



From the Office of Master

It is time to proclaim our joy for life and for our Granges. The past year has seen our various committees working hard to develop programs that would be low cost but carry forth a joy of our existence and prove what we can do to improve our communities.

The first tool is the Legislative Policy booklet for Massachusetts that the State Session approved in October. I am asking each Grange, Subordinate and Pomona to have a formal presentation of this policy to your area Representatives and Senator. Prove to them that the policies contained therein are important to you as Grangers. This will show them that you are involved in improving the quality of life for all who reside in Massachusetts.

The second tool that has been developed to better life of Foster Care Kids is the Foster Care program of the Community Action Committee. There are numerous Granges that are already providing support to local DSS offices in the form of First Care Kits, Stuffed Backpacks, etc. Each DSS office has different needs and different facilities. Some offices like boxed packages. Other offices like the back packs. Contact the Committee for aid in making contact as they have been in contact with the DSS regional offices and directors. This project has the potential to greatly improve foster care and is a great community builder.

The third tool continues to be the Dictionary project. I have a memo from National Grange that

indicates that 34 Granges took part in this program in 2006 and donated 5,165 dictionaries. This is a great program and the longer you continue doing it, the better your reputation is in your community. Last Wednesday, the First Lady, attended the Groton–Dunstable school board meeting at which the curriculum director for the school district made public recognition of the project done by Groton and Dunstable Granges to provide these dictionaries and their drill to quickly teach usage by playing a search game. This is the kind of recognition we need in our communities.

There are other deserving projects that need recognition but will be passed over in this article to get to the bone of the need. WE NEED NEW MEMBERS. I am setting a goal for each Grange to net gain 1 new member this year. This is not an impossible goal but it must be done. We can not continue to shrug as people leave our fraternity. I have often heard the Grange is in a rut and does nothing. Use the tools. Present the policy booklet to your town board of selectmen. Build partnerships. Get involved, get excited, build Grange.

One personal note: I congratulate Timothy and Andrea Chase in presenting to the world Calvin Michael Chase on Nov. 30, 2006. Linda and I are extremely proud of our newest Grandson.

Fraternally,
Calvin C. Chase, Jr.
State Master



From the Lecturer's Desk.....

Happy New Year! Soon the days will start to get a bit longer, and even though there might be snow in our future, spring will be here before you know it!

This is the time to begin working toward your goals, individually and/or collectively. I hope that you have read your **Program Handbook** and will participate in the contests in **ALL DEPARTMENTS**. We need to increase participation in all of them. I know that both the Youth Department Chairmen and Sister Kathy Gibson of the Deaf and Hearing Awareness Committee would have liked to have had more people entering their contests last year. Let's see if we can all do better and have several entries for all our contests this year. This year's contests will be held **April 15th at Dunstable Town Hall**.

On another note, I sincerely hope that many of you are planning on creating an **Alphabet Book for your town**. Each Grange will have two years to complete this project, and I know that those who do undertake this will do a great job. This is a great way to publicize your Grange in your home town, but it needs to be a team effort. No one person can do it all, and we need to learn to work together if we are to accomplish anything. And remember, **this is NOT a contest**. Every Grange who participates will be rewarded.

Also, whether you are a new or returning Lecturer this year, or someone who is helping to fill this position. **Please ask your Grange Mas-**

ter/President for the Lecturer's Report Forms. These were in the packets handed out to them at State Session. Last year, I received reports, sometimes only one report, from just about half of the Subordinate/Community Granges in the state. The Pomona Granges were better represented. Many times these reports are the only way I can know what is happening in your Grange and if you had a program of special note. **Please** try to send in the reports!

Finally, I have recently returned from National Grange Session. DoriAnn Gedris has created two turnkey programs to loan out to individual Granges. The programs are on **Meth Labs**, a very timely topic, and one on the **Kelly Farm**. I have copies of these programs on DVD for loan if you do not wish to send to The National Grange for them. So far no one has asked me about them at all! **I also have all the books for this year's Pen In Hand Contest available for loan.** Perhaps during one of the winter months you might like to read one of them.

And -- If I wasn't at one of your meetings last, I might be at one of them this year!

Unit next month.....

