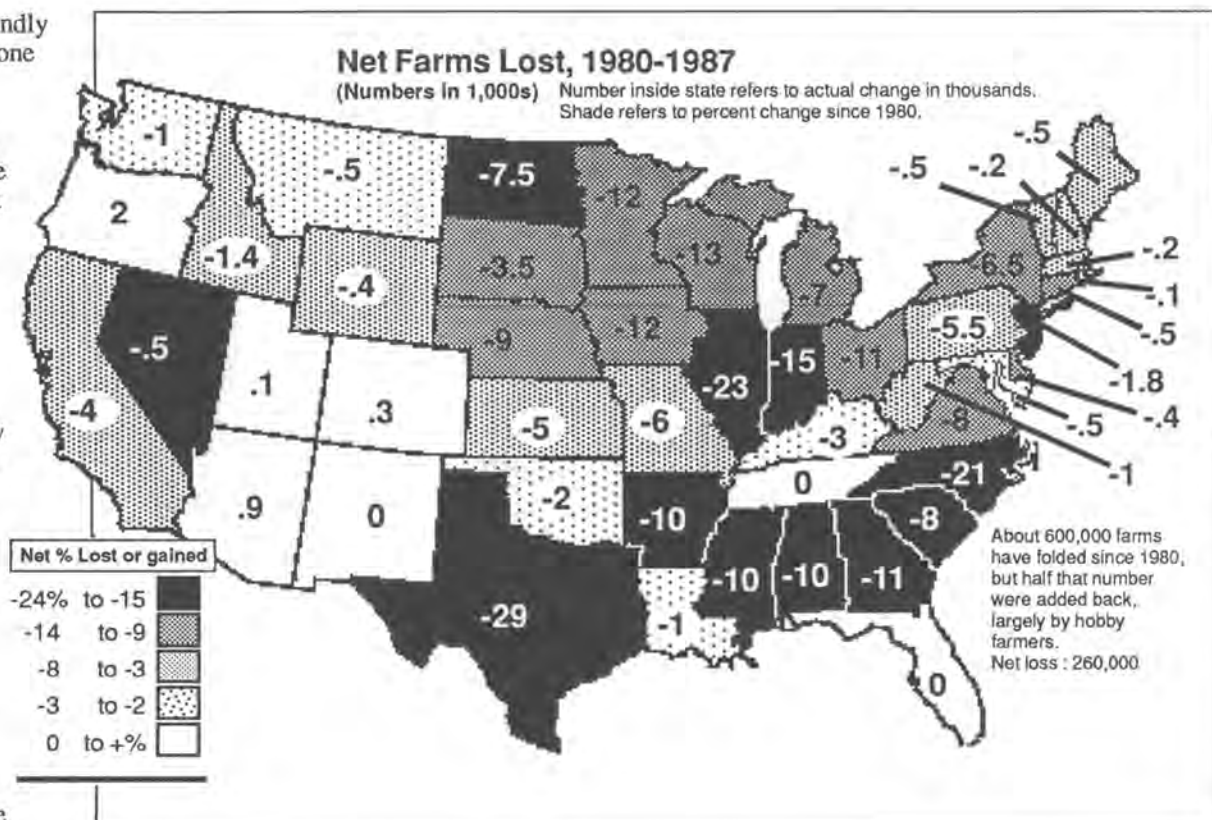
Early in the mornings, before dawn, Harris would sit in the milk barn with a stubby pencil and scribble her thoughts on the backs of yellow Carnation Company Bulk Milk Pick-Up Records. The words came quickly. "We are all bound together with one common bond—survival," she wrote. Or: "The farmer doesn't want more credit, but equity for what we have to offer." Or later: "Can we survive? Only if we unite and let the lawmakers hear our voices."

"I just sat out there in the

milk barn and wrote them things down," she recalled, sitting at the dining room table where she answers the local UFO hotline until well past midnight every night. "I never had any idea I'd get up

and say them."

But she did get up and say them, at meeting after meeting, in county after county. She kept using the words "unite" and "survival" to anyone who would listen.



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture

LONNIE HARRIS STANDS IN HIS PARCHED TOBACCO FIELD DURING THE DROUGHT OF 1986. WHEN SEED ARRIVED FROM MIDWEST FARMERS,

FARM OFFICIALS SWORE IT WOULD NEVER GROW IN THE SOUTH. BUT LONNIE AND EDNA PLANTED 25 ACRES OF WHEAT AND BARLEY . . .



“Farming has been the backbone of this nation,” she said once, “and if you break a farmer’s back, you break the backbone of this nation, and it’s broken forever. When they do away with the family farmers, they’re going to find out that the American way of life has been crippled.”

Harris did whatever it took to get farmers to meetings. “Once I told a bunch of men, ‘Please don’t let me be the only farmer down there with all those politicians, and me a woman at that.’ And when the meeting started, sure enough there were 65 farmers there. They stuck together.”

Her granddaughter Jeannie chortled loudly at the memory. “And besides that, it would have made all those men look bad, you down there all by yourself,” she laughed.

As times grew tougher, so did the meetings. “I remember a man stood up at a meeting and told about how he had been going to kill himself, and the tears were just streaming down his face,” Harris said. “He said he’d rather be dead than to tell his wife and children that he was a failure, to tell his mother she was going to have to leave the farm where she was born and find another place to live. When you hear something like that, you can’t help but be changed.”

When asked why the UFO doesn’t fol-

low in the footsteps of farm activists of the past, why farmers today don’t disarm deputies or put barricades on the roads to the market, Harris just shook her head.

“Really, there’s no point for that. If you have mandatory mediation, if you can get your lenders to listen and give you more time — that’s all we’re asking for. We’re not asking for blood. We’re not asking for war, for rebellion. We’re just asking for a fair chance.”

But later, driving through the rolling farmland and pointing to the fields where some of the best young farmers in the county have been driven out of business, Harris grew frustrated. She never raised her voice, but her faith was visibly shaken by the sight of so much land lying idle.

“You just don’t know how angry it does make us, and you don’t know how we feel when we find out our farm may



ANNIE MAE CHAVIS: “I’M SICK AND TIRED OF FARMERS LOSING WHAT THEY WORKED THE BETTER PART OF THEIR DAYS FOR.”



... AND REAPED WHAT THEY SOWED A YEAR LATER. "A LOT OF PEOPLE SAID IT WAS STUPID TO PLANT THAT BARLEY," EDNA SAID.

"BUT WE PLANTED IT ANYWAY, AND IT CAME UP WONDERFUL FOR US. IT FILLED UP OUR SILO, AND WE'RE STILL FEEDING OFF IT TODAY."



be put on the block and sold. Now I have never been a vindictive person. I raised my boys, and I always told them, 'You can be boys, but you don't have to be mean. You can be decent and respect other humans.' But when I heard we were going to be put on the block, I told my son Jim, I said, 'Son, if it comes to that, if they put a notice in the paper and auction off our land, I'm gonna go to your house and get that gun of yours — I don't even know what kind of gun it is — but I'm gonna get that big pistol of yours and I'll swear I'll go over to the Farmer's Home office and let that man have it right in the face.'"

She stopped suddenly, and turned to look out the window. "That's how desperate I was. And I regret I ever said it, because you know, my boy went out and bought a lock and put it on that gun. He said, 'Momma, you scared me, and I'm not gonna let you do it. It's not worth it. You taught me that hurting people was wrong, and now I'm gonna teach you something.'"

#### "A HURTFUL THING"

Edna Harris is not the only woman who has taken a leadership role in the UFO. Indeed, one of the most striking things about the group is its emphasis on encouraging men and women, black

farmers and white farmers to work side by side to change the way America does business.

Another woman who was instrumental in the early days of the UFO was Annie Mae Chavis, a black farmer in Cumberland County, North Carolina. Like Harris, she runs her own farm and organizes for the UFO. "It gets tough," she said, sitting in the small home she and her husband built 25 years ago. "I have to figure out my papers. I have to get my fertilizer. I have to drive a tractor from Monday morning to Saturday night. I have to run my house. And I have to do everything I do with the RAF and the UFO. It's hard, but I do it because I'm sick and tired of farmers losing what they all worked the better part of their days for. That's a hurtful thing. A hurtful thing."

Black farmers like Chavis have been especially hard hit by the farm crisis of the 1980s. Black-owned farms are generally a fourth the size of the national average, and 79 percent sell less than \$10,000 of agricultural products a year. What's more, black farmers have always had a tougher time than whites getting federal loans, making it hard to get through a bad season. As a result, blacks have been losing land at a rate two and a half times that of whites. At their peak in 1920, black farm owners numbered almost a million. By 1982, only 33,000 remained.

"I'm just thankful I can borrow money and keep farming," Chavis said. "I've always had a harder time than whites when I went to borrow money. I'd be sitting there at the FmHA desk with all my papers, and a white farmer would just walk in and walk out with the money he needed. But when you boil it down to now, this present day, I'm glad I couldn't borrow the money they could borrow. If I had borrowed as much as they borrowed, I wouldn't have my farm."

Chavis began organizing for the UFO in 1984, going from farm to farm, sometimes from sunup to sundown to tell farmers about the organization. She found organizing to be harder than she had expected.

"If I had a meeting in my own home in my own neighborhood right now, I'd be lucky if three people came," she said. "It's the hardest thing to get people organized to try to do some good or help the community. I might go and talk to 100 people, and if five would be at the meeting, I'd be smiling. You might get a little bit more if you promise to feed 'em free. That's off the record, now."

After years of work, however, her efforts finally paid off. Two nights earlier, 23 farmers had come to a meeting and formed the first UFO chapter in the county. One man donated \$100 so the group could open a bank account and pay

for a meeting place every month.

"If it hadn't been for the UFO and the RAF, a lot of people would have lost everything they had, but people still seem reluctant to join sometimes," Chavis said. "You know, I never seen so many doors close — stores, banks, land laying idle, buildings falling down, factories closing down, tractors standing still. That might have something to do with it. People are losing faith in government. They don't want to get involved, because they don't think it will make no difference."

The group has made a difference, though — especially when it comes to uniting white and black farmers. Someday, Chavis said, the UFO might grow strong enough to build on the efforts of the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

"It perhaps will be thataway if it lasts long enough," she said. "Because we honestly sticks together good. We feels for one another. But the blacks can't make it by themselves, and the whites can't make it by themselves. So we got to unite, and we got to stick together if we want to get anywhere. I don't like an organization that's all black, and I don't like an organization that's all white. Because then we never get together and learn from one another. Being by yourself, you'll never get nowhere."

For herself, Chavis wants only to farm tobacco long enough to retire. "I hope one day we can live happy, even if I don't have to farm no more. I hope one day we can just quit farming and live in peace. I sacrifice a whole lot today so that maybe tomorrow we'll be out of debt. If tomorrow ever comes."

For the UFO, Chavis wants an organization strong enough to allow all farmers to live in peace. "The UFO opened doors and cracks where we can stick our head in and fix to *walk* in. Pretty soon we won't have to peep in the door — we'll *walk* through the door," she said. "As you organize you get stronger and stronger. The politicians listen more to 500 people than they would one. So I consider that a good thing, not just for the farmer, but for everyone concerned. I knows we have some power in Washington, D.C. now, and that's a good thing."

#### CREDIT AND PRICE

The power that farmers like Harris and Chavis have helped organize paid off on January 6, when the Agricultural Credit Act became law. The UFO



lobbied hard to make sure the law included sweeping new rights for farmers, and every member of the North and South Carolina congressional delegations voted for the bill.

"This is the first significant credit relief farmers have ever had," said Benny Bunting, a North Carolina hog farmer who chairs the UFO legislative committee. "The law contains a mouthful of new borrower's rights we've never had before."

Among the new rights for farmers contained in the measure are provisions that:

- force federal agencies to restructure a farmer's debt if the new loans would bring more money than selling the farm.

- guarantee farmers access to federal appraisals of their land.

- provide farmers the first option to buy or lease their land if it is being sold by federal agencies.

- establish a loan appeals process independent of the FmHA and give borrowers the right to sit on the appeals board.

Although Bunting worked hard to make sure the new law protects the rights of family farmers, he said "our main job now is to watchdog it to make sure the regulations they come up with will enforce the new law."

He also said the UFO will now turn its attention to the issue that has eluded farmers for 100 years: fair prices for what they produce. "We basically have the credit side of the problem passed now, and it's a big win. But if we don't take care of the prices to go along with that, it's going to be a short-term fix."

When family farmers in the UFO talk about prices, they are talking about nothing short of completely revamping the way the economy works. Despite spiraling food prices, most family farmers actually pay more to grow their crops than they get at the market. Their own cost of production has risen — seed, feed, fertilizer, tractors, gas and oil — but today the prices they receive for their products are only half what they were in 1981 when adjusted for inflation. What they want is what peanut and tobacco growers already have — a system of supply management that allows the Secretary of Agriculture to allot quotas for farm products based on the domestic and export needs. By controlling how much is produced, the government can ensure that prices remain above the cost of production.

"Right now, grain is subsidized by the government," Bunting noted. "Farmers sell their grain in the marketplace, and the government makes up the difference. We want to get our money from the marketplace. It would only mean pennies per

ONE-ON-ONE: UFO MEMBERS BENNY BUNTING (FAR RIGHT) AND WILSON GERALD (OPPOSITE PAGE, RIGHT) LOBBY REP. CHARLIE ROSE (NC) AND REP. PAT ROBERTS (KS)



item to consumers, but it would mean billions of dollars to farmers and would eliminate a lot of government spending that consumers are already paying for in taxes. People think raising farm costs means raising the price they pay for food, but the farm cost is just not a big factor in the consumer price. The retail price of a loaf of Wonder Bread has gone up six cents since 1981, but the price farmers get for that same loaf has actually gone down 1.5 cents in the same period."

The problem, Bunting said, is who controls the prices. "Right now the big corporations are very much in control — that's what much of the trouble is. We don't have any control over the prices, and the consumer doesn't have any control over the prices. That's why we're working to get good laws passed. I think the corporations now are so huge that the only thing that stands a chance with them is something else huge — and that's government. There's no other way for us to get at 'em. We'd be squashed completely without the government's assistance."

#### POWER AND POLITICAL DECISIONS

To further strengthen farmers against the combined power of corporate giants, the UFO has forged links with farmers in the Midwest. The emergency haylift dur-

ing the drought of 1986 had farmers flying back and forth across the country to share their stories and hammer out a common agenda. Today, Bunting serves as president of the National Save the Family Farm Coalition, an organization representing 43 groups in 30 states.

"It's really been interesting to go into these meetings with farmers from all over the country," Bunting said. "You have to realize that farming is different in every region. We've just been building a relationship where we understand their problems and they understand ours. They're fighting the same corporate domination we're fighting."

UFO President Tom Trantham also speaks of corporate domination — he calls it "the strong taking from the weak." Trantham was struggling on his 92-acre farm in South Carolina during the drought two years ago when Pete Owenson, an Iowa farmer, heard his plea for help on the TV show *Nightline*. Owenson offered to lend a hand, and the biggest haylift in history began. Before it ended, train and truck caravans had delivered thousands of bales of hay and 54,000 bushels of seed corn to Southern farmers, and Trantham found himself speaking to standing ovations throughout the Midwest.

"Those Yankees come to me, and you would have thought I was their brother,"

he said. "It's already made a tremendous difference. We meet all over the country and we don't argue any more — we know we have a common problem. I've met with farmers in Montana, Vermont, New York, Iowa, Illinois, and Indiana, and we are taking on the handful of men who run this country."

