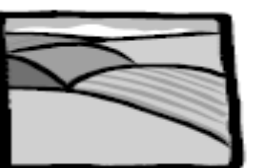
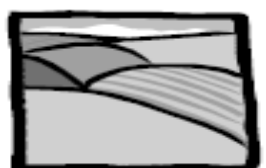


# *Sowing the Seeds*

A journey of acting on God's dream for  
rural America

Six session adult study





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## Welcome!

### From Chuck Hassebrook, Executive Director Center for Rural Affairs:

*Our church is one of the few places we gather in rural America to discuss what is right and what wrong, and our moral obligations to each other.*

*So it is proper and fitting that we meet there to discuss the future of rural America and what it should be—from a moral, social and biblical perspective. The Bible speaks volumes about land ownership, relationships in communities and justice for the poor and widowed. It offers clear and practical moral guidance for how people living close to the land can best structure their economic and community relationships.*

*Sowing the Seeds is designed to enable rural parishioners to come together to reflect from a Biblical perspective on rural issues and problems. Scripture is alive and relevant to the challenges we face today and decisions we must make on our common destiny in rural America. It is critical element of our deliberations, if we are to rise above narrow interests to set a course for the future that reflects our highest values and advances the common good.*

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# Facilitator's Guide

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## Background

In March of 2003, a small group of rural Nebraska United Methodists, under the auspices of Peace with Justice Ministries-UMC, formed the *Sowing the Seeds* covenant group.

Our goal is to pray, study, and act for God's shalom in rural America. Out of many conversations, we decided that the design of a Christian-based adult study could be helpful in fostering healthy discussions about God's dream for rural peoples, their communities and the land.

This is the second edition of *Sowing the Seeds*, with updated policies, and expanded biblical reflection.

**Six sessions and class size:** This adult curriculum is designed for six-60 minute class sessions but your group may wish to adapt it for a longer study. There are four optional tracks:

- 1) rural microenterprise and communities (or a just economy),
- 2) sustainable environment,
- 3) local food networks,
- 4) health care reform.

To stay within the six week time frame, choose one track on which to focus for this study. The group may choose more than one and extend the curriculum additional weeks. To choose a track, look over biblical and policy information for each (pp 13-45), discuss with group members in casual conversations before beginning, address it at a previous meeting, or decide as their facilitators. This may take up to fifteen minutes.

To enhance discussion, we suggest a maximum class size of twelve. If you have more people, you may wish to form small groups for discussion. Each session includes directions for the facilitator, a hand-out for participants, and optional short stories that may be used to generate discussion. The remaining pages in the Facilitator's Guide are designed to help the facilitator plan the sessions and lead discussions.

**Facilitators:** We recommend that a pastor and lay person co-facilitate this study. *Italics* indicate items to be read aloud, gray boxes indicate items to be posted visibly. Save time during a session and write posted items out beforehand.



## Session One

### *The story of Bountiful Prairie*

### *God's place in rural communities*

The purpose of this session is to create space to hear the voice of God and be open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. This session, and session two, will lay much of the biblical and spiritual groundwork to carry you through the remaining sessions.

**Materials needed:** Discussion guide posted and visible to group (How to talk about difficult issues), session goals posted and visible to group, chalk/white board and markers for group responses, copies of Session One hand-out of *The Story of Bountiful Prairie*, copies of Session Two hand-out of the biblical article and United Methodist Social Principles (can be copied front/back on 2 pages) for your corresponding track.

### *Welcome participants to the class and share these goals (2 min)*

Introduce members of group if necessary. Share Chuck's welcome on previous page.

Post visibly and read aloud:

*Create space to hear the voice of God and be open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.*

*Encourage discussion about trends in rural America communities.*

*Explore biblical understandings of care for creation.*

*Discuss how public policy shapes our future.*

*Discuss the pros and cons of policy proposals for a better future.*

*Things YOU can DO to help create a better rural future.*

### *Guides for constructive discussion (5 min)*

*(Read Aloud): Anytime there are complex realities to face, there will be a multitude of varying viewpoints of what should be done. There will be many opportunities, during this six session course, for folks to speak their minds and also to listen respectfully to other perspectives and ideals. Indeed, the Holy Spirit may be most active when there is struggle and disagreement. God works in our most uncomfortable moments to help us*

stretch and grow. A few guidelines will help us foster a healthy environment for discussion.

Optional model for sharing: Every person has four to six chips. When he or she wishes to speak they toss one chip in a basket. This approach helps give equal time to those who speak easily and often and those who may wish to speak, but find it hard to “jump in.” After the chips have been used, the person will simply listen for the rest of the class period. Another model to enhance sharing is to use an egg timer.

The following are suggested guidelines. Post these so all can see and keep them up for all sessions.

## *How to talk about difficult issues*

Post only bold words to save time, if needed, but read descriptions aloud.

**TRY TO ESTABLISH AN ATMOSPHERE OF FAIRNESS.** *For the facilitator: You will have your own opinions, but try to lead impartially. Communicate the process that will be followed.*

**THERE SHOULD BE NO KIND OF THREAT HANGING OVER THE DISCUSSION.** *Take no votes, offer no ultimatums.*

**TRY TO IDENTIFY AREAS OF AGREEMENT.** *People will be on a continuum on controversial issues; there may be more than two sides to an issue.*

**AVOID THE USE OF SLOGANS.**

**REPRESENT OPPOSING POSITIONS ACCURATELY & FAIRLY.** *Practice active listening skills of summarizing and paraphrasing what people are saying.*

**TRY TO IDENTIFY THE CORE OR CENTRAL ISSUES AT STAKE.** *Which issues are most important? Are some largely beside the point?*

**ADMIT WEAKNESS IN ONE’S OWN POSITION.** *If the issues were crystal clear and self-evident, there would not be a controversy.*

**DISTINGUISH MORALITY FROM PUBLIC POLICY.**

**INCLUDE PERSPECTIVES OF ALL CONCERNED.**

**LET A GOOD DISCUSSION BE AN END IN ITSELF.** *There is no need for consensus or conclusion.*

*Adapted by the NE Synod, ELCA from an Alban Institute publication*

## *Space for God's Voice (5 min)*

*(Read Aloud): Where there is no vision, the people perish. (Proverbs 29:18) Part of these sessions will have to do with listening, imaging, and responding to God's vision for us. We are going to do a lot of talking, but we're also going to have spaces of silence where we can each listen to the voice of God.*

*We are a very verbal society so this may seem strange at first, but we hope that you will learn to enjoy the silence and open yourself to God in those moments.*

*You are invited to relax, take a few deep slow breaths and listen to the words of Isaiah 65:21-22. Each phrase can be an in breath or an out breath.*

*With each line, be aware of the breath of God in you. This is a time for slowing down, for opening yourself to the vision of God.*

Facilitator reads this slowly three times and allows silence at the end.

They shall build houses and inhabit them:

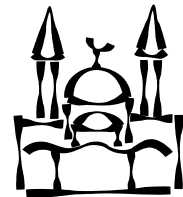
They shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit;

They shall not build and another inhabit;

They shall not plant and another eat;

For like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,

And my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hand.



## *Jesus Clears the Temple: A guided meditation (15 min)*

**Purpose:** *This exercise is intended to offer insight into the time of Jesus, and to show Jesus' struggle against systemic injustice and prompt followers to take similar actions.*

**Directions:** Read aloud the purpose statement above. Ask the participants to sit comfortably in their chairs. Invite them to close their eyes and to begin relaxing through their breathing. Let them know that through a guided meditation, they will travel to a place where time and distance are not barriers. Ask them to "go" with an open heart. As you read the story, take time to let the sensory details sink in. Take prolonged pauses.

Using Mark 11:15-19, Matthew 15:12-17, Luke 19:45-48, John 2: 13-17 as biblical focus, begin this guided meditation.

*(Read Aloud): Please close your eyes now that you are comfortably seated. Begin by taking in a deep breath. Then slowly let it out. As you quiet yourself, relax by being aware of the rhythm of your breathing. You realize that you are slowly approaching a new place. As you get closer, you realize that this is the time and place of Jesus. You are aware that you are now in the Jerusalem of Jesus. In the distance you see the great Temple. Even at this distance you are impressed with its beauty. Now as you stand before the gates of the Temple you are in awe of its majesty. You drink in its beauty and awe and wonder. As the grandeur of the Temple settles in, you become aware of sounds that seem out of place. Your eyes gradually shift toward the sound. You see the money changers at their tables. But what really gets your attention is the commotion around them. It looks like the market place instead of the Temple with all of the buying and selling of sheep, oxen, doves, and pigeons. As you listen more closely, you hear complaints and arguments. You see injustices unfold: exorbitant commissions as money is exchanged. Inflated prices for the animals sold. Weights are rigged for cereal offerings. Widows are cheated. You feel your insides stirring. Your emotions are aroused. Can you name them?*

*Suddenly, out of the corner of your eye, you see something swirling in the air. A rope? No, a whip! A flock of doves swoops by your face. Sheep run by you. You have to run for cover as oxen stampede. Hundreds of coins roll by your feet as you watch the man upset the money changers' tables. Above the commotion you hear a voice speaking with authority saying, "Get them out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a marketplace!" (John 2:16 NAB)*

*"My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples, but you have turned it into a den of thieves." (Mark 11:17 NAB) You realize that it is Jesus who has done this.*

*As the whirlwind of fury dies down, you notice that Jesus is on the other side of the Temple area. You see him touching people. You realize that Jesus is healing them, restoring their sight and curing them. (see Luke 21:14) A calmness overtakes you. You realize that Jesus is not just a great miracle worker but also a great advocate of justice. You are aware that the courage of Jesus is your courage as well.*

*With this new-found comfort, you find yourself slowly drifting away from that time and place of Jesus. A prayer for continued courage in the face of conflict and controversy is said. A prayer of thanksgiving is offered for the opportunity to be a disciple of Jesus.*

**Discussion:**

Who was benefiting from this economic arrangement, and who were suffering?

What possible good could come of Jesus' controversial actions?

What is the significance of the prophetic act being balanced with personal healing?

## *Situations in Rural Communities (15 min)*

Distribute the hand-out of *The Story of Bountiful Prairie* (found on page 10).

**Purpose:** *The purpose of this exercise is to engage participants in discussion about trends in the rural economy and their community. It will lay the groundwork for subsequent sessions on biblical statements on these issues, the root forces driving current trends and practical options for creating a better future for rural communities and family farming and ranching in the 21st century. While these stories are technically fictional, they represent a truth that many rural communities and individuals face in America today.*

**Directions:** Read aloud the purpose statement above. Then invite a class participant to read the story and discuss the following questions as a group. Designate a scribe to write brief responses of the group where all can see.

- 1) How is it similar to your community?
- 2) How is it different from what is happening in your community?
- 3) What are the key forces driving trends in your community?

Distribute Session Two biblical article handouts, and ask class members to read them before the next session.

