

February 2010

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Gothic*

POLICY

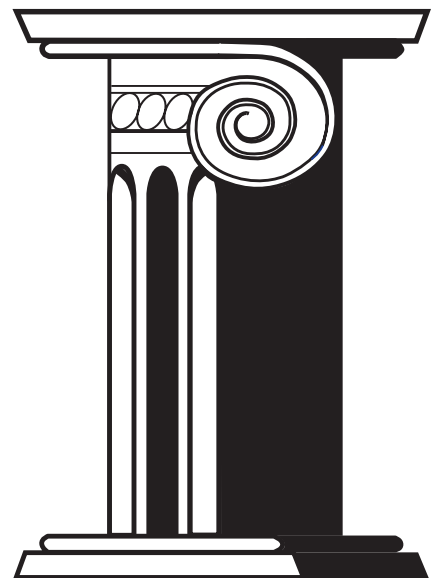
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by

Doug Stout
Public Interest Institute
Mount Pleasant, IA

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**Dr. Don Racheter,
President**

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American Gothic

Preface

American Gothic is a survey of current issues and challenges facing Iowa farmers as they enter a new decade. It seems as though they are often underappreciated and that their role in Midwest life has been taken for granted. Iowa is still a farm state and although economic diversification is a positive development, we can not overlook the continued role that agriculture plays in our economic and social environment. This essay strives to paint a more balanced view of the practices and realities facing the farmer today. Like the market price of their products and the weather conditions in any given growing season, today's producers face many criticisms and challenges which are beyond their control.

“American Gothic”¹ was an iconic 1930 painting of a farmer standing next to his wife, holding a pitchfork outside a rural farmstead. It has become a symbol of the ideal homespun simple life of the American farmer of the early twentieth century. It may be that the rather complex and contradictory interpretations of the painting over the years are a good analogy to the often complex and contradictory image of the American farmer today. The painting was received with very mixed reviews upon being presented in 1930. It received a bronze medal and \$300 prize in a competition at the Art Institute of Chicago, where it was purchased and still remains today.² However, rather than portraying the image of the “steadfast American pioneer spirit,” which we usually associate with the painting today, it was seen by many as a comic caricature poking fun at Iowans. When the picture first appeared in the *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, some Iowans were offended by being portrayed as being “pinched, grim-faced and puritanical.”³

It was not until the heart of the Great Depression

that the painting was seen in a more favorable light, portraying the steadfast, resolute, and simple determination of the American heartland.⁴ So what do you see when you look at the painting of the man with the pitchfork standing next to the woman, both of them in simple rural clothing with a backdrop of what appears to be an Iowa farmhouse? Do you see a positive or a negative image portrayed to the world? The complicated view of the American heartland has never been easy to define; like Iowa itself the American farmer has always been viewed with layers of contradictions and mixed emotions by people living on both coasts of the United States. While most often viewed with a touch of nostalgia for a simpler time in America, where the people are at home with their roots and live with an eye toward more wholesome values, that image has come under attack by some who do not see the romance or intrinsic value of the rural way of life. Some interest groups, usually motivated by a political cause, rather than seeking pragmatic solutions, proclaim that the time of the steadfast pioneer spirit is a thing of the

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past and that the American agricultural system is “part of the problem,” rather than part of the solution to the world’s ever increasing need for food production.

Upon the recent passing of Dr. Norman Borlaug, an Iowa native and the founder of the World Food Prize which is delivered in Des Moines every year, it is a good time to take a look at the Iowa farmer, his place in the world, and the contradictory images which confuse our perspectives of the issue on a daily basis. This is never more acute than when the spotlight is shown brightly on the agricultural producer in the midst of the partisan, regional, and international economic struggles related to our system of agricultural price supports debated at the renewal of what are usually five-year farm bills in the United States.