Susan Rotellini



Chaplain's Message

I have a question for everyone this month and the question is this – what is in your toolbox? I'm certain that most of us, when speaking of a toolbox, would think about a mechanic, plumber or a carpenter. But, what I'm talking about is your personal toolbox. The place where you would keep the tools you use all day long, every day.

It's easy to associate with the men of trade who use very specific tools, for a specific purpose, on a day-to-day basis. Mechanics need wrenches, screwdrivers, and other types of hand tools every day, to repair cars and trucks and keep them in tip-top shape. A plumber also needs specific types of wrenches, pipefittings, and so forth to repair or replace faucets or water heaters. Carpenters will need hammers, saws, tape measures, and various other hand tools and power tools to build houses.

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These and other tradesmen keep all their appropriate tools in a toolbox and whichever item they happen to need is right there at their disposal.

However, what is in your toolbox? You might say, "Oh, I don't need a toolbox, I don't have a craft." You could reply, "What do I need a toolbox for?" Let me explain. I'm talking about the very special tools you need every day to exist as a person. Some of the most important tools you should have with you every single day are patience, love, understanding, confidence, and compassion. Also throw in laughter, knowledge, honesty and kindness. Consider these the most important tools you could keep with you in your toolbox - the toolbox of your heart, soul, mind and body. These are the tools that will help you in every situation you find yourself in. There are others of course, and the larger your toolbox, the more you will be able to carry with you!

In the Grange, we have always considered the notion of the importance of tools. Beginning with the axe, plow, harrow and spade, there are many lessons to be taught about their significance and meaning. These lessons include thoroughness, perseverance, and understanding. We are also taught to be humble as well as diligent. The founders of our Order believed in the importance of these ideals and so we should as well. These basic qualities are what separate us as Grangers from other groups and organizations. I am a firm believer in change, and the importance of changing and improving, but I can't help but wonder if the lessons included in the ritual of our Grange are still very vital principles that we all need to pay utmost attention to, especially now in these most trying times. If getting back to basics is the goal we are all striving for in this world, then the Grange is a wonderful place to begin.

So, I ask you, what is in your toolbox?

Fraternally yours,
Randy Belseth, Chaplain

Quote of the month: "Peace and friendship with all mankind is our wisest policy, and I wish we may be permitted to pursue it." – Thomas Jefferson

Deaf and Hearing Awareness**What's the difference between a "Deaf", "deaf", and a "Hard of Hearing" Person?**

Deaf – this term is generally used when referring to a particular group of deaf people who share a language (American Sign Language or ASL) and a culture.

deaf – refers to those who are unable to hear well enough to rely on their hearing and use it as a means of processing information. People who fall under this category tend to have lost their hearing due to illness, trauma or age or who live in the "hearing world" and don't share in the culture of Deaf people.

Hard of Hearing – refers to those who have some hearing, are able to use it for communication purposes, and who feel reasonably comfortable doing so.

What is wrong with the use of the terms: "Deaf and Dumb", "Deaf-Mute" or "Hearing-impaired"?

Deaf and Dumb – A relic from the medieval English era, this is the granddaddy of all negative labels pinned on deaf and hard of hearing people. The Greek philosopher, Aristotle was the first to use this term because he felt that deaf people were incapable of being taught, of learning, and of reasoned thinking. To his way of thinking, if a person could not use his/her voice in the same way as hearing people, then there was no way that this person could develop cognitive abilities.

Deaf-Mute – Another term from the 18th -19th century, "mute" means silent or without a voice. This label is technically inaccurate, since deaf and hard of hearing people generally have functioning vocal chords. The problem lies with the fact that to successfully modulate your voice, you need to be able to hear your own voice. Because deaf and hard of hearing people use various methods of communication other than using their voices, they are not truly mute. True communication occurs when one's message is understood by others, and they can respond in kind.

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In Memoriam

Frank W. Poskitt
Jane Dunn

Westborough #116
Westborough #116

When we are called to lay down our implements on earth, may we enter the Paradise not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, and received that welcome plaudit "Well done, good and faithful servants."

Membership Tips of the Month

Use the Tools



Do you really want new members? If you do, then it is time to use at least one of the tools provided by your State or National Grange. When you take a new tool to

your Grange and propose using it, you wake people up, you inspire members, and you reinforce the idea that others want to help.