## *Closing (2 min)*

Responsive reading from a paraphrase of Genesis 1. Group responds with **God saw it was good.**

**Leader:** *God spoke "Light" and light appeared. And God separated the light from the dark. God named the light day and the dark night. And it was day one.*

**Group response:** **God saw it was good.**

**Leader:** *God spoke "Sky in the middle of the waters; separate water from water." God*



*separated the water under the sky from the water above the sky. God named sky the heavens. And it was day two.*

**Group: God saw it was good.**

*Leader: God spoke, "Land, appear." God named the land earth, the pooled water ocean. God spoke "Earth grow all varieties of seed-bearing plants, and every fruit-bearing tree. " And it was evening and morning. And it was day three.*

**Group: God saw it was good.**

*Leader: God spoke "Lights! Come out... Shine in the heaven's sky. Separate the day and night. Mark the seasons and days and years." God made two big lights; God placed them in the heavenly sky to light up the earth. And it was day four.*

**Group: God saw it was good.**

*Leader: God spoke, "Swarm, Ocean, with fish and all sea life! Birds, fly through the sky over the earth. Prosper, reproduce, fill the ocean, and reproduce on earth." And it was the fifth day.*

**Group: God saw it was good.**

*Leader: God spoke and Earth generated life of every sort and kind; cattle, reptiles and wild animals. Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image." God created them male and female. God blessed them. "Prosper and reproduce." Then God said, "I've given you every sort of seed-bearing plant for food." God looked over everything God had made. And it was the sixth day.*

**Group: God saw it was good.**

*Leader: On the seventh day God rested from all God's work. God blessed the seventh day and made it a Holy Day. Because on that day God rested from God's work and this is the story of how it all started.*

**Group: And God saw it was all good.**



## *The Story of Bountiful Prairie*

In 1974, the community of Bountiful Prairie was booming. The Russians were buying grain and crop prices were rising. Strong grain prices prompted strong livestock prices.

Young families who had started their lives in the city were coming back home to farm. Main Street was booming. Farmers were buying new cars, pickups and tractors. Merchants were bringing their sons and daughters into their businesses and building new homes. Churches and schools were sprouting new additions.

But when commodity prices softened and interest rates skyrocketed in the 80s, it all came crashing down with record foreclosures and families leaving the land. Machinery dealers and small businesses went down in a chain reaction.

Things were a little better by the end of the 80s and in the subsequent decades. Still, the community seemed to be slowly dying. Every year it took more acres to make the same living. Livestock production got harder as corporate farms expanded and meat packers paid them premiums, while discounting livestock from small operations.

Everyone was adapting as best they could. Many farmers tightened their belts and hunkered down to pay off debts and make it to retirement. Those who could find them took off farm jobs. Some decided to call it quits while they could still hold on to the family land. Most told their kids to not even think about coming back to farm.

A few families decided the answer was to get big. Why not? Under the farm program, the bigger you farmed the more money you got. New technology like Roundup Ready made it feasible to manage bigger acres. Competition among expanding farms was fierce. Cash rents and land prices went up, squeezing profit margins ever tighter.

The whole community was struggling. Efforts to lure a new factory to town were not successful. To the contrary, the one plant that had moved to Bountiful Prairie in the 60s for its lower labor costs now moved to China to hire people for a few dollars a day.

Retail businesses were suffering from declining population and growing competition from a Wal-Mart down the road. Local merchants complained that wholesalers charged them more than the retail price at Wal-Mart, which used its size to get deep volume discounts. Still, local people flocked to Wal-Mart. It was cheap. Some took part time jobs there. But pay was low and there were no benefits.

Every institution in town was struggling. Church attendance and donations were down. There were fewer young families in town to participate. The school was considering closing. Kindergarten enrollment kept dropping and state aid was declining.



## Session Two:

### *Exploring biblical understandings of care of creation*

**Purpose:** *Session Two will take us on a journey to a small Nebraska farm where David and Connie Hansen will give us a tour and explore perspectives that may or may not be similar to our own. This session will also give us the opportunity to explore one of four different tracks. As a group, we will decide which track to follow. Each track includes a biblical lesson and pulls it together by tying it to our social principles of the United Methodist Church. If time allows, you may explore more than one track, or break into small groups and visit each one, reporting back to the larger group.*

**Materials needed:** Hymnal, extra copies of Session Two hand-out, download video online [www.cfra.org/sowingtheseeds](http://www.cfra.org/sowingtheseeds), prepare to watch with group on computer, television, or projector. Re-post goals.

### *Space for God's Voice (5 min):*

Repeat the meditation from Isaiah 65:21-22 from the first session. Do not rush this meditation, go slowly.

### *A Different Reality (15-25 min)*

#### **Watch the DVD *Walking the Land***

**Directions:** Watch the video "Walking the Land" with farmers Dave and Connie Hansen from Ansley, Nebraska. Discuss the following questions as a group. Ask the designated recorder to write brief responses of the group so all can see. There will not be enough time to discuss each of these question extensively. Have a timekeeper to move you along, or choose which questions you wish to discuss in depth.

There are a number of joys that happen daily on a family farm. Share your experiences of some of the joys of farming, either presently or from your past.

According to Dave Hansen, a perfect world would be one where the vast majority would be involved in producing their own food. Do you agree or disagree?

Do you think it's important that consumers have a relationship with producers? Why or why not?

Dave says that it makes more sense for a secure food supply that we raise and consumer more locally. Do you agree or disagree, and why?

## *A Biblical Basis (15-25 min)*

Choose one of the tracks for your group to study. Discuss the questions about the biblical track article for Session Two. Refer to Social Principles hand-out provided earlier. Ask folks to bring this hand-out to the following class sessions.

## *Closing (2 min)*

Responsive reading of the first stanza of *For the Fruits of This Creation* (used with permission from Augsburg Fortress) Ask group to respond with **Thanks be to God**.

**Leader:** *For the fruits of this creation...*

**Group:** **Thanks be to God.**

**Leader:** *For good gifts to every nation...*

**Group:** **Thanks be to God.**

**Leader:** *For the plowing, sowing reaping, silent growth while we are sleeping, Future needs in earth's safe-keeping...*

**Group:** **Thanks be to God.**

## Session Two Hand-out

### Track 1 – A Just Economy:

#### Biblical Article

*This article was taken from a Bible study produced by the General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church and from “Who is My Neighbor? A Theological Approach to Globalization” by A. Sue Russell from the book Economic Justice in a Flat World: Christian Perspectives on Globalization.*

Thinking about a just economy has become more difficult with knowledge of injustices in a broader world view, with globalization, and changing dynamics in small communities. Justice returns to that basic question the man asked Jesus, “who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29). What is God’s vision for economic justice in the world? The parable of the laborers in the vineyard shows an order often repeated by Jesus, but difficult to grasp: the last shall be first, and the first shall be last. The GBCS article says, “Jesus told this parable just shortly before his entry into Jerusalem. In the conversation that precedes this story the issue of what must be done to have eternal life was raised. One young man went away sad because he found it too hard to contemplate the price of giving away all his possessions. Peter also voiced his concern about the future of the disciples who had given up everything to follow Jesus. Jesus reassured Peter that there is enough in God’s economy for all, but that no one’s place is assured. The story of the laborers in the vineyard provided an illustration of this meaning.”

For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the market place; and he said to them, “You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.” So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o’clock, he did the same. And about five o’clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, “Why are you standing here idle all day?” They said to him, “Because no one has hired us.” He said to them, “You also go into the vineyard.” When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, “Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.” When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, “These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.”

But he replied to one of them, “Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs

to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?" So the last will be first, and the first will be last.' (Matthew 20:1-16, NRSV)

The parable takes us beyond a human sense of justice, that they should be treated equally, given a fair wage for their time, but beyond that to a divine sense of justice: in God's eyes, all of them are equal, each worker's labor is of the same value to God.

This theme is echoed in other parables of Jesus. A. Sue Russell speaks about the Good Samaritan in Luke, and the conversation that led up to it. An expert in the law comes to Jesus, perhaps to test his scriptural authority, and asks "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?", or in other words, "what does the Lord require of me?" Jesus counter-questions, what is written in the law? To love God and to love neighbor, passages he extracted out of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. And then the core of the question surfaces, "who is my neighbor?" Who is it that I actually have to love? In the context of the scripture this "lawyer" used from Leviticus, it means not to lie, cheat, or steal, not to take advantage of the weak, to pay fair wages, and not exploit foreigners (p 55). Since Leviticus was written, this acceptance of foreigners had changed from a position of dominance, welcoming aliens with hospitality, to Jesus' time, when numerous groups of foreigners occupied Israel, and the Hebrews were at the bottom of the totem pole. Romans, Greeks, numerous factions of Jews, were they all to be loved? The natural human response is to limit the number of people in our "in-group", to be overwhelmed by disagreements and differences and believe that neighbor is limiting, to family, friend, or nation. But Jesus, as he tends to do, turns the concept on its head with a story.

Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup>Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup>So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup>But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. <sup>34</sup>He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. <sup>35</sup>The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.'" (Luke 10:30-35, NRSV)

The beaten man, stripped of his possessions, has no identity or affiliation, representing any person. The priest and Levite, perhaps concerned about cleanliness issues of their religion, pass by. They are familiar with the scripture Jesus' questioners quote about how to love a neighbor, but also guided by the same scripture to maintain boundaries of "holiness". The Samaritan, considered a half-breed, despicable, and unclean by the Jewish population, is the one who offers help. And not just a little help, he bandages him, anoints (a healing and holy act), and takes him to an inn to be cared for. And Jesus asks, so simply, which of these was a neighbor to the robbed man? We already know the answer; the one who showed mercy. "Go, and do likewise." The story is transformed into an example of love without boundaries of religious law, geographical location, or ethnic identity.

Although the law became an excuse for the religious to deny help, its original intent was to carve out a space specifically for those most vulnerable members of society: widows, orphans, foreigners, hired workers, disabled, elderly, poor, (p 60). The kicker of the story was that the Samaritan himself was in this vulnerable group, not a holy man in the eyes of Jesus' listeners, but an outcast. And when Jesus is promoting this understanding of loving a neighbor, he was asking his followers to be particularly conscious of being a neighbor to those in greatest need.

Russell points out the creation of God, making humans in God's image. Each person is then a "unique reflection of the image of God," (p 61). Seeing people in economic situations in this way, rather than commodities or statistics, opens up the opportunity to ask what is just?

Several other examples can be drawn from the Bible about economic inequalities. In Luke, Jesus talks about wise and faithful servants, knowing the will of their master. "From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded," (Luke 12:48). Justice is refusing to exploit when one has the upper hand. The prophets often rail against Israel for neglecting widows and orphans, in Ezekiel 34:4 for refusing to care for the sick sheep. James too, sends warning. "Come now, you rich people, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you. <sup>2</sup>Your riches have rotted, and your clothes are moth-eaten. <sup>3</sup>Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you, and it will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure\* for the last days. <sup>4</sup>Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts," (James 5:1-4, NRSV).

The early Christian community of Acts pooled all their financial resources to ensure that the entire community was taken care of, "there was not a needy person among them," (Acts 4:34). In Moses' time, among the extensive Levitical code was a mandate of Jubilee, the accumulation of seven cycles of seven years. On the fiftieth year, debts are forgiven. "This fiftieth year is sacred—it is a time of freedom and of celebration when everyone will receive back their original property, and slaves will return home to their families," (Leviticus 25:10, CEV). Slaves are released also on a regulated seven year schedule. This celebration equalizes possessions, so none become too rich, and those owing debts are forgiven. The Hebrew people have a specific incentive for kindness to slaves and servants, having been enslaved themselves in the land of Egypt.

Recurring themes show us structures in Hebrew law that allow for a redistribution of wealth, and special attention to marginalized groups of people. It warns God's wrath against those in a position of power who refuse the cry of the needy. It advocates fair wages, and debt forgiveness. And above all, Jesus offers us a new way to see the way we relate to people, a new kind of love, without limits.

