



Written by [Rebecca Terrell](#) on May 20, 2022

Published in the June 13, 2022 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 38, No. 11

For Amber Waves of Grain and the Fruited Plain, Thank America's Farmers

Ram Trucks hit a homerun in 2013 with a Superbowl commercial honoring American farmers. The pictorial tribute featured the distinctive voice of ABC News Radio broadcaster Paul Harvey, delivering a speech at the 1978 Future Farmers of America national convention.

“And on the eighth day, God looked down on his planned paradise and said, ‘I need a caretaker.’ So God made a farmer.” Harvey described God creating someone with a tenacious work ethic and selfless perseverance — a person strong and tough, yet gentle and compassionate — close to his Creator, good to family, true to country — a unique sort who shows up and sticks around when times get hard.



thankafarmer.org

His sentiments recall the old cliché, “If you ate today, thank a farmer.” That is good advice, but extremely limited in scope. We could add: If you got dressed, or drove a car, or played sports, or walked your dog, or washed your hands with soap, thank a farmer. And that’s not the half of it.

Most of the raw materials that make up items we use every day originate on a farm or ranch. There is cotton in your denim jeans, corn in your toothpaste, and soy in newspaper ink and children’s crayons. Your car tires and shoe soles include animal byproducts, as do many medicines, also made possible through (farmed) animal testing. You can credit tree farmers for houses, musical instruments, and even pencils and paper. Agriculture provides both the food you eat and the food your food eats. Without it, we’d be hungry, naked, and homeless, forced to subsist as nomadic hunter-gatherers.

Farmers make life fun, too. “There’s wool inside our baseballs,” points out Rhonda Ross, founder of the education nonprofit Thank A Farmer (TAF), “and the material on the outside of the ball is cowhide.” Ross founded TAF to educate children about the importance of American farmers. Her book *Fun Farm Facts to Fool Your Family, Friends and Other Fine Folks* traces the origin of many everyday items backwards, as she says, “from plate to pasture.”

Ross brings the book to life with TAF Magic Shows at state and county fairs, where her tricks happen when kids in the audience shout the magic words, “Thank a Farmer!” To the children’s delight she gives them pointers on how to “gross out mom,” telling them lipstick is made from the fats of cows, sheep, and pigs. “The next time your mom puts on lipstick, you can tell her she looks just as pretty as a pig!”

Ross, who comes from a farming family but grew up in Chicago, told *The New American* how TAF came about. She was visiting friends in Wisconsin when their children said that kids at school were making fun of them for dairy farming. They lived outside a major metropolitan area experiencing urban sprawl.



Written by [Rebecca Terrell](#) on May 20, 2022

Published in the June 13, 2022 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 38, No. 11

Instead of adapting to their time-honored surroundings, the newcomers shortsightedly demanded that the county conform to their standards.

“City folks had moved out to rural areas, got on boards, and passed a law that you couldn’t use heavy machinery on the roads before 8:00 a.m.,” Ross recalled. “These are dairy farmers who start their day at 4:00,” but suddenly their work was getting in the way of morning commuters. People from the city wanted all the benefits of country life, but hypocritically insisted on clear roads.

Ross realized the profound misunderstanding behind such ingratitude, and knew it also explained the jeers her young friends were facing. “We have to grow a new generation that appreciates farmers,” she says. It’s an uphill battle, considering the negative messages constantly bombarding children. Environmental and animal-rights groups have done a lot to undermine respect for agriculture by targeting youngsters with destructive ideas. Some erroneously say “you have to go back to farming like they did in the 1800s to be true to the land,” Ross observes. “We have to counter PETA [People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals] to get them off the backs of livestock farmers.”

Slippery Slope

Northern California cattle rancher Debbie Bacigalupi agrees. “They want to go back to some point in history, and at the same time they’re using modern conveniences” that exist thanks to contemporary farming. She gives the example that “it is impossible to be in modern society and to be vegan or vegetarian, because consumption doesn’t mean just eating. It also means using” goods made of animal products. From fluids that lubricate vehicles to goose down that stuffs pillows and jacket linings, everyone uses animal commodities on a daily basis.

She bristles at the self-righteous hypocrisy of environmental activists, whose arguments imply that farmers are bad guys who would destroy their surroundings for profit without coercive bureaucratic oversight. “Anyone who owns something is more likely to take care of it,” she says, recalling what a fellow member of the coalition American Agri-Women pointed out: “If we were as bad as they say we are, we would have fired ourselves long ago.”



Home on the range: The McIrvin family has worked the Diamond M Ranch for six generations in Washington state. *(Photo credit: McIrvin)*

Bacigalupi emphasizes the interdependence among producers, manufacturers, and consumers. “We



Written by [Rebecca Terrell](#) on May 20, 2022

Published in the June 13, 2022 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 38, No. 11

need each other,” and should appreciate each other’s plight rather than biting the hand that feeds. However, in her industry, philosophical differences have morphed into unconstitutional regulations that are “destroying private property rights.” For instance, populations of gray wolves have been climbing since California’s 2014 Endangered Species Act granted protection to the livestock predators. “You can get a \$100,000 fine and prison for even harassing a wolf. Meanwhile the wolves are killing our cattle,” Bacigalupi laments.

