

Agricultural Activity in a CHPEM-Inspired Public Economy

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November 2024

Currently, farming is in a state of crisis, in the USA, in Europe, and globally. This crisis has been brought about by increasingly powerful giant transnational capitalist agricultural corporations (Big-Agriculture). Small family farms have not been able to compete with corporate megafarms and are being bought up by these transnational agricultural corporations. As Big-Agriculture has increasingly dominated world food production and food distribution, small family farms have been increasingly threatened, to the point of potential extinction.

Historically, small family farmers and rural farm communities have provided a solid foundation and wholesome culture for societies. Big-Agriculture has greatly weakened these rural communities and the culture they developed. Throughout the world, rural farm communities are suffering mightily and many are disappearing.

Making matters worse, Big-Agriculture has increasingly violated fundamental principles of good farming. Conservation principles (i.e., ecologically protective farming) have been violated. Agro-chemicals (e.g., Monsanto's glyphosate) have been polluting the soil and human beings, potentially irreversibly. In its pursuit of profit, power, and control, Big-Agriculture has disrespected the environment, farm animals, and Humanity.

For more on the crisis facing farming, please see the following article:

<https://www.globalresearch.ca/farmers-world-unite-oppose-big-business-interests/5871012>

The power of Big-Agriculture is currently so great that it is unlikely that farmers of small family farms will be able to reverse Big-Agriculture's increasing dominance, even if they "unite" and receive strong help from advocates of small family farms. In my opinion, the most effective way to correct the mess that Big-Agriculture is making is to consider the option of applying the Children's Hospital Public Economy Model (CHPEM) to agriculture.¹⁻⁴ Why should we consider this option and what would farming look like if the CHPPEM were applied to agriculture? As a way to answer these questions let me tell a story about my grandfather.

During the 1920s, 30s, and early 40s, my grandfather owned and operated one of the larger wheat farms near Cheney, Washington, a few miles south of Spokane. My mother fondly remembers harvest time, when all of the wheat farmers around Cheney would work together to harvest each farmer's acreage, one at a time, in the late summer. They had to time things just right---waiting long enough for the hot summer sun to ripen the golden tassels of wheat, but harvesting before late summer rains matted down the waving fields of grain. There was both wisdom and luck involved. Most important was teamwork and group effort. They would gather

their horse-drawn combines and harvest the first farm, then move to the second farm, then the next. It was a collaborative effort. None of the farmers could have harvested their individual farm by themselves. When it was my grandparent's turn to have their wheat harvested, my grandmother would provide a huge steak and eggs breakfast each morning for all the farmers and farm-hands. After all of farms had been harvested, there was a celebration

I never met my grandfather, because he died a few years before I was born. From what I could gather, he was an "altruistic natural leader."⁵⁻⁷ He was highly respected among his fellow farmers and in the community as a whole. He had an innate and practiced ability to lead other farmers in a kind, competent, effective way. Other farmers trusted his advice and judgment. They loved his sense of humor, too. He reportedly enjoyed playing practical jokes on his friends. He was a leader in encouraging and teaching new conservation measures to other farmers. His understanding of ecologically protective farming was ahead of his time. He taught fundamental principles of responsible farming to the younger farmers. He was a leader at the local grange and would help his fellow farmers decide when it was best to send their wheat down the Columbia River to Portland.

He was an "FDR democrat" who believed in "public works" and cared about the plight of farmers during and after the Great Depression. He worked, politically, to obtain farm subsidies from the US Department of Agriculture when farmers desperately needed financial assistance during difficult times. These well-deserved and gratefully received subsidies enabled the farmers to "farm the right way" and honor conservation principles, rather than take harmful short cuts.

I suspect my grandfather was like the excellent physicians I have worked with: He was conservative, progressive, liberal, radical, and revolutionary all at the same time.⁸ His social, political, and economic thinking and beliefs could not be categorized by just one of those labels. All of those labels fit. He was not reactionary or overzealous. He was committed to the fundamental principles of wholesome healthy farming. He was appropriately tolerant of new and different ideas, but was also appropriately intolerant when/if conservation principles and ethical principles were violated.

My grandfather would have been horrified by the corporatization of agriculture that has occurred during recent decades—the chemicalization promoted by Monsanto; the potentially irreversible contamination of the soil, our food, and Humanity; the replacement of small family farms with multinational corporate mega-farms; the violations of conservation principles and other ethical and scientifically-sound practices of farming; the affront to common sense and common decency on the part of Big-Agriculture; and Big-Agriculture's increasing dominance of world farming and world food production.

