

Mom,  
Dad,

It's still a bit easier for me to write and edit because I'm still wrapping my head around ideas from the past 3 years, especially the past 3 months. I'm finding the language to express things I've known gutturally for ten years. I hope this helps explain more of what I'd like to do and why.

I know a lot of things. I also don't know a lot of things, especially the 'how' for some of this. But the learning would be exciting.

### **## What do I want, basically, and why?**

I want to carry on the work of tilling and keeping the land and lifestyle of my ancestors. Moreso, I want it to be transformed and invigorated with a relationship with Jesus Christ. What do I mean by that?

Even before the fall, God places Adam and Eve in the garden to till and keep it. This tilling and keeping is so fundamental; it is the primary role that man is supposed to have in this world: cultivating it and ordering it, bringing it into something even higher yet - it is in very beginning that man is called to be a priest and minister over the world.

There is a relationship between man and land. Wendell Berry likens this relationship to a marriage. A sort of covenant, and a sort of relationship that cannot be fully understood, only lived. And while land is not the same thing as another person - there is still a sincere love that I have for our farm, a love which is more and more longful each day.

It is not only a sort of romantic affection towards it, but increasingly, a recognition of its justice. The modern industrial world is predicated on an impersonal cubicalization, where a man's ownership of the fruits of his labor is not recognized, let alone the ownership of his tools - he is reduced to a cog in a machine. At best, he is a notable cog - but never is he truly free. Only if he becomes a wrench, a 'disruptor', is he free, but this is a freedom often corrupted.

And, what is this freedom anyways? Freedom to what? To follow God's order - rather than the order of the world. It isn't a sort of freedom in interchangeability, or complete and utter independence. As mom was reinforcing to me, there is freedom in structure - the farm seems like such a structure that would give me the freedom I am looking for: a structure of ownership, which entails responsibility.

Farms have the potential to be harmonious disruptors. If they can wean themselves off of dependence from foreign imports, realign the distribution of surplus to those that they can have community with, and break from the patterns of industrial production which are violent - they can be neither destructive disruptor nor cog, but a font from which God's order is shown to the world. The God-dependent farm is the foundation, where care and love for the land is first and foremost what yields fruits, with any sort of technical mastery as a consequence rather than driving factor. Also, raising children NOT on a farm, increasingly terrifies me. In a world so devoid of sanity, we need lived ties to God's order.

I have come to understand that this sort of desire to love and come into relationship with the objects of work is what I principally desire in my work, because it is so formative to my soul and my relationships with others. It is this what I believe we need - we as in the entire body of Christ, but we as in our family as well.

### **## So, what could a farm look like?**

"A farmer's job is to feed himself and to improve the soil"

I would like to utilize more of our land for production of food and other immediately useful commodities - rather than commodities (or quantities thereof) that are only useful in the context of an industrial apparatus. More chickens - more cows. Fruit trees and vegetables. But I understand that I do not understand what would be best suited to the land, and that it could require trial-and-error, and time investiture, to get this built up.

We definitely need a new house - or a few. I would love to build these. I don't have the knowledge right now to do this but I want to learn.

### **## What can be built on the foundation?**

I think it's important to look into the future and community to see why we're laboring and building - it's for others, not ourselves. It's to be the shining farm on the hill, or to be a source of other good things for the world. Here are just a few ideas that excite me, or that I see as good investments down the line (though, ultimately, the best thing to do is listen to people in the area and see what's needed):

- Reinvigorate 4-H programs, or even run parallel programs, that seek to match students with actual on the job training, and an understanding that it's a good to stay in your community and use your skills to better it rather than "the world".
- A furniture business that makes flat-pack, heirloom-quality furniture.
- A crop-share program that sells surplus produce to the B-N area - Lincoln, Clinton, Wapella, Heyworth, McLean... (Is this what the folks in the grove are trying to do or would be interested in?)
- Develop a line of agricultural equipment, or an open-source-hardware movement (similar to what has happened with 3D printers like the Prusa) for tractors and a other farm implements.
- I think that a great service could be done by forming a retreat house or community around the farm with a Catholic context. Peter Maurin dubbed such a thing an "Agronomic University".
- Build a shop co-op like a makerspace. However, it should have buy-in rather than rent-in; if you want to be a part, you pony up \$10,000 or something and that. There's too many issues with the rentorship style that the makerspaces out here have, but the idea that a lot of us would benefit from access to a mill or lathe from time to time, is valid.

### **## What am I worried about? What am I unsure of?**

(Just because I am worried about these things doesn't mean I am strongly, or should be)

- Isolation and living as an island. In particular, I do ponder what prospects for a wife would look like - but I also suspect God will provide.
- Sustenance without a why. Again, we should be striving towards something.
- (over)-dependence on oil and trade on a market system that at any moment could utterly collapse, or which is evolving to be more and more like Sodom and Gomorrah.
- I don't suspect this to be a problem, but I don't want to live comfortably in luxury. I always find myself least happy when I am comfortable.
- I don't know exactly if I want to farm as a full-on lifestyle or just as a foundational component of how I support myself. I suppose I don't need to know the answer to that yet.

## **## Where should I start?**

This is what I'm most looking for guidance on. Blindly coming back doesn't seem wise - it's a temptation for just maintaining the same that I'm doing. I need to reintegrate properly. Here are possibilities to start with:

- Come back for harvest. Be more involved with the managerial side, the record-keeping, actually understand the farm as it stands.
- Do some design work for a local machine shop.
- Figure out the steps to start work on a house
- Other ideas and suggestions...

I hope that helps. Let's call sometime soon.

- Thad