

ARTICLE

AGRICULTURE - a fundamental principle

Problem: The agricultural system in the world is not satisfactory

Solution: In the globalized world we need to establish a decentralised system based first on individual and family; local and national self-reliance paired with a sophisticated interdependence at global, national, and local levels.

Proper agricultural development is a fundamental principle conducive to the advancement of mankind and to the reconstruction of the world. The fundamental basis of the community is agriculture and the agricultural class exceed other classes in the importance of its service.

There are at least three reasons for the emphasis on agriculture as the foundation for social order. The first is to ensure that all have a diet sufficient to nourish full physical and mental well-being. Second, everyone, not only the producer, has a high economic stake in the success of the agricultural system. Although in the industrial nations, as few as two percent of populations are engaged in farming, as many as twenty five percent work in the food and agricultural system in production and distribution of farm inputs and machinery, marketing, transportation, food sales and handling, advertising, finance, and so on. In Third World countries, most people are directly employed in farm work. Third, food has a tremendous cultural significance. Our most basic human relationships - mother to baby, parent to child, gatherings of family and friends, national, religious, or ethnic feasts and festivals - involve nurturing through food. Conversely, because of the need to eat we can all understand and empathise with hunger. Food and agriculture, then, have a profound symbolic power that can be a unifying force.

In the globalised world we need to establish a decentralised system based first on individual and family; local and national self-reliance paired with a sophisticated interdependence on the global, national, and local levels. A system that manages the resources for the benefit of whole communities rather than a struggle to capture wealth for individuals, ruling class or a state monopoly. Village reconstruction will involve the establishment of a central community institution, termed the "General Storehouse" directed by a democratically elected council of trustees responsible for the allocation of resources and services. The Storehouse combines functions of economic regulation, lending and social service. Its first responsibility will be to stabilize farm economy. It will guarantee a minimum income for the farmers under any harvest condition. The excess of funds will be channelled upward to the national treasury, presumably to be allocated likewise within the community of communities.

While rudimentary, this scheme establishes principles needed in agricultural and community development: social responsibility for ensured productivity; democratic control and regulation of community resources, especially credit; community support for individual or collective initiatives. It provides a means of social regulation or trusteeship without imposition on entrepreneurship while enshrining the principle of community self-reliance at the foundation of mass economics.

The threefold relationship of humans to nature gives our work on the land a quality of worship. It demands a new approach to agriculture, which is the main meeting point of humanity and nature. The idea of agriculture as a form of worship is implied in the word agri-culture. Agriculture means literally the cultivation of fields, but behind the word culture is the latin cultus and the Sanscrit kwel, which means to dwell, to care, and to worship. From the word agriculture, we are led to a deeply religious concept, embedded in language, which has to do with agriculture implying dwelling on the land and caring for it as an act of worship. The understanding that our work is worship carries with it the responsibility of finding an appropriately caring quality in our endeavours. Our work-worship becomes the more worthy to the extent that we assume our responsibility to the land and to each other by implementing sound husbandry in a just and sustainable food system.

The task of building a new social and economic order is associated with the redesign of agriculture to ensure economic viability for producers in self-reliant communities, which are vital cells in a global organism founded on

cooperative interdependence. We are to bring a spiritual sense to our agricultural work, to elevate it to a form of worship, and in the process to transform our inner lives in correspondence to God's Will revealed in nature and Word. We are to conduct our lives individually and collectively in such fashion as to ensure a sustainable society by balancing technical and spiritual development. We are to have a vision of our relatedness to the earth and are called to an inspired station where we find ourselves empowered to take full responsibility in carrying forward an ever-advancing civilization.

Paul Haney

This partial summary, extracted by Farhang Sefidvash from the article with the same title was published in the Journal of Bahá'í Studies, vol 3, no 1, 1991. This article was taken from the e-mail publishing service of the Research Centre for Global Governance - a global "Think Tank". Membership represents 92 countries.

You may subscribe and take part by sending an e-mail message to: <mailto:rcgg@orion.ufrgs.br>

Baha'i Prayers available from Warwick A small (A6 size) single fold leaflet containing 9 short Bahá'í prayers on various topics. Ideal for giving to enquirers or placing on stalls 50 for £2.50 +p&p. From Warwick Bookshop, e-mail: <mailto:vickers@netcomuk.co.uk>