See Discussion Questions on the following page.

How does the economy reflect aspects of God's vision of economics and how does it fall short? Consider local, national, and international economies.

Who are the groups of people currently not treated like a "neighbor" (in Jesus' understanding) in our current economy?

How can a local community shape their own economy?

What are individual choices a person can make to work toward a just economy?



## Track 1 – Rural Microenterprise and Community: The United Methodist Social Principles

*The Social Principles “provide our [United Methodists’] most recent official summary of stated convictions that seek to apply the Christian vision of righteousness to social, economic, and political issues.” They are voted on during General Conference every four years by elected members from every conference. No United Methodist is required to ascribe to them.*

**The Economic Community**—We claim all economic systems to be under the judgment of God no less than other facets of the created order. Therefore, we recognize the responsibility of governments to develop and implement sound fiscal and monetary policies that provide for the economic life of individuals and corporate entities and that ensure full employment and adequate incomes with a minimum of inflation. We believe private and public economic enterprises are responsible for the social costs of doing business, such as employment and environmental pollution, and that they should be held accountable for these costs. We support measures that would reduce the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few. We further support efforts to revise tax structures and to eliminate governmental support programs that now benefit the wealthy at the expense of other persons.

**Work and Leisure**—Every person has the right to a job at a living wage...We believe that persons come before profits. We deplore the selfish spirit that often pervades our economic life. We support policies that encourage the sharing of ideas in the workplace, cooperative and collective work arrangements...We support policies that would reverse the increasing concentration of business and industry into monopolies.

**Rural Life**—We support the right of persons and families to live and prosper as farmers, farm workers, merchants, professionals, and others outside of the cities and metropolitan centers. We believe our culture is impoverished and our people deprived of a meaningful way of life when rural and small-town living becomes difficult or impossible...We support governmental and private programs designed to benefit the resident farmer rather than the factory farm and programs that encourage industry to locate in nonurban areas.

**Corporate Responsibility**—Corporations are responsible not only to their stockholders, but also to their stakeholders: their workers, suppliers, vendors, customers, the communities in which they do business, and for the earth, which supports them.

We applaud corporations that voluntarily comply with standards that promote human well-being and protect the environment.

## Track 2 - Sustainable Environment: Biblical Article

*The information in this article was taken from Learning the Language of the Fields: Tilling and Keeping as Christian Vocation by Daniel G. Deffenbaugh, Cowley Publications (2006).*

Caring for the land out of respect for God's creation and to ensure an abundant future for our children has become a serious concern to Christian communities. How do we best utilize, respect, and appreciate the land we have been provided by a generous Lord? How do we respect the limits of nature while ensuring there is enough for humanity? The Bible continually affirms God's initial summation of a good creation. The primary way Christians have come to understand their relationship with the land has been through the Hebrew creation story. Genesis is a wealth of lore to help us understand our ancient covenant with God, and our rightful place among all of God's creation. In fact, Genesis contains creation stories from two separate authors, known as Priestly and Yahwist. Compare them below.

Priestly: Genesis 1:27-31 <sup>27</sup>So God created humankind<sup>♂</sup> in his image, in the image of God he created them;<sup>♂</sup> male and female he created them. <sup>28</sup>God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.' <sup>29</sup>God said, 'See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. <sup>30</sup>And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.' And it was so. <sup>31</sup>God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Yahwist: Genesis 2:5-2:25 In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, <sup>5</sup>when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; <sup>6</sup>but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— <sup>7</sup>then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground,<sup>♂</sup> and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. <sup>8</sup>And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. <sup>9</sup>Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

<sup>15</sup> The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.

<sup>16</sup> And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; <sup>17</sup>but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the

day that you eat of it you shall die.'

<sup>18</sup>Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.' <sup>19</sup>So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. <sup>20</sup>The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. <sup>21</sup>So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. <sup>22</sup>And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

These two stories have much to offer us in understanding our traditions of dominion, naming, shepherding, tilling and keeping. They have consciously and unconsciously affected our culture. Deffenbaugh's book focuses on tilling and keeping, also translated as serve and preserve, which should be considered alongside more harsh characteristics like subdue and rule, which have so often dominated the conversation. He focuses on the second narrative, representing a "hands-on" God who digs around in the mud and plants the Garden of Eden, and waters it with rain. God breathes life into Adam, who comes from the very soil, and whose name means "earth child". In the first narrative, the human is set apart, as above creation, in the second, a vital part of it. Then God sets Adam to till and keep the garden. We are physically images of the Earth, but ethically reflect the image of God (p 106-107). The image of coming from the Earth then leads to an ethical responsibility to care for that which we are a part, other humans, the Earth itself and its fruits. The Earth is in constant cycles of re-creation, and we are a part of that process. "Because of the interdependence of matter, soul, and the presence of God, which pervades all reality, the human being, through work, contributes in a small but significant way to the building of 'the fullness of God' (Eph. 3:19; Col. 2:9) toward which all of creation is proceeding," (p 113).

When studying the creation story, one must inevitably follow up with "the fall": Adam and Eve's excommunication from Eden. The shalom, or peace and interconnectedness, which God established through creation, is broken. According to Deffenbaugh, this sin occurs through acquiring knowledge, and rejecting "responsibility as an imager of God," (p 116). Adam and Eve separate themselves to become an "I". This separation leads to an eternal chasm between what should be their natural relationship with the generous land, or Eden.

Understanding our place in creation as image of God or image of Earth can also be explained by two differing understandings: that spirit and matter are diametrically opposed or that they are "two distinct features of a single substance or reality," (p 111). Deffenbaugh quotes Pierre Teilhard as saying, "...we must not forget that the human soul...is inseparable, in its birth and in its growth, from the universe into which it is born." If Christians re-think their relationship to the world and material creation, the world shifts from something "inherently evil" to something of value, to preserve.

The Hebrew journey beginning with Abraham then becomes a quest to return to place, return to right relationship with God and a fulfillment of the covenant. They receive the

Torah while sojourning in the wilderness, in “extreme landlessness”, (p 122). The promised land is their rightful place, but their behavior effects their worthiness of such a gift. The law prohibits coveting, and demands acceptance of the landless poor, and the alien. Rather than turning to oppressors themselves, the Hebrews’ experience with oppression in Egypt can lead them to act “responsibly and thankfully in accordance with the law,” (p 122).

The tension between keeping the covenant and worshipping other gods ends up splitting the Hebrews, and eventually leaves them landless yet again. The prophets send warnings to a complacent people, of a broken homeland and a broken relationship with God. The Messiah’s role is to restore this relationship. The prophet Micah speaks, “they shall beat their swords into plowshares,/and their spears into pruning hooks;/nation shall not lift up sword against nation,/neither shall they learn war any more;/but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees,/and no one shall make them afraid,” (Micah 4:3-4). The Messiah infuses the earth with righteousness, a vision which “does not involve some final separation from the earth of which humans are a part,” (p 124).

Deffenbaugh carries the message of care for creation into a command of Jesus’, “love your neighbor as yourself,” (Mark 12:31). Humans “can’t be abstracted from their local ecology,” and when a place is cared for, the people are cared for also. The health of each is wrapped up in the other, (p 129). Jesus’ acts of healing people portray his investment in a physical creation, as well.

Our stewardship of the earth comes not of our superiority, but rather as a vital part of God’s shalom. “Our likeness to God lies...in our capacity for entering into authentic reciprocal relationships—with God, with humans, *and with the nonhuman inhabitants of our place*...We are called to affirm that the care of souls, so long a central concern of the church, must necessarily entail the care of soils,” (p 125).

What are some cultural understandings of how humans should responsibly interact with the environment?

In what ways is our faith connected to our treatment of creation?

What are the impacts of globalization on our connection to a certain place and culture?

How can we better understand the nature of God by our tie to land?

What groups of people are most hurt by environmental degradation?

## Track 2 - Sustainable Environment: The United Methodist Social Principles

*The Social Principles “provide our [United Methodists’] most recent official summary of stated convictions that seek to apply the Christian vision of righteousness to social, economic, and political issues.” They are voted on during General Conference every four years by elected members from every conference. No United Methodist is required to ascribe to them.*

**Energy Resources Utilization**—Affirming the inherent value of nonhuman creation, we support and encourage social policies that are directed toward rational and restrained transformation of parts of the nonhuman world into energy for human usage and that de-emphasize or eliminate energy-producing technologies that endanger the health, the safety, and even the existence of the present and future human and nonhuman creation. Further, we urge wholehearted support of the conservation of energy and responsible development of all energy resources, with special concern for the development of renewable energy sources, that the goodness of the earth may be affirmed.

**Sustainable Agriculture**—A prerequisite for meeting the nutritional needs of the world’s population is an agricultural system that uses sustainable methods, respects ecosystems, and promotes a livelihood for people that work the land.

We support a sustainable agricultural system that will maintain and support the natural fertility of agricultural soil, promote the diversity of flora and fauna, and adapt to regional conditions and structures—a system where agricultural animals are treated humanely and where their living conditions are as close to natural systems as possible. We aspire to an effective agricultural system where plant, livestock, and poultry production maintains the natural ecological cycles, conserves energy, and reduces chemical input to a minimum...

**Global Climate Stewardship**—We acknowledge the global impact of humanity’s disregard for God’s creation. Rampant industrialization and the corresponding increase in the use of fossil fuels have led to a buildup of pollutants in the earth’s atmosphere. These “greenhouse gas” emissions threaten to alter dramatically the earth’s climate for generations to come with severe environmental, economic, and social implications. The adverse impacts of global climate change disproportionately affect individuals and nations least responsible for the emissions. We therefore support efforts of all governments to require mandatory reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and call on individuals, congregations, businesses, industries, and communities to reduce their emissions.

## Track 3 – Local Food Networks: Biblical Article

The information in this article is taken from Food for Life (Fortress Press) by L. Shannon Jung, used with permission.

Food is scattered throughout the Bible, not as a side-bar to bigger events, but rather at the center of dramatic stories, a tool of right relationship with God and other humans. The act of eating is an experience shared by every human being, partaking in the bountiful gift of God's creation. "[One of] the meaning[s] of food...is our empathetic imagination of the other's eating," (p 11). Through the connection, food can take on the role of justice.

The Bible's story of origin, God's creative act of existence, was of a good world, in which all have sustenance. "I have provided all kinds of fruit and grain for you to eat. And I have given the green plants as food for everything else that breathes. These will be food for animals, both wild and tame, and for birds. God looked at what he had done. All of it was very good!" (Gen 1:29-31a, CEV). This attitude of bounty suggests more than use, it demands stewardship. In the creation story, God's providing food for all has strings attached, humans have the responsibility to care for creation. "Fill the earth with people and bring it under your control. Rule over the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, and every animal on earth," (Gen 1:28, CEV). "The covenant promise reiterated throughout the Old Testament is that God the Divine Gardener will continue to nurture and supply our needs with loving care. Food, health, and our very lives are good gifts...In the table grace...we acknowledge that we 'live by grace and know that we are strangely sustained, nurtured, and nourished'." (p 21).