Regulators in her area are also trying to cut off farmers’ water use because of drought, but are simultaneously pushing a dam-destruction project so wild salmon can swim upstream. “We need to shut down agriculture for this?” she asks incredulously. “These same fish are sold at Costco in Alaska for \$4 a pound.”

“We’re so overly-regulated, it makes it harder every year to raise food,” says Len McIrvin of Diamond M Ranch in Washington state. Like Bacigalupi, he faces stiff penalties for defending his herds against wolves, and regulators use salmon as a scapegoat to infringe on private land. “We have to maintain a wide buffer zone around streams so trees can be planted so the water stays cooler so fish can spawn,” he told *The New American*. The federal Clean Air Act imposes further onerous restrictions on normal agricultural activities. “Farmers are fined if they stir up too much dust” while driving, so they “have to use water trucks to dampen farm roads” even during drought when water can otherwise be restricted.

Government-imposed water issues plague California’s San Joaquin Valley, where farmers produce most of the state’s commodities. Former U.S. Representative Devin Nunes (R-Calif.) calls this area “the breadbasket of the solar system” and a “garden of Eden.” But his website also recounts the area’s water crisis “as a ‘man-made drought’ caused by government decrees that force water to be dumped in the ocean and wasted,” to supposedly protect a three-inch baitfish.

Jim Shoemaker, a California businessman running for U.S. Congress, blames such bureaucratic mismanagement on a “storm drain mentality.” On his website he relates how farmers’ rain-water pools — which he calls “aquifer recharge ponds” — boost the underground water table, store surplus for dry seasons, preserve water quality, and even protect the fish that regulators purport to save. Yet bureaucrats, incredibly, characterize water-pond holding as “diversion” from runoff to the Pacific Ocean, to the detriment of farmers.

Federal environmental legislation also contains a unique measure known as the citizen suit, “modelled after provisions in the civil rights acts” of 1964 and 1968, according to the *University of Richmond Law Review*. Any citizen can bring a lawsuit to challenge what they consider to be violations of environmental regulations.

Water rights provide a case in point. Since the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency identifies some farm ditches in the nation’s waterways, landowners are at the mercy of both bureaucrats and radical activists. The California Farm Bureau’s *AgAlert* cites the example of John Duarte, forced in 2017 to pay a \$1.1 million fine for federal wetlands violations because he plowed a wheat field on his property.



Written by [Rebecca Terrell](#) on May 20, 2022

Published in the June 13, 2022 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 38, No. 11



True environmental custodian: California rancher and activist Debbie Bacigalupi advocates consumer education to dispel myths that demonize farmers and cripple them with regulations. (*Photo credit: Youtube/ Debbie Bacigalupi*)

Water is only one hook; the Clean Water, Clean Air, National Environmental Protection, and Endangered Species Acts, among other regulations on wildlife and wetlands, encompass animal “rights,” vehicle standards, emission restrictions, occupational issues, and much more. “Anyone can sue on behalf of a lizard or a lake,” Joe Mehr-ten, a rancher and pomegranate farmer in California’s Central Valley, told *The New American*. As landowners get bogged down in lengthy litigation, lawyer fees, and potential penalties, bureaucratic agencies cooperate with environmental groups who bring charges, funneling “huge sums of money” to them in settlements, he said. Meanwhile, farmers who apply for federal permits to work their land face a complex and confusing labyrinth of environmental red tape.

True Colors

Mehrten defends landowners as ideally suited to care for the environment, and posits that regulators have different objectives. “The environmental movement is a socialist movement,” he said. “Look up the word ‘environment’ — it means everything that surrounds you. It gives a new significance to the Environmental Protection Agency” and indicates exactly what regulators want to control.

“This stupid behavior is deliberate,” Mehrten charged, and is being used to usher in shortages blamed on climate change and world politics. It’s a lesson we should have already learned, he says, quoting Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky from his 1936 book *The Revolution Betrayed*: “The basis of bureaucratic rule is the poverty of society in objects of consumption.” The communist official admitted, “Such is the starting point of the power of the Soviet Bureaucracy. It ‘knows’ who is to get something and who has to wait.”

Mehrten warns of the outcome of historic parallels. “It’s an imitation of the food crisis in Ukraine in the 1930s,” he notes. That famine, known as the Holodomor, or “death by starvation,” resulted when Stalin collectivized the farms of independent landowners and confiscated their crops. Historians estimate some four million to 10 million Ukrainians perished in 1932 and 1933.

Similarly, today’s “food shortages are artificial,” agrees McIrvin. “It’s regulations that make it hard to farm.” He points to the example of “mom-and-pops” in meat packing forced to close their doors because



Written by [Rebecca Terrell](#) on May 20, 2022

Published in the June 13, 2022 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 38, No. 11

of bureaucratic regulations. “Now we have a captive supply with 85 to 90 percent of cattle going through only three or four major meat packers in this country.”