Fighting for legislative reform, Trantham said, has changed the way he looks at politics. "You know, 10 phone calls to a senator makes a difference. Did you know that? Before I got involved in this, I would have thought it would take 5,000 or 10,000 phone calls to change a vote. Now I know how it's done."

That new awareness — knowing how it's done, knowing how those in power play the game and how people can unite and bring about change — may be the single biggest achievement of the United Farmers Organization. Out of its accomplishments and cooperation has come a sense that it is possible to organize, that it is possible to take on big corporations and win.

On her farm in the Piedmont region of North Carolina, Edna Harris looked through the congressional testimony and farm bills and newspaper clippings scattered on her dining room table. She shook her head in disbelief and said, "I still can't believe that things have went like it has. For somebody like me to just be out here on a farm — and I ain't never been in politics or nothin'. I was a Sunday school teacher, but that was years ago. . . ."

"But the UFO changed things right plenty, for me and for everybody. Ask the farmers who they're going to vote for, they'll say I'm going to vote for the man who will control the price of bread and milk and butter. That's another thing the UFO has done. Farmers are more aware of what they need to do in politics, of how they need to get the legislature to work. It's really made a lot of them more aware of the political situation. That's how we got in the situation we're in — we let other people do what we should have been doing, making decisions about our lives. Now we're organized. Now we're learning to make decisions about our own lives." □

*Eric Bates is managing editor of Southern Exposure.*

*For more information on the UFO, contact Tom Trantham, president, Rt. 2, Box 244, Pelzer, SC 29669, phone: (803) 243-4801. To learn more about the programs of RAF, contact Kathryn Waller, executive director, 2124 Commonwealth Ave., Charlotte, NC 28205, phone (704) 334-3051.*

# Unsettling America's Family Farmer

by Cary Fowler, Program Director,  
Rural Advancement Fund

My grandmother was the keeper of the farming traditions. She ran the family farm, actually a collection of small farms accumulated by her father, who, I'm told, gave her a shotgun one Christmas when he gave dolls to his two other daughters. Evidently he had high hopes for my grandmother. But blessed with just one daughter — not the shotgun toin' or farming type — my grandmother was left with me, her only grandson, to concentrate on as she neared eighty. "Don't you think you might want to be a farmer?" she asked over and over — probably because I never gave the correct answer.

She persisted. In her '57 Ford we spent many an hour driving along dusty back roads surveying fields and crops. Each field was a little different and she gave a running commentary on the nature and quality of the soil in each, sometimes slowing down or stopping to point out differences within a single



ANNIE ELLIS IN HER PEPPERS, 1980. SHE HAS LIVED ON HER FAMILY'S FARM IN BAHAMA, N.C., ALL HER LIFE. PHOTOGRAPH BY BILL BAMBERGER.

field. She'd tell me that this field would produce good corn, but the one across the road was slightly better. She'd rarely tell me exactly why. Some things are learned more intimately if you don't approach them too intellectually. To this day, I think I know something about the soils of Madison County, Tennessee. My

to pass his or her life on to the next generation. Yet it was not to be with me. And increasingly it is not to be with a whole generation of young people coming up on the farm. Educated to be farmers, these children are inheriting the accumulated wisdom, the rich legacy of experiences their family and community

grandmother taught me about them.

But my grandmother's efforts were in vain. I was not to be a farmer. Still, in her efforts can be seen the optimism that guides all farmers. In what must be humanity's ultimate act of faith and optimism, farmers sow their seeds every spring not knowing if the rains will come or if pests or disease will strike down their crops. The farm is no place for a pessimist.

The family farm produces not just crops, but farmers. As if by instinct, as a cow nudges its newborn calf to the nipple, the farmer seeks

have had in farming for generations. But they will not become farmers.

Most of today's farmers would still become farmers if they had it to do over again. But in a recent survey by North Carolina State University, a majority said their own future in farming was doubtful. And a resounding two-thirds responded that they did not see farming as a "real option" for the next generation.

Today's farmer is a producer of raw materials and a consumer of manufactured goods. It is a position not unlike that of Third World countries and their peasantry. In the modern supermarket there is an aisle for fruits and vegetables and an aisle for meats. And there are a dozen or more aisles for processed goods. Here you can find dollar loaves of bread with four cents worth of wheat, and potatoes for \$2 a pound in the form of potato chips.

The money to be made in food is not made in growing it — growing food is just one procedure on the long assembly line, the grower of the food is just one more worker in the American food factory. The money is in the processing, packaging, retailing, and advertising of food. The transformation of the neighborhood Mom and Pop grocery store into national supermarket chains has given the processors and retailers enormous power over the individual, unorganized farmer. The "local" supermarket doesn't want to deal with the local farmer and a pick-up full of tomatoes.

The tomatoes stocked on the shelf are not there because they won a taste contest. Nor are they cheaper. No, they've arrived in town because the local manager knows it is easier to order all fruits and vegetables from a single source that can supply them year-round than to deal with the area's farmers. So most farmers learn to specialize by growing only a couple of crops and marketing them to middlemen. As early as the 1950s this trend was evident even in the kitchens of farm families — not since the fifties have farm families grown as much as half of the food they themselves consume.

As consumers, farmers have the biggest impact on the multibillion dollar farm supply business. But in recent years interest on farm debt has become almost as big an expense as that for machinery, fertilizer, and pesticides. Since 1977, prices received by farmers have increased 28 percent. But prices paid out by farmers have risen 63 percent. While the assets of farmers have tumbled, debt has risen. To our concern about Third World debt might be added the growing problem of farm debt — \$205 billion in 1985.

Today's family farmer is on the way to becoming a sharecropper. The farmer may own the land, but the farmer does not control the land. The boss-man has become a big corporation. The farmer, like the sharecropper of the '30s, produces crops for the boss-man, and buys from the boss-man at the boss-man's prices. And like the sharecropper of old, today's farmer has lots of debts, little power, and few alternatives.

The family farm struggles to survive

farming years ago when he asked, "Who will sit up with the corporate sow?"

Efficient farming is not 9-to-5 farming. Efficient farming starts with the lessons parents and grandparents give to the young ones. They are lessons about how to read the soils, how to treat the livestock, how to repair the tractor and how to be a good neighbor. By shaking our faith in the future, the new sharecropping system emerging in this country attacks the agriculture that is educating the next generation of farmers. What will happen to future generations who try to farm without the knowledge and wisdom of today's farmers? How will we learn that farms are not factories and in any case that farmers cannot be trained to be farmers as factory workers might be trained on the assembly line? What kind of crisis will it take?

The farmer expecting to be run out of business, and the farmer who cannot in good conscience promise the kids a future in agriculture, becomes a poor



FARMERS IN GALLERY OF MINNESOTA STATE CAPITAL WAIT FOR VOTE ON A BILL TO STOP FARM FORECLOSURES, 1985. PHOTOGRAPH BY THOMAS FREDERICK ARNDT.

by doing what it does best — producing food most efficiently. That's right. Every USDA study I know of over the past 25 years has shown that the family farm is the most efficient size unit in American agriculture. Texas Agriculture Commissioner Jim Hightower put his finger on the problem of large-scale

and ultimately dangerous farmer — one who tries to "get by" without planting cover crops, repairing the fences, worming the animals. Too often the work of the farmer is determined not by the needs of the land or community, but by the dictates of politics and the requirements of High Finance for whom

the farmer sharecrops. It is, in fact, becoming increasingly difficult to be a "good" farmer.

When I drive past the mobile homes and sagging barns so commonplace in my native South, I wonder if we plan on staying here very long. It doesn't look like it. I don't get the feeling we are treating agriculture as though it must be permanent, as though we must "do right" by it today in order to have it tomorrow. Perhaps a little "manifest destiny" lingers in our blood telling us that once again we can do horrible things to the land and people without paying a price.

Before she died, my grandmother pointed to her land and told my mother and me that we'd live to see the day it was worth \$1,000 an acre. We thought she was crazy. Now a big highway runs along the edge, and there are factories, car dealerships, subdivisions. The land is probably worth \$5,000 an acre today — that is, if you are willing to see it paved.

Unfortunately, we have no mechanisms for setting the true long-term value of such land and certainly no way of placing a value on the worth of the family that

farms that land — on what they really contribute to the well-being of the community. In our economy, that which is priceless becomes valueless. Today's price tag becomes the chief planning instrument of the future. Literally, we get what we pay for. My grandmother understood that the value of the land was greater than the price. If agriculture is ever again to prosper, it will take more farmers like her. Just as important, it will require non-farmers adopting some of her attitudes to strengthen the all-important relationship between farmer and society. Until then, agriculture will suffer.

Evidence of agriculture's decline can now be found in eroded fields, falling barns and foreclosure sales. But in a sense, these are the effects of the loss of optimism, the loss of control over the future, the loss of the "culture" in agriculture. It is the result of agriculture becoming agribusiness. Knowing that the children will graduate from high school and leave the farm permanently, the farmer makes rational, businesslike decisions. Things slide. Farmers know

they can take care of society, but many no longer believe society will care for them — or their descendants. In the past decade we have lost hundreds of thousands of farms — farms gobbled up, paved over or just plain abandoned. Can the nation afford such a loss without injury to its future? Perhaps it is our descendants who should worry.

Farming has always been a uniquely cultural activity, highly influenced by the farmer's sense of time and place. And, as always, its wise practice depends on the existence of strong ties with the past, with our ancestors, and a solid bond with the future — our children. It rests on the strength of relationships, complex relationships which are revealed in the *Manifest Destiny* exhibition. In the photographs presented here, we see that farming is not so simple as sowing and reaping. And in the policy statements from the Rural Advancement Fund that follow below, we see that practical solutions that address fundamental flaws in these delicate, complex relationships are within our grasp. □

## Policy Statement: Family Farms

The National Sharecropper Fund/Rural Advancement Fund (NSF/RAF) was founded during the last great farm depression when the largest single out-migration of farm people occurred in the Southeast. Then, as now, it stood for the right of people on the land to earn a decent living from their labors.

Today, we face conditions in agriculture similar to those in 1930s. Families and whole communities are disintegrating under the weight of the crisis. Since 1981 we have lost over 600,000 farmers in the United States. Of the 2.2 million farms remaining, 640,000 are operated by families who depend on farming for most of their income. Of those families, 120,000 are expected to shut their gates within the next two years, and another 200,000 are in a high risk category.

Related industries, mainstreet rural businesses, churches, schools, and banks are closing daily. Thousands of acres of land and valuable farm assets are passing out of the hands of farm families and into the hands of investors. Adjusted for inflation, the price farmers receive for their products is half of what it was

in 1981, yet consumer prices and food processors' profits are higher than ever.

To survive under the terms of the present economy, farmers have been forced to expand, applying more chemicals and working longer hours to squeeze out a greater yield, sacrificing good stewardship practices and substituting debt for income.

By eliminating the mid-sized producers our nation is moving towards a dual system of agriculture; part-time farmers, who cannot make a living from their small farms, will produce a marginal part of the nation's food; the majority of our food production will be controlled by a handful of giant corporate interests. If the present trend continues, farm people will have no choice but to return to sharecropping and tenant farming, or become low-wage "factory farm" laborers. With the proliferation of agricultural strip-mining methods employed by agribusiness investors, depletion of our natural resources will accelerate.

Present farm programs are the most expensive this nation has known. These

ineffective programs benefit the large conglomerates who are the major buyers, processors, and distributors of farm products. Tax, credit, trade, and commodity policies meet the needs of these corporate giants for cheap raw food and fiber. This kind of system is not sustainable; it is not inevitable.

RAF opposes the continuation of farm programs which subsidize large producers and food processors while forcing farmers to maximize yields and sell below the cost of production.

RAF supports:

— commodity programs that guarantee small and mid-size family farmers (gross farm income of under \$200,000) a fair share of the net earnings generated from farm products;

— programs that emphasize sound supply management with production quotas (such as the current peanut program) and a minimum price to produce parity at the farm level (balancing price received with total cost of production);

— debt restructuring which passes the benefits of the reduced value of land and

farm assets to farmers in debt rather than to speculators, who currently acquire farm assets at 25 percent below book value through foreclosures and bankruptcy sales;

— tax, credit, and conservation programs, such as grants and low-interest loans, which allow farmers to scale up or down as needed, to diversify operations and make the transition to methods which are less capital- and chemical-intensive;

— cost-share measures and enforced compliance among large-scale recipients

of farm programs to encourage conservation;

— supply management as a means of conserving land and resources and as an incentive to on-farm feeding of livestock;

— discouragement of tax code farming by the elimination of such tax breaks as rapid depreciation schedules, use of capital gains and investment credits which give unfair advantages to large investors.

RAF advocates democratic opportuni-

ties for farmers including producer referenda and elections for farm lender, commodity, and cooperative boards from local working farmers. If we are to have an agricultural system that is sustainable, providing low cost, quality food over the long term, then America must have policies which enable farmers and farm communities to sustain themselves.

## Policy Statement: Farm Labor

The deplorable working and living conditions of farmworkers are well documented. For the privilege of toiling in the fields for minuscule wages in order to feed the people of this nation, the average farmworker will cut some 20 years off his or her own life expectancy. This farmworker will be three times more likely to suffer from exposure to toxic chemicals than the average American. In Florida, the infant mortality rate among migrant workers is 250 percent higher.

Despite national child labor laws, a 1970 study estimated that one-fourth of all farm labor in the U.S. is performed

by children. And despite a federal constitution outlawing slavery, involuntary servitude is not an isolated incident among migrant farmworkers.

RAF has long advocated the coverage of agricultural workers under federal law to guarantee them the right to organize and bargain collectively with their employers. The average farm worker today earns less than \$5,000 a year. Increasing the federal minimum wage would provide immediate aid.

Federal and state programs to increase the availability and quality of housing and medical care are also urgently needed. Current reform efforts to record,

evaluate, and limit the exposure of farmworkers to thousands of agricultural chemicals and pesticides must also be strengthened.

The RAF believes that justice and human decency require that all farmworkers have access to drinking water, handwashing facilities, and toilets in the fields where they work. They are the only American workers not protected by such standards on the job. Farmworkers formally asked the U.S. government to establish field sanitation standards 15 years ago. Finally, in February 1987, after "a disgraceful chapter of legal neglect," a Federal appeals court ordered

*"Everyone would stare and think, 'What trash.' I mean, how do you think your fruits and vegetables get to the supermarket shelf? They don't just grow there. Somebody's got to pick them."*

— L.H. Tindal,  
migrant farmworker



L.H. TINDAL BURNING THROUGH THE TREES, 1979. PHOTO BY HERMAN LEROY EMMET.

the secretary of labor to issue federal field sanitation standards for farmworkers. Now that standards have been issued for employers of 11 or more farm laborers, serious attention must be given (1) to ensure their strict enforcement and (2) to extend their application to include those still not covered — more than half the farmworkers in America.

RAF is also opposed to the newly enacted H-2A provision of the Immigration Reform Law. We believe that this law, providing for the importation of

foreign agricultural workers, legalizes the exploitation of a captive labor force of tens of thousands of foreign laborers who will work seasonally at low wages under inadequate health and housing standards. The so-called “guest-worker” program displaces domestic workers and undercuts their ability to negotiate fair wages and working conditions. We support efforts to repeal this portion of the new immigration law.

In conclusion, RAF believes that all

farmworkers are entitled to the same rights and protections available to other workers. These include the right to organize and form labor unions and to bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing. We support the consumer boycotts, both past and present, implemented by the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) and the United Farmworkers Union (UFW) to achieve fairer working and living conditions for their members.