For the Hebrews, this nourishment was conditional; the dietary laws of the Torah keep them in right relationship to God. The manner of eating can be sanctified and holy, or not. When the Hebrews lose sight of God's plenty, God limits them to bring them back to appreciation, only providing the manna they need one day at a time. The appropriate response to God's gift of abundance for the Hebrew people was worship and celebration. "In response to Yahweh's gift, the creatures are to enjoy that gift; they are to celebrate, feast, and party," (p 22). The second part of the covenant is then to return the favor, to "imitate the love and generosity of God. We respond to God's hospitality to exhibiting *compassion and justice* to all," (p 23). In Hebrew times, this meant welcoming the stranger, loving the alien, caring for widows and orphans. Sharing food becomes an act of justice.

The themes of the Old Testament are echoed again in the New Testament, in the life of Jesus and in the early church. Jesus' actions were informed by the Hebrew tradition, and meal-sharing was a central ministry of his life. The table was open to everyone; Jesus ate with Pharisees, tax collectors, unclean sinners, and the apostles. He fed people and allowed others to feed him. He turned water into wine, he fiddled with Jewish dietary laws, he fasted and feasted, he put compassion first. Jesus' meal

sharing was an act of justice and hospitality, and the most basic part of his human experience. Many of these acts have been carried forward into Christian tradition. Jesus reminded his followers often to rely on God for daily bread and seek the bread of life. “Jesus replied, ‘I am the bread that gives life! No one who comes to me will ever be hungry. No one who has faith in me will ever be thirsty,’” (John 6:35, CEV).

Jesus uses the image of a banquet to illustrate the kingdom; the host invited many, but they refused. “Go as fast as you can to every street and alley in town! Bring in everyone who is poor or crippled or blind or lame...Not one of the guests I first invited will get even a bite of my food!” (Luke 15:21, 24). Not only are the marginalized included, they become the honored guests. Jesus’ eating practices got him into a lot of trouble, attending a great feast at a tax collector’s house. “Why do you eat and drink with those tax collectors and other sinners?” (Luke 5:30b, CEV), they ask him. “For a religious leader like Jesus to associate with social dregs, even to the extent of social bonding at table, was offensive and unthinkable.” He offered radical inclusiveness, and accepted it. Concern for compassion and justice overwhelms the concern for respectability,” (p 29). These actions were intricately linked with mission: reaching out, proclamation and action.

In the story of feeding the five thousand, the miracle of trusting God for daily bread is demonstrated, and the gift of sharing provides food for everyone. This abundance operates out of a spirit of generosity and fairness which allows there to be enough for everyone. “After everyone had eaten all they wanted, Jesus’ disciples picked up twelve large baskets of leftovers,” (Matt 14:20, CEV).

By no coincidence, one of the greatest metaphors for Jesus’ life and death is the image of bread, water, and wine – nourishment. This is especially demonstrated through the sacred Christian sacrament of communion. The Passover meal that Jesus shared the night before his death was a symbolic realization of a new covenant. The early church celebrated communion as an act of “remembrance and as a covenant renewal,” (p 26). It opens up the possibility that all eating is sacramental.

If eating is Jesus’ way to enter into equal relationship with people, it becomes an action to usher in the kingdom. “Eating with Jesus is the epitome of all that is present, symbolically and literally, in food and eating.” Paul also speaks of the Lord’s Supper as anticipating the kingdom, a vision for the future. “The eucharist opens up the vision of the divine rule which has been promised as a final renewal of creation, and is a foretaste of it,” (p 27). Isaiah gives a vision of that final victory, “On this mountain the LORD All-Powerful will prepare for all nations a feast of the finest foods. Choice wines and the best meats will be served,” (Isaiah 26:6, CEV).

An attitude of plenty and welcoming is contrary to modern concepts of scarcity, where there is never enough and the rich take from the poor. In the early Christian community in Acts, resources were pooled to ensure care of everyone and shared meals. “All the Lord’s followers often met together, and they shared everything they had. They would sell their property and possessions and give the money to whoever needed it. Day after day they met together in the temple. They broke bread together in different homes and shared their food happily and freely,” (Acts 2:44-46, CEV). Feasting gives

“a sense of exuberant enjoyment that expresses appreciation and engenders stewardship,” (p 28).

The Bible affirms food as “enjoyment, providence, goodness, *delighting*” and as “hospitality, justice, mission, *sharing*,” (p 31). Establishing relationships with the land, with the growers, with the bounty provided by God, and with neighbors and friends is purposefully walking toward the Kingdom of God, to re-establish love of neighbor and care for creation. It is joy-giving and joy-receiving. “When you eat or drink or do anything else, always do it to honor God,” (1 Cor 10:31, CEV).

What are God’s intentions for the use of food and human care of creation? How are they reflected in our lives today?

What do the implications of abundance and hospitality mean for this community? Who is currently being left out of this vision?

How might sharing food become an act of justice? *Justice here means the proper treatment of people and the proper treatment of the environment.*

How could public policy affect the way food is enjoyed and shared?



## Track 3 – Local Food Networks: The United Methodist Social Principles

*The Social Principles “provide our [United Methodists’] most recent official summary of stated convictions that seek to apply the Christian vision of righteousness to social, economic, and political issues.” They are voted on during General Conference every four years by elected members from every conference. No United Methodist is required to ascribe to them.*

**Family Farms**—The value of family farms has long been affirmed as a significant foundation for free and democratic societies. In recent years, the survival of independent farmers worldwide has been threatened by various factors, including the increasing concentration of all phases of agriculture into the hands of a limited number of transnational corporations. The concentration of the food supply for the many into the hands of the few raises global questions of justice that cry out for vigilance and action.

We call upon the agribusiness sector to conduct itself with respect for human rights primarily in the responsible stewardship of daily bread for the world, and secondarily in responsible corporate citizenship that respects the rights of all farmers, small and large, to receive a fair return for honest labor. We advocate for the rights of people to possess property and to earn a living by tilling the soil.

We call upon governments to revise support programs that disproportionately benefit wealthier agricultural producers, so that more support can be given to programs that benefit medium and smaller sized farming operations, including programs that build rural processing, storage, distribution, and other agricultural infrastructure, which link local farmers to local schools; and which promote other food security measures.

We call upon our churches to do all in their power to speak prophetically to the matters of food supply and the people who grow the food for the world and to develop ministries that build food security in local communities.

**Rural Life**—We support the right of persons and families to live and prosper as farmers, farm workers, merchants, professionals, and others outside of the cities and metropolitan centers. We believe our culture is impoverished and our people deprived of a meaningful way of life when rural and small-town living becomes difficult or impossible...We support governmental and private programs designed to benefit the resident farmer rather than the factory farm and programs that encourage industry to locate in nonurban areas.

## Track 4 – Health Care:

### Biblical Article

*The information in this article is taken from “The Bible and Health Advocacy: Ancient Vision, Modern Imperative” (2006) and “Health and Wholeness” by Rev. Cynthia Abrams, and is a publication of the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society, used with permission.*

“The biblical narrative is filled with stories of God's healing presence in the world. This includes spiritual, psychological, emotional, social, as well as physical healing. Christ's desire that we experience abundant life reflects God's desire that we experience spiritual, physical, and mental wholeness and healing,” (H&W).

The Bible may not speak of health care directly, but does have related themes to guide a Christian discussion about health care in modern times. Cynthia Abrams define health care this way: “We require health care when our health is compromised.” Abrams pulls out four biblical themes: abundance, community, humanity, and stewardship. Focusing on God's covenant with the Hebrew people, the admonitions of the prophets, the life and ministry of Jesus, and the community of the early church, we find threads of continuity to help shape the conversation about modern Christian communities and health.

*Abundance.* Starting from the beginning of creation, God's design for humanity has been for health and wholeness. “When God created humankind, God declared it to be very good, (Gen 1:31)”, (H&W). This design of wholeness is reflected in Jesus' mission as revealed in John 10:10 when Jesus says, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” An attitude of abundance is contrary to “contrived scarcity”, where each person must fend for themselves. Jesus' ministry of healing the lame, blind, those hemorrhaging, and with leprosy, were signs of God in him. And these signs were not presented to the elite, but rather to the poor and outcasts. God's promise of wholeness was and is for the whole world. “Many of the accounts of Jesus' ministry document how Jesus saw restoration to health as a sign of the Kingdom of Heaven becoming present amongst us,” (H&W). In a parable in Luke, Jesus responds to the question, “who are my neighbors?” A beaten man lies in the gutter, and the religious are too pure to help him. One man, an outcast himself, felt sorry for him. “He treated his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them.” He drops him off at an inn agreeing to pay whatever it costs. Which of these was a real neighbor, Jesus asks? “The one who showed pity.’ Jesus says, ‘Go and do the same!’” (Luke 10:37, CEV).

When considering physical health, considering Jesus' humanity is also important, for Jesus' ultimate sacrifice was that of physical suffering. Our suffering is tied to Jesus' suffering.

*Community.* Abrams uses Paul's letter to the Galatians as an example of hospitable and caring community. Paul tells them, “You obey the law of Christ when you offer each other a helping hand...If you follow your selfish desires, you will harvest

destruction, but if you follow the Spirit, you will harvest eternal life. Don't get tired of helping others," (Galatians 6:2,8-9, CEV). The sin of greed not only hurts others, it hurts the self. In the early church, as with Jesus, healing was offered to those who lined the street to get a glimpse of Peter (Acts 5:15). "Many men and women started having faith in the Lord," (Acts 5:14, CEV). The acts of healing gave them faith in the goodness and grace of God.

The early church also focused strongly on caring for those in their community: "None of them claimed that their possessions were their own, and they shared everything they had with each other...God greatly blessed his followers, and no one went in need of anything. Everyone who owned land or houses would sell them and bring the money to the apostles. Then they would give the money to anyone who needed it," (Acts 4:32b-35, CEV). They actively sought to include and care for all, not in a gated community, but welcoming the sick, lame, and poor. It was no easy task, and they didn't always get it right. In the next chapter Ananias and Sapphira are struck down from lying about giving the full price of their house to the community. Not only is care for the community upheld, but neglect of the community is active sin.

*Humanity.* To look at God's intention for humanity, it is helpful to look back again at the origin story of the Hebrews; in Genesis 1:27 – "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them." All human beings were created in God's image, making each person's life infinitely precious. In order for a life to be filled with the goodness God intended, Shalom, often translated as peace, must be present. "Health in its fullest and most complete sense is Wholeness. The Bible expresses this Wholeness with the word "Shalom," which encompasses every facet of health, physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual, both of the individual and of the community," (H&W). In Ephesians 6:12, Paul tells the church in Ephesus that the enemy is not human, but rather the forces of darkness – "For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh but against the rulers, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."

*Stewardship.* We may think of stewardship primarily around financial issues, or possibly even environmental. Caring for these things does have a direct impact on our physical and spiritual health, or Shalom. Stress and disorder lead to incompleteness of the Wholeness intended for humanity. Psalm 95:5 says "The sea belongs to God who made it and the dry land, because God formed it." Damaging God's creation is essentially damaging ourselves. Taking responsibility for personal health is also a central part of stewardship. Paul calls the body a Temple in 1 Corinthians 6:19, and although he is talking about sexual purity, the message is clear. Bodies are sacred places, made in the image of God. They must be cared for.

