

## The Morning Paper

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After The Dickinson Press newspaper arrived, there was the instinctive turn to the obituary section. There were 10 obituaries or death notices, but no birth notices. In fact, rarely are birth notices printed, which is an affirmation that seldom are there any births, at least in the rural sectors of the Midwest.

Later, a story popped up on the Web noting a producer's final movement of cattle, bringing to close a long-term cattle lease. The grass is destined to be returned to nongrazing. The lack of people and cattle has huge impacts on the dynamics of a society based in agriculture.

Perhaps we need to stop and think a little more than we usually do. Often the answer is thought to be in a quick Web search for a quantifiable answer. The loss of people and cattle from the landscape creates questions about why this is happening. In actuality, these questions are much longer and the answers much more elusive.

A quotation from the first paragraph in Chapter 6, entitled Farming, from "The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson - Volume VII - Society and Solitude (1870)" certainly makes one think.

"The glory of the farmer is that, in the division of labors, it is his part to create. All trade rests at last on his primitive activity. He stands close to Nature; he obtains from the earth the bread and the meat. The food which was not, he causes to be. The first farmer was the first man, and all historic nobility rests on possession and use of land. Men do not like hard work, but every man has an exceptional respect for tillage, and a feeling that this is the original calling of his race, that he himself is only excused from it by some circumstance which made him delegate it for a time to other hands. If he have not some skill which recommends him to the farmer, some product for which the farmer will give him corn, he must himself return into his due place among the planters."

The quote was found in a recent visit to the Ralph Waldo Emerson Web site at RWE.org, which is dedi-

cated to the life and writing of the noted author. The site certainly jars loose a few thoughts.

Yes, the 1870s would have been vastly different from today, but as the Dickinson Research Extension Center seals the binding on its first 100 years of existence and starts the next 100 years, perhaps the review is more than worthwhile.

Two thoughts stand out. "The food which was not, he causes to be," and "he himself is only excused from it by some circumstance."

Driving through the Midwest, one can't help noticing that the region lives on agriculture. The loss of people and cows has a devastating effect on food production and beef. The sister crops that produce bread and other produce also are fundamental to this area.

It is interesting that Emerson notes food as the heart of what is created here and to excuse anyone from such activity needed to be the exception. There seems to be an embedded obligation for people to participate. Instead, the cattle are asked to leave and those versed in their care laid to rest.

It was just The Dickinson Press newspaper and a click of MSN.com, but perhaps the meanings should be pondered more. This is agriculture country where cows, wheat and a multitude of produce have been raised for a very long time. Maybe it was just the local paper and the Internet doing what they do, the bearers of good and bad news.

Before we bid farewell, perhaps we should think that Emerson wasn't too far off. Agriculture creates and innately belongs to the people. The default position is to stay and produce and not delegate to others. Bring back the cows and the people will follow.

May you find all your NAIS-approved ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at [www.BeefTalk.com](http://www.BeefTalk.com). For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 1133 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to [www.CHAPS2000.com](http://www.CHAPS2000.com) on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0289.

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## **How Important Is Agriculture?**

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Ralph Waldo Emerson