

Sustainable agriculture is something I do for a variety of reasons. The first reason is that I believe that according to 1 Thessalonians 4: 11-12 I want to "...make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need." I firmly believe that if I am a consumer I have a duty to be a producer. There is something that is wrong in my mind when 90% of the people consume what 10% produce. The model the Bible lays out is that each man has his own vineyard and produces his own wheat and oil and milk. In fact blessings in the Bible are always listed in terms of having an abundance of agricultural items. Abraham was so rich that he and Lot had to separate because they each had too much livestock and their herdsmen were fighting over grazing land. When Jacob complained about Laban's mistreatment of him, God caused him to work out a deal with Laban where Jacob ended up with the healthiest and strongest livestock. When Jacob met Esau on his way back home, he sought to appease him with a gift of many droves of livestock. Even the Levites were given cities *and their pasture lands* so that they wouldn't be just leaching off their countrymen. In God's plan, Jerusalem had land set aside inside the city to produce the food the residents consumed. The nation of Israel never really obeyed God completely in His plan. They never observed the year of Jubilee or let the land rest every seven years as God had asked them to. This was the reason the deportation to Babylon lasted 70 years, so the land could rest for the time the Israelites did not let it rest during their time using the land. Paul warned that he who doesn't work should not eat.

Our culture today is set up in such a way that most people don't think about where their food comes from or what effort was employed to produce it. We complain about the price of food, yet most of commercially produced food is farmed by people from other countries being paid minimum wage or less in order to satisfy our culinary desires. We want it cheap, easy and mostly already prepared so we can take more time to spend on whatever our pleasures are. I believe this is not the Biblical model. The curse put on mankind because of Adam's sin was that we would produce food "from the sweat of our brow". Very few people do much sweating to produce their food. They use others to sweat for them. What this does is separate us from the effects of the curse, so we start to forget that we are sinful people in need of repentance and forgiveness. Ever since the Garden, mankind has been trying to mitigate the effects of the curse so we can pretend we are not accountable to God. Agriculture is bound up in the very heart of God and his desire to bring all men to Him. Most illustrations in the Bible and most of Jesus' parables involve agriculture. If we are separated from this most basic part of life, we find ourselves almost illiterate to some of the illustrations taught in the Bible. If one is to take a critical look at history, it has only been in the past 100 years or less that the majority of the population has been separated from agriculture. Think about how we classify "disadvantaged" countries as "non-industrial". Industrialized nations are the rich, wealthy and powerful nations. Yet is this an accurate picture of things from a Biblical perspective? Remember that the wisdom of God is foolishness to men and the wisdom of men is foolishness to God.

The god of our nation and world is humanism. This is basically the belief that man is God. If man is God, then he can create things and destroy things. He can destroy the earth and he can destroy all things. But this is not really true. God created the world and has promised in Genesis 8:22 "While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, And cold and heat, And summer and winter, And day and night Shall not cease." Man cannot destroy what belongs to God. Just as Jesus explained to Pilate that no man could take His life unless he willingly laid it down, no one can destroy God's creation because it belongs to God and God has already told us how it began and how it will end. So, the modern advances of "science" and "medicine" are really attempts of man to prove he is the supreme being and that the power of life and

death are in his hands. When we really look at this, of course it is obviously a sad deception. Jesus holds the keys to life and death and God alone has control of these things. The Bible makes it clear that blessings and curses are directly tied to obedience to the precepts He has clearly laid out for us in His Word. God's laws are not disputable or able to pass away. Whether a person likes them or not does not affect how they operate. If I don't like the law of gravity, I cannot just disregard it and walk off a cliff without consequences. On the other hand, if I have no understanding of the law of gravity, but do not violate it I will still reap the blessing of not ending up a broken heap at the bottom of the cliff. In the same way, people who even inadvertently obey God's laws reap the blessings and those who disobey them willingly or not, reap the curse. So, if we search the scriptures for a Biblical viewpoint on agriculture, it would appear that it is our responsibility as much as we are able, to provide for ourselves so that we are not a burden to others, and so that we can share with others in need.