## Policy Statement: Biotechnology

In studying how life works, biologists can be likened to those who tinker with engines, seeking to understand the whole system by identifying the functions of the parts. Ultimately, the diversity of life on this planet can be reduced to genes, the tiny carriers of heredity found in every living cell. It is genetic diversity that gives rice its tolerance of so many growing conditions, that gives potatoes their many colors, that provides wheat its resistance to myriad diseases, and gives some corn its sweetness and other corn its pop.

Thousands of years ago, most agricultural crops originated in countries we designate as the Third World. The genetic diversity represented today in these crops is, in itself, a natural resource. It is the common heritage of all mankind; a heritage we employ as the foundation of plant and animal breeding and as the most basic raw material for new biotechnologies.

RAF believes that this genetic diversity — the world’s most precious natural resource — is in danger of being lost; once gone, it is lost forever. As Mark Twain once said, “The first rule of successful tinkering is to save all the parts.” We support increased collection and improved conservation systems for

seed variety and genetic diversity from the village level in the Third World countries to the national efforts of the U.S. We support the full and free exchange of genetic resources and deplore any attempt to restrict access to these resources for political or commercial reasons.

Biotechnology — the use of living organisms to make or modify products — is one of the most powerful technologies ever introduced to society. It has the ability to improve our quality of life almost beyond imagination. However, the changes it will bring to agriculture will likely strengthen the position of large, heavily capitalized farms, further endangering the nation’s beleaguered family farmers. And the present trend towards the use of this technology in the development of biological warfare agents — directed at both people and agriculture — has the ability to eliminate life itself.

RAF believes in the strict regulation of biotechnology for the social good. Judicious support, principled criticism, and constant questioning of biotechnology will be required for society to experience it as a blessing and not as a curse. As powerful as it is, biotechnology will never be able to eliminate or

long obscure the problems of injustice in rural America caused by discrimination against the farmer and neglect of the environment.

In the wake of illegal releases of genetically altered micro-organisms in Montana, South Dakota, Nebraska, and California, RAF supports immediate Congressional oversight action to review the adequacy of existing biotechnology regulations for protecting public health, agriculture, and the environment.

RAF steadfastly opposes the use of biotechnology as an instrument of war and calls upon all nations to renounce such use in strong and verifiable international convention backed by national legislation.

RAF believes it is absolutely vital that Third World nations, in particular, have access to information about the social and economic consequences of introducing biotechnologies into developing countries. In order to develop strategies to cope with these consequences, Third World planners and policy makers must be able to monitor the activities of biotechnology companies, new scientific developments, and potential products. Third World countries must also formulate national laws to regulate the use and testing of biotechnology products within their borders.

RAF supports the establishment of an “international code of conduct” on biotechnology through the appropriate United Nations body. An international code of conduct could be used to establish rigorous standards for the development, use, and testing of biotechnology throughout the Third World.

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*“We’re talking about the control of the entire food chain. The prayer, ‘Give us this day our daily bread,’ should not be a prayer to a Ceiba-Geigy or a Dupont or a Shell Oil.”*

— Pat Mooney, RAF International

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# *Manifest Destiny:* The Exhibition

by Ken Bloom,  
Exhibition Curator and Director of the Light Factory

**F**ifty years have come between us and America's most popular tale of national crisis, whereby failure in the financial house of cards and abuse of the fertile plain laid waste to lives, and hands across the land lay idle.

Photographers from the Farm Security Administration were mobilized to record the tragedy. They, along with journalists, film makers, essayists, economists and a multitude of artists, went into the interior passionately looking for unpolished truth. It was felt that a good close look into the face of the displaced might so enrage the visceral genius of people that they would be moved to transform society. But bureaucratic objectives prevailed. Government programs were designed to get people back to work, to reestablish the economy. The image-makers provided "evidence" and the photographs were taken at face value.

Photographs no longer carry such authority. New media, more media, and college-trained image-makers bear down

hard upon the truth that documentary images pose. Questions of context and rightful voice of the subject may have complicated the innocent assumption that the documentary photograph is evidence of fact, but old habits die hard. When it

comes to rural America, image is still predicated upon the notion that prototypical Man breaks the horizon with his feet on the ground and his head in the sky. We like to think of farmers as taking up nature's gauntlet with grit in their teeth; how then can we imagine the complex truth of their struggle with repayments on overextended obligations?

It remains impossible to determine the voice of rural America from a few photographs and some selected quotes. And yet in the documentary project *Manifest Destiny*, we have several photographers, a



FARM SECURITY  
ADMINISTRATION  
PHOTOGRAPH BY  
WALKER EVANS.  
FLOYD BURROUGH,  
COTTON SHARECROPPER,  
HALE COUNTY, AL,  
1935.

farm advocacy organization, and an arts organization collaborating to promote a greater understanding of the challenges facing America's food producers. The intent, as seen in the sample of photographs beginning on page 17, is a fresher, perhaps truer vision that awakens audiences to the deeper complexity of life on America's farms.

Vast difficulties arose in creating the exhibition. Photographers struggled against one kind of mythmaking — and effectively perpetuated the process. In wanting to show how vulnerable and critically balanced the economics and process of food production is — how interdependent we are as a nation regarding the role of the food producer and the consumer — photographers resorted to personalizing the situation. Amidst the romanticized yet very real battling of the elements, the farmer is still confronted with the falling value of his labor against the reality of the new, capital intensive farm — a system predicated on cheap food prices to support consumer demand, pitting the farmer-producer against the system.

Complicating the issue is the diversity of players in the field: migrants, sharecroppers, and tenants, as well as big family farmers attached to collectivized agribusiness, monocultures, and an intervening government bureaucracy. With such unsettling economic relationships, one wonders how the photographer is supposed to take on imaging the problems. On top of this lies the challenge for the photographer in making a meaningful image at all. Today there is so much associated cultural baggage that no image is free to be an "accurate" neutral document.

The photographer must not only recognize the degree to which any image is coded, but also acknowledge that at the instant of its manufacture, a photograph has historicized the situation. As the photographer looks into the face of the farmer, although the subject may face forward, the photographer sees into the past, across the field — the field behind the subject. The subject faces the future, the photographer the past. Here is a rather fundamental difference between nostalgia and optimism.

In its apparent distillation, the context of the event will be further sublimated by gesture, symbol, metaphor and likeness

— never continuity. Without the before and after shot, or serial composite, only text may complete the story. To their credit, most of the photographers contributing to *Manifest Destiny* presented careful documentation. But any text may be applied providing any number of possible meanings. Credibility is tenuous at best. Since most of the photographers selected for the exhibition have been involved with their subjects for long periods of time, their claims to credibility are based on having been accepted by their subjects.

Faced with a wide range of challenges, including understanding his or her own role as producer of consumable images, the photographer must guess against the judgment of the audience. Together they have a compact that trades on an uncompromising demand — to be convincing. Underlying this compact is the

unspoken, assumed narrative — a tradition to which the images must refer as if each image were but an episode in an epic drama.

The story begins with humanity cast from the garden — the loss of innocence for which humankind must suffer. In the case of *Manifest Destiny*, the photographers are also addressing the possible loss of the American garden. As the photographers are challenged, they are also subject to being seduced by their own desire for sentiment, their desire for truth, their desire for meaning. Unbalanced equations have become lore. But no one player has a monopoly on waste and imbalance, or a loss of innocence. Farm folks have been known to spill their milk over a drop in prices. Everyone participates in the system, but the roles are not equal — and the history is not convenient. The people whose lives are currently disrupted are caught in the

same process of expansionism that displaced the native American population — in many cases by their pioneer parents.

Encased within the exhibition's mix of photographic images are symbols of inner conflicts, symbols of a tension between rural and urban, artist and farmer, present and past, male and female, purity and defilement, myth and fact. With such material for the photographer-chroniclers of the current condition of agrarian America, it is no wonder they are compelled to take a stand.

### Sponsors of *Manifest Destiny*

Non-profit organizations interested in hosting the *Manifest Destiny* exhibition should contact Leslee Samuelson at the Southern Arts Federation, Suite 122, 1401 Peachtree Street, NE, Atlanta, Georgia 30309, phone 404-874-7244. The exhibit includes 50 photographs and requires 167 feet of linear display space.

For more information about the programs of the exhibition's sponsoring organizations, contact Ken Bloom, executive director, The Light Factory, 119 E. Seventh Street, Charlotte, NC 28202, phone 704-333-9755; and Kathryn Waller, executive director, The Rural Advancement Fund, 2124 Commonwealth Avenue, Charlotte, NC 28205, phone 704-334-3051.

The photographers featured in *Manifest Destiny* are: Robert Amberg, Durham, NC; Thomas Frederick Arndt, Minneapolis, MN; Margot Balboni, Brookline, MA; Bill Bamberger, Cedar Grove, NC; Tim Barnwell, Asheville, NC; Joseph Bartscherer, Seattle, WA; Stephen M. Dahl, Minneapolis, MN; Robert Dawson, San Francisco, CA; Herman LeRoy Emmet, New York, NY; Carl Fleischhauer, Washington, DC; Bill Gillette, Ames, IA; Frank P. Herrera, Martinsburg, WV; Karen E. Johnson, Brooklyn, NY; Stephen Johnson, San Francisco, CA; Sue Kyllonen, Minneapolis, MN; Les LeVeque, New York, NY; Ken Light, Vallejo, CA; Rhondal McKinney, Normal, IL; Andrea Modica, Oneonta, NY; John Moses, Durham, NC; Thomas Neff, Baton Rouge, LA; Sarah Putnam, Cambridge, MA; Phil Reid, Staunton, VA; Jim Richardson, Denver, CO; Arty Schronce, Raleigh, NC; Stephen Shames, Philadelphia, PA; William Strode, Louisville, KY; Wendy Watriss & Frederick Baldwin, Houston, TX; and Lyle Alan White, Wichita, KS.

The exhibition is made possible in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts through the Southern Arts Federation of which the NC Arts Council is a member.

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# Unsettling Images

Photographs from the contributors to  
“Manifest Destiny, Unsettling America’s Family Farmers,”  
an exhibition sponsored by the Rural Advancement Fund  
and the Light Factory.

With excerpts from the May 1987 Citizens Forum  
held in commemoration of  
the Rural Advancement Fund’s 50th anniversary.



STEPHEN  
SHAMES.  
JOSEPH  
FETTER  
(AGE 9) OF  
CHELSEA,  
IOWA  
HOLDS A  
PICTURE OF  
HIS FATHER,  
1985.

*Joseph’s father committed suicide  
on July 25, 1982, knowing he was going to lose his farm.*



SARAH  
PUTNAM.  
POTATO  
FARM, NEW  
SWEDEN,  
MAINE,  
1983.



SARAH  
PUTNAM.  
HARVESTING  
POTATOES.  
SCHOOL LETS  
OUT FOR TWO  
WEEKS SO  
THE KIDS CAN  
HELP WITH  
THE HARVEST.



SARAH  
PUTNAM.  
POTATO  
FARMER PETER  
BONDESON  
WITH SON,  
NEW SWEDEN,  
MAINE, 1983.

*“The government says we’ve got 110,000 acres in potatoes in Maine, but I don’t believe it. The government says a lot of things I don’t believe. The government looks after consumers, really, and they’d rather have a few farmers angry at them than raise the prices and get the whole country mad.”*

— Peter Bondeson

*“More than 2,000 farm families are being forced off the land every week. Communities which once bustled with activity are being boarded up, with schools, small businesses, and churches no longer able to function for lack of people and money.*

*The Reagan administration’s market-oriented policy, with its goal of getting the government out of farming, is the blueprint for delivering our food-producing land into the hands of insurance companies, speculators, and the landed elite.”*

— Helen Waller,

National Save the Family Farm Coalition

*“Farmers can survive natural disasters, army worms, droughts, and boll weevils easier than they can survive federal policies aimed at putting us off the land.”*

— Tom Trantham,

United Farmers Organization



STEPHEN JOHNSON, INDUSTRIAL PARK, LINCOLN, CALIFORNIA, 1986. FROM THE GREAT CENTRAL VALLEY PROJECT.



TIM BARNWELL.

METHODIST  
CHURCH IN  
SNOW,  
WALNUT  
SECTION,  
MADISON  
COUNTY,  
NORTH  
CAROLINA,  
1983.



THOMAS  
FREDERICK  
ARNDT.  
COFFEESHOP/  
AUCTION BARN,  
SLEEPY EYE,  
MINNESOTA,  
1985.



WENDY  
WATRISS/  
FREDERICK  
BALDWIN.  
BUCHANAN  
FAMILY  
REUNION,  
EAST-  
CENTRAL,  
TEXAS,  
1976.

*The Buchanan farm has been  
in the family since the 1880s.  
Grandfather Buchanan began as a tenant farmer,  
then purchased land. His will stipulated that  
the land not be sold.*



WENDY  
WATRISS/  
FREDERICK  
BALDWIN.  
"Doc"  
BUCHANAN,  
LANDOWNER  
AND FARMER,  
EAST-  
CENTRAL,  
TEXAS,  
1976.





WENDY  
WATRISS/  
FREDERICK  
BALDWIN.  
EAST-  
CENTRAL,  
TEXAS,  
1976.

*A Polish-American couple  
at the Knights of Columbus Hall,  
the Fourth of July.*



TIM  
BARNWELL,  
PAUL  
DOCKERY  
AND  
HORSES,  
ANDERSON  
BRANCH,  
MADISON  
COUNTY,  
NORTH  
CAROLINA,  
1980.

*“This land hasn’t been  
worked in over 15 years.  
We had to clear it,  
burn off the brush,  
and pull up the big rocks  
and stumps.  
It’s pretty rough going,  
but up here you learn  
to use what  
you’ve got.”  
— Paul Dockery*



JIM  
RICHARDSON.  
FARMER NEAR  
SILVER,  
KANSAS  
BRUSHES DUST  
FROM HIS EYES  
DURING A DUST  
STORM.



ROBERT  
DAWSON.  
LARGE CORPORATE  
FARM NEAR  
BAKERSFIELD,  
CALIFORNIA, 1983.  
FROM THE GREAT  
CENTRAL VALLEY  
PROJECT.



ROB  
AMBERG.  
GEORGE  
AMMONS,  
TURKEY  
FARMER,  
DUPLIN  
COUNTY,  
NORTH  
CAROLINA,  
1987.

*"Black farmers have been in a continuous crisis for the past 50 years, like white farmers are now. We not only have faced the general decline of the farm economy, but also neglect, racial discrimination and economic exploitation. Blacks are losing land at an annual rate of 500,000 acres. In Duplin County, 232 black farmers operate over 7,000 acres of land and most are on the brink of disaster. There are only 181 black farmers under age 25 in the United States. If this current trend continues, blacks will be a landless people within the next 10 years."*

— George Ammons,  
United Farmers Organization



JOHN  
MOSES.  
MIGRANT  
FARMWORKER  
BOY IN  
STRAWBERRY  
FIELD, FLOR-  
IDA, 1979.



JOHN  
MOSES.  
WAITING  
FOR WORK,  
FLORIDA,  
1979.



THOMAS  
FREDERICK  
ARNDT.  
DENNIS AND  
MARY SELLNER  
BALING HAY,  
SLEEPY EYE,  
MINNESOTA,  
1985.



RHONDAL  
McKINNEY.  
ILLINOIS  
LANDSCAPE,  
1982.

