

Rural Life Report

SPIRITUALITY COMMISSION SUBCOMMITTEE

December 2015

Exploring the Vocation of the Agricultural Leader

In the past few years, the Catholic community has placed a significant emphasis on developing an understanding of the vocation of the business leader in a changing and dynamic global economy. But there is also a need for leadership, informed by faith, in an equally important area that's shifting just as rapidly as the business sector: food and agriculture. Up until this point, the vocation of the modern agricultural leader has been underdeveloped, despite the bounty of related wisdom from the Catholic tradition.

In just a year's time, Catholic Rural Life had partnered with the National Farmers Union, the University of St. Thomas, and the St. Paul Seminary School of Divinity to get the project up and running. The organizations presented a proposal to Cardinal Turkson (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace leader), and the cardinal gave his blessing to partner in the initiative.

The first leg of the effort took place this fall. A national symposium entitled "Vocation of the Agricultural Leader: Faith, Food, and Environment" was held in St. Paul November 5-7. The symposium brought together agricultural leaders, theologians, and environmentalists to address the challenges facing the farming community today. An international symposium in Rome will follow the year after.

The developments that emerge from both symposiums will be used to create a comprehensive set of resources to help agricultural leaders around the world navigate their vocation in the shifting landscape of the 21st century. Much of the conversation focused on the impact economic, technological, and cultural changes have on agricultural practices and rural development, often in ways that don't promote the common good or the wellbeing of local communities and farmers. The symposiums developed practical solutions rooted in Christian wisdom by relying on the expertise of both food and agricultural leaders and theologians.

This collaborative effort is long overdue — especially considering that food issues affect literally everyone on the planet. If we don't come together to address problems facing the agricultural sector, we run the risk of failing to meet the ever-increasing demand for food production using sound environmental approaches and ethical models.

At the symposium, farmers and rural residents actively engaged with people they don't normally hear from in their daily lives, and academics and activists will have the opportunity to learn from the practical experience of the people most directly connected to the farms.

Our farmers have a lot of challenges and a lot of responsibilities. They're called to develop strong rural communities, work year-round in ever changing climates to support their families, and also share in the responsibility of feeding the world. Faith allows farmers to survive and thrive through the ups and downs of each year.

Barb Seamandel

Rural Life Chair