There are several tools that the Leadership/Membership department has for your use. A new Idea Book with 86 different ideas from 10 different states is downloadable from the web site and each State Master has a copy of it. A Lecturer's Program Guide is available to your Grange in the same fashion as the idea book. More than 35 PowerPoint presentations are available upon your request on leadership and membership development topics.

National Grange will also provide brochures for your use, each state has a variety of materials and programs to help you, and many Pomona's will supply you with help when you ask for it. If you really want new members, it is time to start using some of the tools that are available to you. Contact Ed Luttrell at membership@nationalgrange.org or contact your State Master/President or Membership Director to learn about any and all of the tools available to you. It all begins with you starting action in your Grange!

Use the tools available to your Grange and you will find it is easier to attract new members.

Deaf and Hearing Awareness from Page 3

Hearing-impaired – The deaf and hard of hearing community view "hearing-impaired" as negative, because the label focuses on what they can't do. With this label, a standard has been set: the "hearing" standard. To be anything other than "hearing" is not acceptable to the mainstream society, and deaf and hard of hearing people failed to meet the "standard". The preferred term is "hard of hearing".

Words and labels can have a profound effect on people. Deaf and hard of hearing people are sensitive as to how they are referred, because they have experienced being put down and disparaged by other people. They have seen their intelligence, their abilities, and their skills questioned simply because they are deaf or hard of hearing. Show your respect for deaf and hard of hearing people by refusing to use the above terms.

Above information retrieved from the National Association of the Deaf website: www.nad.org.



Look in the Mirror

Ever wonder why your Grange isn't bring in more new members? The person responsible is the one looking back at you in the mirror. Responsibility means you must be a leader in recruiting new members.

To be a leader, you must create a welcoming atmosphere in your Grange. What happens

when a person walks in the door? What happens when a member stands up and proposes something new and different? If the members of your Grange don't introduce themselves and welcome all visitors and new people and if they don't take a proposal and give it consideration and look for ways to do it, you need to create a new attitude in your Grange. Leaders create new attitudes by having them.

With a great attitude, it is necessary for you to show the way by talking to nonmembers about your Grange. Brag about something to people you know outside the Grange. Tell nonmembers what you are doing at the Grange. Talking about Grange to people will require most members to step outside their comfort zone. As a leader, you must set the example in sharing the Grange message outside your Grange.

Look in the mirror and take responsibility and you will find it is easier to attract new members in your Grange.

Thank You

I want to thank the State Grange Chaplain, and LuAnn for the nice visit with me while in the hospital. The cards with so many names from State Session, and for the beautiful basket of colorful flowers delivered to my home. And especially for everyone's concern.

Faternally,

Ellen Hitchings

Albert J. Thomas Library Museum

Junior Grange merit badges, manuals, constitution, merit badge manuals; Riverdale Grange of Gloucester badges; were among the materials donated by Allan W. Gaspar, Rowley Grange.

Swift River Valley program book, Franklin Worcester Pomona badge, donated by Nancy M. Blackmer.

**The Secretary's Corner
National Grange Convention**

Massachusetts submitted two resolutions to National Grange session this year. The first was State Resolution #1 "Small Scale and Organic Farming". This was National Resolution #38 and it was adopted by National Grange. The second was State Resolution #10 "Over the Counter Drugs". This was National Resolution #430 and it was adopted by National Grange.

**Updates to the State Grange
Constitution and Bylaws**

Updates to the State Grange Constitution and Bylaws are now available through the State Secretary's office. There is no charge for these updates. These printed pages will fit into the 2004 version of the State Grange Constitution and Bylaws. If your Grange does not have the 2004 version of the Bylaws, they are available through the State Secretary's office for a cost of \$3.00. This will include the most recent updates. To obtain a copy, please contact Randall Vaill, Jr., State Grange Secretary, 1018 Hillside Drive, Palmer, MA 01069-2178, or by phone: 413-284-1135, or via email: secretary@massgrange.org.

Directory updates & additions:

Pomona Deputy, Central Area: Donald Segur, PO Box 288, Jefferson, MA 01522

Subordinate Deputy, Central Area: David Gale, 11 Royalston Road, Orange, MA 01364

Family and Community Action Committee member, NE Area: Jacalyn Carter, 58R Jewett Street, Georgetown, MA 01833

Youth Directors: John and April Carter, 1304 Main Street, Leicester, MA 01524

Youth Committee member: Tom Johnson, 108 Main Street, Rutland, MA 01543

Events and Activities

February 2

PITTSFIELD #14 - Families and friends invited to our Valentine's Day Program followed by a cake walk.