It may be beneficial to bring some perspective to the role of agriculture in the establishment of our society. The American farm family is not just a part of our history, they really **are** our history. This is a nation which was founded by farmers, defended by farmers, and which has survived and prospered

solely as a direct result of the productivity, bountiful harvests, and independent values of the farm community. In 1790 the total population of the United States was 3,929,214 people. Over 90 percent of the American labor force at that time was composed of farmers.⁵

Iowa was first seen by Europeans in 1673, when French explorers Joliet and Marquette traveled down the Mississippi River. They recorded that “Iowa appeared lush, green and fertile.”⁶ For the next 300 years, settlers would agree the area was indeed lush and green and its soil was highly productive. The history of Iowa is undeniably intertwined with its agricultural productivity.⁷

By the 1860s, farmers had poured into Iowa in large numbers and it was no longer desolate prairie. In 1867 the railroad reached Council Bluffs, providing year-round rail transport for the corn, wheat, beef, and pork being raised by Iowa farmers to reach Chicago, and from there the food could be shipped all over the world.⁸ The international perspective of the people of the region and the interest and understanding of world events

which is common in the upper Midwest, particularly in Iowa, is not something new. It is more acute than is generally expected from our “city cousins” and more prevalent here than in the plains states to our west. It has deep roots; trade has always been an important part of the Midwest economy.

Agribusiness, which sometimes comes under attack today by environmental activists, as though it were a recent aberration in the normal food chain, has worked hand-in-hand with farmers to develop the Iowa economy since early in our history. In Cedar Rapids, an oats processing plant was opened around 1870; it later took the name “Quaker Oats.” Meat packing plants like Sinclair Meat Packing in Cedar Rapids and John Morrell and Company in Ottumwa also set up shop.⁹ Surprisingly enough, we should not be afraid to admit that animal waste has never had a good aroma, but Iowans have historically chosen not to build housing developments downwind of the confinement areas and packing plants. It would be more beneficial to focus our initiatives on more effective odor control

and waste management than on demonizing the livestock producer, and in fact such efforts are ongoing in Iowa. The Iowa State University Extension Service has a web site dedicated to the issue of Livestock – Manure/Odor Management Information. There is also an “Odor and Nutrient Management Newsletter” which is published quarterly.¹⁰ Surprisingly, advancements in helping to manage the problem receive less interest from both the press and the public than sensationalistic stories which highlight individual problems created by the livestock industry in Iowa, which have existed in varying degrees since the inception of the industry before the foundation of our state. For forty years the State of Iowa has produced almost a quarter of all of the hogs in the nation.¹¹

Farms and small towns soon covered the entire state. Before the Civil War, Iowa farmers raised a great deal of wheat. After the war they diversified their production, raising more corn and converting it into pork, beef, and wool; increasing production; and creating

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Agriculture still provides over 27 percent of Iowa's economic production.

general prosperity.¹² This trend continues today in Iowa agriculture as corn and soybeans are the dominant crops, while pork and beef production lead the way in our meat industry. There has been some concern that the growth in the corn-based ethanol industry will lead to only corn being grown on suitable land. However, this is not going to happen. Iowa currently leads the country in soybean production. The Iowa Soybean Association estimates that Iowa soybean farmers contribute more than 9 billion dollars to the Iowa economy each year.¹³ In Iowa, the vast majority of farmers use a corn and soybean rotation. This means that they routinely rotate their fields between the field production of the two crops. While this can be impacted in the short run by wide divergence in the market price between the two crops, over the longer haul the rotation is both environmentally and economically necessary. The two crops require different nutrients for their growth; failing to “rotate your crops,” means that you will wear out your soil, causing you to substantially increase your production costs as you are

forced to add more nutrients in order to maintain your yields. Crop rotation makes sense for both economic and environmental reasons and is here to stay for the foreseeable future.

If there is anyone who has been misguided by urban rhetoric and has now come to believe that the Iowa economy is not still closely tied to agriculture, they should reconsider their perspective. While Iowa's economy has diversified from its nineteenth century dominance by agriculture, that diversification is often overstated. According to a study by Iowa State University economists, there are still 92,600 farms in Iowa, which is a number that continues to decrease over the years as economies of scale continue to have an impact in the agricultural industry.¹⁴ The contribution to Iowa's economy by production agriculture and ag-related industries has actually increased since 2002.¹⁵ They now provide over 27 percent of the state's economic production, an astounding \$72.1 billion.¹⁶ From an employment standpoint alone, 332,000 Iowans, one out of every six, are employed by the

agriculture industry, and one of every 18 Iowans is a farmer.¹⁷

One way to bring “value added” products to national markets is our meat industry. The term “value added” became a popular phrase with Iowa politicians many decades ago. Most of Iowa’s agricultural grain production is in commodities: soybeans and “number two yellow corn” commonly known as “field corn.” It is unfortunate that many Iowans and certainly most Americans do not even know that the rich harvest of field corn taken from Iowa’s abundant fields is not even digestible by humans in its current form, only a small percentage ends up being utilized directly in food products. Considering, that “Corn is King” in Iowa and that field corn production is still a dominant factor in our state’s economy, we are all woefully uninformed about even the basic facts about the crop. How many Iowans can tell you that the average stalk of corn only has one ear on it?¹⁸ I would suspect that not even many Iowa farm families know that the average ear has between 500 and 1200 kernels, averaging about 800 per ear.¹⁹