The second reason I believe in sustainable agriculture is that I believe we are given stewardship of the earth. The earth was cursed by Adam's sin and it still groans under that curse. Whenever we sin, the Bible clearly states that sin and bloodshed pollute the land. It is clearly stated in 2 Chronicles 7 :13-14 "If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land." The fertility and lack thereof of the land is directly related to our sin. Because of this, we have a responsibility to live broken, repentant lives and to till the land so that it is productive for our own use and also as a witness to unbelievers.

The third reason I practice sustainable agriculture is the selfish benefits I receive as a result! Nothing tastes as good as home-grown vegetables, home-made cheese, fresh milk from your own animal or fresh home-grown eggs or especially fresh honey, straight from the hive. I can't describe the satisfied feeling I feel when we sit down to a meal of things all produced by us on our farm. It is the reward for the sweat of our brow, and we can appreciate it in a way you can't appreciate store-bought food. Even when we had to make the hard choices and slaughter a dearly loved goat, we could eat her meat, knowing that this is what every Jewish family had to go through on Passover to understand the sacrifice and the great price that was paid for their sin. Then, to see the Lamb of God, Himself, revealed as the sacrifice for all time, could they have understood that picture without the sacrifice of the family's pet lamb? It was so enlightening to see a broody hen raise her little chicks. One day I lifted a hen up and only saw three chicks. Suddenly I heard a soft plop! And a chick fell out of her wings, then another and then a third. What a picture of Jesus when he wept over Jerusalem and wished He could gather her as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. I never really understood that picture before. Or the parable of the wheat and the tares? How many times have I had to choose between leaving a weed and damaging the plant to pull it out? We separate ourselves from the heart of God when we stay away from the soil. I could go on and on and on with examples of how God reveals Himself in farming, but I think you get the picture.

As Christians we need to obey God and work with our hands so we behave properly toward outsiders and are not in any need. We need to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and then all these other things will be added to us. Most of our modern lifestyle is about fulfilling selfish pleasures. Those most prone to falling into sin have little productive activities in their lives. The Biblical model for caring for the poor was to leave the edges of the fields un-harvested so the poor could gather food. It wasn't gathered for them, threshed and baked into bread and handed to them, they had to go and get the grain

from the field and do the rest themselves. In the New Testament church, only widows over 60 years of age with no relatives to care for them could be cared for by the church. If a family had a widow, it was their responsibility to provide for her, not the church and certainly not the government! We have been so accustomed to the way the world does things that we have forgotten to seek out God's ways in the scriptures. By not being a part of producing our own food, we forget the work and sweat involved and then we don't think to expect any effort on the part of someone who is "poor" to take some responsibility for their own provision. Perhaps we make it too easy to be "poor"? Ruth is an example of what it involved to glean a field to provide for herself and her mother-in-law, both widows. Ruth did it willingly and was grateful for the kindness of Boaz to allow her to glean in his field. Consider that Ruth was a foreigner and was not even raised under Jewish law, yet still understood the heart of God in it.

I also believe that many of our modern ailments are from lack of obedience to God in regard to taking responsibility for our own provision. A tired farmer never has insomnia! A man working by the sweat of his brow has no need for a gym membership to stay fit. A busy farm wife has no time to feel sorry for herself and gossip and be a busybody. Children raised on the land learn responsibility, they learn the joys of birth and the sadness of death, they learn the "birds and the bees" in a way no one but God himself can display, and they learn that they are made in God's image and are not animals, so they don't have to act like animals. They learn to interact with all kinds of people, old, young, grumpy and pleasant and learn how to be a blessing to those in need. They learn how to react to emergencies and they have a sense of what is really important in a way that kids who spend all their lives in front of video games never do. Most of all, they learn to commune with the Creator and to understand in a very practical and concrete way what His Word really means. Mostly they learn the power of real prayer. In James we are taught that if any man lacks wisdom he should ask God. This is the daily walk of a farmer because there is always something one doesn't understand. God the Creator of all, can reveal to our tiny minds wisdom to manage the world we messed up.

So why do I believe in sustainable farming? Because I believe that digging down in the dirt of the earth I can find the heart of God and learn obedience to Him in a way I can't any other way.