In Luke 12:48b, Jesus tells his followers "From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required. The prophet Ezekiel rails against the leaders of Israel, "You have never protected the weak ones or healed the sick ones or bandaged those that get hurt. You let them wander off and never look for those that get lost. You are cruel and mean to my sheep," (Ezekiel 34:4, CEV). God's gift of life is not one to be taken lightly. Abrams identifies the conflicting sentiment as unchecked greed. It is easy to get caught up in one's own wants and needs without considering the damage done

to others. Both statements from Luke and Ezekiel are critiques of the leadership, or those with much. If God has blessed them with many gifts, it then becomes their duty to share that abundance with those less fortunate. Especially those in leadership positions in the church and government (in the Hebrews time, inseparable) are held accountable for the welfare of the people.

These four topics together shape a dialogue of inclusion; that the dignity of life for every human being is to be respected, upheld, and made whole. The sick and lowly will be exalted, and those with much will be required to share their blessings. Spiritual health is fully tied to physical and mental health. As Jesus and the Apostles performed miracles of healing, they brought these people to wholeness, and to know God. Those who neglect care for those who need it the most are chastised as greedy, those who seek to help the least of these are held up as people of God.

How do we or might we promote Shalom in our communities? What are the factors currently adding or detracting to God's vision of Shalom?

What policies or structures promote or degrade human dignity in our society?

How do we neglect or uphold the notion of stewardship as it applies to health?

Who are the people in our community not receiving the care they need?

## Track 4 – Health Care Reform: The United Methodist Social Principles

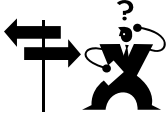
*The Social Principles “provide our [United Methodists] most recent official summary of stated convictions that seek to apply the Christian vision of righteousness to social, economic, and political issues.” They are voted on during General Conference every four years by elected members from every conference. No United Methodist is required to ascribe to them.*

**Right to Health Care**—Health is a condition of physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being. John 10:10b says, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” Stewardship of health is the responsibility of each person to whom health has been entrusted. Creating the personal, environmental, and social conditions in which health can thrive is a joint responsibility—public and private. We encourage individuals to pursue a healthy lifestyle and affirm the importance of preventive health care, health education, environmental and occupational safety, good nutrition, and secure housing in achieving health. Health care is a basic human right.

Providing the care needed to maintain health, prevent disease, and restore health after injury or illness is a responsibility each person owes others and government owes to all, a responsibility government ignores at its peril. In Ezekiel 34:4a, God points out the failures of the leadership of Israel to care for the weak: “You have not strengthened the weak, you have not healed the sick, you have not bound up the injured.” As a result all suffer. Like police and fire protection, health care is best funded through the government’s ability to tax each person equitably and directly fund the provider entities... It is unjust to construct or perpetuate barriers to physical or mental wholeness or full participation in community.

We believe it is a governmental responsibility to provide all citizens with health care.

**Rural Life**—We support the right of persons and families to live and prosper as farmers, farm workers, merchants, professionals, and others outside of the cities and metropolitan centers. We believe our culture is impoverished and our people deprived of a meaningful way of life when rural and small-town living becomes difficult or impossible...We support governmental and private programs designed to benefit the resident farmer rather than the factory farm and programs that encourage industry to locate in nonurban areas.



## Session Three:

### *Explore how public policy shapes the future*

**Purpose:** *The purpose of this session is to explore how public policy shapes the future. The trends we see in rural America today are not the result of irresistible forces of nature or laws of economics. They are the result of decisions made by people—especially policy choices—that can be changed by people. Policy choices reflect values. If the trends created by current policies do not reflect our values, we can change them. The following policies are only examples. This is not an exhaustive list of policies affecting rural America. This session will lay the groundwork for subsequent sessions focused on policy solutions to create a better future for rural America.*

**Materials needed:** Bibles (same translation) for everyone in the class, Session Two Hand-out, Session Three Hand-out. Re-post goals.

### *Space for God's voice (5 min):*

Begin again with the Isaiah 65:21-22 breathing in and out meditation.

### *Return to Bountiful Prairie (2 min):*

Invite a participant to read the following.

*Brenda Noble grew up in Bountiful Prairie with a spirit to farm. But after surviving the farm crisis she decided to pursue the emerging market of organic foods. Soon the Nobles learned that turning away from the commodity crops supported by the Farm Bill meant that they would have to rely on themselves. The processors refused to pay a higher price for their grass-fed animals, and their smaller operation couldn't get access to the established distribution chains. So the Nobles took their farm on the road, bringing their products directly to farmers markets and individuals in the nearest city.*

### *Looking at rural policy (35 min)*

**Directions:** Read aloud the purpose statement at the beginning of this session. Distribute Session Three Handout. Read aloud Policy A, including the Pro and Con Statements. Take ten minutes to discuss the questions, and continue for each policy.

## *Closing (2 min)*

Responsive reading of Psalm 126

Psalm 126: A Harvest of Joy

A Song of Ascents.

**When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,<sup>\*</sup>  
we were like those who dream.**

<sup>2</sup>*Then our mouth was filled with laughter,  
and our tongue with shouts of joy;*

**then it was said among the nations,  
'The Lord has done great things for them.'**

<sup>3</sup>*The Lord has done great things for us,  
and we rejoiced.*

<sup>4</sup>**Restore our fortunes, O Lord,  
like the watercourses in the Negeb.**

<sup>5</sup>*May those who sow in tears  
reap with shouts of joy.*

<sup>6</sup>**Those who go out weeping,  
bearing the seed for sowing,  
shall come home with shouts of joy,  
carrying their sheaves.**

## How Public Policy Shapes our Future

Read aloud Policy A proposal below, including the Pro and Con Statements. Take ten minutes to discuss the questions. Continue for each policy.

What are the implications of scripture studied in Session 2 for this policy?

How is the policy shaping the future of your community?

Is this policy helpful or is it undermining rural community and family farm and ranch vitality?

### **Policy A. Farm Programs and Payment Limitations —**

The federal farm program provides payments based on historical production and payments to compensate farmers when prices fall below a certain level. Theoretically, payments to large farms are capped by payment limitations, but very few farms are affected, both because the limits are set at a high level (\$340,000) and because loopholes allow even those limits to be avoided.

**Pro:** Advocates of this policy say that farms need to be big to be efficient. And free enterprise depends on growth and expansion. If we are going to compete internationally, we need big farms that can beat the production costs of international competitors. Farms should not be penalized by payment limitations for growing in productivity and efficiency. The current policy is fair because large farms get no more payment per bushel than smaller operations. The savings from a payment limitation could be directed to rural development. Proposals for such rural development are outlined in the next two sessions.

**Con:** Critics say this policy subsidizes large farms to bid land away from small and mid size operations—ultimately driving them out of business. Large expanding farms get more federal payment for every acre they add. As long as that is the case, farm program benefits will be bid into higher rents and land prices and does little to improve the income of farm operators. In short, the absence of effective payment limitations drives down the profit margins in farming by subsidizing large farms to drive up land costs. And studies show big farms are no more efficient than 600 -acre farms in the Corn Belt.

**Policy B. State Economic Development Policy –** State economic development policy has focused on providing tax incentives for large employers to create or relocate jobs. Relatively little—in some states almost nothing—focused on starting small businesses.

**Pro:** All other states provide incentives to lure large employers. To deny such incentives would be akin to unilateral disarmament. Large employers provide the



biggest impact on the local economy. They add to the economic base for a broad range of other local businesses. If the economic base grows, a broad range of small businesses will also grow. Small—typically retail businesses—don't add to the base. They just recirculate dollars.

**Con:** The current policy is profoundly imbalanced. Most states invest far more per job in large corporate enterprise than small business. Rural areas are largely left out of the benefit because large employers rarely move to small rural communities. Society is weakened because the policy leads to concentration of ownership in fewer hands and shrinks the number of self-employed people able to build assets, earn a middle class income and gain a stake in the future of their community. Control of the local economy is vested in companies with no commitment to the local community.

### **Policy C. National Renewable Electricity Standard –**

The Renewable Electricity Standard (RES) is a market-based policy that would require electric utilities to gradually increase the percentage of electricity produced from wind, biomass, and other renewable sources. A system of tradable “renewable credits” allows producers who do not meet the mandated standard to purchase credits from producers who go beyond what is required.

**PRO:** Advocates of this policy argue that wind and other renewable energy sources have the potential to both benefit the environment and increase economic opportunity in rural areas. The RES serves the common good by addressing the very real threats of reduced crop production and extreme weather damage from climate change. It would also reduce our nation's dependency on foreign oil. It boosts our rural economies because states like Nebraska, Kansas, Iowa, and the Dakotas have some of the greatest wind resources in the nation. Harvesting wind energy means there will be jobs for rural people in manufacturing and maintaining wind turbines. Further, with local and/or community ownership, profits will flow in as the extra electricity generated from wind energy is transported to other states.

**CON:** Critics of this policy argue that renewable energy will simply become another extractive industry, with little benefit or investment remaining in rural America. Corporate ownership of electric utilities means that both profits and electricity will flow out of rural America and into urban centers, leaving rural communities with little more than the eyesore of massive power lines. The high-voltage “superhighway” would take land away from communities and damage rural environments. Although some residents would benefit from the construction of new power lines and lease payments it would bring, others in the community would be left worse-off and empty-handed.

### **Policy D. Individual Health Insurance Mandate –**

All Americans will be legally required to have adequate health insurance coverage. If your employer does not provide health insurance, you will have to purchase health insurance from a private insurer or the government. Even individuals who have been denied coverage from private insurers are guaranteed access to health insurance from the federal government. Premium subsidies will be available to qualifying families and small businesses.

**PRO:** Advocates of this policy believe that the only way to address the rising cost of health care is to ensure that all Americans have health insurance. Universal coverage will drive down health care costs by addressing two primary problems: (1) uninsurance and underinsurance and (2) insufficient primary care. The number of Americans who are uninsured or underinsured is rising dramatically. When these people get sick or hurt they are often unable to bear the cost of their medical care. The cost of uncompensated care is passed on to tax payers or the insured through higher premiums. Often, the cost of managing expensive chronic diseases could have been avoided had people had access to preventative care earlier. By making sure that all Americans have insurance to cover routine preventative care while they are still healthy, health care expenses down the road will be greatly reduced.

**CON:** Critics of this policy question how cost effective government intervention would be. The bureaucracy that would be necessary to enforce the health insurance mandate would be costly and complex. More importantly, this opens the door to widespread regulation of the health care industry and government interference in personal health care decisions. This policy is simply a slippery slope to squeezing out private industry in health care entirely.



## Session Four and Five: Policy Proposals for a Better Rural Future

**Purpose:** *The purpose of this session is to engage participants in thinking about how public policy can be used to create a better future for rural communities. The policies described may either be (1) already in existence with funding, (2) already in existence without funding, or (3) proposals that need to be included in future legislation. By familiarizing ourselves with all three groups, we can make use of the resources currently available while we speak in unison for funded legislation that allows rural America to realize its rightful future – one of prosperity, diversity, and respect.*

**Materials needed:** Session Two Hand-out, Sessions Four & Five Hand-out, hymnals: select a hymn which affirms God's gift of land and bounty, posted discussion questions. Re-post goals

### *Space for God's Voice (5 min):*

Repeat the breathing in and out meditation centered on Isaiah 65:21-22.

### *Return to Bountiful Prairie (2 min):*

Invite a participant to read aloud the following.

