



# *Sustaining Life on the Land*

## *Reflections on Rural Life*

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### **INDUSTRIAL - SCALE AGRICULTURE**

#### **“HOW BIG IS TOO BIG ?”**

Jim Tobin, Catholic Conference of Ohio 1999

Many Church leaders have been asked to offer guidance regarding issues of large-scale agricultural operations. The issues surrounding such agricultural practices are complex. There are many faith-filled rural laborers who have dedicated their lives, and work extremely hard, to produce safe and affordable food. Many of these laborers are under pressures to expand their operations, or to contract with large corporations or processors for profitability, marketing, and sustainability.

Catholic Social Justice teachings offers moral principles which can be applied to industrial-scale agricultural operations, as well as all urban or rural businesses. One way to apply these principles is through asking the question, “How big is too big?”

***1. Work and it's related profits should benefit, first and foremost, the laborers.***

An operation may be “too big” if it does not provide just wages and benefits, decent working conditions, and allow workers freedom to join unions and other associations.

***2. Food is a necessity of life and its production a way of life.***

An operation may be “too big” if it forces or coerces smaller farm operations out of business, or promotes policies and practices which limit food access to those most in need.

***3. Stewardship and care should be given to God's creation, assuring sustainability of a healthy environment for future generations.***

An operation may be “too big” if it cannot assure compliance with environmental safety standards, does not provide adequate plans for safe waste disposal, and does not pursue “good neighbor” practices which seek resolution of legitimate issues of concern.

***4. Private property owners and private businesses have a social responsibility to address issues related to the “common good.”***

An operation may be “too big” if it gives almost

exclusive attention towards its own profitability and offers little consideration to the needs of the community or the nearby neighbors.

***5. Businesses should enable persons to be active and productive participants in decisions affecting their life, family and community.***

An operation may be “too big” if it does not offer meaningful community and worker participation and allow shared decisionmaking concerning such issues as location, expansion, size, zoning, taxes, and accountability.

***6. “Contracts” should be built upon open communication, fair negotiations and cooperative agreements.***

An operation may be “too big” if it only offers one-sided contracts, unfair risk sharing, and an ineffective system for dispute resolution.

***7. Laws and practices should foster diversity of land ownership and diversity among the means of production by persons, families and organizations rooted and committed to a local community.***

An operation may be “too big” if the owners and controllers show little concern for the local community and strive to monopolize in areas such as land ownership, production means, marketing access, and product price.