—

*"The family farmer is the man in the community  
who may go to town in a beat up truck,  
but will have the most beautiful cows  
or corn fields, with rows straight as an arrow.  
This is our pride,  
our quality,  
our Cadillac."*

— Tom Trantham, United Farmers Organization



*Rancher Les Stewart's affection for older ranching traditions is evident in his maintenance of willow corrals and his preference for an open fire to heat branding irons. Other ranchers in the valley may use wire fence corrals and propane to heat the irons, but they share Stewart's fondness for horseback roping. Compared to handling calves in a modern squeeze chute, roping is fun and volunteer workers are easy to find.*

CARL  
FLEISCHHAUER.  
FALL BRANDING AT  
THE NINETY-SIX  
RANCH, PARADISE  
VALLEY, NEVADA,  
1979.



ANDREA  
MODICA.  
TREADWELL,  
NEW YORK,  
1986.







STEPHEN  
M. DAHL.  
GIRLS AND  
CHICKENS,  
CANNON  
FALLS FAIR,  
GOODHUE  
COUNTY,  
MINNESOTA,  
1986.

*Babbette Sisson (below) dressed to attend her senior prom.  
Her family produces beef on land which was once a dairy  
farm started by her great-grandfather.*



ANDREA  
MODICA.  
MARYLAND,  
NEW YORK,  
1986.

---

*“Farming has been  
the backbone  
of this nation,  
and if you break a farmer’s back,  
you break the backbone  
of this nation  
and it’s broken  
forever.*

*When they do away  
with the family farmers,  
they’re going to find out  
that the American way of life  
has been crippled.”*

— Edna Harris,  
United Farmers Organization



STEPHEN  
M. DAHL.  
TRACTOR,  
GOODHUE  
COUNTY,  
MINNESOTA,  
1987.



SUE KYLLONEN.  
MARY UHLIR,  
MONTGOMERY,  
MINNESOTA,  
1987.

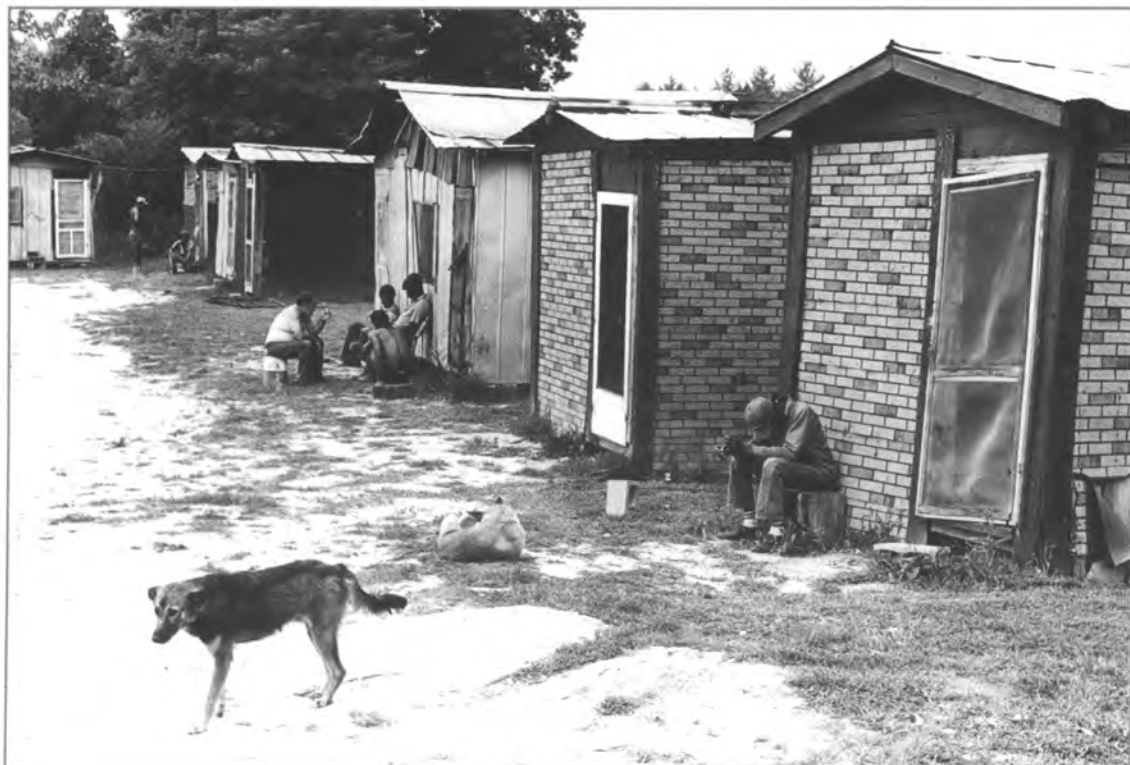


SUE  
KYLONEN.  
MARY UHLIR'S  
TEA PARTY,  
MONTGOMERY,  
MINNESOTA,  
1987.



KEN  
LIGHT.  
CHITS,  
FORTY  
BUCKETS AT  
35 CENTS  
EACH,  
HOMESTEAD,  
FLORIDA,  
1982.

*"In the Old South, although the entire economy depended on the labor of slaves, their reality as persons was denied. They had to be invisible for the system to survive. It is the same with farmworkers today. The makeshift houses and trailers that serve as their shelter are far from the main roads. Health inspectors can't find them, and sheriffs don't want to."*



JOHN  
MOSES.  
MIGRANT  
FARM-  
WORKER  
CAMP,  
NORTH  
CAROLINA,  
1977.



KEN  
LIGHT.  
ONION  
PICKER,  
RIO  
GRANDE  
VALLEY,  
TEXAS,  
1979.

*"There have indeed been ten slavery convictions against crew leaders in our state in the last six years, and I myself have taken men from camps who tried to escape and were bloodied and beaten in the attempt."*

— Sister Evelyn Mattern, N.C. Council of Churches



JOHN  
MOSES.  
PEACH  
WORKERS,  
SOUTH  
CAROLINA,  
1979.



HERMAN  
LeROY EMMET.  
THE TINDALS,  
MIGRANT  
FARMWORKERS  
AT AN ORANGE  
GROVE,  
LOXAHATCHEE,  
FLORIDA,  
1981.



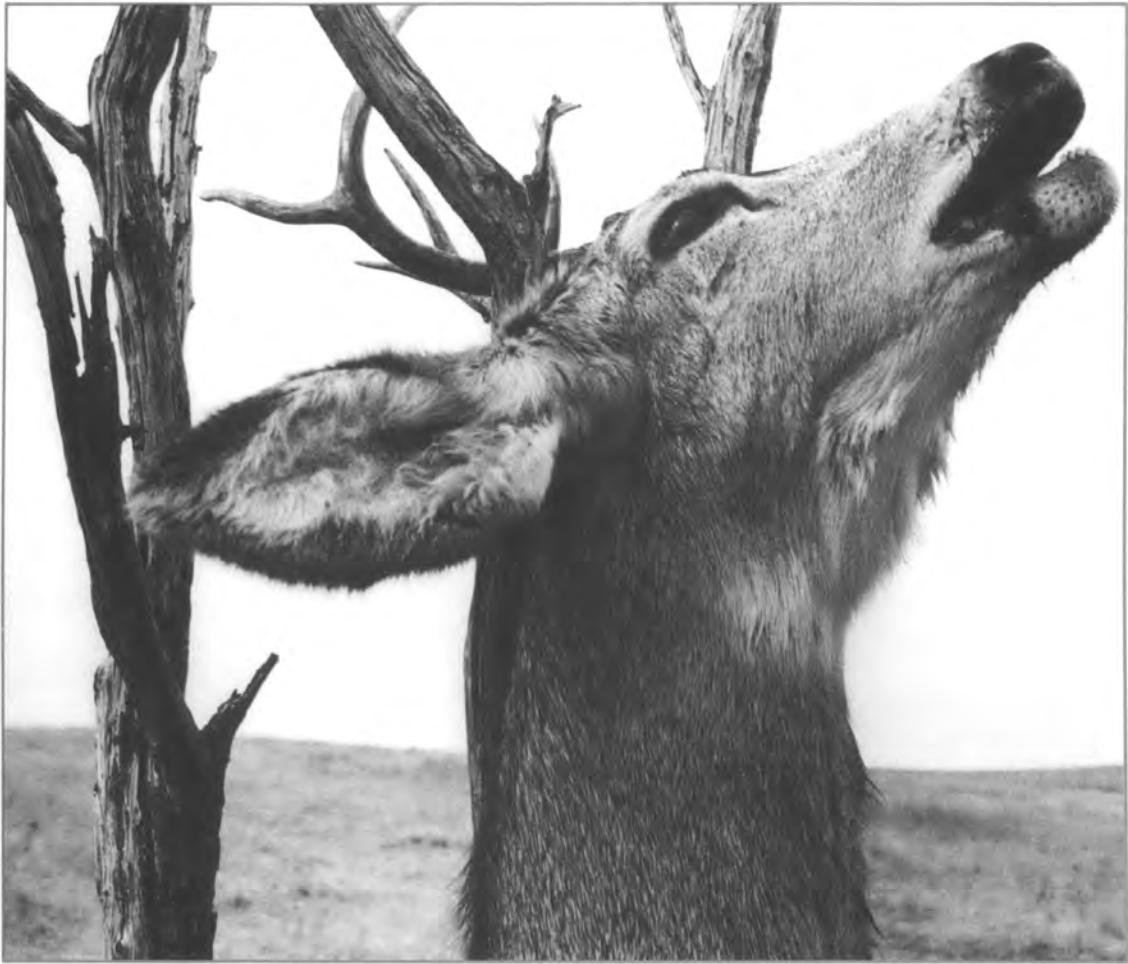
HERMAN  
LeROY  
EMMET.  
TINA  
MICHELLE  
TINDAL  
WARMING  
HER FEET,  
EDNEYVILLE,  
NORTH  
CAROLINA,  
1979.



STEPHEN M. DAHL.  
LLOYD AND SON LORRIE.  
NERSTRAND,  
MINNESOTA,  
1987.



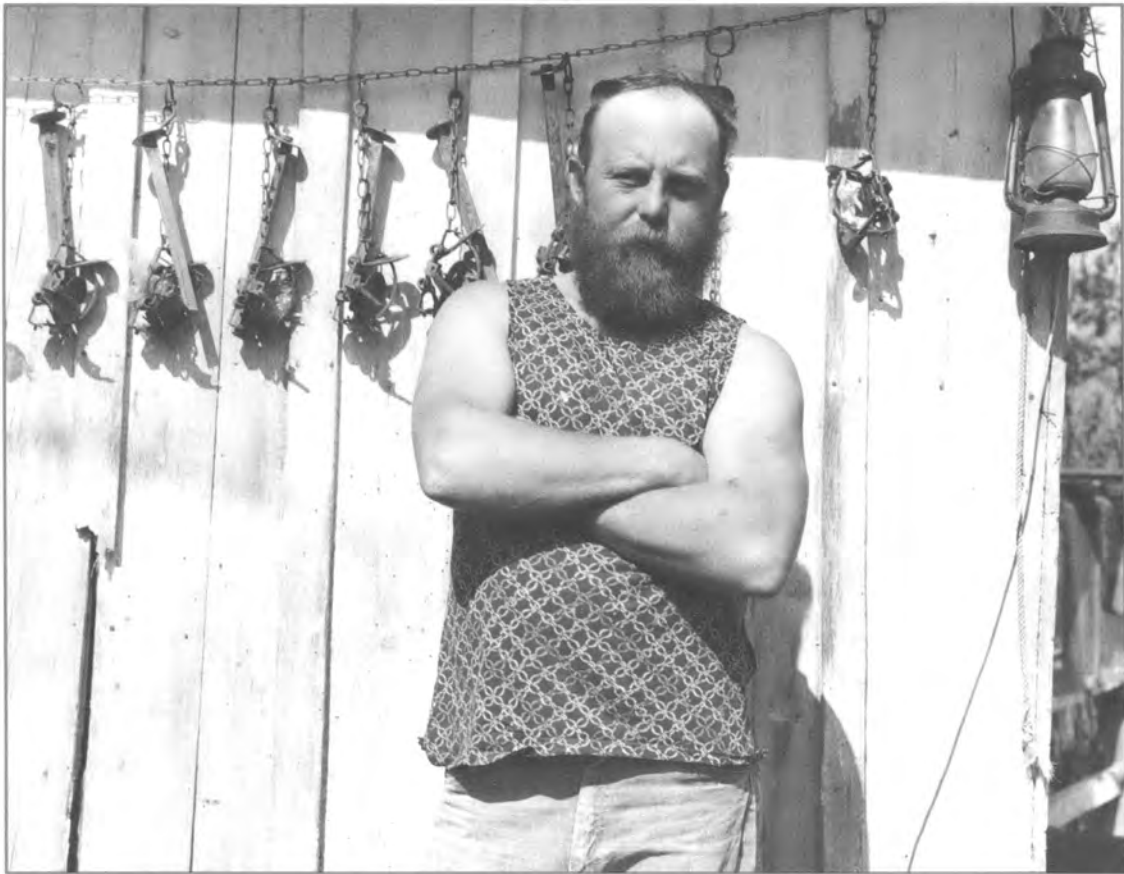
STEPHEN M. DAHL  
MARY KISPERT  
PREPARES MEAL FOR  
HER GRAND-  
SONS, LANCE  
AND LORRIE,  
NERSTRAND,  
MINNESOTA,  
1987.



LYLE  
ALAN  
WHITE.  
THE  
UNVARNISHED  
TRUTH,  
MITCHELL  
COUNTY,  
KANSAS,  
1983.

*"Farmers are hunters.  
They will kill for their food.  
On the other hand,  
I buy my meat in packages  
at supermarkets,  
always!  
The hunt hurt.  
It put my habits in perspective."  
— Lyle Alan White*





FRANK P.  
HERRERA.  
MONROVIA,  
MARYLAND,  
1980.

Eugene (above), age 28, lives in a tenant farmhouse with his wife and children. Since he suffered a serious heart attack at 27, Eugene has been unable to do steady strenuous farm work. To supplement his income, he fishes and traps muskrats.



THOMAS  
FREDERICK  
ARNDT.  
KILLING A COW,  
SLEEPY EYE,  
MINNESOTA,  
1985.



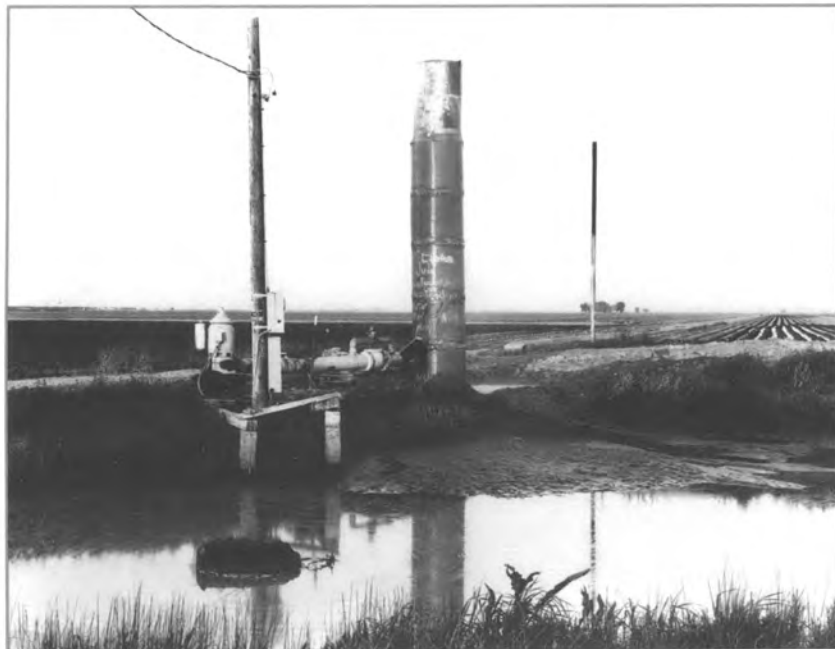
LYLE  
ALAN  
WHITE.  
THE  
POWER,  
DUDE  
KOLLING,  
DICKINSON  
COUNTY,  
KANSAS,  
1983.