**Session Four:** *Don and Dee live on the other side of town from the Nobles. Even though they both work long hours in larger towns to the south of Bountiful Prairie, they are having trouble making ends meet. They usually have to rely on food stamps and emergency food banks in order to have enough to eat. But as often as she can afford, Dee stops by a large chain grocer after work. At the food bank, she takes her bag of processed meals knowing that they won't get by without it.*

**Session Five:** *Bess and Mary are both retired widows who also live in Bountiful Prairie, right off Main Street. Neither one drives anymore, so they walk together on Monday mornings to the local grocery store. They've noticed that the store is less busy than it use to be – there is hardly ever more than a few customers at one time. Rumors have been going around about the store closing. This is bad news for Bess and Mary, who wonder where they will get their groceries? The only other store in town is the Mini Mart, and they only sell packaged snack food and hot dogs. Their friends are also worried, but no one knows what to do*

### *Policy Analysis for Track Focus (15-20 min for each policy):*

**Distribute the hand-out for Sessions 4 & 5**

**Directions:** Read aloud the purpose statement above. Then read aloud the proposed policy reforms on the Session Four & Five hand-out for the appropriate track and any reform proposals the group would like to add. Then go through the proposals one by one (including those below and any added by the group) discussing the following questions. Keep in mind there are two full sessions dedicated to policy, take your time, and designate a time-keeper if needed. Be sure to divide up your time to allow adequate discussion of each proposal.

- 1) *What are the implications for the proposal of biblical concepts as outlined in the article from session two?*
- 2) *What are the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed reform?*
- 3) *Would you support, oppose or modify the proposal?*

### *Closing (5 min):*

Read aloud or join in singing the words of a hymn, selected by you, as your sending forth. Suggestion - Look in the Index of your hymnal for topics like healing, creation, harvest, justice, or stewardship.



## *Hand-out Policy Proposals for a Better Rural Future*

### **Track 1 – Policies to support rural microenterprise and communities**

**Farm Program Payment Limitation Reform:** Provide full farm program support on each farmer's first \$250,000 of production, a lesser level of support on the second \$250,000 of production and no support on production over \$500,000. Close loopholes so that each farm family (husband/wife and dependent children) is treated as one farm and cannot subdivide to avoid the limits. The savings from a payment limitation could be directed to rural development. (Proposals for such rural development follow)

**Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program:** This new program (2008 Farm Bill) is designed to provide loans and grants to microenterprise development organizations (MDO) to assist and help establish rural businesses (including local food businesses) with 10 or fewer employees. MDOs help entrepreneurs acquire skills, loans, technical assistance and support networks.

**Value-Added Agriculture Market Grant Program:** This is a competitive grants program designed to help producers move into value-added agricultural enterprises. Under the 2008 Farm Bill, the definition of "value-added" has been expanded to include locally-produced agricultural food product. Twenty percent of the total funding will be set aside for grants to projects that help mid-side farmers and ranchers establish marketing partnerships – "mid-tier value chains" and beginning or socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. Although these are notable improvements, the funding for this program has been slashed from \$40 million to \$15 million. Congress needs to reinstate funding for this program to at least \$40 million and continue to target benefits to small and mid-sized farms and ranches.

**Specialty Crop Block Grants:** This program is designed to support projects which enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops and/or benefit the specialty crop industry as a whole. The Specialty Crop Block Grant Program-Farm Bill broadens the definition of specialty crops as: fruits and vegetables, dried fruit, tree nuts, horticulture and nursery crops. Examples of enhancing the competitiveness of specialty crops include, but are not limited to: food security, nutrition, marketing, "buy local" programs, environmental concerns and conservation, and education. The Farm Bill provides mandatory funding of a total of \$365 million from fiscal year 2008-2012.



## Policy Proposals for a Better Rural Future

### Track 2 – Policies to support a sustainable environment

**Rural Energy Self Sufficiency Initiative:** New to the Farm Bill, this program provides financial assistance to increase the energy-sufficiency of rural communities. Grants are awarded to projects for conducting energy assessments, formulating plans to reduce energy use from conventional sources, and installing integrated renewable energy systems – community-wide systems that replace conventional energy use with renewable energy use. This program is funded with \$5 million annually to cover up to 50% of project costs.

**Community-Based Energy Development (C-BED):** This renewable energy initiative is designed to ensure that local and regional economies receive the maximum benefits from renewable energy through community-based renewable energy projects. C-BED projects are locally owned by farmers, businesses, schools, community groups, and ordinary members of the community. Recognizing the importance of keeping the financial benefits of ownership in the community, states like Nebraska, Iowa, Minnesota, and Illinois each have their own C-BED legislation. In general, C-BED wind developments harness federal wind energy tax incentives to provide competitively priced power *and* new rural economic opportunities.

**Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) – Organic Transition Incentive:** EQIP is a conservation cost-share and incentives based program that assists farmers and ranchers with the installation of conservation-based practices and farming systems. EQIP now includes an incentive provision for transition to organic production. There are also special provisions for beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

**Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP):** Formerly the Conservation Security Program, the CSP has been greatly improved in the 2008 Farm Bill through increased funding, universal farmer eligibility, and a simplified payment process. The CSP provides payments to farmers and ranchers to maintain and manage existing conservation practices and implement additional conservation activities on land in agricultural production. Payments are designed to compensate the producer for improving, maintaining and actively managing conservation activities in place at the time of the application, and adopting new conservation activities during the contract term.



## *Policy Proposals for a Better Rural Future*

### **Track 3 – Policies for promoting Local Food Networks**

**Community Food Projects Competitive Grants Program:** A competitive grants program to develop community food projects, including enhancing the self-reliance of communities in providing for their food needs. Provides \$5 million mandatory funding for fiscal year 2008 and each year thereafter, making it a permanent program.

**Emergency Food Infrastructure Grants:** This is a competitive grants program to expand the capacity and infrastructure of food banks to handle perishable foods and distribute locally produced foods from small family farms and ranches. At least 50% of grant funds must be targeted to agencies that serve rural communities. This program is authorized at \$15 million per year through fiscal year 2012, but without funding. Congress needs to support food sovereignty within rural communities by funding this program.

**Farmers Market Promotion Program:** This program provides \$33 million in mandatory funding over five years to provide competitive grants of up to \$75,000 to promote farmers' markets and other direct marketing ventures. Ten percent of annual funding must be set aside to implement projects using "food stamp" benefits at farmers' markets.

**Mobile Meat-Processing Units:** Several Mobile Meat-Processing units have been manufactured in Washington State and are currently in operation around the country. A Mobile Meat-Processing Unit allows "on-farm" slaughtering of large animals. The carcasses would then be transported to facilities for further cutting and packaging to grocers, restaurants, consumers or other institutions in want of locally-raised meats. With this type of local processing small and medium sized farmers could keep their products local and avoid long-distance shipping costs. Congress should provide funds for the establishment of new local USDA-inspected cut and wrap facilities or the upgrading of existing facilities to meet USDA standards.

**Beginning and Socially Disadvantaged Farmers & Ranchers Contract Land Sales Program:** This program is designed to encourage retiring landowners to sell to beginning or socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers through private, contractual agreements backed by the USDA.

**Beginning Farmer & Rancher Development Program:** This is the first ever USDA competitive grants program targeted specifically to beginning farmers and ranchers. The program doesn't provide grants directly to beginning farmers and ranchers, but does allow for those with successful track records in serving beginning farmers and ranchers to provide the mentoring, training and technical assistance they need to allow them to enter agriculture successfully. This program is funded at \$75 million for the duration of the 2008 Farm Bill.



## *Hand-out Policy Proposals for a Better Rural Future*

### **Track 4 – Policies for Health Care Reform**

**Healthy Food Education & School Gardening Pilot Program:** This program authorizes hands-on gardening pilot programs at “high-poverty” schools in up to five states, but without funding. Congress needs to fund this program so that children who are more likely to go without nutritious foods can learn at an early age about healthy food and where it comes from.

**Seniors Farmers Market Nutrition Program:** This program provides \$20.6 million per year in mandatory funding for fresh fruits and vegetable vouchers to low-income seniors that can be used at participating farmers’ markets, roadside stands and community supported agriculture subscriptions.

**Funds to Recruit & Train Health Care Professions:** Congress must act to address the shortage of health care professionals in many rural areas. Programs need to be put in place to train health care professionals in rural areas for work in rural areas, while also incentivizing these professionals to remain in practice in rural areas. Programs should give priority to students from rural areas who express a desire to remain in rural America after their training is complete.

**Telemedicine and Distance Learning Program:** This program awards grants and loans to help rural communities with construction of facilities that provide distance learning and telemedicine services. Public libraries that wish to provide this service are also eligible for assistance. The 2008 Farm Bill also allows funds to go to improving the technical infrastructure and information technology in rural health care facilities. \$100 million in funds is available annually.

**Public Health Insurance Option:** Because the rural economy is largely based on self-employment and small businesses, we are more dependent on the individual insurance market. Over the years, this market has become concentrated and unaffordable. More and more rural people are uninsured or underinsured because they cannot afford or have been denied adequate health care coverage. To make sure that all rural Americans have access to affordable quality health care coverage, any health care reform provision must provide a public health insurance option so that individuals and small businesses can receive the same comprehensive care and affordable coverage that larger groups enjoy.





## Session Six:

### *Things YOU can do to help create a better rural future*

**Materials needed:** Bible, a black/white board to mark down comments, markers, covenant forms, hymn *You are the Seed* from your denomination's hymnal, package of seeds to share (optional), hand-outs for session six, envelopes, copies of evaluation form.

#### *Space for God's voice (5 min):*

Breathing meditation of Isaiah 65:21-22.

#### *Making a difference (20 min):*

Distribute the hand-out for session six.

**Purpose:** *The purpose of this session is to engage participants in a discussion about opportunities for them to help create a better rural future ranging from very limited involvement to more significant leadership roles. Challenge participants to accept responsibility for contributing to the solution to rural problems.*

**Directions:** Read aloud purpose statement above. Ask group to read silently the opportunities to get involved in creating a better rural future. As a group, brainstorm other ways of getting involved. Then discuss the following questions:

- 1) What are our responsibilities as Christians and citizens of a democracy for the betterment of our community and agriculture?
- 2) What activities would fit your interests and abilities?
- 3) What steps will you take? (You will be invited to fill out a covenant form at the end of this session.)

**Read or sing together** the first stanza of "You are the Seed" but use the word I instead of you. (If this hymn is not in your hymnal, select another with words of personal commitment.)

#### **You are the Seed**

*[I am] the seed that will grow a new sprout;*

*[I am] a star that will shine in the night;*

*[I am] the yeast and a small grain of salt, a beacon to glow in the dark.*

*[I am] the dawn that will bring a new day;*

*[I am] the wheat that will bear golden grain;*

*[I am] a sting and a soft, gentle touch, my witnesses wherever [I] go.*

*Go, my friends, go to the world, proclaiming love to all, messengers of my forgiving peace, eternal love.*

*Be, my friends, a loyal witness, from the dead I arose; "Lo, I'll be with you forever, till the end of the world."*

*United Methodist Hymnal, 583. Words & Music by Cesareo Gabaraín.*

### *Forge a Covenant (15 min):*

**Distribute the covenant forms** and invite class members to be in silence and prayerfully consider what each can do to plant seeds of God's vision in rural America. Allow a few minutes for this silent process. Then invite the entire class to discuss what actions they may take TOGETHER...post for all to see. Then allow some time for individuals to write their own personal covenants. The covenant forms may be placed in self-addressed envelopes and the facilitator mail them out six weeks after the class as a reminder of commitments made. You may wish to schedule a reunion in four to six weeks to see what folks are doing and to plan more steps of involvement.

