

Principle: The inherent worth and dignity of every person and #7 Respect for the interdependent web of all existences of which we are a part.

Support Local Farmers

You may have noticed these yard signs popping up like sunflowers along roadsides- in the countryside, in town. I have one in my driveway, even though I have little traffic. Why do I have one? What motivated me to stop at a farm east of Mauston and ask where I could get one? I really wanted that message in my driveway.

Have you seen them? Thought about their meaning? What is the property owner's objective in placing the sign?

Well, I have been doing just that.

To give you some perspective on my leanings:

I had recently joined the National Farmer's Union as a step in giving support to that group which works on behalf of farmers, farming sustainability, farming practices and more. I also subscribe to the Eau Claire newspaper "Country Today." And, I like to read short stories/books about farming/farmers who work hard/who value their work through the toughest times. I even send off a few dollars to a tiny farm-a single woman, who determinedly works to maintain her little farm in Vermont.

So, I'm looking for ways to "support local farming". That is, to be supportive beyond the stories and news articles full of facts and data.

This morning, I don't want to present/discuss or have all of you discuss small vs. large, organic vs. non-organic, pork, beef or chicken practices, irrigating or not, etc. There are endless issues related to "farming"even among farmers/farming families/corporations there are endless differences, beliefs, practices, abilities, objectives, etc. etc. etc. In any given room of farmers there will be various experiences and points of view.

So, no, not that today.....

This morning I want to focus on our "relationships" with farmers. Do I, Linda have one or many or NONE.

And You? Do you have any with farmers or no relationship at all. In the past, never, occasional, county fair conversations, where and how? What relationships have been meaningful? How might YOU support local farmers based on your interactions?

I took my idea from an article in the Wisconsin Farmer Union's newsletter entitled "Building rural

power one conversation at a time.” It is written for people who advocate on farm issues. But I took from it the need for farmers to talk with all of US. To find ways to explain farming practices, farming issues—one conversation at a time so that we might all better understand the complexity of individual operations, to understand the life and work of these individuals, to educate us about the many, many issues. And, **on our part, I stress, for US**, all of us, to find time to listen to them, to see them as a valued, smart, **very** skilled, capable, resourceful, determined group of people. **Hence, principle number 1.** Yes, there are so many groups of people for us to understand: Seniors, natives, blacks, immigrants, children, disabled but this is another group that deserves our attention, I think. I took from last week's lovely church service, the importance of sharing stories. Stories, experiences build connections, build support between people, within communities. So, listening, then action in response, in support.

-Back to the signs: My understanding that the signs were started/made by the Future Farmers of America high school students to raise money to purchase agricultural foods to provide foods for Food Box programs: school lunches, Food Banks, etc.

So, when I gave \$10 for a sign, it went to that local FFA for the baskets of food. So, that's good! It helped the farmers with their surplus (now that their markets have changed since COVID) and it helped the food needs of local residents.

But the message on the sign is also what is important.

“Support Local Farmers (also Support Local Agriculture)”

Well, how might we do that? I asked a family friend, whose family farm is one of declining number small farm families in this county. They maintain a small dairy herd, two families are supported. Sometimes. The last year has been awful. (Read the papers: _____) One adult works “out”, benefits probably come through her work.

So, what were her thoughts to my question: What does that sign message mean to her? What does their family want to convey to folks driving by? Here's what she and 4 others said: _____

It would be different goal from me posting a sign. I want to show support for them. I want to buy local produce, I want to buy milk from a WI farm. And cheese. And beef. And cranberries. And honey. (Shop co-ops, shop farmers' markets, shop roadside stands.

So, I try to do that.

I also want to maintain relationships with farmers. I had a bit of farming in my life when my first husband and I raised cattle, and chickens, and pigs and sheep.... 4-H was a big part of our life then and I am grateful for those relationships. Was it our livelihood? No. Did we work as hard, or worry as they did? No. But I learned more in those years about farming. If I go to a County fair, I talk to the kids and parents in the animal barns, I read their fun and informative signs. I sit by the parents at the animal shows. I cheer for the kids guiding their cows, sheep, hogs around the ring. It's fun to watch but

I also want them to know I value their work and commitment.

But I don't live farming. And that is a big wide difference. So, I try to learn in the ways I've already told you about.

Here are some responses to my questions: “ _____ ----”

Now, what about you? How do you see farmers? (one comment-just a farmer”). Do you talk with them? Do you know any? Do you buy local? When you buy local, do you talk with the producers? Do you honor their work?