*"I don't know why I can dowse.  
It's a funny thing, 'the power.'  
I believe it's a gift God gives some folks.  
I was at a family gathering when I learned I had it.  
I was still pretty young and it was at our reunion.  
Talk got on about a passed-on relative  
who could dowse. Well, a bunch of us got to trying it,  
and with me it worked."*

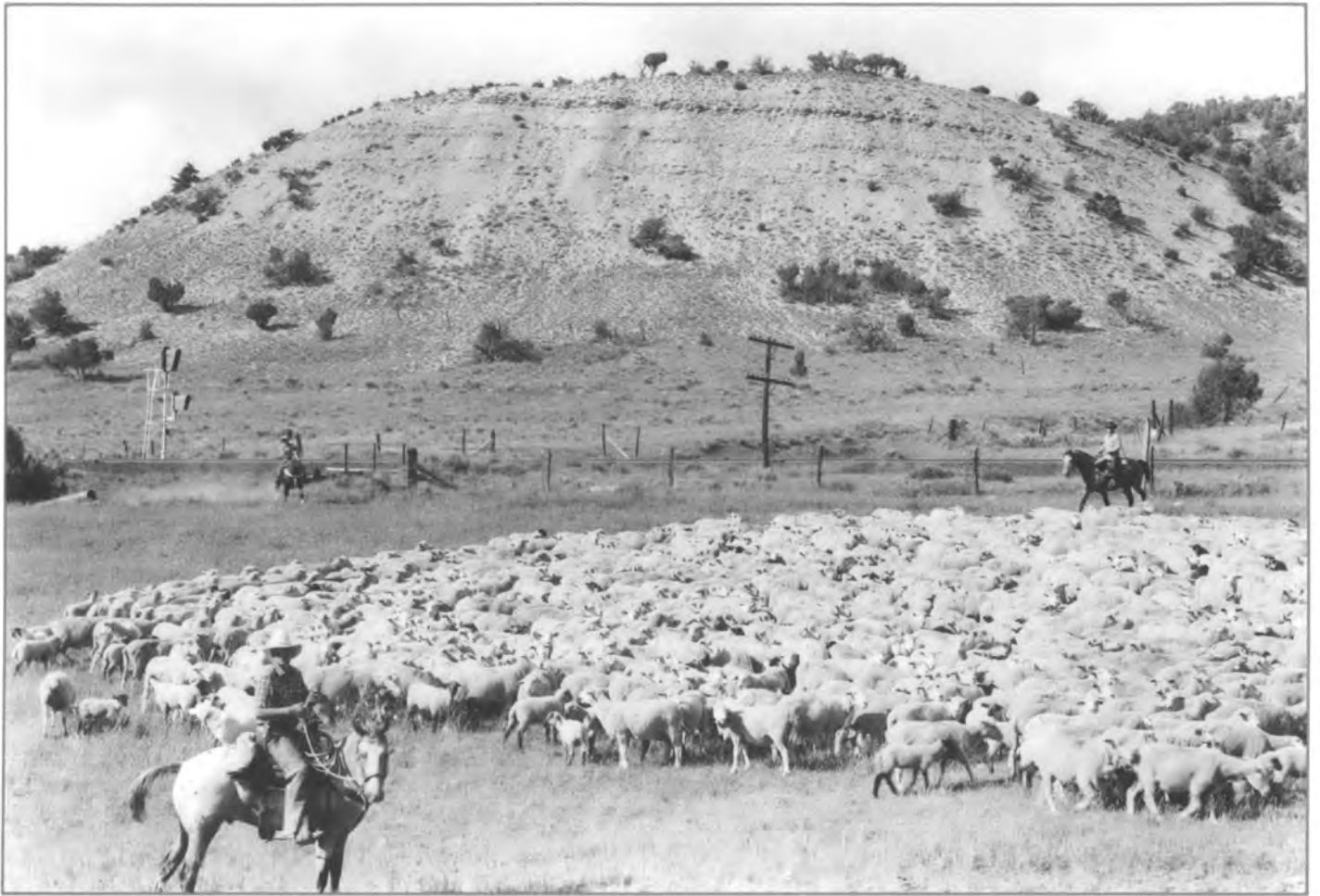
— Dude Kolling



ROBERT DAWSON.  
STORAGE TANKS,  
CORCORAN, CALIFORNIA,  
1984. FROM THE GREAT  
CENTRAL VALLEY  
PROJECT.



ROBERT  
DAWSON.  
GROUNDWATER  
PUMP, NEAR  
ALLENSWORTH,  
CALIFORNIA,  
1984. FROM  
THE GREAT  
CENTRAL  
VALLEY  
PROJECT.



THOMAS  
NEFF,  
HERDING  
CAMPBELL-  
HASMIRE  
SHEEP OFF  
MESA,  
NEAR  
EDWARDS,  
COLORADO.  
1986.

*"In 1987, the U.S. Patent Office said that all forms of animals short of homo sapiens can now be patented. Here's a handful of government bureaucrats who have arbitrarily redefined life. Their decision said that living things are 'manufactured products' and 'compositions of matter' indistinguishable, for all intents and purposes, from toasters and tennis balls.*



THOMAS  
NEFF,  
CROSSING  
THE EAGLE  
RIVER,  
NEAR  
EDWARDS,  
COLORADO.  
1986.



THOMAS  
NEFF.  
RANDY  
CAMPBELL  
ROPING A  
LAMB,  
1986.

*“Imagine a new form of tenant farmer in the coming decades — not only are they going to be leasing their land, they’re going to be leasing their animals, too. And every time a patented animal gives birth, they’re going to have to pay a royalty.”*

— Jeremy Rifkin, Foundation on Economic Trends



THOMAS  
NEFF.  
IRWIN  
CAMPBELL AND  
MARIO VILLA  
CASTRATING A  
LAMB,  
1986.



WENDY  
WATRISS/  
FREDERICK  
BALDWIN.  
BLACK  
RODEO,  
COWBOY'S  
PRAYER.  
EAST-  
CENTRAL,  
TEXAS,  
1982.



JIM  
RICHARDSON.  
CONNIE  
AND EINER  
SCHOU  
AT THEIR  
WEDDING  
DANCE,  
CUBA,  
KANSAS,  
1980.



JOHN  
MOSES.  
FARM-  
WORKER  
FAMILY,  
JOHNSTON  
COUNTY,  
NORTH  
CAROLINA,  
1976.



KEN  
LIGHT.  
PACKING  
SHED  
WORKER,  
RIO  
GRANDE  
VALLEY,  
TEXAS,  
1979.

*“‘Cheap food’ is not cheap when it is paid for by the ruin  
of land, families, and communities.*

*At present, almost none of the farmland in our country is paying  
its users enough to take proper care of it.*

*The result is severe soil loss and soil degradation. . . .*

*An agricultural policy that will reconcile the now competing interests of  
farm land, farm people, and urban consumers cannot be achieved  
except as a part of a long-term, coherent, all-inclusive policy of  
land use and land stewardship. The goal would be  
to increase gradually the number of family livelihoods  
in farming until we have enough people on the land,  
not only to make it produce, but to give it the good care  
that it needs and deserves. To divide the usable land  
among these many owners would be good for agriculture,  
good for the democracy, good for the land, and good for the consumer.”*

*— Wendell Berry, poet*





ROBERT  
DAWSON.  
CRACKED  
MUD AND  
VINEYARD,  
NEAR ARVIN,  
CALIFORNIA,  
1985. FROM  
THE GREAT  
CENTRAL  
VALLEY  
PROJECT.



ROBERT  
DAWSON.  
PLOW  
PATTERNS AND  
POWER POLES,  
SHERMAN  
ISLAND,  
CALIFORNIA,  
1982.  
FROM THE  
GREAT CENTRAL  
VALLEY PROJECT.



CARL  
FLEISH-  
HAUER.  
WICHITA,  
KANSAS,  
1980.

*Backroom of buckaroo Chuck Wheelock's house  
at the Reed Ranch, one of a group of ranches  
owned by absentee-landlord  
Willard Garvey.*

# Citizens' Forum on Agricultural Issues



Members of the Citizens' Forum included (top row, left to right) J. Benton Rhoades, executive director for the Committee on Agricultural Missions of the National Council of Churches; the Most Rev. L.T. Matthiesen, Catholic Bishop of Amarillo; Helen Vinton, a rural specialist with the Louisiana-based Southern Mutual Help Association and RAF/NSF board member; Hubert E. Sapp, executive director of the Highlander Research and Education Center in Tennessee; Dan Pollitt, law

On May 8, 1987, the Rural Advancement Fund of the National Sharecroppers Fund sponsored a Citizens' Forum in Washington, DC to commemorate the 50th anniversary of an initiative which would be incorporated as the National Sharecroppers Fund. An overflow crowd of friends, supporters, and media representatives packed the U.S. House of Representatives' Agricultural Committee Hearing Room as Forum participants discussed three issues central to the past and present work of RAF/NSF—family farms, farm labor, and biotechnology.

These seemingly diverse topics are linked by more than their relevance to the RAF/NSF program. Increasingly, farmers and farmworkers—once viewed as adversaries—are finding themselves on the same side of the fence, locked outside the policy councils and corporate boardrooms where crucial decisions affecting agriculture are made.

The Forum highlighted the need for a partnership between these two groups to define and pursue public policies that

professor at the University of North Carolina and RAF/NSF board member; Jim Hightower, Texas Commissioner of Agriculture and presiding chair for the hearing; Barbara Bode, director of the National Agenda for Community Foundations; and Baldemar Velasquez, farmworker-founder of the Ohio-based Farm Labor Organizing Committee.

RAF/NSF board members seated below the panel are: Rowland Watts, retired attorney and Workers Defense League co-founder; Gonze L. Twitty, South Carolina saw mill owner and president of the Southern Cooperative Development Fund; Dr. Charles Ratliff, Jr., economics professor at Davidson College in North Carolina; Rev. A. H. VandenBosche, retired Presbyterian minister and National Farm Worker Ministry board member; Robert Miles, Mississippi farmer and civil-rights activist; and Fay Bennett, NSF/RAF executive director from 1952 to 1970.

Special thanks to Robert Amberg for the photographs and Ralph Hils for a draft transcript of the hearing. Supporters of RAF/NSF are acknowledged on page 63.

## The Family Farm

*The first panel of witnesses provided a sobering analysis and a moving personal portrait of the state of family farm agriculture today.*

**HELEN WALLER, MONTANA GRAIN FARMER AND PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL SAVE THE FAMILY FARM COALITION:**

The family farm system of agriculture is threatened with extinction in America. More than 2,000 farm families are being forced off the land every week. Communities which once bustled with activity are being boarded up, with schools and churches no longer able to function for lack of people and money. The wealth of these communities has dried up because of national farm policy which allows farm production to be purchased by grain merchandisers at far below the cost of production, with deficiency payments to farmers failing to make up the difference.

The administration's market-oriented policy with its goal of getting the government out of farming is the blueprint for delivering our food-producing land into the hands of insurance companies, speculators, and the landed elite.

The assumption that there will ever be a "free market" for the transaction of grain commodities is a myth. In reality, it makes no difference to what facility a load of grain is delivered — local elevator, flour mill, or barge loading point. In each case, the price paid the farmer by the grain handler comes from a quotation off the Chicago Board of Trade, with an adjustment for transportation. There is no competition out there for our product. At this point, only the price support established in farm legislation can force the grain trade to bid up in order to get our grain. That price support gives us the option of borrowing against the value of our commodity from the federal CCC [Commodity Credit Corporation] at whatever price level the legislation dictates.

The loan level for wheat was set at

\$3.30 a bushel at the time John Block was Secretary of Agriculture. But the 1985 farm bill gave him the authority to drop that rate. And right before he left, he did just that — he dropped the loan rate to \$2.40. So the market price set by the grain trade immediately fell to meet that level. Traditionally, the loan rate set by the government sets the market price because that's their only competition.

So when it dropped from \$3.30 to \$2.40, that left us with a 90-cent deficit that had to come from the taxpayers' pockets [through "deficiency payments" provided in farm legislation]. And that's what made the farm program so extremely expensive. Instead of forcing the grain purchasers to pay \$3.30 a bushel, it shifted the burden directly on the taxpayers. And I'm saying that's wrong. Let the grain trade pay the value of the commodity, not the taxpayer. The taxpayers are now subsidizing grain processors.

Some say, "We have to export more grain." The present administration has consistently lowered loan rates — and



HELEN WALLER

consequently the market price — in an effort to be more competitive on the world market. But despite the low prices, foreign producers sell on the world market at just below whatever price the U.S. establishes.

What has this accomplished for U.S. grain farmers? Economic disaster. Since 1980, under a program of lowering loan rates, the United States has lost 50 percent of its export market, which represents a 58 percent drop in value. The present farm program of lower commodity prices is working counter to what the administration had anticipated, and at the same time is driving family farmers off the land.

This activity denounces one of the most basic principles on which this country was founded — the widely

will give them a fair share of the abundance which their labor brings to our tables. In recent months several groups, most notably members of the Rural Coalition, are rising to meet the challenge of exploring ways in which such a partnership may be forged.

Biotechnology, the "gene revolution," has grave implications for farmers, farmworkers, and consumers alike. While the Green Revolution affected only major grain crops, biotech products promise to impact every area in the future production of food and medicine. Biotechnology cannot simply be labeled "good" or "bad" — it is here and there's no turning back. But it is imperative that as citizens we ensure that its development be oriented to meet real and basic needs of society. For example, as Jack Doyle told the Forum panel, "Through genetic engineering, we can develop pest-resistant crops (and thereby reduce our dependency on chemical herbicides) or we can produce new pesticide-resistant crops that increase the marketing of pesticides."

The recent patenting of an animal has grave implications for all of us. Who will own the rights to patented living organisms, and to their offspring? Who will decide what characteristics to add or delete from the genetic code of life? Who will play God?

The substance of the Forum was talk, but its purpose was to spark action — action now, while we still have choices. Implicit in all the testimony and response was the need for each of us, as citizens, to make decisions. As Texas Agriculture Commissioner Jim Hightower, who chaired the Citizens' Forum, said in his summary of the day's testimony:

"It seems to me that a common theme running through all of this is that we're not talking about technical issues here. ... We're dealing with moral issues, matters of justice. We're really talking about stealing. They're stealing our farms; they're stealing the labor of our people; and perhaps now they're trying to steal our future. And 'they' are not the outlaws. 'They' are the officials — corporate, academic, and governmental officialdom."

Action is needed in all these arenas, action informed by the moral perspective and humane policies conveyed through this testimony and the Forum overviews reprinted on pages 12 to 14.

— Kathryn Waller  
Executive Director, RAF/NSF

dispersed ownership of land. America will be weaker if farm operators are no longer owners of the land they work.

