

A Good Way To Put Farmers Out Of Business



Several years ago I heard a story about a young soul-winning city preacher who tried to convert a cantankerous old farmer. I have told it many times and with current happenings going on in our country's political scene, I think it sort of applies to some of the confusion we are seeing coming from our government. It is told that a young preacher came upon a farmer working in his field. Being concerned about the farmer's soul, the preacher asked the man, "Are you laboring in the vineyard of the Lord, my good man?" Not even paying any atten-

tion to the preacher and continuing his work, the farmer replied, "Naw, these are soybeans." "You don't understand," said the preacher. "Are you a Christian?" With the same amount of attention he gave the preacher with his previous answer, the old farmer said, "Nope, my name is Jones. You must be lookin' for Jim Christian. He lives a mile south of here." Not even attempting to give up, the young preacher tried again, asking the farmer, "Are you lost?" "Naw! I've lived here most of my life," answered the farmer. "Are you prepared for the judgment day?" the frustrated preacher asked. Catching the farmer's attention he asked, "When's it

gonna be?" Thinking he had accomplished something, the young preacher replied, "It could be today, tomorrow, or the next day." While putting his hoe against a fence and taking a handkerchief from his back pocket, the farmer wiped his brow and remarked, "Well, don't mention it to my wife. She don't get out much and she'll wanna go all three days." This story deals with a serious matter, but yet is funny. I am sure at some time in all of our daily dealings, each of us has been involved in a conversation much like this one. We just can't seem to get our point across no matter how hard we try. And, today around this nation, trying to get their point across, is the farmer instead of the preacher. As more and more generations become unassociated with the farm,

as well as become used to plenty of food at a reasonable cost than anywhere else in this world anytime and any day, farmers have become frustrated about how some leaders and influential media have taken it upon themselves to "fix" something that is not broken. In a recent article by *New York Times* writer Nicholas Kristof, he called for president-elect Barack Obama to forget about choosing a "Secretary of Agriculture," but instead select a "Secretary of Food." He agreed with and quoted author Michael Pollan who has written books stating, "We're subsidizing the least healthy calories in the supermarket - high fructose corn syrup and hydrogenated soy oil, and we're doing very little for farmers trying to grow real food." Kristof wrote in his article, "The Agriculture Department - and the agriculture committees in Congress - have traditionally been handed over to industrial farming interests by Democrats and Republicans alike. The farm lobby uses that perch to inflict unhealthy food on American children in school-lunch programs, exacerbating our national crisis with diabetes and obesity." Kristof says he was raised on a farm in Yamhill, Ore., but by some of the things he suggests, such as doing away with the Secretary of

Agriculture and changing the position to Secretary of Food, makes me wonder if he left the farm a long time ago and didn't even leave the front porch light on. His article stopped preaching things to help, but instead projected a direction for our next president to take that will give real farmers a reason to get out of the farming business. I just spent several days meeting with hundreds of Tennessee's farmers at the 87th annual Tennessee Farm Bureau convention, which represented a majority of individuals who make their entire living from farming. From all of those "grassroots" individuals who gathered to discuss issues in their industry, I did not meet a single one who I would call an industrial farmer. Yes, several of them do farm large amounts of acreage and have large numbers of livestock, but each one represented a family who makes their living from producing our food. In my opinion, there are no such things as industrial farms and factory farms. Those are simply shock terms used by those who know not what they are talking about and who wish to see agriculture, as we know it, a thing of the past. With articles like the one from Kristof and a recent Environmental Protection Agency proposal to regulate greenhouse gases on

farms under the Clean Air Act, that will assert new taxes on livestock operations, it is no wonder that our farmers are concerned about what is happening in our nation's capitol. The out-of-reason proposed regulation by EPA could put up annual assessments of \$175 for each dairy cow, \$87.50 for each head of beef cattle and \$20 for each hog on 90 percent of our livestock producers in this nation. If this becomes implemented it will cause the end to many farms and add a cost to our economy without reducing greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. It's time we stop listening to those who seem to talk with a full stomach and empty thoughts. This country hasn't seen hunger for a long time and that is one reason many have no understanding of what the consequences can be without the agricultural society we enjoy today. Please, president-elect Obama, make your selection for Secretary of Agriculture very carefully and listen to the farming communities. Their futures and this country depend on it.

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