The corn we eat, which we refer to as “sweet corn,” is grown in much, much smaller numbers and on much fewer acres than field corn. The sweet corn is what creates the summer treat of “corn on the cob,” and it is the corn that fills the cans we open to serve along with our holiday meals. For comparison, Iowa farmers harvested 11.9 million acres of field corn in 2002, but only 4,876 acres of sweet corn, according to the U.S. Census of Agriculture.²⁰

Much of our field corn and our soybean production have historically been sold in bulk around the nation and around the world, we have been a national leader in the export of bulk commodities. “Value added” is the term used to describe an attempt to try and take our home-grown bulk commodities and process them locally, so that the processed goods can then be sold at a higher price and more of the value and the profits from the “end use” of the product can be maintained in Iowa. This can be accomplished in many ways. One of the most common ways has been to add value by feeding the corn and soybeans directly to livestock close to the fields of production. This

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“Value added” is the term for the attempt to try to keep more of the economic gain from our products in Iowa.

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The nation has 67,000 hog farms and thousands may be shut down before the crisis, which began in 2007, comes to an end.

is one reason for the growth of the Iowa cattle industry and our long-time position as one of the top hog producers in the nation. The cost of feeding the hog historically represents about 60 percent of the total cost of production.²¹ Hogs are fed soybeans as a source of protein and corn as a source of carbohydrates or energy.²² Iowa, of course has an abundant supply of both grains.

For an example of how feeding the grain to livestock, rather than shipping the raw commodities out of the region, is beneficial, we should look at some actual numbers. To produce a 250 pound hog, which will yield 125 pounds of retail cuts of pork; it would take 13 bushels of corn and about 6.25 bushels of soybeans as processed soybean meal. The weight of the raw commodities would be 1,100 pounds.²³ The amount saved in transportation costs as well as the normally substantially increased value of the meat produced -- rather than the raw grain -- is an important aspect of the continued importance of the pork and beef industries in Iowa.

While we are examining the long-term and historical importance of agriculture to

Iowans, the current stressful conditions for Iowa pork producers should be noted. In November, Neil Dierks, the Chief Executive Officer of the National Pork Producers Council, called it as terrible of an “economic situation as we’ve seen.”²⁴ The nation has 67,000 hog farms and thousands may be shut down before the crisis, which began in 2007, comes to an end.

Farmers have lost an average of \$23 on every pig sent to market during that time for a total loss of \$5.3 billion dollars according to agricultural economists.²⁵

So what contributed to the crisis? Several factors occurred which led us to this point in time. In 2007, corn prices jumped from \$2.50 per bushel to \$4.00 per bushel, due in part to the increased use of ethanol as a fuel source in the United States. The world recession in 2008 decreased demand for pork both in the United States and in export markets around the world. China, a large importer of United States pork recovered from a decreased domestic supply and had thus reduced its imports. The final blow was the unfortunate labeling of the H1N1 flu by the media

as “swine flu.”²⁶ This came about because the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention identified the genes from the flu virus as being similar to those found previously in pigs in Asia and Europe. So even though there is absolutely no evidence -- or even any scientific speculation -- that the disease can be caught from eating pork products of any kind, the industry has suffered from the name association. The additional dramatic economic impact came at a very bad time for the Midwest producers.