The only way to reverse this trend is to replace the failing farm policy with a plan to restore economic and social justice in rural America. This plan has been formulated, beginning with hearings throughout the countryside where farmers have spoken out for price supports, supply management through farmer referenda, and parity — the return of the cost of production plus a reasonable profit at the farm level. This is the Family Farm Act, introduced by Congressman Dick Gephardt and Senator Tom Harkin.

Let me just add that I have a 20-year-old son who is now looking toward a future on the farm. The only way to reverse the outward flow of the farmer is to bring profitability back to the farm sector at the production level, at the level of the individual small farmer. When that happens, there will be plenty of incentive for young people to again enter the farming business. One of the bigger national tragedies we have now is the outward flow of some of the most educated, most efficient farmers on this land. And we will not, as a nation, be able to replace those people overnight. They won't come from the textbook setting of economists with their flowery speech about how the farm should be farmed. These will have to be dirt farmers that know the land and understand what it means to plant that seed and nurture that crop to maturity.

**TOM TRANTHAM, DAIRY FARMER FROM PELZER, SOUTH CAROLINA, AND PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED FARMERS ORGANIZATION:**

The family farmer is the man in the community who may go to town in a beat-up truck, but will have the most beautiful cows or a corn field with rows straight as an arrow. This is our pride, our quality, our Cadillac.

Farmers are working too hard, and not telling you — the American people — the real problems we've got. But now we have to. I'm ashamed to be here, and I'm ashamed to let you know what my financial situation is. I've worked all my life. I've condemned people that had financial situations like my own now. A few years ago, I had \$200,000 equity in my small family farm. Today, I'm \$200,000 in the hole. I can't walk into a bank, much less borrow any money from one. And I'm ashamed of that.

Just a couple of months ago [February

1987], I received the first check from the 1986 drought relief that the federal government put through. Ladies and gentlemen, my cows had only three weeks of feed left in July 1986. I had made the decision to part with my farm. I could not see my cows starving. In the drought of '83, a friend of mine tried to hold on — and his cows actually died on his farm. I made a promise to myself after seeing his cows that I would never let that happen.

In the drought of '86, I was ready to disperse our farm, and my family and I would have been packing our bags to leave our home. But the American people — not the government — turned that around. They brought salvation to my farm. Through the "farmer-to-farmer haylift" (see page 9), they brought what it took for us to survive. Today my cows are doing well. We're now harvesting South Carolina feed. It's a great pleasure to have fed them corn and hay from Iowa, Michigan, and Illinois — and the cows enjoyed it. But today we're feeding them South Carolina feed, and it's quite a pleasure.

Now then, that federal program money is going to help. It's going to help me buy the feed and seed to plant this year's crop and to continue on. But there was no way I could have survived the drought with my own resources or waited for the federal check that was due several months down the road.

If parity was at the farm level, we would have lost the crop of '86, but there would have been a profit in '85. There would have been a little nest egg, a savings account, or at least credit for us to fall back on. You can always tell a good year — a farmer will go out and buy a new pickup. And they will wear it out over the next five years, because the next five may not be too good. We're used to that. We can live with that kind of life.

Give me parity at the farm level, and I may buy a new pickup once in a while, but if a drought comes or the army



**TOM TRANTHAM**

worms hit my crop, I will be able to live through that. I think that says that God won't put more on us than we can bear — but I don't know about the government.

American agriculture is very profitable the instant it leaves the farm, but not a minute before. While farmers were helping farmers survive the most severe drought in 100 years, Cargill rolled up a 66 percent profit increase. The president of my own dairy co-op received a \$50,000 raise during the same time we were struggling to feed our cows.

Four years ago you paid \$1.89 for a gallon of milk and I received \$1.23. Today you pay \$2.43 per gallon and I receive \$1.14.

Each year the supply goes up, but the price goes down. So our only alternative is to increase production again and again.

Farmers can survive natural disasters, army worms, droughts, and boll weevils easier than they can survive federal policies aimed at putting us off the land. We have been forced to farm beyond our facilities and abilities. For instance, in the early 1980s I expanded my herd from 80 cows to 120, and believe me I went broke. My facilities are only capable of handling 80 cows. Increasing to 120 cows reduced my efficiency tremendously. My production dropped from 18,000 pounds of milk per year to 15,000 pounds.

**GEORGE AMMONS, A TURKEY FARMER FROM DUPLIN COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA, AND MEMBER OF THE UNITED FARMERS ORGANIZATION:**

I grew up on a farm, and now operate my own farm. It has proven to be a disastrous feat for me and my family. I inherited 150 acres free and clear. In order to make a living, I mortgaged the land to build four turkey houses. Like other black farmers, I could never get a limited-resource loan or any other low-interest loan, because we black farmers were not informed of the programs that were there for our benefit. Black farmers in the rural South have been in a continuous crisis for the past 50 years,



**GEORGE AMMONS (RIGHT)**

like white farmers are in now. We not only have faced the general decline in farm economy, but also neglect, racial discrimination, and economic exploitation.

When we did learn of our rights and opportunities and asked for them, the loan officers would always find excuses to refuse our applications. Those of us who were able to get loans were forced to take them at the highest interest rates. Most black farmers could not get loans at all and operated on just what cash they had or could get from family or friends. We have had to lease enough acreage to make a living. Many black farmers have been unable to add to the 25 or 40 acres they inherited in the 1800s.

I testified before the U.S. House Subcommittee on Civil Rights in 1984. Their own report documents an unequal distribution of agricultural credit and the denial of due process in obtaining farm ownership and operating loans. A report by the U.S. Civil Rights Commission in 1982 warned that unless lending policies at the Agriculture Department were changed, there would be no black farmers in the U.S. by the year 2000. That trend has not slowed because lending policies have not changed.

Experts agree that blacks are losing land at an annual rate of 500,000 acres.

This is 2.5 times faster than white farmers. Black farmers once owned over 15 million acres of farmland in the U.S. but today we own less than 3.2 million acres according to the 1982 U.S. Civil Rights Commission. In Duplin County there are 232 black farmers who operate over 7000 acres of land and most of these farmers are on the brink of disaster. And at the same time, there are only 181 black farmers under the age of 25 in the United States. If this current trend continues, blacks will be a landless people within the next 10 years. The loss of its land base will be devastating to Black America.

Like all family farmers we are the victims of low prices, high interest, tight credit, and natural disasters. And while fair prices and sensible farm policies would help us just as it would others, we do face extra problems due to years of discrimination. The research has already been done. We need to go ahead and solve the problems now. I recommend that:

— FmHA should be required to use its limited-resource, lower interest loan funds to provide operating and ownership loans to blacks and other truly limited-resource farmers as it was intended to do. Or a new special fund should be set up for this purpose.

— The Farm Credit System should also establish a special low-interest loan fund for blacks before any bailout occurs.

— A special watch-dog commission to oversee all USDA programs should be set up. This commission should have the power to collect data and to publicize regularly on a county-by-county basis the distribution of benefits of USDA programs by race. It should have the authority to investigate violations and discrimination on site rather than in Washington.

— More blacks should be hired, promoted and appointed to important decision-making committees within USDA.

— Special extension agents for each county with the sole responsibility of assisting black and other limited-resource farmers should be funded. This includes enlarging the current 1890 land grant college small farmers programs.

— Anytime limits are set on the amount of debt or equity a farmer must have to qualify for programs, the situation of black and other small-acreage or low-equity farmers should be taken into account. For example, the 1985 Farm Bill set a minimum of \$40,000 per year in sales for a borrower to qualify for FmHA protections. This leaves out many black and small farmers.

— As thousands of acres of farmland are taken into inventory by Farmers Home and the Farm Credit System, this land could be redistributed to blacks after the previous owners have had first chance to buy or lease back the land. A priority should be set on giving blacks opportunities to acquire this land and thus offset some of the devastating land loss.

As taxpayers, we have paid our fair share for USDA programs, but we have not received our fair share of the benefits.

**WENDELL BERRY, KENTUCKY FARMER, AUTHOR, AND POET:**

It is not just the needs of the farm people that should determine agricultural policy, but also the needs of the farm land. A wise agricultural policy would seek out and foster those accommodations by which the interests of farm land and the interests of farm people cease to be competitive interests and become the same. If these two interests are reconciled, then the legitimate agricultural interests of urban people —

permanent, healthy supplies of food and water — will be met as well.

Much of the farmland of the United States is extremely vulnerable to erosion, and it therefore requires extraordinary concern and skill of its users. In general, the more marginal and vulnerable the land, the less it has repaid care, and the less care it has received. At present, almost none of the farmland in our country is paying its users enough to take proper care of it. The result is serious and sometimes severe soil loss and soil degradation.

A related problem is the pollution of our soil and water by agricultural

chemicals. In terms of land use and land-use policy, these substances must be understood as labor substitutes or labor replacers. The evils of erosion and pollution signal the decline of the farming population, both in numbers and in the necessary devotion and skill.

Almost every agricultural problem that we have is either caused or made worse by overproduction. Overproduction, in turn, is caused by the economic individualism, the wide dispersal, and the disarray of the farm population, abetted by advances in plant breeding and in chemical and mechanical technology. Overproduction is now widely recognized as a destroyer of farm families and communities; that it is equally destructive of land has, so far, been less noticed or less acknowledged. Production control, of course, is the obvious and the proper solution, and production control is properly the work of the federal government, since that is the only organization that includes all potential competitors.

The goal of a sound agricultural policy would be to increase gradually the number of family livelihoods in farming until we have enough people on the land, not only to make it produce, but to give it the good care that it needs and deserves. To divide the usable land among as many owners as possible, given the requirements that the use of land implies an inescapable necessity to care for it, would be good for agricul-



WENDELL BERRY

ture, good for the people, good for democracy, good for the land, and good for consumers.

To such an agricultural policy there will be three objections: (1) that it would impose checks and corrections upon the working of the free market; (2) that it would obstruct the further development of large-scale industrial agriculture, which has long been the chief aim of the agribusiness corporations, the agricultural bureaucracy, and the colleges of agriculture; and (3) that it would increase the cost of food.

The answer to the first objection is that the so-called free market is responsive only to the most immediate economic objectives. It cannot define or respond to the long-

term requirements of the land, the users of the land, or of the consumers of the land's products. It cannot, that is, define or enforce the requirements of a responsible land stewardship.

The answer to the second objection is that large-scale industrial agriculture, with its industrial aims and standards, is the chief cause of the present problems in rural America. Large-scale industrial agriculture has failed, and its failure is written incontrovertibly in the statistics of soil erosion, soil pollution, ground water pollution, aquifer depletion, bankruptcy, family failure, and community death.

The answer to the third objection is that it will not increase the cost of food in the grocery store by much, and that it will greatly reduce its environmental and human costs. "Cheap food" is not cheap when it is paid for by the ruin of land, families, and communities. The food industry, in the midst even of the present farm depression, remains enormously profitable to agricultural suppliers, and to the transporters, processors, advertis-

### A Choice of Church or the Cows

**Question from Bishop L.T. Matthiesen:** *If you had all the religious leadership in the country, what would you say to us that we can do to help this situation?*

**Tom Trantham:** *You've got to help us get parity at the farm level. When we make a profit, my son will stay on the farm, Helen's son will stay on the farm. We'll pay our bills. There will be no bank failings. We will feed you cheaper than anyone in the world. We have fed you cheaper, and we will continue to.*

*We hear talk about if we get parity at the farm level, it will push the price of food up. Well, we could go up just four cents on a loaf of bread and it would double the price of a bushel of wheat to the farmer. Four cents! You put profit at the farm level, through parity, and farmers will stay home and do their work.*

*Farmers are unified on the need for price relief. A few weeks ago, with Helen Waller, we had 20 farmers together in Vermont representing groups from all over the country. And we left there united.*

*A profit of 66 percent is excessive. That's what Cargill is making. Excessive profit is sinful. But you put profit back into farming and you won't have farmers in trouble. When we were in Vermont, a man blew his brains out and the lady sitting next to me was his neighbor. He had lost his wife and Farmers Home was foreclosing on his farm. He had no other reason to live.*

*What we need is a reasonable profit, not an excessive profit. And if we had that, I could cut my cows back down to 80 cows and be in your church on Sunday. But now, I have to milk 120, and by the time I'm through milking, you've already left your church.*



BISHOP L.T. MATTHIESEN

ers, and marketers of food. In view of this, is it not more than bad faith to object to a decent increase of earnings to food producers?

**BETTY BAILEY**, DIRECTOR OF RAF'S FARM SURVIVAL PROJECT AND AUTHOR OF THE POLICY STATEMENT ON PAGE 12, SUMMARIZED THE CHOICE CONFRONTING EVERY CITIZEN OF THIS COUNTRY REGARDING THE FATE OF THE FAMILY FARM:

We can continue present government programs which reward greed and worship excess, exploiting family farmers, taxpayers, and consumers while encouraging the destruction of our precious soil and water resources; or we can implement policies to support and enlarge our pool of small and mid-size independent farmers, providing incentives for competitive and innovative family farm entrepreneurs. We have a choice.

**BETTY BAILEY**



## The Farmworkers

*The testimony of the second set of witnesses shifted the hearing's focus from the family farmer to the thousands of farmworkers who spend their lives harvesting many of the foods that appear each day on American tables and whose lives are still threatened by unjust, hazardous, even lethal, working conditions.*

**ROGER C. ROSENTHAL**, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE WASHINGTON-BASED MIGRANT LEGAL ACTION PROGRAM (MLAP):

There have been changes for the better for migrant farmworkers in the 50 years since the National Sharecroppers Fund was established. There have been some positive changes even in the past 25 years. But that does not take away one bit from the fact that the present status of migrant farmworkers is still abysmal. It is, in fact, a national disgrace.

I have seen the small one-room shack in Orange County, New York, one hour from New York City, which stands, unattached and unanchored, on stone pilings and which literally lifts off those pilings, tilting to one side, when the worker who lives there moves from one end of the room to the other. I have heard the story of the public health nurse who worked with farmworkers in labor

camps in North Carolina, a woman who thought she had lost her capacity for shock, having found terrible medical conditions among her patients including active cases of tuberculosis. One day she had to change her scheduled visit to a particular labor camp. She arrived, unannounced, early in the morning just in time to see the camp crewleader put the guard dogs away. She had not known that her patients were literally held captive at night in their labor camp.

Well, you might say, there are federal laws to protect these workers. But let us take a moment to look at some of these laws.

The Fair Labor Standards Act which mandates a minimum wage and prohibits child labor was passed by the Congress in 1938 — but it took 30 more years for farmworkers to be covered by the law. Even so, two-thirds of all farmworkers are still not covered because threshold requirements make it applicable only to larger employers. It took ten more years, until 1977, for farmworkers to obtain the same minimum wage level as other workers. And in spite of the fact that farmworkers toil long hours in the fields, sometimes 12 hours or more a day, they are still not entitled to overtime. Moreover, the extent to which employers do not

comply with the minimum wage is shocking; so is the sorry enforcement record by the U.S. Department of Labor.

Working conditions covered by federal statutes are also not enforced. Crew leaders routinely misrepresent the conditions of employment, which workers only discover after being taken hundreds of miles from home. There are also problems of housing, transportation, pesticides, and safety that come up daily throughout the country.

The National Labor Relations Act, which covers more than 40 million workers across this nation, does not apply to farmworkers. Therefore, the struggles of all worker groups to achieve contracts and union recognition from employers are truly modern-day versions of the tale of David and Goliath. The successes of these worker groups against the huge corporate interests in agriculture are successes against absolutely overwhelming odds.