“The high prices you’re seeing on meat in the grocery stores — the cattlemen aren’t getting those profits. The meat packers are,” explains McIrvin. “They charge what they want.” In response to this price gouging, instead of removing restrictions that suppress smaller competitors, the Biden administration announced last December more than \$1 billion in subsidies to “ensure American families, farmers and ranchers get a fairer shake.”

What is more likely is the same result of past federal agricultural assistance programs, which have presaged expansion of Big Ag to the detriment of small farmers, consumers, and taxpayers alike. “The federal government has fixed the game for decades, siphoning billions of dollars out of the wallets of taxpayers and into the accounts of multi-million acre mega farms,” wrote *The New American’s* Joe Wolverton of Trump’s \$16 billion farm bailout in 2019. “This con is carried on by one administration after the other, without regard to party affiliation.”

McIrvin views such federal subsidies and expanding regulations as setting the stage for a perfect storm of catastrophic food crisis. Agriculture is hit from all angles; he points to the fact that most states have phased in overtime pay requirements for farm workers to coincide with the federal Fair Labor Standards Act. Farmers have long relied on exceptions to the arbitrary guidelines due to seasonal ebbs and flows inherent in their industry. Additionally, McIrvin says, the price of livestock feed is unprecedented. But he expects that “fuel will be the straw that tips the scales,” predicting a rapid rise in costs up to 100 percent over those just a few years ago. He believes “that might do more than anything else leading to food shortage.”

Happy Ending

The answer? “Free enterprise has always been the solution,” McIrvin says. Bacigalupi agrees, adding, “We also need education” that teaches people how much they need agriculture, how important farmers are to true environmental stewardship, and how dangerous misguided bureaucrats and radical activists are to food security.

“Agriculture is science,” notes Ross, and should be appreciated rather than despised. It answers the challenge of how to feed a growing population with less land and more efficient crop yields. Ross points to Norman Borlaug, an American agronomist credited with saving millions of people in third-world nations from starvation in the mid-20th century through developing high-yield, disease-resistant wheat. His work earned him the 1970 Nobel Peace Prize, the 1977 Presidential Medal of Freedom, and a Congressional Gold Medal in 2006. It also gained him the now-ironic accolade “Father of the Green Revolution,” despite stiff criticism from the environmental lobby for raising third-world economies above subsistence farming and contributing to a population explosion. In a post about “environmentalists’ role in exacerbating food shortages” in 2008, *New York Times* science columnist John Tierney quoted Borlaug’s answer to his critics: “Many of them are elitists. They’ve never experienced the physical sensation of hunger. They do their lobbying from comfortable office suites in Washington or Brussels. If they lived one month amid the misery of the developing world, as I have for fifty years, they’d be crying out for tractors and fertilizer and irrigation canals and be outraged that fashionable elitists back home were trying to deny them these things.”



Written by [Rebecca Terrell](#) on May 20, 2022

Published in the June 13, 2022 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 38, No. 11

Here we see in stark contrast the diametrically opposed goals of agriculturists and eco-radicals. Farmers promote life and prosperity, not only in growing and raising, says Bacigalupi, but even in attracting pests and predators. Their farms are natural carbon sinks, and fields grazed by their livestock deter wildfires. They cultivate a strong and honest work ethic in their families, adds Ross, and partner daily with God in growing and raising, and in witnessing life and death on the farm.

“I believe it’s agriculture that makes us strong” as a nation, says Ross. She highlights the unique diversity of the United States, which makes self-sufficiency possible. So the next time you sit down to enjoy Idaho potatoes, or New England clam chowder, or Washington apples, or Virginia ham, or Hawaiian pizza, or Georgia peaches, or baked Alaska, or Maryland crab cakes, or Texas toast, or Carolina barbecue, or Maine lobster, or California rolls, or Mississippi mud pie, or Boston baked beans, or Omaha steaks, or Florida citrus, or Louisiana hot sauce, or even Kentucky Fried Chicken, take a moment to thank God for our farmers. They grew this country strong, from sea to shining sea.

Rebecca Terrell is a senior editor of The New American.



Written by [Rebecca Terrell](#) on May 20, 2022

Published in the June 13, 2022 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 38, No. 11

Subscribe to the New American

Get exclusive digital access to the most informative, non-partisan truthful news source for patriotic Americans!

Discover a refreshing blend of time-honored values, principles and insightful perspectives within the pages of "The New American" magazine. Delve into a world where tradition is the foundation, and exploration knows no bounds.

From politics and finance to foreign affairs, environment, culture, and technology, we bring you an unparalleled array of topics that matter most.



[Subscribe](#)

What's Included?

- 24 Issues Per Year
- Optional Print Edition
- Digital Edition Access
- Exclusive Subscriber Content
- Audio provided for all articles
- Unlimited access to past issues
- Coming Soon! Ad FREE
- 60-Day money back guarantee!
- Cancel anytime.