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Man's Relation to the Land

A Statement of Principles Which Shall Underlie Our National, State and Individual Actions

WE HOLD:

God created the world, of which the earth is a portion, with a purpose, and through His loving Providence He maintains the world for the good of human beings. Therefore, all human beings possess a direct natural right to have access to created natural resources.

God's intention in creation is to enable man to live with dignity in accord with his noble nature and destiny, to develop his personality, to establish and maintain a family and to be a useful member of society. Society exists to fulfill these aims.

The Good Earth

THE LAND IS GOD'S greatest material gift to mankind. It is a fundamental source of food, fiber, and fuel. The right to use such elemental source of life and development is essential for human welfare. No law or contract is superior to natural law. A fundamental human right is not to be denied or rendered ineffective by any legal ordinances, apparent previous rights or obligations.

Stewardship

LAND IS A VERY SPECIAL KIND of property. Ownership of land does not give an absolute right to use or abuse, nor is it devoid of social responsibilities. It is in fact a stewardship. It implies such land tenure and use as to enable the possessor to develop his personality, maintain a decent standard of living for his family and fulfill social obligations. At the same time, the land steward has a duty to enrich the soil he tills and to hand it down to future generations as a thank offering to God, the giver, and as a loving inheritance to his children's children.

The Family and Land

SINCE THE FAMILY is the primary institution, access to land and stewardship of land must be planned with the family unit in view. The special adaptability of the farm home for nurturing strong and wholesome family life is the reason for the universal interest in land use and rural welfare. A unique relationship exists between the family and the vocation of agriculture. The farm is the native habitat of the family. The family's welfare must therefore have the first consideration in economic and social planning. Throughout the history of the United States these fundamental principles have been worked out through national and state legislation, and they have been upheld by court decisions and popular acclaim.

Land Use and Human Welfare

EFFICIENCY IN LAND USE is not to be judged merely by material production but by a balanced consideration of the spiritual, social and material values that redound therefrom to person, family and society. The land is not to be a source of benefit to a favored few and a means of servile labor to the many.

Second only to making land available to the family is the responsibility of society to encourage and to educate the land

stewards in the proper and most efficient use of the land and in such techniques as will make them masters of their own economic destiny.

The Tiller's Rights and Duties

THE WORKER ON THE LAND and his family possess the first right to the fruits of their toil for a decent standard of living. Second to such right come the rights of any non-operating owner and of the State. Rural people have the right to receive directly their just share of the economic, social and religious benefits in organized society.

The stewards of the land owe sacred duties and obligations to God, the community and humanity. A faithful and honest fulfillment of their responsibilities goes hand-in-hand with their rights and privileges.

* * *

Suggested methods for the practical application of the declared principles on land policy:

1. Make use of the land an integral part of socio-economic planning and thinking.
 2. Insist that education for land stewardship and the productive home be outstanding features of rural education.
 3. Emphasize a special program of enlistment and training in secondary, liberal arts, technical and professional schools for professional service to the rural community.
 4. Make the family-type farm operated by the owner a major objective of legislation and planning.
 5. Reform the system of taxing land and improvements so as to facilitate access to natural resources, security of tenure and proper land use.
 6. Revise land sale and rental contracts, mortgage obligations and other debt instruments so that no loss of ownership or insecurity of tenure be possible except through negligence or injustice on the part of the farmer-operator.
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7. Discourage large land holdings as undemocratic and unsocial.

8. Where large-scale production is necessary and advisable, encourage the use of co-operative techniques with local ownership and management.

9. At all times encourage co-operatives as a means of intellectual, moral and material advancement.

10. Where and when large-scale industrialized farming exists and requires employment of seasonal or year-round labor, demand for such labor group a living family wage, decent housing conditions and collective bargaining.

11. Urge that wages and housing for the laborer on the small farms be decent and just. (Low wages and poor housing for the farm laborer tend to lower the reward and standards of living of the family-type farmer, bringing his own family labor into competition with the poorly paid hired hand.)

12. Extend social security provisions, particularly health, old age and survivors' insurance, to farm people and other rural dwellers.

13. Develop locally owned and controlled business and industry in rural communities.

14. Encourage development of the "one foot on soil and one foot in city" type of living as greatly advantageous to the family when adequate cash income is secured from work in industry or commerce.

15. Make land settlement possible for returned soldiers and displaced war workers through proper financial and educational planning, provided qualified people so desire and sound arrangements can be made.*

* [Land economists, rural sociologists, religious leaders and others interested in the well-being of the farmer who wish to express their support of this statement may communicate with either of the sponsors, Dr. Benson Y. Landis, 297 Fourth Avenue, New York 10, N. Y.; Msgr. L. G. Ligutti, 3801 Grand Avenue, Des Moines 12, Iowa; and Dr. Gabriel Davidson, 386 Fourth Avenue, New York 16, N. Y.—EDITOR.]

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