And then there is the story of field sanitation — the 15-year fight to obtain the right to a toilet, handwashing facilities, and potable drinking water in the fields. In principle, the Occupational Safety and Health Act protects farmworkers' rights along with non-agricultural employees. Yet in the early '70s, the Department of Labor failed to act on



a petition by farmworkers to promulgate a field sanitation standard. That standard, which was finally issued one week ago on May 1, took 15 years to obtain, including a full trial and several appeals to the U.S. Court of Appeals which finally ordered the Department of Labor to issue the standard immediately. And yet the standard, due to Congressional restrictions, still does not cover 80 percent of farmworkers. These workers remain unprotected, subjected to the daily indignities of squatting in the fields, dehydration, and exposure to toxic pesticides without the ability to wash them off.

To make matters worse, the current federal administration has targeted farmworker programs for massive cuts or extinction. In budgets submitted to the Congress, it has requested substantial cuts in the Chapter 1 migrant education program, substantial cuts in the FmHA farm labor housing program, and extinction of the tiny but important High School Equivalency and College Assistance Migrant Programs.

The presidentially appointed board of the Legal Services Corporation has specifically targeted migrant legal services programs for large cuts or extinction. My agency, the Migrant Legal Action Program, has just fought off an attempt by the Legal Services Corporation to defund our program. The Corporation has threatened to cut the Texas farmworker program by three-quarters, despite the fact that its figures show a three-fold increase in migrant farmworkers and dependents over the past ten years.



Another serious problem on the horizon is the impact of the new immigration law on farmworkers. Domestic U.S. workers, in as yet untold numbers, may lose their jobs to imported foreign workers. And the actions of the Immigration and Naturalization Service and the U.S. Department of Labor in implementing the new statute are extremely discouraging to farmworker advocates.

A lot of people don't understand that migrant farmworkers don't seek government help and don't come to our offices as clients in an urban setting do. Legal

Services paralegals and attorneys have to go out to the labor camps to let people know their services are available.

Because of the lack of control that farmworkers feel about their lives and their economic situation, they are very afraid of rattling the cage or of seeking assistance. They know that if they do, they may not get the job the next year, and even though it doesn't pay them the minimum wage, it's the difference between their children having clothes and starving. They don't want to lose

## Campaign to Control Pesticides

**Question from Hubert Sapp:** *I'm interested to know if you see any possibilities for linking farmworkers together with others who are endangered by pesticides?*

**Evelyn Mattern:** *Farmers also know very little about the pesticides they're using. I think that is an area where farmers and farm workers could work together. In both cases, they have been very poorly served by the producers of chemicals who don't label things properly, and by the government that doesn't require correct labeling. The first time I went to a legislative committee hearing in our state on agricultural issues, I was the only non-chemical company person in the room. I was naive enough to think*

*that people there from Shell Oil and Sunoco were in the wrong room!*

**Rev. A. H. VandenBosche:** *The National Farm Worker Ministry has just voted at its last executive board meeting to go nationwide on its pesticide campaign. I conceive that this is the thing that can bring people together. In many ways this could be more effective than the grape boycott and Campbell's boycott because it will bring so many of us together. Churches can and should be involved in this issue, from the National Council of Churches to the local congregation.*



EVELYN MATTERN

the little that they have.

Farmworkers must be brought out from the shadows into the light of day. This country must confront its obligations to help people who are the key to our economy and our well being. We must not turn our backs on those who are poisoned by pesticides, denied decent housing and who suffer the indignity of terrible wages and working conditions. We must rededicate ourselves to sustaining the hard-working men, women, and children who sustain us through picking the food we serve on our table every day.

**SISTER EVELYN MATTERN, REPRESENTING 25 DENOMINATIONS WITHIN THE NORTH CAROLINA COUNCIL OF CHURCHES:**

North Carolina, where I come from, has the third largest number of farmworkers in the country. There are approximately 100,000 seasonal farmworkers who live in our state year-round, and another 60,000 migrants who come from Florida, Texas, or the larger East Coast cities to help with the planting or picking of tobacco, sweet potatoes, cucumbers, peppers, and other vegetables. Seasonal workers in North Carolina tend to be black American families; migrant farmworkers are generally single black males traveling in crews or Hispanic families traveling in extended family groups. There are also smaller numbers of Haitians, Cubans, and Central Americans.

Unlike the very large migrant labor camps one sees in other parts of the country, farmworkers in North Carolina typically live in small cinder block camps, groups of trailers, old pack houses, tenant shacks on the farmer's land, old tobacco barns, and — increasingly — in independent housing that they find in the towns near where they work.

The treatment of farmworkers in North Carolina is best understood by remembering that we are a former slave state. There have indeed been ten slavery convictions against crew leaders in our state in the last six years, and I myself have taken men from camps who tried to escape and were bloodied and beaten in the attempt. As a measure of attitudes that persist, our state legislature declined to pass a state anti-slavery law in 1983, largely because of intense lobbying against it by the North Carolina Farm Bureau.

Nevertheless, it may be that the most pervasive and persistent slavery today is

not the kind that relies on guns and whips and vicious dogs. Economic slavery destroys as much human potential from generation to generation as did the legalized slavery of the Old South. Economic slavery is based on piece work and "debt peonage," whereby half of every dollar earned goes to the crew leader, who then deducts further exorbitant amounts for travel, housing, meals, cigarettes, alcohol, and (now, increasingly) drugs. By the end of the season, the soul of a whole family may be owned, as Tennessee Ernie Ford sang it, by the "company store."

Much of this economic slavery is legal. In our state farmworkers have no rights to worker's compensation, overtime pay, collective bargaining, freedom from invasion by pesticides, or even visitors in their employer-owned

housing. Because of lack of enforcement of laws that do exist, farmworkers are practically excluded from minimum-wage laws, unemployment insurance, social security benefits, and alcohol, drugs, and firearms laws, and child labor laws. Agriculture is the third most dangerous occupation in our country, and farmworkers have twice the rate of hospitalization as the general public. But the "agricultural community" — in our state, defined solely as farmers — remains unique in deferring the entire cost of medical care for farmworkers onto the taxpayer. Our state legislature is right now in the process of vigorously rejecting inclusion of farmworkers in worker's compensation laws because the costs of such coverage would be, as one legislator said to me, "the last spike in the farmer's coffin."

**BALDEMAR VELASQUEZ**



### *The Potential of Partnership*

**Baldemar Velasquez, panel member and leader of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, reflected on his experiences with the boycott of Campbell's Soup and the connections between the first two segments of the Forum's testimony:**

*Growing up in Texas and working on many of the small farms that were described earlier, I always felt that these were the rich people. Over the years I've come to understand that the "small family farmer" on whose farms we worked — in comparison with the rest of the people in this society — are not "rich."*

*The system is arranged so that the food processors are buying a very perishable crop. So the farmer, who is contracted to that processor, has no economic will of his own. And the farmworker has no economic will. The farmer can't retain anything in order to get a higher price for it. It'll rot. And the farmworker is told that the processor*

*isn't his employer. So they really have us.*

*In the struggle we've had in the Midwest, the only option we had was to organize to demand multi-party collective bargaining [between farm labor, farmers, and the processor] and just boycott the heck out of the processors until they come to the bargaining table. We've signed Campbell's and we've just signed Heinz as well.*

*I think there's widespread sympathy across the country for the small farmer, as there is for the farmworker. If we combine the two forces, we could see a coalition whose impact goes beyond anything either group has imagined before. When the economic will of the American public can come together and focus on one bank or one of these characters who makes these decisions that hurt us all, we have the power to move mountains.*

In the Old South, although the entire economy depended on the labor of slaves, their reality as persons was denied. They had to be invisible for the system to survive. It is the same with farmworkers today. The makeshift tobacco barns, tenant houses, and trailers that serve for their shelter are far from the main roads. Health inspectors can't find them, and sheriffs don't want to.

Agencies don't have data on farmworkers. Try to find out how many there are, where they are living, which farmers use them, what pesticides they are exposed to, what injuries have been sustained, what the various agencies define a farmworker to be. You end up agreeing with Truman Moore who wrote in 1965 in "The Slaves We Rent" that our government knows more about migrating birds than migrating farmworkers.

This failure to keep accurate records of migrants and their living conditions is no accident. Right now, the North Carolina Council of Churches — for which I work — is suing the Farmers Home Administration over this issue. That agency has unspent money for farmworker

housing programs, and our state has ten counties designated by the agency as areas of high need for these programs. When we applied for some of that money, we were told that there was no need and no demand. We are outraged, but we realize that the reason we have been denied is that we had the temerity to buy a piece of land for housing that is on a main road, near a town, with access to grocery stores, school bus stops, and middle-class white people.

To break this modern system of slavery, I recommend the development of:

- comprehensive federal and state policies that include farmworkers in agricultural programs, rather than the current proliferation of federal and state agencies using too little money to work in fragmented ways;

- far-reaching agricultural policies that encourage small-scale farming, local markets for farm products, and the drastically reduced use of herbicides and pesticides;

- full coverage of all farmworkers in state and federal labor, health and safety, insurance, and housing laws, and



*... the most pervasive and persistent slavery today is not the kind that relies on guns and whips and vicious dogs. Economic slavery destroys as much human potential as did the legalized slavery of the Old South.*

— **EVELYN MATTERN.**

vigorous enforcement of these laws;

- church and privately sponsored programs that put attorneys, organizers, and leadership development trainers into the field to assist farmworkers, much as the church has done in support of migrant social workers; and

- a hemispheric economic policy that invests U.S. dollars in small-scale

development projects in Mexico and the rest of Latin America. As long as U.S. foreign policy dollars in the region go primarily to support repression, we will continue to see a flow of people from there to here. You can't build walls high enough, nor man enough guns, to stop hungry people who have nothing to lose.



# Biotechnology

*The third area focused on by the Citizens' Forum represents a new presence in agriculture — biotechnology or the engineering of living organisms to make or modify products. But, as Jim Hightower said in introducing the witnesses, this new technology hinges in many ways on "an old issue of the pre-eminence of science, bureaucracies, and corporate systems over people and human institutions."*

**JEREMY RIFKIN**, FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF THE FOUNDATION ON ECONOMIC TRENDS IN WASHINGTON, DC:

Let me try to place this biotechnology revolution in context. The world economy is making a long-term transition out of petrochemical-based resources into biological resources. Similarly, we're moving out of industrial-based technologies into biotechnologies. There is a very big question mark about how we'll organize the Age of Biology as we move into the twenty-first century.

There are two broad philosophical and technological options. On the one side, we have ecologically based technologies, a science based on empathy with the environment and stewardship of our natural resources. On the other side, we have a reductionist-

based technology that intervenes in the genetic code and the blueprints of living things.

I can best express it by way of two images. If you open up a chemical trade magazine, you will see envisioned there twenty-first century farms where animals are chemical factories, where the chemical and pharmaceutical companies control the entire process, and where agriculture is reduced to industrial technology and industrial terminology.

I saw another image of the farm future eloquently expressed in the *Washington Post* a few months ago. It was a news article about a Midwestern farm which, in the 1970s, had gone over from petrochemically based agriculture to organic agriculture. It had diversified its crops, it had moist soil, and was doing well. Surrounding that farm were farms that looked like they were embedded in poison, with chemicals, pesticides, and fertilizers. The one farm was doing quite well with minimum energy inputs and was producing quality crops while the farms around it were going out of business.

I think it's naive and disingenuous for the chemical industry to say we have only one future — biotechnology. I do not believe that biotechnology is a *fait*

*accompli* for us in the twenty-first century. It will depend on the will and vision of citizens around the world as to what kind of future they want.

Let me go into several aspects of biotechnology which dramatically illustrate the problems we face; but let me also preface this by saying that the basic assumptions of biotechnology exacerbate all the problems of the Green Revolution: We're going to have increased monoculturing and loss of gene diversity because, by its very nature, genetic engineering is designed to streamline plant and animal species more quickly than classical breeding techniques can. And we will see the loss of soil nutrients. Biotechnology aims to imprint efficiency into the genetic codes of plants and animals so we can grow more in less time. But from non-equilibrium thermodynamics we know there's no such thing as a free lunch. You cannot continue to accelerate the production of biologically useful utilities without depleting the nutrient base.

Let me give you three examples of problem areas. First, there is the regulation of genetically engineered organisms that will be placed on our farmland on a massive scale. You probably know that the first genetically engineered microbe was released recently in a plot of California land after a four-year regulatory and court struggle. The chemical, pharmaceutical, and biotech companies are talking about introducing scores, then hundreds, then thousands of genetically engineered viruses, bacteria, plant strains and animal breeds into our commercial agricultural system. That's the scale we're talking about. Dupont is to set up a \$200 million life science complex and Monsanto a \$150 million complex. Right now we introduce thousands of chemical products each year, and not all of them are safe. Imagine introducing thousands of genetically engineered bacteria and viruses. It strains the imagination to believe they will all be safe.

Next, we have the Bovine Growth Hormone (BGH), a classic example of the problems with this technology. We're producing too much milk in this country, yet the chemical companies come up with the BGH which will increase milk production, throw thousands of farmers out of business, and further degrade the rural communities of this country — just so there can be some profits for Upjohn, Eli Lilly,



**JEREMY RIFKIN**

Monsanto and some other companies. But we don't believe that the BGH is a *fait accompli* either. We have a coalition building here and in Europe; we plan a nationwide and international boycott in the next year. We're going to ask families all over the world whether they want to have milk from cows injected with the BGH.

Finally, let me raise one more issue — animal patenting. About a week and a half ago the U.S. Patent Office said that all forms of animals short of *homo sapiens* can now be patented, even animals with human genes functioning in their genetic codes. This has tremendous ethical implications. Here's a handful of government bureaucrats who have arbitrarily redefined life. They said in their patent decision that living things are "manufactured products" and "compositions of matter" indistinguishable, for all intents and purposes, from toasters and tennis balls.

The impact on animal husbandry is going to be devastating. Imagine a new form of tenant farmer in the coming decades — not only are they going to be leasing their land, they're going to be leasing their animals, too. And every time a patented animal gives birth, they're going to have to pay a royalty. When they sell their herds, they're going to have to pay royalties. If you're a dairy or hog farmer or a cattleman, this is the kiss of death.

One last point: Opposition to genetic engineering is building and it cuts across traditional ideological boundaries. This isn't a rightwing-leftwing question. It poses a whole new spectrum — sacredness and respect for life versus utilitarianism. We have animal welfare organizations joining with national farmer groups against the patenting of animal life. In the Baby M case and other issues, feminists are finding themselves sharing some sentiments with people in the right-to-life movement. We have conservative Christians joining with environmentalists. I think the Age of Biology is creating new alignments where constituencies can come together regardless of old wounds and old histories.

This is a particularly strong international effort as well. Over 140 organizations from all over the Asian continent recently came together for a conference in Malaysia. Among other things, they passed a resolution advocating a total moratorium on all genetic engineering until a risk-assessment science can be

developed. And they said they don't want any dumping of genetically engineered products in the Third World. Instead, their resolution called for research and study for sustainable agriculture futures. I think that we in this hemisphere have to move together with our European, African, and Asian friends and develop a worldwide movement to oppose aspects of genetic engineering technology and to favor new organic approaches to agriculture for the next century.

