



Sustaining Life on the Land

Reflections on Rural Life

REFLECTIVE READINGS

TAKEN FROM *STRANGERS AND GUESTS : TOWARD A COMMUNITY IN THE HEARTLAND*
A REGIONAL CATHOLIC BISHOPS' STATEMENT ON LAND ISSUES, MAY 1980

SOCIAL VALUES

Many farm people, like other people in our society, are being strongly influenced by social values that contradict traditional religious values. These social values include excessive competitiveness, consumerism, orientation toward profit maximization and an unquestioning acceptance of economic, political and legal structures that oppress people at home and abroad. They do not recognize that the economic system which they often unquestioningly advocate is usually the root cause of many of the problems they face. Many of them are often forced to make investment and marketing decisions based on what that system imposes rather than on what they as individuals would wish to do. Economic necessity usually resolves this conflict of values in favor of the overriding requirements of the economic system, which usually are determined by the large corporations whose interests and power manipulate its workings.

(paragraph 34)

FARMERS & FARMWORKERS

Farmers are not the only ones involved in agriculture who suffer from this system. The plight of migrant agricultural workers, often members of racial and ethnic minorities, is scandalous in some areas. Many farmworkers, despite their long and arduous hours of physical labor, are poorly paid, ill clothed, undernourished, condemned to live in substandard housing and denied bargaining power. Family farmers are often squeezed between the just demands of farmworkers for better wages, housing and working conditions, and the contractual requirements imposed by large corporations that prefer mechanization in the fields. Farmers and farmworkers together form the most vital productive group in society, because without the food they produce few people could survive.

Farmworkers' suffering is a particular affront to Christians who consider the words of Saint Paul:

The Scripture says, "You shall not put a muzzle on an ox when he is threshing the grain," and also, "The worker deserves his wages" (I Tim. 5: 18).

(paragraph 35)

LAND STEWARDSHIP

In the Christian tradition, the biblically-based concept of stewardship describes what people's relationships should be with the land and with each other. In the Bible and the teaching tradition of the Church, these principles of land stewardship are evident:

- (1) The land is God's;**
- (2) People are God's stewards on the land;**
- (3) The land's benefits are for everyone;**
- (4) The land should be distributed equitably;**
- (5) The land should be conserved and restored;**
- (6) Land use planning must consider social and environmental impacts;**
- (7) Land use should be appropriate to land quality;**
- (8) The land should provide a moderate livelihood;**
- (9) The land's workers should be able to become the land's owners;**
- (10) The land's mineral wealth should be shared.**

All of these principles could be applied in the heartland.