If anyone has a legitimate point in expressing concerns about the amount of corn being used to produce cleaner-burning domestic energy, while reducing imports of foreign oil primarily coming from nations that are not necessarily inclined to have our best political or economic interest at heart, it is the nation’s livestock producers. In essence, we are lowering the costs of our energy imports by shifting some of the burden to increased input costs for our meat producers. The accusation that we are depriving starving children in Africa of food because we are using ethanol produced

quite often but certainly not exclusively from field corn, (ethanol can be produced from a wide variety of substances including rice hulls and switchgrass)²⁷ is disingenuous. It is an argument which should be seen for what it is...an intentional propaganda attack on the ethanol industry, which does not hold up under scrutiny. If we are depriving anything of its normal daily feed, it is cows, chickens, and hogs. Those animals do not then go hungry, but the inputs into their growth do become more costly, raising the cost of production for our livestock farmers, while at the same time raising the income to our farmers who produce corn. Those higher corn prices also decrease the level of financial support needed to maintain our current grain production. The ethanol industry also creates more energy independence for our nation, reducing the number of United States’ dollars exported to foreign oil producers, improving our balance of trade, and resulting in an economic benefit to all Americans.

Critics have also pointed to the use of ethanol as a contributing factor for

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Transportation costs caused by the spike in foreign oil caused food prices to increase, ethanol was not to blame.

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The European Union pays out more than half of its annual budget in farm subsidies, four times as much as the United States.

an increase in consumer food prices. However, the increase actually could be attributed almost directly at the time to increased transportation costs. Ironically, those increases in transportation costs were attributable to the spike in imported oil prices, the very problem ethanol is helping to address! Actually, the Farm Bureau “Thanksgiving Dinner Price Survey” found that the average family could expect to pay four percent less for their Thanksgiving dinner this year compared to last year.²⁸ Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey said last November: “The USDA found that the average consumer in the U.S. spent only 9.8 percent of their disposable income on food and that percentage has been falling. For example, Americans spent 13.9 percent on food in 1970.” He went on to compare those numbers to the 22 percent of their budget spent on food for people in the United Kingdom and the 26 percent spent by people in Japan.²⁹

The use of ethanol also goes a long way toward helping to create an actual market economy for corn, allowing farmers to react to

the free market by adjusting annual planting decisions to sell their product in something that much more closely resembles a normal market environment. A competitive free market around the world for most agricultural products, which actually responds to market forces like price and supply, is still only a farmer’s hope for the distant future. However, it is very inaccurate to believe that it is the United States who is holding back progress in moving toward that goal of open markets.

The European system is far more adept at distorting the world-wide agricultural marketplace with large agricultural subsidies than the American approach. A recent report said that the European Union spent more than \$71 billion United States dollars (50 billion Euros) in agricultural support payments.³⁰ This is the first time that all 27 nations in the European Union have been required to disclose how the money from “farm support” payments are allocated. The *New York Times* and the *International Herald Tribune* conducted a computer analysis of the data. The resulting *New York Times* article from last

summer calls the European Union expenditures the largest agricultural aid program in the world, and says that it is “one that provides financing to a wide variety of recipients beyond the farmers who plow the soil – German gummy bear manufacturers, luxury cruise ship caterers and wealthy landowners ranging from Queen Elizabeth II of England to Prince Albert II of Monaco.”³¹

The study goes on to say: “The European Union pays out more than half of its annual budget, around 53 billion Euros, in farm subsidies, four times as much as the United States.” According to Stefan Tangermann, an agricultural economist, individual European families “are paying double for their food – one for the higher prices in the stores and then for the taxes they pay out for subsidies.”³²

While the United States has continually been a world leader in calling for a phasing out of agriculture farm price supports and continues to do so, a policy which has been generally consistent for decades and across political parties and administrations, unilateral economic disarmament

would leave our farmers in an untenable position. They would not be competing against the world’s other agricultural producers, but rather they would be competing directly with the international treasuries of the 27 nations in the European Union. And of course, the European Union is not the only governmental authority around the globe that is distorting the marketplace in favor of their own producers.

Some other nations around the globe are even more resistant to free and open markets when it comes to agricultural products. It would not be a “fair fight.” So while there are many needed reforms in the agricultural support programs our country provides, and there have been many different approaches that have been tried and suggested... unilaterally ending them would be an economic disaster for Iowa and for the United States economy as a whole. Cavalier and uninformed statements, usually by politicians representing urban areas who are apparently unaware (or cynically call for things they don’t really want to see happen) ignore the devastating impact the collapse of the American

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Those who live on the land see it as a legacy to be passed on, not as a resource to be “used up.”

agribusiness economy would have on the nation as a whole and on their constituents.