**JACK DOYLE OF THE WASHINGTON-BASED ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY INSTITUTE:**

The definition of biotechnology that farmers, farmworkers, and others should insist upon is the broadest one possible; one that embraces what I call "common sense genetics." We should not become so enamored of agricultural biotechnology that we go out of our way for a high-tech solution when a common-sense alternative is right in front of us.

If we use this new biology only to divide up the natural world into its smallest possible commercial parts — that is, if we use this knowledge only to patent the genes of nitrogen fixation or photosynthesis to make products, rather than improve our ability to work *with* the biological realm — we may only create further economic and environmental problems for the future.

But biotechnology does provide us with some new tools and some new opportunities. Let me offer you one possibility: I believe it would be possible to drastically reduce, if not totally eliminate, the use of pesticides in agriculture by "building-in" disease and insect resistance into crops and livestock with the help of biotechnology.

Certainly, we have increasing public concern over the use of pesticides in agriculture, pesticide residues in food, groundwater pollution, and farmer/farmworker poisonings. Why not use the opportunity of biotechnology to call for

a major national program in disease and insect resistance research that would eliminate the need for pesticides in agriculture? One could look at this as a kind of "preventative medicine" or a pro-active public health strategy.

I believe such a program would elicit widespread public support and accomplish several things simultaneously. First, it would reduce public, farmer, and farmworker exposure to pesticides. Second, it would reduce the cost of production for farmers and thereby improve farm income and profitability. Third, it should improve consumer faith in the agricultural system and possibly reduce prices once all associated "pesticide costs" were reduced through the system. And fourth, it could provide a powerful basis for rejuvenating the

land grant universities and agricultural experiment stations.

Part of the reluctance to pursue this kind of research in a major way dates to the discovery and widespread use of cheap and abundant pesticides, antibiotics, and animal drugs that became available at the end of World War II. In this country, we were doing a lot of good disease and insect resistance research at the turn of the century and on into the 1930s. But there was a powerful disincentive to continue this research as the chemical and pharmaceutical approaches gained precedence and the genetics of yield became the exclusive focus.

While the new biology has the potential to move us out of the chemical pesticide era, some troubling developments may preclude society from pursuing this opportunity.

We know, for example, that there are more than 30

companies exploring ways to give crops the genetic wherewithal to resist chemicals, not pests — and thus subject them to the application of more herbicides. U.S. Forest Service researchers are exploring ways to make forest trees resistant to herbicides. Others are considering ways to give honeybees genes to make them resistant to the side



**JACK DOYLE**

effects of certain insecticides. And still others are exploring ways to make chemical growth regulators serve as prompts or signals for turning genes on or off in crops and livestock.

The net effect of such research will be to further entrench the chemical and supplement approaches in agriculture. Such approaches will likely prove to be increasingly expensive, inefficient, and environmentally damaging when compared to using "built in" genetic resistances and other common-sense biological strategies. To prolong the old and outdated chemical and supplement approaches in agriculture with biotechnology is, I believe, going the long way around the barn. Today's new biology gives us a chance to be smarter and safer.

The potential for biotechnology to broaden agricultural opportunity and improve public health and safety will be eclipsed if the technology only becomes a vehicle for further economic consolidation. Quite simply, genes are becoming a substitute for labor and resources in agriculture, and thereby a powerful ingredient for economic consolidation throughout the food system. The Congressional Office of Technology Assessment prepared a report last March which says the net effect of biotechnology will be to cut in half the number of farmers we now have. "Of all the technologies coming to agriculture," the report says, "the biotechnologies will have the greatest impact because they will enable agricultural production to become more centralized and vertically integrated."

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*There are over 100 projects in biotechnology sponsored by the chemical warfare and biological defense program.*

— DR. SUSAN WRIGHT

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The old lines that separated chemical, pharmaceutical, seed, and energy companies are becoming obsolete in this new age because DNA, the genetic code of life, is the common raw material in all

their undertakings. A handful of companies now control the world's chemical crop industry; these are also the major pharmaceutical firms, and the plant breeding companies. They are the companies that will be the leading biotechnology companies. These are life science corporations using DNA as their raw material.

How do you make a technology like this — one that can be lodged in so few hands — accountable? We must insist that this technology is accessible and broadly available — and that involves a strong public sector presence. That is why pursuing projects like disease and insect resistance research are in the broad public interest and serve as a spur to, and a check upon, the private sector.

**DR. SUSAN WRIGHT** OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN ILLUMINATED THE MILITARY APPLICATIONS OF BIOTECHNOLOGY:

It would be a tragic reversal if the agricultural pests which farmers and farmworkers have worked so hard to control are given new life by the military establishment as weapons to destroy crops. Biological weapons are organisms — viruses, bacteria, fungi — that are used to cause death or disease in people, animals, or plants. During and after the second world war, extensive research and development efforts in

many countries, including the United States and the Soviet Union, transformed biological weapons from crude instruments of sabotage into weapons of mass destruction. Fortunately, biological weapons have not been extensively assimilated into military systems, but specialized uses against economic or other strategic targets like agricultural crops or forests may be envisaged. The monocultures of modern agriculture are particularly vulnerable to biological warfare.

As a result of strong international and domestic opposition to the development of chemical and biological weapons in the 1960s, recourse to biological warfare is prohibited by an extensive international legal regime. The 1972 Biological Weapons Convention — the most extensive disarmament treaty in existence — prohibits development, production, and stockpiling of biological and toxin weapons. The 1925 Geneva Protocol prohibits use of biological as well as chemical weapons. The United States, the Soviet Union, and most other major states are parties to these treaties.

In theory, then, the threat of biological warfare should have been eliminated. However, in recent years, particularly since 1980, there have been renewed grounds for concern.



First, biotechnology provides the means not only for enhanced control over the behavior of living things but also the ability to construct novel organisms and substances. A Pentagon report released last year claimed that exotic new bioweapons are now within reach of industrialized nations and even those that are less developed.

Second, since 1980, the Reagan Administration has repeatedly accused the Soviet Union of violations of the biological warfare legal regime. In each instance, however, the evidence for these charges has turned out to be tenuous. For example, the "yellow rain" claimed by George Schultz as a "lethal toxin weapon" developed by the Soviet Union for use by the Vietnamese turned out to be nothing other than the feces of Southeast Asian honeybees. The Reagan Administration has not received support for its allegations from any other nation, but these charges have helped persuade Congress to increase appropriations for chemical and biological warfare programs.

Third, since 1980, there have been steep increases in spending on the Chemical Warfare and Biological Defense programs. The request for fiscal year 1987 of \$1.44 billion is 554 percent of 1980's level. Support for research and development for these programs is projected at \$220.4 million — an increase of 400 percent over FY 1980. In real terms, spending now exceeds the highest levels of the 1960s when an active chemical and biological warfare program was being pursued.

Many of these new military research dollars have a heavy emphasis on biotechnology. Eighteen government laboratories and over 100 universities and corporations are involved in this work. In 1984, there were over 100 projects in biotechnology sponsored by the chemical warfare and biological defense program.

Most of this research is "defensive" in the sense that the results — e.g. vaccines, detection systems — cannot be applied directly to the construction of new biological weapons. However, there are also "gray" areas where defensive interests and offensive interests coincide. In particular, the Department of Defense has announced plans to construct a new high-containment

facility at its chemical and biological warfare test site at Dugway Proving Ground, Utah, for the purpose of testing aerosols of lethal pathogens and toxins. For the immediate future, the Department intends to test "conventional" biological warfare agents such as anthrax, but the overall rationale for this facility suggests it anticipates testing genetically engineered pathogens as well.

The biological warfare program proposed for Dugway Proving Ground is unnecessary, provocative, and destabilizing. If pursued, this program will almost certainly stimulate neutralizing measures by adversary nations and a spiraling interaction of research and counter-research, eroding the Biological Weapons Convention to the point where it is no longer effective. Instead of deterrence, the U.S. program will cause

the nation and the world to be more threatened by relatively cheap, easily emulated biological arsenals.

In summary, crucial choices concerning the military use of biotechnology will be made in the near future. Much can be done now to strengthen the biological warfare legal regime and ensure that biotechnology is never used for the development of novel weapons.

**PAT MOONEY**, A CANADIAN MEMBER OF THE RAF INTERNATIONAL STAFF:

One of the things that got RAF/NSF involved in biotechnology and genetic engineering was the understanding that the corn leaf blight which hit Southern farmers in 1970 came first from the Philippines and then hopped through Mexico to the United States. It was effective as a disease because there are 160 kinds of corn growing in the fields,

## Just Say No

**Barbara Bode:** *How should we respond to the planned introduction of biotechnology in field agriculture?*

**Jeremy Rifkin:** *First, you have to recognize the endemic nature of this technology. This is eugenics. It's not about good and bad people — the technology itself is eugenics. If you are in a lab, you have to decide which genes to recombine, add, or delete.*

*Now what criteria will civilization establish to determine the good and bad genes? Every criterion I can think of is culturally biased to the moment. Even efficiency is only a 100-year-old value, unique to the modern age. Do we want to*

*imprint that in the genetic code of life?*

*This is not classical breeding. This is engineering the code of living things for short-term cultural, commercial, and social purposes. I believe we should not even entertain the notion of going ahead with certain aspects of this technology until we've had an informed debate over at least*

*two generations. I think we should just say no to any proposition to release genetically engineered organisms into the fields anywhere because there is no risk-assessment science to judge this by. We have no idea how to judge the consequences of this use of the technology.*

*I think it's time for people coming of age in this country and around the world to understand that just because something can be done does not necessarily mean it should be done. Ethics means the ability to say no to one thing so we can say yes to other alternatives.*

*I think there are two sets of broad alternatives: genetic engineering in agriculture versus a sustainable, organic agriculture policy; preventive medicine versus re-engineering the human being to live in the pollution and filth we've created; special genetically engineered crops for energy versus life-enhancing solar power.*

*We have to make these choices because genetic engineering is only one option. I'm very worried we're going to say we want a little of it. And then a little more of it. And then a little more.*

*And pretty soon we won't have any options for other alternatives.*



**JEREMY RIFKIN**

but all of them are almost genetically identical and all are vulnerable to the same disease.

The world's common bowl of food is a very small group of plants — about 30 of them — which give us about 95 percent of everything we eat. So we are all together vulnerable to the same kinds of problems and same kinds of diseases. The gene pool for these crops is important to all of us wherever we live today.

With genetic engineering and biotechnology — the control of genes — the ability to patent genes and control the future of crops boils down to control over the whole food system. Biotechnology has wonderful possibilities. The danger is partly the regulation of the technology and partly the direction the research is going.

It's a technology which could, on the one hand, reduce the costs of family farm production and increase profits; on the other hand, it could be used to increase overproduction of commodities and wipe out the family farm. It can go either way; it's for us to decide which way it does go.

It's a technology which could help us save endangered species, making it possible for us to have greater diversity in plant and animal life, or it could simply give us super cows and super bulls locked together in an eternal embrace, producing millions upon millions of genetically identical offspring. These are our options.

It's a technology which could increase the nutritional quality of food available to consumers at a fair price or which could simply increase the shelf-life of grocery store commodities. The choice as to which way it's going to go depends entirely upon us citizens, as voters.

And at this stage, it's clear we're not making those decisions. We're prepared to sit back and let the companies make those decisions for us. And by the nature of the technology itself, those decisions will have far-reaching life-changing consequences.

This magnifies the question of where the ownership of this technology lies. There's one very important distinction between the Green Revolution which affected us all a few decades back, especially the Third World, and the Gene Revolution which is affecting us all right now. The Green Revolution was, by and large, a public, non-profit enterprise; the Gene Revolution is entirely in the hands of the private

sector. There are very few controls by the public sector, very little government involvement in this technology.

The patenting and private monopolization of plant species, the monopolization of higher-order animal species and now even the possibility of the patenting of "human traits" — these developments pose questions for legislators, of course. But they pose much wider questions for the whole society. It's time, finally, for the religious institutions to get involved. They can no longer stand back from the discussion; they must deeply immerse themselves in the questions of what life really is and who owns it.

Who has the right to make decisions about the genetic make-up, about life itself? Who's got the right to say that a gene that's been cultivated by Third World farmers for ten thousand years can be endowed with intellectual property rights and monopolized by private companies when that genetic material moves from the

Third World to gene banks in the industrialized nations? The fact is that most of the breeding stock we use for plants and animals is based upon germ plasm from the developing countries.

The problems can be summed up in one particular situation that happened a couple of years ago. In the summer of 1985, Ciba-Geigy, one of the leading pharmaceutical companies also involved in biotechnology and crop chemicals, came to Ethiopia during the famine to sell a hybrid sorghum variety they owned. That sorghum seed came wrapped in three chemicals — two for disease protection and one to protect against Ciba-Geigy's leading herbicide, Dual. The whole package was there, in fact, to extend the sales of the herbicide rather than to help the Ethiopian farmers. These farmers couldn't afford the seed in the first place; in the second place, they couldn't afford hybrid seed that would yield no seed for future plantings; and finally, they couldn't afford the chemical package that came with it.

Worse than all that is the fact that Ciba-Geigy and most other companies use a strain of sorghum called zera-zera as the basic breeding stock for their hybrids, a strain that comes from Ethiopia in the first place. It is a strain which has been essentially extinct in that country since 1982. So now they're selling the strain back to the same country which gave it away freely in the first place. And that raises some morality questions for all of us as to who controls life and who has the right to benefit from life.

A few weeks ago, in a Rome meeting



*Who has the right to make decisions about the genetic make-up, about life itself?*

— PATRICK MOONEY

of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, it was proposed that the world work together through a commission on genetic resources to save germ plasm and to see to its free exchange among countries. This commission would establish a world gene fund financed by a tax of perhaps one percent on the retail price of seeds, to be paid by the seed companies. This tax would then be paid back, in a sense, to the Third World through the gene fund so that all the countries could save seed together and have mutual control over germ plasm resources. The United States is one of the few countries which opposes this proposal. We have a lot of work to do in that area.

In the end we're talking about the control of the entire food chain, not just the first link in that chain. And the prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread," should not be a prayer to a Ciba-Geigy or a Dupont or a Shell Oil. □





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Our thanks to the Gertrude and William C. Wardlaw Fund for grants which made possible, in part, the 50th Anniversary Citizens' Forum and the publication of this special edition. RAF/NSF wishes also to thank the Institute for Southern Studies for their work in producing this edition of *Southern Exposure* and for their valuable role in the continuing Southern Movement.

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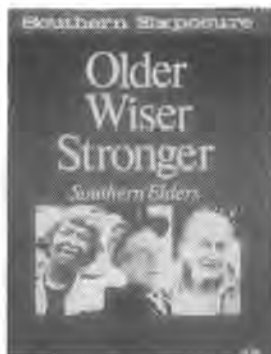
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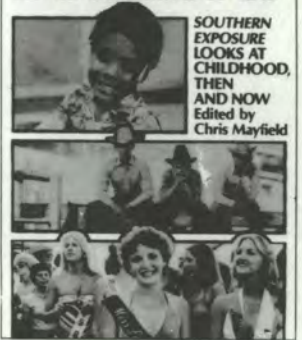
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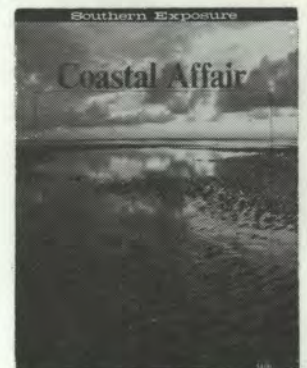


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