February 7

WILLIAMSTOWN #336 - Rediscover America - Janet Patterson. Covered Dish Supper.

February 12

HOLDEN #78 - Red Skeleton Night and Pot Luck Supper. Chaffin Congregational Church 6:00 PM. Red Raffle.

WESTBOROUGH #116 - Safety and Elder Abuse. Speaker from the Police Department.

February 13

ANAWAN #221 - Fun and Games, Penny sale to benefit Heifer project. February 27th snow date.

February 19

CONN. VALLEY POMONA #19 - Invites all Grangers to the Annual Washington's Day Meeting at Shelburne Grange Hall. Program: "History to Go" - Meet "Mary Allen" - Learn about the early residents of the area by Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association. Business meeting at 11:00 AM, Luncheon at 12:30 PM (cost \$6.00). Reservations for lunch: please call Gordon Taylor (413) 625-6306.

February 22

BOROUGH POMONA #11 - Educational Aid and Legislative Night. Speaker: Warren Chamberlain, State Grange Legislative Director.

February 26

WESTBOROUGH #116 - Pot Luck Supper. Exchange student to be guest. Happy 123rd Anniversary.

Reminder: Contact information for your Grange activity and events are to be included in your submissions per Resolution # 16 which passed at State Session.

**Submission Dates for
Events and Activities
Cut and Save this schedule**

January issue will feature February dates - send by December 1st.

February issue will feature March dates - send by January 1st.

March issue will feature April dates - send by February 1st.

April issue will feature May dates - send by March 1st.

May issue will feature June dates - send by April 1st.

June issue will feature July and August dates - send by May 1st.

July/August issue - Send September dates by June 1st. **Please note there is not an issue prepared in August.**

September issue will feature October dates - send by August 1st.

October issue will feature November dates - send by September 1st.

November issue will feature December dates - send by October 1st.

December issue will feature January dates - send by November 1st.

Mark your 2007 Calendars

Mar. 31 - Dinner Dance

April 15 - Talent Contest, Bake off Sign A Song and Public Speaking - Dunstable 1:00 PM

April 29 - Go to Church Sunday - Holden

Sept. 16 - Degree Day - Norwell

Oct 25-28 - 135th Annual State Session - Plymouth

To those committees and/or officers that are in charge of the above referenced events, kindly forward details to the Editor ASAP

National Master's Annual Address



It is a privilege and an honor to convene this 140th annual convention of the National Grange of the Order of Patrons of Husbandry here in America's heartland. We want to thank the Illinois State Grange for completing the plans to host us in such a fine facility, and in such an outstanding manner.

About a month ago, the population of the United States reached 300 million people. This means that there are roughly twice as many Americans as there were in 1950, about three times as many Americans as there were in 1900 and more than five times as many Americans as there were in 1867, the year the National Grange was founded. The reasons are many. Americans bring a new baby into the world roughly every eight seconds and that baby is twelve times more likely to live to adulthood than a baby born in 1900. We are all living longer than any previous generation. Average life expectancy has increased by more than 30 years in the past century. Finally, a new immigrant legally arrives in our nation every 30 seconds. At this pace of growth and longevity, we are adding new Americans at a rate equal to a new city of Chicago every year. Some time before the mid point of this century there will actually be 400 million Americans, an event that I predict, a surprising number of people in this room will be around to mark.

On a whole, this is an accomplishment to be proud of. Today Americans are healthier and more prosperous than any other people on earth or at any time in our nation's history. Our air is cleaner and our water is purer than at any time since comprehensive records have been kept. Every natural resource and product of the earth whether water, food, minerals and even energy is more abundant, more available and more affordable today, relative to total personal income, than when our national population was 100 million or even 60 million.