Those who try to distort the issues often have no sound background or understanding of the agribusiness economy on a worldwide scale or cynically “grandstand” on their views confident that the majority of their audience is not well versed in the subject.

Agricultural support payments are certainly “market distorting,” although great effort has been made to try to make them less distorting of the free market than the former structure of the payments. To the extent that the world agricultural commodity market can more accurately follow the free market concepts, concepts which at least until recent government actions have made the American economy more vibrant and consistently dependable than any economy in the world (There is a very sound and valid reason the United States dollar is the world’s “reserve financial currency,” and there is a legitimate reason that the United States has been a magnet for investment for decades.), it is a great step forward. However, unilateral

disarmament for farm subsidies would be just as bad an idea as was the call for unilateral disarmament when we were faced with the nuclear threat of the Soviet Union.

An abrupt end to domestic agricultural support programs would also be likely to result in an environmental disaster. American farmers faced with blatantly unfair competition in the world markets to deeply subsidized European grain...and unable to influence the world price of commodities...would be forced to abandon their ever increasingly environmentally friendly practices and do whatever it took to try to maximize their own short-term production in a desperate attempt to produce enough commodities (in an artificial world market with prices which would have no reflection on the actual costs of production due to foreign subsidies distorting the price structure)...to stay in business.

The national media apparently finds stories which indicate that farmers are good stewards of the land much less interesting than those which disparage their farming practices. It has always been

the case that the person who lives on the land sees it as a legacy to be passed down through generations, not a resource to be “used up.” It only makes common sense, and this is the heartland after all; we try to maximize that trait as often as possible. Very few of the people who deal with family farmers on a regular basis would ever make the claim that they do not care about the long term quality of the land or the state of the environment in which their children are going to grow up to live.

How many Americans currently know about the technological advances which have enabled farmers to become much more efficient, while at the same time reducing the amount of fertilizers they need to maintain their crop yields? Responsible farm organizations for years have been moving forward toward utilizing the information provided by Global Positioning Systems (GPS) to better target field applications. By using precise computer assisted models of the soil content in each area of the field, fertilizer applications can be greatly reduced by only applying the

minimum amount to each specific area of the field to maximize yields. This technology allows the farmer to save money by minimizing excess costs of adding fertilizer to portions of the field where it will be in excess. This is also done to reduce the amount of “run-off.” Where fertilizer is added to land which does not need it, it tends to be washed off. In the past, this lead to an increased amount of run-off in our waterways and a waste of capital by the farmer on unnecessary input costs. Like many other policy areas, we tend to be presented with confrontational versions of policy alternatives. Common sense practical solutions tend to be less “exciting” and don’t make the headlines. However, that does not mean that there are not initiatives being pursued every day that can maintain a consistent grain supply, contribute to stabilizing a steady level of farm income, and increase the tools available to enable the farmer to do that which they are already inclined to do by their very nature; be good stewards of their land.

We are currently dealing with activists who call for hugely expensive

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Initiatives are being pursued every day to increase the tools available to help farmers be even better stewards of their land.

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World hunger is an issue that has proven to be resistant to the best intentions of the world's leaders.

limitations on the level of carbon output by American society. The likely result of such policies would be to do incredible damage to an already reeling American economy, leading to even further job losses. Some of our policy makers are not thinking logically. The resulting leap in energy costs, particularly in the Midwest, where coal is usually our source of energy, would be devastating. Without agreement from other nations of the world, especially China, we are unilaterally increasing our production costs while giving them a competitive economic advantage.

The irony of the situation is that competitive advantage will logically cause them to sell more products, thereby burning more coal and building more industrial plants to meet the increased demand for their products, meaning that worldwide carbon output is only likely to increase as a result of independent action by the United States without worldwide output agreements. We will leave aside for the moment the contentious argument about the degree of global warming actually taking place and also the degree to

which human interaction with the environment is to blame for any increase in world temperature levels. Even if we assume for the sake of argument that the “Al Gores” of the world are correct, unilateral action is not an acceptable or even a rational answer to their concerns about the impact of warmer global temperatures on our environment. It is all the same world. If we decrease our economic activity as a result of self-imposed carbon limitations; while at the same time India and China increase their economic activity, while they burn the cheaper and generally less clean coal on which their economies depend, then we have lost economic opportunities (jobs) and we have accomplished nothing in trying to decrease world-wide carbon output.

