



Church of the Brethren General Board

The Farm Crisis

March 1985

The cries of Brethren on farms and in farm-related enterprises are being heard. Many of our people are caught in a national condition of mounting farm debt, rising costs, and falling crop prices. We have been a people close to the soil. We have tilled the soil. We have nurtured our families in rural settings. We have built our churches in the countryside. In earlier times, as in the drought years of the later 19th century, Brethren responded effectively to aid members caught in agricultural crisis, now our members who live and work in the context of the family farm again find their economic existence threatened. When these members are in danger, our whole body is affected. We must respond as a whole body. We are called to take absolutely seriously Paul's lyric: "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together." (1 Cor. 12: 26).

A decade has elapsed since the adoption of the statement *The Church and Farm Issues* by the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference in 1974. The statement, based upon a report of a study committee on *The Church and Agriculture*, expressed a deep concern for the rapid loss of family farms leading to the death of a way of life.

The steady loss of family farms has accelerated to a record high in 1984. United States agriculture appears to be in the midst of radical restructuring caused by a management, technological, and capital-intensive revolution. Big farms are getting bigger and changing the very nature of farming. Traditional medium-sized family farms are vanishing at a depression era rate. Small farms are hanging on, but only because their operators work also in other occupations.

Farm related businesses and industries are seriously threatened. For many farm communities this all sounds like a death knell. The General Board as it meets in March 1985, feels the pain of what is happening to our own people and to the nation in this farm crisis.

To the brethren, farmers and farm-related persons, we convey our concern and prayers in a time of stress and crisis. We are called to be communities of love and service, where committed brothers and sisters give and receive counsel. Such an environment provides a primary source of strength to those encountering serious financial problems.

Among the ways the community of faith might be helpful are these:

1. Support the pastor in providing spiritual counsel and practical assistance.
2. Encourage persons to be open to spiritual and emotional support from active participation in a small group fellowship of the congregation.
3. Maintain a loving and non-judgmental climate in the congregation which makes it comfortable to ask for help before a crisis becomes unmanageable.
4. Plan church school electives or weekend workshops that help non-business persons in the congregation to understand the unique risks and problems inherent in business and farming.

5. Schedule regular breakfast support groups where encouragement and guidance may evolve.
6. Offer, when appropriate and feasible, temporary financial assistance to cover monthly mortgage payments, food purchases, or health insurance premiums.
7. Help the farmer or business person to get in touch with professionals in the community, such as public accountants, attorneys and counselors.
8. Become effective advocate to the federal and state government for policies which support family farms.

To State and Federal governments of the United States we urge action that will:

1. Establish as the first priority of farm programs the support of family-owned and operated modest-sized farms.
2. Correct the inequitable distribution of benefits of farm programs by limiting eligibility for subsidized credit and support payments to moderate-sized farms
3. Raise target price levels to reflect more adequately the costs of production.
4. Revise tax policies to eliminate artificial stimulus for farm investment.
5. Secure for the U.S. an adequate supply of food and promote a stable world food reserve.
6. Make funds available to restructure farm debts of moderate-sized farms to radically reduce the number of farm bankruptcies.
7. Prevent soil erosion, which destroys future production capacity and pollutes the air and water.

Finally we reaffirm and commend for study the 1974 Annual Conference Statement The Church and Farm Issues, believing it provides guidance relevant to these times. We offer our prayers and concern for those suffering in this crisis.

**The above resolution was adopted by the Church of the Brethren General Board on March 5, 1985.*