Were he to be alive today, I suspect my grandfather would have recognized and understood these trends as the predictable evolution and outcome when the corporate capitalist model is applied to agriculture---just as I have recognized and understood the predictable evolution and outcome of application of the corporate capitalist model to health care. There are obvious parallels between the predictable evolution of corporatized agriculture and that of corporatized health care. Potentially irreversible disaster has occurred in both cases.

I cannot speak for my grandfather, of course, but I can easily imagine that in response to this harmful corporate evolution of agriculture, my grandfather would have been willing to strongly consider the option of applying the Children's Hospital Public Economy Model (CHPEM) to agriculture as a meaningful way, and possibly the only way, to fight Big-Agriculture and preserve small family farms, restore conservation principles, protect the soil, restore responsible farming in general, and provide healthier food at affordable food prices. He would have realized the likely futility of farmers of small family farms rising up to take on Big-Agriculture. He would have realized that Big-Agriculture is too powerful, too wealthy, too unwilling to reform itself, and too resistant to legislated regulatory checks on its behavior.

I believe my grandfather would have embraced the notion of a "public economy" (a CHPEM-inspired public economy), cautiously at first but then enthusiastically. In his case, he would have focused on application of the CHPEM to wheat farming and farming in general. He would have considered how, in a public economy, skilled farmers who had little or no farmland of their own or were tired of financially struggling to maintain a small or medium-sized private farm, particularly when competing against ruthless corporate mega-farms, would have opportunity to become "public farmers" who farm public farm land---just like salaried "public school teachers" teach in "public schools" and salaried academic pediatricians practice medicine in public children's hospitals.

The public would provide the farm land, resources, and equipment. The "public farmer" could fully concentrate on farming---much like academic pediatricians appreciate and prefer working for a salary at a public children's hospital, where they can focus on the science and clinical practice of medicine and need not deal with the "business aspects" of owning their own "private practice." For similar reasons, some farmers who privately owned farmland, even large acreage, might prefer to sell their land to the public; farm that same land for the sake of the public; farm that land in "the right way;" and forego the "business aspects" of private farm ownership.

Granted, such a change would result in some sacrifice of individual control (loss of some aspects of individual liberty) but it would result in the public, including farmers of small farms, having greater public control over (and freedom from) an out-of-control and immensely powerful Big-Agriculture. I suspect my grandfather would have argued that creating greater public control

over Big-Agriculture (by developing Public Agriculture) was well worth sacrificing some individual control, some aspects of personal individual liberty. Besides, he would have realized that as a public farmer he would not need to sacrifice the principles and freedoms that he, personally, held most dear (e.g., conservation principles, respect for the land and farm animals, respect for Humanity, and a “most precious freedom”⁹); whereas the capture of farming by Big-Agriculture involves great sacrifice of these principles and this most precious freedom. On balance, he would feel more free and able to do more good as a “public farmer” than is the current case for private farmers who struggle to keep their small family farms afloat.

Becoming a public farmer does not mean that farmers would ignore the business aspects of farming. Public farmers who have a talent for and interest in the business aspects of farming would be asked to take the lead in looking after the financial aspects of the public farms. They would be doing so for the sake of the public, not for their own benefit---much like “altruistic natural leaders” in a public children’s hospital are asked to assume leadership positions that involve creation of appropriate budgets. I imagine that my grandfather would have been a highly valued “altruistic natural leader” within the public farm system, and he would have readily agreed to serve in that capacity. He would have enjoyed the “precious kind of freedom” that the public farms would provide. (See article entitled, “A Most Precious Kind of Freedom.”)

Many of my academic pediatrics friends and I have concluded the following: Ownership of a private practice is over-rated; corporatization of health care is unacceptable; and working for a public children’s hospital (during the altruistic era) has been the most enjoyable and meaningful way to work. Similarly, farmers of small family farms would likely conclude: Ownership of a private small family farm is over-rated; corporatization of agriculture is unacceptable; and being responsible for farming a public plot of land, as part of a larger public farm system that is devoted to “farming right” and serving the public with healthy affordable food, would be the most enjoyable and meaningful way to be a farmer.

So, in the final analysis, my guess is that my grandfather, if he were alive today, would respond to the current farming crisis by strongly encouraging farmers of small and medium sized farms to consider application of the CHPEM to agriculture---i.e., consider becoming “public farmers” in a “public farm system.” This would be analogous to school teachers being “public school teachers” in a “public education system,” or physicians being “public physicians” in a “public health care system.”

