

Where have all t

This week's feature deals with an issue of vast significance to all of us as Canadians. So often in our modern world we overlook the most basic values that our nation was built upon. There is a culture in Canada that is facing extinction, a culture based on nurturing the land, a heritage and tradition that has survived until present, all the upheavals within society. Unfortunately, in the here and now farming and the nurturing of one's own land has become an increasingly difficult task, one that faces powerful elements bent on its destruction.

The very nature of our economy and our penchant with over-production and profit have squeezed many subsistence farmers out, forcing them to sell their land, their livelihood, and their dignity. It is my hope that this feature will enlighten many of us raised in the urban sprawl as to the "culture" of farming, the last bastion of people in harmony with nature and the elements.

"If the farmer is selling his product at less than the cost of production he has no energy left to go beyond that. If we can bring about profitability in our farming operations, we can then point out to the farmer a better way of carrying on his operation."

Malcom McLeod

Minister of Agriculture

New Brunswick

This quotation touches the surface of a very serious problem in our modern community. Much of the problem stems from great outside pressures being placed on our agricultural sector. Canadian farmers have been asked to demand the last ounce of productivity from our soils — largely because of, economic necessity, international prices and technological progress. In these days of high production cost and low commodity prices, the least expensive way is often the only way a small farmer can survive. Coupled with the need to increase production to stay alive small farmers are faced with the rapid depletion of our soils and other environmental factors. Our Federal and Provincial Governments have considered increased production a major priority often without consideration of the long term consequences to the agrarian sector of society. Farmers are encouraged to produce in greater quantities, on the same amount of land, to meet the demands of both domestic and export markets. Until recently small farmers could obtain relatively low-cost fertilizer and fuel which could compensate from the resultant loss of nutrients that come with increased production. Now, the cost of such necessities have driven many farmers into bankruptcy, their farms once fertile are now wastelands to be bought out by huge agribusiness interests with the capital to sustain a profit.

In the past several years the threat to small farm interests has become so great that these individuals can now be placed on an "endangered species" list, it has become an increasingly arduous task to try and run a small farm in our modern economy and one that seems to place more stumbling blocks than incentives.

On Wednesday, December 5th, the National Farmers' Union met on Prince Edward Island, as a group they represent farmers interests nation-wide (although each area faces different problems) and this was their annual meeting.

Addressing the annual meeting of the N.F.U., Prof. S. Pobihushchy, of UNB's Department of Political Science indicated that, "Society today gears production towards profit and urges consumption for profit." He defined the family farm as being, "A set of relations between people, animals and the land, and a lifestyle loved by those who participate not because of profit but because of the realization that life cannot go on without that relationship." He suggested people are functioning in an ideology telling them they don't have to worry about abusing the land or the environment because, "we will acquire the knowledge to correct the problem."

"There is no evidence to date to support a belief that we can solve the problems we cause in nature and life by using technology," he warned, citing such examples as the Great Lakes, the dying New Brunswick forests, the dying oceans, high unemployment and a disregard for the elderly in society. He said science and technology are not being used for good purposes or to direct human purpose towards a har-



mony with nature. Instead, it is being used to gain control not only over the environment but over "our neighbours."

Professor Pobihushchy warned "the family farm is disappearing as a consequence of the grasp for power over the people and the economy. The disappearing farm is a symptom of the larger problems facing western society. He added:

"I've heard it said that Farmers aren't ambitious, that they really don't want a lot of land—just their neighbours'. We're spending millions in space for the simple sake of gaining control beyond earth."

Professor Pobihushchy's concerns are well founded. We are presently witnessing the most farm foreclosures since the Great Depression, small farms are disappearing at an alarming rate, rising inflation and interest rates coupled with low commodity prices and high production costs are the greatest evils. Beyond these, we find a developing mega-complex, interests working to undermine the small farmer. Huge investors like McCains with the capital to turn large tracts of land into production, buy out small farmers allowing them to stay on, working as farm labourers. This phenomenon is not judged by isolated cases but is broad encompassing, sucking many once prosperous small farmers into its momentum. The N.F.U. is attempting to bring a sense of unity to small farmers but, it is relatively powerless against the financial and political power of these huge agribusiness interests.

Wendell Barry in his book: *The Unsettling of America, Culture and Agriculture*; has defined in simple terms what farming, the best farming calls for:

"The best farming requires a farmer—a husband man, a nurturer—not a technician or business man. A good farmer is a cultural product; he is made by a sort of training, certainly, in what his time imposes or demands, but he is also made by generations tested preserved, handed down in settled households, friendships, and communities that are deliberately and carefully native their own ground, in which the past has prepared the present and the present safeguards the future."

The concentration of the farmland into larger and larger holdings and fewer and fewer hands—with the consequent increase of over-head, debt and dependence on machines—is thus a matter of complex significance cannot be disentangled from its cultural significance. It forces 'a profound revolution' in the farmer's mind: once his investment in land and machines is big enough, he must foresake