



BeefTalk 682: Love of the Land

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

“He (farmer) stands close to nature; he obtains from the earth the bread and the meat. The food which was not, he causes to be.”

— Ralph Waldo Emerson —

If one really ponders, there are two thoughts that dominate much of the discussion in agriculture.

There are those days that never should come but they do. A quick note, maybe a phone call or email or some other communication, but the message is still the same: Someone has passed on from this life. In this case, that someone is Steve.

We are left behind to rake leaves and to continue the preparing for what this life will bring us. Once one rakes the leaves and puts everything in order, the tree seems awfully bare.

However, at times, if one is not careful, there can be this dream that, no matter what we do, the leaves always will stay

on the tree.

We can become indifferent, so we begin to believe we can keep the tree green. However, it does not work that way. Everything we do somehow must help those who will come after us. Simply being here as a user does not work.

I had the pleasure to walk with Steve not that long ago and admire how he had come to appreciate all that he was doing for those close to him and, in a much broader way of helping people, helping people through the land that he loved.

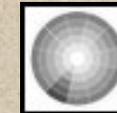
Ralph Waldo Emerson once said: “He (farmer) stands close to nature; he obtains from the earth the bread and the meat. The food which was not, he causes to be.”

That was Steve because he was the one who “obtains from the earth the bread and the meat.” Walking along, the source was the land and all that can be produced from that land. Not only producing but marketing the produce face to face to those who needed an evening meal.

If one really ponders, there are two thoughts that dominate much of the discussion in agriculture. There are those who constantly are seeking inputs to expand outputs. The assumption is that by increasing inputs, one can expand outputs and feed the world.



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The same thought would apply to supply and demand for all that people desire. If the demand is strong, supply will increase and associated inputs will be sought, with the costs wrapped up in the final product.

Technology has advanced at an aggressive pace to keep up with dwindling inputs. This aggressive model assumes that larger and larger quantities of food can be produced through the discovery of new inputs to meet a growing population.

As Steve and I walked, another model was quite evident. There was not a need to feed the world, but a need to feed the neighbor. If everyone was to take care of his or her neighbor, the world never would be hungry. One greater than us came up with that idea, but Steve was a living example of one who took care of the neighbors.

The capacity of the land to produce food is astonishing. A pair of hands and some space can yield a tremendous bounty of food. Going back to Ralph Waldo Emerson: "He stands close to nature; he obtains from the earth the bread and the meat. The food which was not, he causes to be."

This bountiful harvest is what makes the heart and soul of those who love the land smile. The harvest yields what we need and, as we spread that harvest around, the neighbors smile. As the neighbors share with neighbors, the world smiles.

Another friend's thought arrived in one of those quick emails shortly after I learned of Steve's passing. The discussion centered on family. It stated: "We now worry over them, so the list just expands from parenthood on. This is a difficult world for those young people as they mature and stand up for values and principles that are eroding quickly in society at large. I think these values and principles will be sorely tested as this environment continues to get worse."

As we move further from the land that Emerson and Steve and so many of us have cherished, the world does get contentious.

There is the idea that, in an input-driven world with less reality and more presumption, all wants can be had. Again, this is not a true statement.

For many generations, the land has provided for those who were dependent on the land. The land was reality. As ranchers and farmers, livestock and crops were cared for and neighbors cared for neighbors. Caring for all the living things that were entrusted to the farmer or rancher was assumed to be a simple task.

Emerson understood the connection between the land and the need to farm. Steve was that connection. The soil, crops, grass, cattle, harvest and the final food product are connected.

Finally, a few freshly cut flowers, a meal, some conversation and a farewell, are all products of the land and its people. We need more people like Steve to keep our future strong. Farewell, Steve.

May you find all your ear tags.

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