I hasten to add that none of this “application of the CHPEM to agriculture” or to other components of the general economy should occur without extensive public education and dialogue about the CHPEM beforehand.^{10, 11} An essential principle of the CHPEM is that it should never be implemented in a general economy until/unless the public has received thorough education about the CHPEM, has engaged in extensive dialogue about it, and has

democratically determined whether it wants to implement a version of the CHPEM. This is analogous to the paramount importance of “patient education” and the “informed consent” process in Medicine.

Further comments on what farming would be like in a CHPEM-inspired public economy: Laws prohibiting agricultural malpractice by Multinational Agribusinesses would be proposed, publicly discussed, then subjected to a vote (perhaps by referendum in order to bypass the lobbying influence on Senators and Representatives). Similarly, laws shutting down Agrichemical businesses, like Monsanto, would be proposed. Agribusinesses, including agrichemical businesses, would be held to account (via public hearings and investigative reports) and the possibility of appropriate penalties would be publicly discussed---e.g., farm land bought up by Big-Agriculture would be returned to the public, to be farmed by public farmers.

While considering proposals to dismantle the current irresponsible transnational corporate agribusinesses, proposals could be made to create more small and medium-sized family farms than have ever existed in recent US history. One proposal would be for these farms to be publicly-owned but family-operated. The public would acquire or mobilize farmland and seek excellent, responsible farmers to farm it. This acquisition of land could occur via various means: Farmland currently owned by Agribusinesses could be given to the public, as part of a penalty arrangement. Farmers that currently still own farmland would be asked to consider selling their land to the public according to an attractive arrangement that would be more than fair to the farmer. Public land that has not heretofore been used for agricultural purposes could be mobilized to do so.

Excellent, responsible farmers, preferably farmers who have heretofore been farming small and medium-sized family farms, would be sought to farm these public farm lands. They would receive appropriately generous public support—a generous salary, all of the equipment and supplies they need, educational resources (especially for less experienced farmers), and the gratitude and respect of the public. The farmers would be viewed by the public and would view themselves in the same way that CHPEM-inspired pediatricians who work for public children’s hospitals are viewed and view themselves. These farmers would be public “physicians for the land” who provide care for the land and healthy food for the public. They and the public would develop great pride in their Public Agriculture.¹² The food produced by the public farm system (public agriculture) would become healthier, as would the soil. As a result, all of us could become healthier.

An additional benefit of the public farm system is that rural farm communities would become revitalized and more wholesome than ever before. Not only would these communities thrive as

farming communities, but also other public activities would be developed in these communities, rendering these communities more economically diverse, as well as more demographically diverse. The rural communities could be transformed into highly attractive places to live, thereby contributing to a reversal of unhealthy, excessive urbanization.

In my opinion, as this CHPEM-inspired public farm system (Public Agriculture) is increasingly developed, the new “public farmers” would enjoy their work more than ever before and would find their work more meaningful than ever before. They would sense how much they are appreciated by the public. They would appreciate not having to worry so much about the financial stresses involved in farming. They would appreciate the appropriate salary, the farming equipment, and other forms of ample support provided by the public farm system. They would appreciate the freedom and support to “farm the right way.” They would experience the same “precious freedom” that pediatricians experienced during the altruistic era of public children’s hospitals.² They would also notice how their rural farm community has come alive again, is prospering and becoming more wholesome and healthy than before. When they look back, they will conclude that their lives and their rural communities are far better off than was the case during Big-Agribusiness domination of farming.

I suspect that my grandfather would be pleased to see the “vast fields of public agricultural activity”¹³ that a CHPEM-inspired public economy would create on the farmlands of America. He and his fellow farmers would be glad to see the replacement of Big-Agriculture with Public Agriculture---replacement of “Mean Arrangements of Man”¹⁴ with kind public arrangements that create Social Beauty¹⁵ for all to enjoy. He would be pleased by the return to ecologically protective farming. He would be happy that farmers could again enjoy a “Most Precious Freedom.” He would find peace in seeing rural farm communities create Social Beauty to match the beauty of his beloved “amber waves of grain.”

RELATED ARTICLES:

The Footnotes refer to the following related essays, which are posted (or will soon be posted) on the **Notes From the Social Clinic** website: www.notesfromthesocialclinic.org [These essays are listed, by title, in the Table of Contents \(TOC\) of the website.](#)

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