

Farming Economy Still in Downward Shift

by Jonathan Griffel

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In his 1977 book, *The Unsettling of America*, author Wendell Berry identified two different perspectives when viewing land. There are the exploiters and the nurturers. An exploiter looks to the land as only a vessel to yield him great returns. He looks to gain the most profit with the least amount of work possible.

The exploiter doesn't care about what the future holds for the land, they only care about immediate returns usually at the blatant expense of soil health and longevity. The nurturer looks to see what the sustainable carrying capacity of the land is and how he can make a living while also working well. The nurturer prioritizes the land first because they know that the land will outlive them and create the possibility of more generations returning to care for the land.

The farming economy is currently undergoing a downward shift. We have had consecutive years of high prices and supply is outweighing demand in a way that makes margins tighter. Tighter margins will inevitably lead to less farmers. We experienced this shortly after Berry's book was published in the 1980's and we will experience it again. We will look up in two years and have less farmers. However, we won't have less land.

If you look at the number of acres farmed in the United States, the number has remained virtually unchanged since 1935. In 1935, there were just short of 7 million farms in the United States. That number decreased rapidly from 7 to 2 million around 1980 and has been on a slow decline since.

These two concepts are connected because as we lose farmers, we lose the people who care about the longevity of the land, the nurturers, and they are replaced rather quickly by people who look at the ground simply from a numbers perspective.

The exploiters will come and take whatever they can from the land much in the same way they have done with other natural resources. The ownership interest will not be involved in the day-to-day operation of the farm, but rather will only seek growth in the form of more land and higher profits. This is similar to a publicly traded company that lays off employees before a share holders meeting to boost the bottom line; growth at all costs.

These two types of mindsets aren't just prevalent in the agriculture community, but also in small communities. Far too often I hear from people that they are moving to bigger communities because there isn't anything to do in a small town. They prefer to move to bigger cities where events are already established and it takes nothing for them to participate. The only barrier to entry is if they want to participate or not. This is a version of the exploiter mindset. What is the most I can gain for my time with the least

amount of effort possible. There is nothing wrong with wanting to have access to these events and resources, all I ask is that you get involved in helping with them. Yes, it will take work and time, but the reward comes in doing the work. Participating in the process and helping to grow and foster something that is positive not only for you, but impacts your community as well.

If you have questions about farming or comments about Ag Corner, feel free to reach out at jonathan.griffel@gmail.com, connect with me on Facebook at Griffel Farms, or on Instagram at [jon.griffel](https://www.instagram.com/jon.griffel) for daily farming content.

Farmers Almanac

March 3rd: National What if Cats and Dogs had Opposable Thumbs Day- ponder about answering the tough questions the plague our world like this one.

March 11th: International Fanny Pack Day-

I just recently wore a fanny pack for a 90s themed event and I would be lying if I said it wasn't handy as heck to have. My wife said that I either looked

irresistible or insane, I am going with irresistible.

Marchh 16th: Absolutely Incredible Kid Day and National Panda Day

Folklore

A wet spring, a dry harvest. Crossing my fingers for this one after the dry year we had last year.

So many mists in March you see, so many frosts in May will be. Since this one is based off of me seeing it, I will just close my eyes on the misty days and hope there isn't any frost in May!

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