



Philosophical Ponderings of a Farmer

Farming or Financial Stability? (c) 2020

On the one hand, it has been so easy for me to make the choice to do what I love every day. I am fortunate to have secure housing, value outdoor recreation over paid entertainment, and don't have a family to support. On the other hand, I do still worry about the financial position I have chosen to put myself in by farming. While I am able to cover my basic living expenses, I am certainly not saving for retirement. I'm pretty stoked that I might be able to pay myself minimum wage this year, which would be quite an accomplishment after just three years in business and absolutely zero debt - but in the long run, that is not sustainable.

It is easy to paint a rosy picture of the Jefferson County farming community (our producers always look so happy at the farmers market, right?), and I am sure there are farms that are financially viable, but there are also many that are not. Some farmers are in massive amounts of debt, others are supported by spouses that work off-farm, and some by family or inheritance. I have even heard stories about local food producers not getting the medical care they need because they can't afford to go to the doctor. Are any of those situations sustainable long-term?

What does it mean, then, in a county that really does support local producers, that our farmers are still struggling - not earning enough to save for unexpected situations or for retirement? I know our capitalist system was never designed to support small farms, but how did farmers used to make it? Traditionally, land was the 'retirement fund' that was passed down to the next generation, or sold to another farmer (or a developer). But these days, many of our farmers are either in a lot of debt to own land or they don't own land at all. Where does this leave them when they can no longer farm?