

**AMERICAN BAPTIST
RESOLUTION ON FAMILY FARM* CRISIS**

The creation, including the land, water, air, and all living beings, is a gift from God. We live in a fragile relationship to the land. As we care for the land it cares for us and other living creatures. We are called to be responsible stewards--to conserve, sustain and renew the land with the hope that future stewards will also manage and enjoy.

Currently, many family farm operations in the United States are facing a severe economic crisis. The family farm involves a very large capital investment to realize a small net income. This potential income can quickly become a loss because of its vulnerability to economic, political and natural conditions.

The crisis is more than economic. It is also a crisis with psychological, social and spiritual dimensions that are having a profound impact on rural communities where farm families are the backbone. Issues of self-worth are being raised at the deepest level. Individuals, families and communities face the trauma of feelings of failure and forced change. Issues of faith and hope that sustain life's meaning are being brought into question.

The crisis adversely affects structures and relationships - not only of families themselves, but also of their communities. The impact on rural communities is such that when family farm operations fail, other business operations are also threatened, and the community itself is in serious jeopardy. The demise of family farm operations also opens the way for their replacement by corporate farms whose techniques may well increase irreparable damage to the land.

Many present governmental policies, rather than providing helpful assistance, are contributing further to the family farm crisis. Many family farmers feel that present governmental policies have sacrificed critical farm programs and thereby constitute a moral as well as an economic crisis.

In light of the above, the General Board of the American Baptist Churches calls American Baptists to:

1. Recognize that often we have taken for granted the people and the resources of the family farm, the farm communities and the land itself;
2. Develop a caring perspective by educating ourselves in order to understand better and respond appropriately to the complexities of the crisis and the effects upon the quality of life for all citizens;
3. Participate more intentionally in the public dialogue about issues and decisions that affect people and the land, speaking more directly of human values and relationships, of community and justice, of regenerating the land;
4. Encourage conservation measures which will promote sustainable agriculture and the preservation of fertile soil and clean water;
5. Foster cooperative interaction of concerned parties: farmers, agribusiness, farm organizations, lenders, public policymakers, university personnel, and others;

*The family farm in this document is defined as agriculture production units in which the members of a farm family

assume the risk and provide the management and the majority of the labor, peak season excluded.

6. Assist farm families in making necessary transitions;
7. Support rural communities in their efforts to be renewed and revitalized;
8. Counteract the activities of hate groups that blame the farm crisis on racial, ethnic, or religious minorities;
9. Continue to provide survival grants to ABC Regions from the National Disaster Response Office for farm families in need of emergency funds, counseling, training or other assistance;
10. Support the work of the ABC Hunger Office in the areas of development of public policy, advocacy and education regarding hunger concerns related to economic and food production issues.

We call upon farm organizations, other concerned groups and public policy makers to work together to develop a comprehensive and effective national farm and food policy that will:

1. Provide debt relief to family farmers who show viable prospects for solvency with such assistance;
2. Develop and use appropriate managing and marketing techniques to enable farmers to earn a fair profit on their investment;
3. Establish a reasonable moratorium on farm foreclosures where the foreclosure is based upon declining collateral due to land devaluation;
4. Encourage operator ownership of farm resources and widespread distribution of farm land and other production assets;
5. Allow family farm operators first choice on repossessed farm land at a fair and equitable price;
6. Develop tax policies which encourage fair and responsible use of farm land and resources;
7. Encourage international fair trade of farm products;
8. Encourage effective stewardship of land through research and development of regenerative agriculture;
9. Foster cooperative efforts worldwide to enhance food production in developing countries and effective means of distributing food resources to the most needy areas of the world.

In spite of the pain that is being experienced in rural communities, there is much potential for good in these crisis times. The future is full of hope because the future belongs to God who calls us to renewed efforts to bring justice and ecological wholeness to the land and its people. There is new potential for growth in caring within the community. There are new opportunities for dialogue between members of rural communities, public decision makers and people affected by those decisions. The people of God who share God's vision of justice and of community must be active agents of hope exploring new opportunities and fostering meaningful dialogue wherever and whenever possible.

Adopted by the General Board of the American Baptist Churches - June 1987.
165 FOR, 0 AGAINST, 0 ABSTENTIONS
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POLICY BASE

American Baptist Policy Statement on Hunger

As American Baptists, we shall support domestic programs which encourage maximum, efficient food production within the limits of good uses of energy and ecological practice....In principle, we support government programs which unleash, not constrain, the energies of the American farmer.

American Baptist Policy Statement on Human Rights

As American Baptists, we declare the following rights to be basic human rights, and we will support programs and measures to assure these rights:

4. The right to a secure and healthy environment, clean air, pure water and an earth that can nurture and support present and future generations;
8. The right to develop skills and abilities...and to receive a just return for one's labor.

SUPPORTING POSITION

American Baptist Resolution on Land Reform

Resolved, that the members of our churches work for the preservation and multiplication of the family-owned, family-managed, family-lived-on and family-worked farm.