World hunger is another issue that is often dealt with by the media in a very superficial way. First we should all be able to agree that hunger is something that should not still exist in today's world, however like racial, tribal, and religious tensions around the globe, it has been an issue that has proved resistant to the best intentions of the world's

leaders. It is also an issue that many people do not properly understand, and if the problem is not properly understood, it can't be properly addressed. It is not the case that the world does not produce enough food to feed the world, although population gains in some parts of the world might cause that to be the case at some point in our common future. It is not a well-founded argument that increased ethanol usage is in any way responsible for world hunger, although that is a claim, and a tactic, that is often used by supporters of oil imports, as well as by some well-meaning, but not necessarily well-informed, activists for the world's impoverished population.

“Somewhere in the world, a child dies of hunger every five seconds -- even though the planet has more than enough food for all.’ U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon laid out this sobering statistic as he kicked off a three-day summit on world food security Monday in Rome. ‘Today, more than 1 billion people are hungry,’ he told the assembled leaders.” He added that six million children die of hunger every year -- 17,000

every day.³³

World agriculture produces 17 percent more calories per person today than it did 30 years ago, despite a 70 percent population increase.³⁴ The problem is not that potential food is being diverted to energy. World hunger has not increased due to ethanol production. The causes of world hunger are many and varied. However, the amount of world agricultural production being used for non-food production is not one of the prominent factors among them.

World conflicts and the racial, religious, and ethnic tensions they are often based on bear some of the blame for world hunger. Extreme poverty in some parts of the world leaves some people unable to purchase enough food to survive, even as some nations who have hungry people export food. Corrupt or authoritarian governments sometimes ignore the suffering of their own citizens for political or economic reasons. Transporting food to remote areas is also an expensive and difficult task, particularly in countries that have unstable governments, broken economies, poor infrastructure, and internal

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World agriculture produces 17 percent more calories per person today than it did 30 years ago.

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World hunger is a far more complicated issue than merely a case of “supply and demand.”

violence and strife. The world is a very difficult and dangerous place. A great deal of suffering takes place on a daily basis, but unfortunately this is not a new problem. It has always been the case, and it is simply not true that agricultural products that would have reached hungry people are being displaced by non-food based agriculture.

The United Nations Secretary-General did point out during November of last year at the world summit on food security in Rome, that the world population is still growing rapidly in some parts of the world and indicated that future food production might not keep up with the growing population. He said: “Urgent action is critical. In 2050, the world will need to feed 2 billion more mouths -- 9.1 billion in all.”³⁵ However, there have been predictions for decades that our world population would outstrip our ability to feed them. Those predictions have not yet come to pass. Shortage of world calorie production is not an issue. However, does it really matter to those who are dying of hunger today that the problem does not lie with a shortage

of world food, but rather with reasons having more to do with social divisions, extreme poverty, conflict, corruption, and political division?

The fact that so many children still go to bed hungry and even die from malnutrition is a sobering commentary of our world’s condition, but it is not a commentary on American domestic farm policy or on the growing use of ethanol. Should we be alarmed, should we be saddened, should we be ashamed that children are starving to death in this world? Of course, we should be ashamed. However, like many of our world’s problems the solutions are neither as simple nor as straightforward as some pundits would have us believe. Perhaps it is more telling that most Americans are probably not even aware of the severity of the hunger problem, or its actual causes.

Solving the world’s hunger problems would actually probably require intensive “nation building” in parts of the world where governments and societies are currently dysfunctional. It is appropriate to have a national debate on what degree of responsibility we have in

solving the world's complicated issues. However, those that would try to cynically tie the plight of the world's hungry to the percentage blend of ethanol in our fuel mix are trying to exploit a tragic issue for their own political expediency.

We currently face a growing problem of obesity in our country. This trend is particularly troubling when looking at the extent of the problem in our young people. A great many of us can personally relate to the fact that it is much easier to "keep the weight off" than it is to lose weight which has already been added on. So we face a future in which the number of heavily overweight Americans is likely to increase and we will face the added health care costs which are associated with obesity.