Even rural communities, where our Grange Halls stand as monuments to the perpetual stability of the rural way of life, will soon feel the impacts of this population growth. Some of our farming communities have experienced population decline in recent years, mostly because of the out migration of our children and grandchildren seeking better employment. However those population trends are starting to reverse. The baby boomers are now reaching retirement age. They are increasingly attracted to the rural and farming lifestyle. Over the next 40 years, it is unlikely that any community in the United States, large or small, will be exempt from the population growth and migration that will occur. It is also unlikely that any community is predestined to miss out on the potential for prosperity that those two new generations of rural and farm entrepreneurs will bring to our nation.

To assure that our rural areas are prepared for an influx of new residents, we must be working now to adopt the progressive public policies that will allow people to select the rewarding rural lifestyles that they want to have in the 21st Century while preserving the unique character of our rural communities. We must assure that basic infrastructure and public services are available to everyone living in rural communities. This means reinvigorating our commitment to issues such as rural health care, rural education, rural public safety, as well as transportation, energy, housing, labor and telecommunications access. Numerous recent studies by government and nonprofit organizations over the past few years have confirmed that the access to infrastructure and basic public services will have tremendous impact on the future prosperity of rural communities. These issues will be even more

important than traditional agriculture, trade, and environmental policies that command today's headlines. People will continue to live and work in rural communities even if our nation never signs another trade agreement, if Congress never passes another Farm Bill, or if we never completely decide what amount of environmental protection is appropriate for our society. However rural communities will not attract new residents or retain their young people if they don't have access to advanced telecommunications services like broadband Internet, if the transportation infrastructures that brings products to market are crumbling, if their children and their employees' children can't get a good education, if there are few quality social and cultural opportunities, or if their community lacks adequate health care services, especially for older rural residents.

I'm not suggesting that we should ignore today's headline issues as we craft our policies this year and from here on. I am, rather, advocating that we keep our focus on the long term view of how all of these issues will impact the prosperity of our Grange communities over the next several decades.

One issue that will have long term impact on our communities over the next forty years will be immigration. In October, the Congress passed, and the President has signed, legislation that would authorize the construction of 700 miles of fence along much of the boarder with Mexico. I do not believe that this alone will solve our illegal immigration problems. Arnold Swartzenegger, the recently reelected Governor of California, met this past week with the new President of Mexico. He made the statement to the effect that only growth of opportunity and wealth in Mexico will keep Mexicans and other Central Americans in their homelands. Trade agreements over the past few years were designed partially to assist in this effort. But then not all U S citizens agree with the expansion of the Mexican economy if the cost involves the loss of jobs in the U. S. economy.

It will be interesting to watch as the new Congress meets in January and develops an agenda for control of illegal immigration. The task will not be easy. For example, between 25 percent and 35 percent of all of the people who lack permanent health insurance coverage and who must rely on charity health care, are illegal aliens, a fact that argues for solutions to quickly reduce the illegal population in the United States. However, more than 50 percent of all the non-family farm labor in the country is estimated to be provided by illegal aliens, a fact that suggests caution before taking drastic action for fear of disrupting our food system. In preparation for the renewed debate, we need to review our Grange policy. On one hand, we ask our government for strict control of our boarders and accountability for the legal status and whereabouts of any guest workers or foreign visitors in our country. On the other hand, we reject the notion that farmers and ranchers should be required to make any effort to monitor the legal status of their laborers. The immigration challenges that existed a year ago have changed little and will haunt our next two generations if we fail to act soon to take responsibility for our boarders.

To address a growing public safety crisis in rural America, this past year the National Grange has produced a DVD on the effects of methamphetamine (meth) on our rural populations. More than 450 copies of our meth DVD have been distributed so far to Granges, churches, schools, youth organizations and first responders across the nation. The cost in cleanup of busted and abandoned labs is astounding. Additionally, these costs do not begin to measure the cost in human terms on lives ruined by users, and secondhand effects on those in their households. Abandoned farm buildings become havens for meth labs. Legitimate farm chemicals that nurture our crops become the ingredi-

ents for making this poison. Will social welfare programs be a key to solving the drug addiction problem? Will legalization of drugs such as marijuana, cocaine and meth become a focus of the cure? Can a combination of public education and strong law enforcement turn this problem around? We need to become more aware and more proactive in sustaining our rural communities against threats like meth so that two generations hence, our rural communities are places where people want to live and work.

