



# *Sustaining Life on the Land*

*Reflections on Rural Life*

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## **ACTIVITIES AND PROJECTS FOR PARISHES AND SCHOOLS**

In 1998 the Ohio Bishops issued a statement entitled, *Life on the Land: A Call to Reflection and Action on Agriculture in Ohio*. The following are ideas compiled by the Ohio Catholic Rural Life Conference.

### **Education/Service Programs for Schools and Religious Education**

#### **Parish Based Model**

The present agricultural system has led to a widening gap between food producers and consumers. This gap is characterized particularly by a lack of knowledge or awareness of the origin of our food, that is, what is involved in getting food to our tables.

A good place to start this education is the schools. Projects that will teach and engage children in a better understanding of the food system also leads them to a deeper appreciation of God's gifts of creation and the role all humanity plays in being good stewards of God's earth.

A helpful model in this approach is **Project Farm Hands**, a multifaceted program, developed by the Rural Life Office of the Toledo Diocese which has five independent projects which may be developed independently or together make up one project. One of the advantages of this program is the intentional involvement of children, faculty, parents and parishes and the farming community in the development and adaptation of the project.

**The Children's Project** is an in-school project. Teachers are encouraged to infuse agricultural, food and environmental principals throughout the curriculum. Where used, teachers have enjoyed the freedom and creativity to plan their own program utilizing resources from the local rural life office, library or local agricultural extension offices. Visits to a family farm and grocery store are included in the classroom activities. The **Project Farm Hands** handbook and video have examples for teachers in all areas of the curriculum.

**The Seed Project** encourages parishes to involve their members in gardening for the hungry. Gardeners are asked to "grow a row for the hungry" when planning their own vegetable gardens. Produce may be brought to the church on Sunday and a volunteer may deliver vegetables to a local food kitchen. Parishes may distribute seeds during the Feast of St. Isidore (patron of farmers) and offer a first fruits blessing in July or August to involve the parish in the project.

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**The Steer Project** involves projects for raising funds to pay the cost of raising and processing a steer or hog. Local family farmers may be found who will raise the animal and be reimbursed for their expenses. In this way the livestock farmer feels the support of the consumer, consumers become more aware of how animals are raised for food, and hungry people are fed

**Gleaning** is a biblical tradition in which farmers after their harvesting allow the poor into their fields to glean the leftovers. In our day this may be done through churches, service and youth groups working with farmers to glean much needed food which otherwise would go to waste.

**Worm Works** is a Toledo diocesan project that involves children in good stewardship and service to the hungry. Children have a worm box in their school to recycle food and other waste. They learn math and science skills and Christian values of care for God's creation and service to the poor. When the vermicompost is ready the children use it to plant vegetable seeds which later are transplanted into the 28 urban Toledo gardens. There children and adults are involved in growing their own food and caring for their neighborhoods. Schools from all over the diocese are involved in the project.

These projects represent hands-on experience with food and food production. At the same time producers and consumers may interrelate with one another. Each project supports locally grown food and distribution.

For more information call the Toledo Diocesan Rural Life Office:  
**419-334-1331.**

## **Adult and Parish Activities**

**Kitchen Round Tables** are informal gatherings in homes for four to eight couples who come together to share their concerns about food and land issues. These may be groupings of farm couples only or mixed groups from urban, rural and suburban areas. The groups could gather to discuss "**Life on the Land**", and could move toward some action for justice through legislative advocacy or service in the wider community. The gatherings could be modeled on the small faith communities.

**Workshops/Forums/Conferences** may be developed around "**Life on the Land**". Diocesan offices, parishes or organization may use the document for adult education opportunities. Catholic Charities may, for instance, work with the Rural Life Office to provide workshops on peer support, stress management, legal workshops, financial planning for the farming community

undergoing change resulting from land use policies and agricultural concentration affecting their lives. Parish adult religious formation programs may be developed to address the Catholic Social Teaching related to “**Life on the Land.**” Programs for on-going formation for pastors, religious educators, principals and other parish leaders could be planned.

**Directory of local farmers’ markets/food coops** may assist consumers in taking actions to support local food producers. Parishes, dioceses and others could work together to develop a directory to facilitate access to community resources.

**Advocacy** is an important element of any system change process. Skills in legislative advocacy may need to be developed in those who become aware of what is occurring in the global food system. Educating and working for human rights and economic justice for farmers, farmworkers, agribusiness laborers is a gospel mandate. Workshops and hand-outs would assist in the development of in policy analysis, letter writing, and legislative and congressional visits.

**Rural Plunges** have been an effective way of bringing persons of diverse geographic and cultural backgrounds together to address food and land issues. Through two to three day “visits” with interactive presentations, staying with farm families on the farm, and meetings at agribusiness industries, participants come in touch with the real life concerns of the Church as it seeks justice in the local and global food system.

**Celebrating Rural Life** in dioceses demonstrates to the rural community the appreciation we have for their service to all who eat. Liturgies and prayer services reflective of the spirituality of rural people may be developed for use by all parishes. Parishes in rural, urban and suburban communities may also be more deliberate in their prayers of the faithful to address land and food issues. Thanksgiving, the Feast of St. Isidore, planting and harvest seasons, first fruits, droughts and floods provide opportunity to pray, teach and act.

Parishes could also develop relationships among rural, urban and suburban parishes through which friendships may be formed, events celebrated and on-going projects may enhance the life of people on the land wherever they live.

**The activities listed above are not meant to be all-inclusive. They are some suggestions that may be adapted for use by parishes, schools, diocesan offices or individuals. There is no one formula for beginning any of the above projects. However there are resources to assist you. For more information on implementing any of these activities contact your Diocesan Rural Life Director.**