Some activists who have an agenda against modern American farm practices like to point a finger at the use of corn sweeteners as a significant cause of the obesity problem. This is also a cynical and misguided approach. A can of cola sweetened with sugar contains an equivalent amount of calories as one which is sweetened with corn syrup. The problem is not with what

type of sweetener is utilized, the problem is the consumption of too much cola, too much fast food, and the fact that the youth of America are playing too many of their sports on a video console rather than in the neighborhood park. They are trying to solve a complicated societal problem by finding an inappropriate scapegoat to be blamed, because it fits with their agenda and they are not willing to actually address the difficult issues of how to adjust our society to adopt a healthier lifestyle.

Wouldn't it make sense that some of the critics who attack the use of ethanol, on the misguided assumption that it reduces the amount of food in the world, might be better served by focusing their attention on the fact that Americans consume too many calories? Every calorie not consumed in America would seem to be one that could be used to combat world hunger given their analogy with ethanol. We could accomplish many goals at the same time; we could reduce the level of obesity in America, which would reduce our health care costs, while also freeing up enormous amounts of food

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Eliminating the use of non-food agricultural products in the United States entirely would have little impact on world hunger.

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American farmers have always been entrepreneurs. They would love to have a free market system which would allow them to get a consistent and fair return on their crops and livestock.

calories which would then go to alleviate world hunger. If activists really believe the problem is that there is not enough food to go around, then obviously those of us who are not malnourished should all eat less of it. This would also decrease the demand and make all of the “calories” cheaper so that more in the world could afford to buy them?

I hope it is understood that the argument is “tongue-in-cheek.” It would not do much to solve the problem of world hunger to have Americans eat less, and neither would eliminating the use of ethanol completely. Neither of those policies is directly connected to the tragedy of malnourishment, the problem is simply not a world-wide shortage of food calories. As a practical matter, we could do more to solve world hunger by investing the money our nation saves from our decreased dependence on foreign oil imports through the use of ethanol to try to address some of the underlying issues facing people in impoverished areas of the globe.

American farmers have always been entrepreneurs. They would love to have a free market system which

would allow them to get a consistent and fair return on their crops and livestock. The greater utilization of ethanol, corn sweeteners, corn-based plastics, biodiesel fuels, and a host of other agricultural-based products is a great way to harness the productivity of the American farmer and create a diversified market for their products. The crops produced by our farmers are a renewable resource. They often replace petroleum-based products, petroleum supplies which at some point in the future must be finite, and even if the supply does not run short in the foreseeable future, we still bear a huge cost. We send American resources overseas to pay for the import of foreign oil to run our economy and bear the burdens and the risks that are inherent in an energy import strategy and our dependence on foreign sources.

The federal farm programs began in 1933 as a response to an agricultural market that had collapsed due to the world-wide depression.³⁶ Since that time, there has never been a true world free market for agricultural products. The diversification of the uses of agricultural

products is something that should be celebrated in the heartland. It decreases the uncertainty of the market and allows the producer to make business decisions designed to capture their income from the marketplace, rather than having to be dependent on government support programs. This is an advantage not only to the farmer, but also to the taxpayer and to the economic vitality of our rural communities and agribusiness centers throughout the nation.

We should be celebrating the fact that the farmer, the livestock producer, and the rural lifestyle have been instrumental in forming the values we treasure. Instead the rural areas of our nation continuously face threats from interest groups who prefer to see the American farmer as “part of the problem.” In reality, the “problem” usually has nothing to do with the realities of modern farm production, or with things that are within the control of the family farmer. American Gothic should properly be seen as portraying the steadfast, resolute, and simple determination of the American heartland. We should

celebrate the traditional rural values of family, hard work, and community that we still treasure today...and which can be traced back to the founders of our nation, who tilled the soil and built our country. The great experiment in democracy, that even with the struggles we face today, is still the beacon of freedom for the world. Iowa is a creation and a product of those agricultural roots...as exemplified by this quote from the *History of Iowa* in the state’s official register:

“Moreover, Iowa is still a place where most people live stable, comfortable lives, where family relationships are strong and where the quality of life is high. In many peoples’ minds, Iowa is ‘middle America.’ Throughout the years, Iowans have profited from their environment and the result is a progressive people and a bountiful land.”³⁷

American Gothic

Iowa is still a place where family relationships are strong and the quality of life is high.

American Gothic

(Endnotes)

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³⁵U.N. chief.

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**Public Interest Institute
at Iowa Wesleyan College
600 North Jackson Street
Mount Pleasant, IA 52641-1328**

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