In agriculture, we also face some of the most difficult challenges and the most lucrative opportunities as our nation's population grows over the next half century. Nationwide, farmers today are a highly diverse and constantly evolving group of nearly 2.2 million entrepreneurs who differ greatly in the size of their operations, the products they produce, their ownership structure, their use of farm labor, geographic location, their need for capital and financing, the environmental challenges they face, the marketing decisions they make and the annual revenues they derive from their farming operations. Fewer than 15% of farms today are commercial scale, farming-only businesses. According to USDA, these farms produce 75% of all domestic agricultural production. The remaining 85% or more of all farmers in the United States rely on off farm employment by at least one member of the family, to remain active in the agriculture sector.

Moderate sized farms are actually the only segment of agricultural production in our nation that is increasing in numbers of participants and, therefore, increasing as a total percentage of the agriculture sector. As such, the rough stability in the total farm numbers in the U.S. over the past 15 years is due almost entirely to the entrepreneurial spirit of new moderate sized farm operators. In addition, an increasing percentage of our nation's agriculture production assets are moving away from traditional food and fiber production. Instead, they are being devoted to entertainment, recreational and service sector uses such as agritourism, sports hunting and fishing, show and exotic animal operations, and the fast growing personal horse ownership sector. The productive output of these "service" applications for agriculture assets are not generally captured in national farm production statistics. But they have an undeniable impact on the business plans and lifestyle choices of hundreds of thousands of family farmers and ranchers living in our rural communities. Therefore, federal farm programs, as well as our National Grange policies, need to be as flexible as possible to support the decisions of individual family farmers and ranchers regardless of how they choose to participate in agriculture.

On the positive side, the output of our commercial agriculture sector is unparalleled in the history of the world. While the United States represents only five percent of the world's population, American farmers and ranchers produce twenty-five percent of the world's agricultural production. American farmers and ranchers are the foundation of an abundant, safe and efficient source of domestic food, fiber and energy. The potential for increased commercial demand for US agricultural production is nearly limitless when we consider the vital needs to reduce our nation's dependence on imported energy, to meet the strong demand by U.S. consumers for high quality or locally produced food that will promote healthy lifestyles, and to provide affordable, basic sustenance to more than one billion human beings around the world who subsist in conditions of poverty. Our nation has been blessed with the most abundant natural resources for agricultural production, and it has nurtured and trained the most productive generation of agriculturalists of any nation in the world. In this environment, we can confidently claim that the United States does not have too many farmers. Just the opposite is

true. We currently have far too few family farmers and ranchers who are willing to seize these opportunities over the next several decades in order to earn above average, market driven, returns on their investments of time, talent and capital.

Nearly limitless commercial opportunities for agriculture, as more broadly defined, also means there are nearly limitless numbers of potentially successful farm business plans and rural lifestyle goals that the next two generations of farmers and ranchers will be able to deploy to capture their fair share of the market. Therefore, at a minimum, the 2007 Farm Bill should set a goal of increasing participation in our domestic agricultural sector by encouraging the greatest participation by individuals and families within the agriculture sector, as well as the broadest practical distribution of agricultural production among those participants. The era when the direct benefits of federal farm programs or international trade protections accrued mostly to the producers of a limited number of specific agricultural commodities should come to an end. The 2007 Farm Bill should support farm programs that gradually shift resources to provide credit, risk management, income support, and environmental stewardship for family farmers and ranchers, regardless of the crop or livestock they produce. Farm programs should encourage sound conservation techniques, preserve prime agricultural land in the face of strong development and preservationist pressures, assure compliance with our existing international trade agreements and facilitate the introduction of cost saving and environmentally beneficial new technologies for all segments of the agriculture sector.

The next Farm Bill should also recognize and promote adoption of innovative farming practices like part-time, new uses, low investment/expense, direct-to-consumer, biotechnology, bio-energy and organic farming. A successful 2007 Farm Bill will provide additional resources to assist family farmers and ranchers in managing risks and disasters that are beyond their control. Beyond risk management, it must also incorporate strong legal protections for farmers who rely on traditional commodity markets or contract production from the antitrust threats that arise anywhere along the production and distribution chain from farm to consumer. It must directly address the collapse of reliable and publicly accessible price discovery mechanisms in major and minor commodities. Finally, it must provide new tools to prevent coercion, combat market manipulations and breakdown the existing legal barriers to freedom of commerce, in both foreign and domestic markets, that keep farmers from receiving appropriate compensation for the fair value of their input into the agricultural production process.