**Distribute evaluation forms** and ask folks to complete and leave with facilitator. Facilitator, please send them to: **Kim Preston, Center for Rural Affairs, P.O. Box 136, Lyons, NE 68038.**

### *Closing (2 min):*

Reading or singing of third verse of *You are the Seed* (using I instead of you) continued as facilitator gives a seed to each class member as a symbol of our power to grow God's dream for rural America.

#### You are the Seed

*[I am] the life that will nurture the plant;*

*[I am] the waves in a turbulent sea;*

*yesterday's yeast is beginning to rise, a new loaf of bread it will yield.*

*There is no place for a city to hide, nor a mountain can cover its might;*

*May [my] good deeds show a world in despair a path that will lead all to God.*

*Go my friends, go to the world, proclaiming love to all, messengers of my forgiving peace, eternal love.*

*Be, my friends, a loyal witness, from the dead I arose; "Lo, I'll be with you forever, till the end of the world".*



## Things You Can Do to Help Create a Better Rural Future

**A. Extend this study to others in your community.** The Center for Rural Affairs is available to help guide you through the study 402/687-2100 or [info@cfra.org](mailto:info@cfra.org)

**B. Learn more and write or call your federal and state representatives—**Sign on to the mailing list of *The Center for Rural Affairs* and join the *Rural Action Network*. You will receive the Center's monthly newsletter on rural issues and action alerts to let you know when your call or letter to your representative could make a difference. The Center for Rural Affairs, PO Box 136, Lyons, NE 68038, 402/687-2100, [www.cfra.org](http://www.cfra.org), [info@cfra.org](mailto:info@cfra.org)

**C. Invite a speaker to a church or community group.** Ask them to speak about opportunities for your community or parish to participate in existing programs to support rural development or to address rural issues. Possibilities include:

A speaker from The Center for Rural Affairs on its efforts to strengthen family farms, beginning farmers and ranchers, conservation programs, rural community development rural health care issues, or how the Center can help your community foster small business development,.

A speaker from within your community or within your denomination involved in these issues.

A speaker from the Nebraska Community Foundation in Lincoln, NE on how communities can foster charitable giving to benefit community development through estate plans. 231 Mabel Lee Hall, UNL, Lincoln, NE 68588-0234, 402/472-5400.

A speaker from Nebraska Appleseed to discuss their work on immigration, health care, working poor families. <http://www.neappleseed.org>

A speaker from Nebraska's Voices for Children on their work with economic well being and physical and behavioral health. [www.voicesforchildren.com](http://www.voicesforchildren.com)

**D. Form a rural action group in your community or parish—**In that group, develop strategies to influence your state and federal representatives. For example, your group could request a meeting with your representative or their staff. It could organize a local letter writing campaign to your state or federal representatives or sponsor a public meeting on rural issues to involve more people in your area. The Center for Rural Affairs can provide materials and assistance.

**E. Work within existing organizations** – Sponsor resolutions at county meetings and state conventions of existing farm, commodity and business organizations to make their policies more supportive of family farms, small business and rural communities.

**F. Support small farmers globally** by purchasing Fair Trade products such as coffee, tea, and chocolate for your church and personal use. One source for these products is *Equal Exchange* at [www.equalexchange.com](http://www.equalexchange.com)., 50 United Drive, West Bridgewater, MA 02379, 774/776-7400

### *Resources for further meditation, study and involvement*

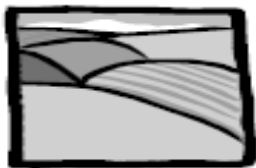
*Psalms from the Heartland*, Judy F. Hoff, 8110 60th Avenue Southwest, Carson, ND 58529-9643 ISBN: [0967406706](https://www.isbn.org/9780967406706)

*The Politics of Jesus*, John Howard Yoker, 1980, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI ISBN: 0802807348

*Theology of the Land*, Leonard Weber, Walter Bruggeman, C. Dean Freudenberger, John Hart, Richard Cartwright Austin, Bernard Evans and Gregory Cusack, 1987, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN (Also available through National Catholic Rural Life Conference, Des Moines, IA).

### *Congressional Contacts:*

Go to [Congress.org](http://Congress.org) to find the contact information for your members of Congress, or call the Capitol switchboard: 202-224-3121



## *Sowing the Seeds:*

### *A Journey of acting on God's dream for rural America*

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I, \_\_\_\_\_ covenant with God and the people of America to do the following to make God's dream come to be:

**I will pray** that God's vision for rural America will come to be.

My prayer practice will involve: \_\_\_\_\_

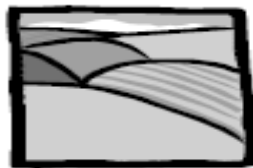
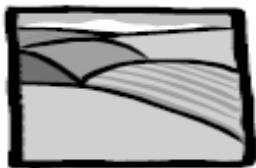
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**I will study and take action** in the following ways:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**I will do all this between now and** \_\_\_\_\_

According to God's Word in Isaiah 65:21-23, *They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. No longer will they build houses and others live in them or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will the days of my people be; my chosen ones will long enjoy the work of their hands. They will not toil in vain or bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the Lord.*"



## *Sowing the Seeds:*

### *A Journey of acting on God's dream for rural America*

## *Group Covenant*

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

We covenant with God and the people of America to do the following to make God's dream come to be:

**We will pray** that God's vision for rural America will come to be.

My prayer practice will involve: \_\_\_\_\_

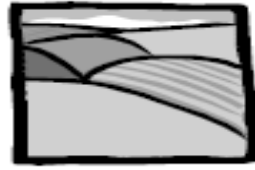
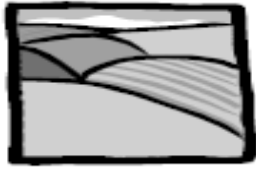
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**We will study and take action** in the following ways: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**We will do all this between now and** \_\_\_\_\_

Signatures:



Rating range: 1 is excellent and 10 is poor; circle the number that reflects your evaluation.

**Facilitators:** The instructions for facilitation were 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Comments and questions for further exploration: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Group:** How did the curriculum meet the intended goals? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Create space to hear the voice of God and be open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Encourage discussion about trends in rural America communities

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Explore biblical understandings of land management

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Discuss how public policy shapes our future

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Discuss the pros and cons of policy proposals for a better future

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Inspire participants to commit to actions that will create a better rural future

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10



## Facilitator's Resources

These are suggestions for further information. There are other sources of information, but we offer this as a start for you.

### Policy Resources for Session Three

#### Policy A. Farm Programs and Payment Limitations—

Overview of Payments and Payment Limitations - [http://www.usda.gov/oce/reports/payment\\_limits/chapter1.pdf](http://www.usda.gov/oce/reports/payment_limits/chapter1.pdf)

#### Policy B. State Economic Development Policy—

Nebraska Economic Development Opportunities - [http://www.cfra.org/resources/nebraska\\_programs](http://www.cfra.org/resources/nebraska_programs)

Why Entrepreneurship?

[http://www.cfra.org/files/Entrepreneurship\\_in\\_Farm\\_Bill.pdf](http://www.cfra.org/files/Entrepreneurship_in_Farm_Bill.pdf)

#### Policy C. National Renewable Electricity Standard—

Frequently Asked Questions about the Renewable Electricity Standard [http://www.renewableenergyworks.org/show\\_page.php?page=faq](http://www.renewableenergyworks.org/show_page.php?page=faq)

#### Policy D. Individual Health Insurance Mandates

<http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa565.pdf>

[http://www.kaisernetwork.org/health\\_cast/hcast\\_index.cfm?display=detail&hc=2486](http://www.kaisernetwork.org/health_cast/hcast_index.cfm?display=detail&hc=2486)

### Policy Resources for Sessions 4 and 5

#### Track 1—Policies to support a sustainable environment

Farm Program Payment Limitation Reform—see above and Farm Programs, a fact sheet in the facilitator's guide

Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program [http://www.cfra.org/files/Microenterprise\\_in\\_2007\\_Farm\\_Bill.pdf](http://www.cfra.org/files/Microenterprise_in_2007_Farm_Bill.pdf)

Value-Added Agriculture Market Grant Program (see page 16 of *Giving A Beginner A Chance in the 2007 Farm Bill*) [http://www.cfra.org/files/Giving\\_a\\_Beginner\\_A\\_Chance.pdf](http://www.cfra.org/files/Giving_a_Beginner_A_Chance.pdf)

Specialty Crop Block Grants (see page 49 of *Farm Bill Programs for You and Your Community*) <http://www.cfra.org/files/Farm-Bill-Programs-for-You-and-Your-Community.pdf>

## **Track 2 – Policies to support a sustainable environment**

Rural Energy Self Sufficiency Initiative [http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/ia/rbcs\\_9009\\_Rural\\_Energy\\_Self\\_Sufficiency.html](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/ia/rbcs_9009_Rural_Energy_Self_Sufficiency.html)

Community-Based Energy Development (C-BED) <http://www.c-bed.org/>

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) – Organic Transition Incentive (see page 13 of Farm Bill Programs for You and Your Community)

<http://www.cfra.org/files/Farm-Bill-Programs-for-You-and-Your-Community.pdf>

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) (see page 11 of Farm Bill Programs for You and Your Community) <http://www.cfra.org/files/Farm-Bill-Programs-for-You-and-Your-Community.pdf>

## **Track 3 – Policies for promoting Local Food Networks**

Community Food Projects Competitive Grants Program (see page 43 of Farm Bill Programs for You and Your Community)

<http://www.cfra.org/files/Farm-Bill-Programs-for-You-and-Your-Community.pdf>

Farmers Market Promotion Program (see page 40 of Farm Bill Programs for You and Your Community) <http://www.cfra.org/files/Farm-Bill-Programs-for-You-and-Your-Community.pdf>

Beginning and Socially Disadvantaged Farmers & Ranchers Contract Land Sales Program (see page 29 of Farm Bill Programs for You and Your Community)

<http://www.cfra.org/files/Farm-Bill-Programs-for-You-and-Your-Community.pdf>

Beginning Farmer & Rancher Development Program (see page 45 of Farm Bill Programs for You and Your Community) <http://www.cfra.org/files/Farm-Bill-Programs-for-You-and-Your-Community.pdf>

## **Track 4 – Policies for Health Care Reform**

<http://www.cfra.org/Health-Care-in-Rural-America>

Healthy Food Education & School Gardening Pilot Program <http://www.ers.usda.gov/FarmBill/2008/titles/titleIVNutrition.htm#healthyfood>

Seniors Farmers Market Nutrition Program <http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/SeniorFMNP/SFMNPmenu.htm>

Funds to Recruit & Train Health Care Professions <http://www.aamc.org/advocacy/educ/nhsc/start.htm>

Telemedicine and Distance Learning Program <http://www.usda.gov/rus/telecom/dlt/dlt.htm>

Public Health Insurance Option [http://files.cfra.org/pdf/public\\_plan.pdf](http://files.cfra.org/pdf/public_plan.pdf)

# Farm Programs

Payment Limitation Reform as proposed by Senator Charles Grassley

*The single most effective thing Congress could do to strengthen family farms is to stop subsidizing mega farms to drive them out of business by bidding land away from them. This legislation would do just that.*

**Lower Limits** - The Grassley Bill would establish effective caps of \$35,000 on direct (fixed) payments, \$65,000 on counter cyclical payments and \$175,000 on loan deficiency payments and marketing loan gains, including gains on generic certificates and forfeited commodities. The nominal limits would be half these amounts.

**Simplification** – Qualifying for the maximum legal payment would be greatly simplified. Farmers would not need to reorganize under the three entity rule. An individual who participates in just one farming operation could receive double the nominal limit, just like an individual who reorganizes his/her farm under the three entity rule. That would reduce farmers’ legal costs by allowing them to receive the maximum payment without hiring a lawyer to restructure the farm.

**Spouse Equity Rule** – The spouse equity rule would be retained in its entirety. Married couples who qualify under the spouse rule would receive up to twice the nominal payment limitations, as under current law. They would continue to be eligible for the same maximum payment as producers who reorganize under the three-entity rule, just like current law.

**Loophole Closings** –The Secretary of Agriculture would be directed to promulgate regulations to prevent schemes to get around these limits, in part by counting all payments on production under the primary control of a single person toward that person’s limitations, under certain circumstances. This would prevent mega farms from avoiding the limitations by constructing business relationships that allow them to control production but put crop ownership and payments in the name of other parties.

These regulations would come into play only when payments on the production controlled by a person exceed the effective limits established by this Act. They would apply to large farmers who 1) share rent land for more than the usual and customary rate in return for other concessions to shift payments to the land owner, 2) provide custom farming services to family members or entities that have less than an arms length relationship; or 3) have primary control over a joint operation or multiple entities.

**Rationale for the Act** - Farmers are not well served by current law. It imposes no real limit on marketing loans gains and its loopholes ensure that limits on direct and counter cyclical payments affect almost no one who spends money on a good lawyer. Thus, it subsidizes the nation’s largest farms to drive their neighbors out of business by bidding land away from them.

Large, aggressive operations use their payments to bid up land prices to get more acres. In the process, virtually all of the program benefits are bid into higher land prices – increasing cash rents, land payments and property taxes. As a result, farm program payments are offset by increased production costs and, in the end, do nothing to improve the income of farmers except on previously owned land.

In short, the farm program encourages farmers to do things that drive down agricultural profitability. In the book *Competitive Advantage*, Harvard Business professor Michael Porter observes that when multiple firms engage in aggressive competition to become the high-volume, low-margin producer in an industry, the result for profitability can be “disastrous”. That is happening in counties across the American farm belt, fueled by uncapped federal payments.

With foreign competition and uncompetitive markets driving down commodity prices, the last thing we need is policy that unnecessarily inflates land costs. Not only does it lower farm profitability. It lays the groundwork for a land price collapse, should the federal spigot tighten.

This proposal would have a moderating impact on land prices. It keeps the basic program in place to stabilize land prices, but it removes the fuel of uncapped federal payments from land price inflation, thus improving the profitability and competitiveness of our farms.

This legislation would leave farmers free to farm as much land as they want. Those who choose to farm big would still receive bigger payments than most farmers, but they would not be offered unlimited federal assistance to expand at the expense of their neighbors.

Neither farmers nor rural America are well served when federal dollars fuel the consolidation of farming into fewer hands. It is destroying mid-size farms and depriving us of an entire generation of young farmers, undermining the rural communities in which all farmers have a stake. That’s bad for all of us.

Finally, cutting payments to mega farms is far preferable way to meeting federal budget constraints that cutting programs that offer a future to rural America. Recent budget cuts have taken significant funds from conservation programs and eliminated most of the new money invested in rural development by the 2002 farm bill. For example, the Value Added Producer Grants Program that helps farmers launch new value added initiatives has been cut by 60 percent.

Without effective payment limitations, there simply will not be funding available for this and other programs that offer a future to rural America.

Fixed Direct Payment Limit	Fixed Direct Payment Limit		Counter Cyclical Payment Limit	
	Commodity	Husband/Wife	Parents/2 Sons or Daughters	Husband/Wife
Corn/Soybeans (50/50)	2,303	6,908	3,255	9,765

For more information on how you can help make a difference, please call Chuck Hassebrook, Executive Director, at the Center for Rural Affairs 402-687-2100, ext 1018 or by email [chuckh@cfra.org](mailto:chuckh@cfra.org) or [info@cfra.org](mailto:info@cfra.org)

# Rural Development Proposals for the 2007 Farm Bill

**Rural Development Policy Options for the 2007 Farm Bill**  
**Center for Rural Affairs**  
**July 2006**

The Rural Development Title of the 2007 Farm Bill should focus on entrepreneurial development – both on the farm and in non farm pursuits - and building assets and wealth for rural people and rural communities. Over half of all new jobs in the most rural regions of the nation come from small non-farm proprietorships termed microenterprise. Options include:

***Creation of the Rural Entrepreneurs and Microenterprise Program*** to provide grants to organizations to provide training, technical assistance and loans to small entrepreneurs in rural areas. The program would serve businesses that employ 5 or fewer people and cannot get commercial credit.

***Creation of a Community Entrepreneurial Development Program*** based on four pillars of rural economic and community development: small entrepreneurship, charitable giving to support community development, youth engagement and leadership development. This program would offer grants to collaborating communities to establish regional initiatives for entrepreneurial development, including small business education and technical assistance, leadership development, youth attraction and retention, community-based philanthropy, and intergenerational business transfer planning. We propose mandatory funding of \$75 million annually.

***Creation of an Entrepreneurship Education Program*** administered through the four regional rural development centers. This program would make grants to four-year and community colleges, the extension services, non-profit organizations and primary and secondary schools to provide access for rural Americans to entrepreneurship education. Too often in rural America, we educate our young to move away. This program would help educate rural people to create their future in rural America. We propose mandatory funding of \$50 million annually.

***Individual Homestead Accounts*** – Provide matching funds for savings accounts established by low and moderate income people in counties that have lost more than ten percent of their population in 20 years. Funds could be withdrawn to start small businesses (including beginning farming), gain education, purchase first homes and pay medical expenses.

***The Value-Added Producer Grant program*** makes grants to farmers and ranchers, including groups of farmers and ranchers, for new value added initiatives. Grants can be used for technical assistance, legal work, market analysis, feasibility plans etc for new initiatives to capture high value markets and to establish new processing operations. Funding for the program should be doubled to \$50 million annually. The program should prioritize project that strengthen the profitability and viability of small- and medium-sized farms and ranches and set aside 10-15 percent of funds for projects concerning beginning farmers and ranchers.

***A Family Farm Innovation Fund*** should be created to provide seed capital for innovative initiatives to strengthen family farming and ranching opportunities. For example, an agricultural bank in eastern Iowa is sponsoring a series of forums on machinery cooperatives as a means of enabling small and mid-size farms to lower machinery costs to competitive levels. But it takes legal work and research to launch such initiatives. USDA innovation funds could support such

initiatives by providing the Secretary of Agriculture authority to use up to \$2.5 million annually to support such initiatives from funds authorized and appropriated for USDA direct lending programs.

***Conservation-Based Development*** - Public access to natural space can be a development asset for communities. It can draw young family to start businesses, populate the schools and revitalize communities. And it can provide the basis for new tourism related self-employment opportunities involving bed and breakfasts, hunting, horseback riding, hiking, biking, wildlife viewing and other activities.

Conservation programs should work in concert with community initiatives to use public access to natural space as a development asset. Landowners who enroll in the Conservation Reserve Program, Wetland Reserve Program or the Grassland Reserve Program should receive bonus payments if they restore natural space and provide public access as part of a community plan to use natural space as a development asset.

Conservation programs should help conservation-minded beginning farmers get started. Programs that provide a ten-year stream of payments could, for beginning farmers, provide one up-front, lump-sum payment in return for a binding 10-year conservation commitment. So structured, conservation payments could help finance farm entry and help establish both stewardship and resource stewards on the land.

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CENTER *for* RURAL AFFAIRS



# Health Care & Rural America

## Making Health Care Work for Rural People

Rural people face many of the same health care challenges confronting the rest of the nation in addition to unique rural challenges. This is a list of 10 points we think are important in the rural health care debate.

- 1. Universal, Continuous and Affordable:** Because of the long-term consequences of being uninsured and underinsured, health care coverage must be available to everyone, without gaps in coverage. Health care must also be cost-effective for individuals, businesses and society.
- 2. Self Employment & Small Businesses:** Owner-operated farms, ranches and small businesses dominate the rural economy. Reform must provide options – including a public health insurance option – for small businesses and the self-employed. This will bolster entrepreneurial rural development.
- 3. An Aging Population:** Many rural areas are experiencing an aging population, and with it an increase in chronic diseases, disability, and pressure on an already burdened health care system. Reform must provide the services and facilities to enable aging rural people to stay in their homes and communities.
- 4. Dependence on Public Plans:** With a population that is older, poorer and with less employer-based health insurance, more rural people are dependent on public health care programs such as state children's health insurance programs, Medicare, and Medicaid. Reform must strengthen these public plans.
- 5. Health Infrastructure:** Rural health infrastructure is a web of small hospitals and clinics often experiencing financial stress. Reform must provide these facilities with resources to update their technology, provide care to the unserved and underserved, and must address their current funding model.
- 6. Healthcare Providers:** Over 80% of rural counties are medically underserved, over a third of rural Americans live with a shortage of health professionals, and only 3% of current medical students plan to practice in rural areas. Reform must offer new approaches and incentives for rural health professionals.
- 7. Health, Wellness & Prevention:** Rather than treating just sickness, our health care system must focus on wellness and prevention as well. This is particularly true for rural areas that suffer higher rates of obesity and other preventable problems. Reform must do more to enhance and promote health and wellness.
- 8. Mental Health:** Over half the counties in the United States have no mental health professionals. Reform must create incentives to provide resources for a specialty rural mental health marketplace similar to what exists for rural medical clinics.
- 9. Emergency Services:** Emergency medical services (EMS) are first-line health care providers in rural areas. Rural EMS providers are underfunded, face growing demand, and workforce and volunteer shortages. Reform legislation must provide resources to make these vital EMS services sustainable.
- 10. Health Technology:** Technology is increasingly used to improve patient safety, quality of care, and efficiency. However, adoption of health information and telehealth technology remains low in rural areas. Reform must include resources for health technology, and efforts to close the rural broadband gap.

### **Why does it matter?**

Rural America presents a unique set of challenges for health care reform. Rural people are more likely to be self-employed or work in a small business. As a result, rural people have lower rates of employer-provided benefits and are more likely to be underinsured or uninsured for longer periods of time.

Health care is also a major barrier to rural small business development, the most effective path in many communities for low and moderate income rural people to pull themselves out of poverty. If we hope to create genuine economic opportunity for rural Americans through entrepreneurship, we must reform the health care system. Health care reform that works for all of America will spur entrepreneurial rural development and stimulate our rural economy.

Today, rural people have less access to health care providers, greater rates of disability and chronic diseases and higher use rates of all public health care programs. The 60 million people in rural America are the most in need of health care reform. They also have much to contribute to the reform debate.

### **What can I do?**

**Take action:** [www.cfra.org/policy/health-care/advocacy](http://www.cfra.org/policy/health-care/advocacy)

**Stay connected:** [www.cfra.org/signup](http://www.cfra.org/signup)

**Contact:** Steph Larsen, [StephL@cfra.org](mailto:StephL@cfra.org), 402-687-2100

### **Learn more**

Visit [www.cfra.org/policy/health-care](http://www.cfra.org/policy/health-care) to access the latest information, including our recent series of health reports.