Convincing policy makers to implement pro-family farm and pro rural entrepreneur policies will be a challenge. The proportion of our population that is directly involved, or has had direct experience, in agricultural production has fallen from nearly 50% a century ago to fewer than 2% today. This means we can no longer take for granted that the general population has a realistic appreciation of the work and commitment involved in producing the safest, least expensive and most abundant supply of agricultural products in the world. Today, the average American under the age of 50 is at least two generations removed from daily life on a family farm or ranch. If we do nothing, over the next forty years, that generational distance from direct experience with active farm life of any kind will increase, until farm life is only a faint cultural memory. Ignorance and antipathy regarding modern agricultural practices among the non-farm population, compounded by nostalgia and myth about our nation's agricultural heritage are among the most dangerous threats to

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National Master's Address Continued...

prosperity in our nation's farming and rural communities. This threat will come in the form of ill-conceived and poorly crafted public policy decisions that could be implemented at any level of government.

Another important challenge that farmers have in common today is their age. A majority of the primary farm operators in the nation are over 55 years old and 35% of our farmers are over the age of 65. The 2007 Farm Bill must recognize this demographic fact and foster a favorable environment which allows our current generation of family farmers to retire with dignity, and assures that the productive resources that they have faithfully stewarded will be transferred to new generations of family farmers and rural entrepreneurs who will produce our nation's food, fiber, recreation and energy throughout the 21st Century.

Only knowledge, education, and a vigorous discussion can effectively counter these challenges to the continued prosperity in our farming and rural communities. The first place we should look for this kind of dialogue is in our own local and state Granges. Our organization is uniquely qualified, over the long run, to reach out and engage our communities in a productive dialogue about the importance of agriculture in those communities, in our state and in our nation. It is a leadership and community service role that is tailor made for our local Granges. Over the next two generations, there can be no more valuable service that we can provide to our communities than to be the focal point for informational support for all of the varied family farmers and rural entrepreneurs who will participate in U.S. agriculture.

In addition, the 2007 Farm Bill should devote unprecedented new resources to research, academic studies, blue ribbon commissions, technical assistance grants, "Sense of the Congress" resolutions and similar endeavors to explore vital questions regarding the interaction between public policy and prosperity in our farming and rural communities. Additional concrete steps should be taken in the 2007 Farm Bill to divest authority for agricultural and rural development policy decisions away from the federal government and down to the regional, state and local government level where local citizens, both farm and non-farm alike, feel a greater sense of efficacy and commitment to an open and fair decision making process that will be appropriately tailored to the needs of their communities.

In an expanding agriculture sector which embraces a wide range of divergent business plans and lifestyle goals for our nation's family farmers and ranchers, one characteristic will continue to tie all of these agriculture entrepreneurs together. Over the next four decades, successful farms will overwhelmingly be knowl-

edge based enterprises. Whether you have 1000 dairy cows or five acres of organic vegetables, whether you use quarter million dollar tractors to work two thousand acres of soybeans or use an ATV to manage 14 acres of wine grapes, and whether you take in guests on your farm bed and breakfast or you adhere strictly to the latest bio-security entry protocols on your operation, your knowledge, skills and experiences regarding your farm operation and regarding your business and lifestyle plan for that farm will be the most important factor in determining if you survive and prosper.

At no point in time since the Founders of the Grange met in Washington DC to create an organization whose mission was to educate farmers, as well as all Americans, about the changing structure of American agriculture, has the impending structural shift in the nature of our rural communities been more apparent. Circumstances have once again brought us to a seminal point in time which calls out for bold, creative leadership in farming and rural communities to help shepherd these communities through the rapidly changing demographic, social and economic forces sweeping our country. I am confident that the National Grange is the right organization to forthrightly address the major challenges facing today's family farmers, ranchers and the rural communities that nurture them. We can do this through the adoption of innovative and progressive policies as part of the 2007 Farm Bill and other legislation. We can do this by being the community organization where family farmers and ranchers instinctively look for support and guidance. As our nation moves forward to welcome the next 100 million Americans, the greatest opportunities for the sustainable creation of wealth, for the equitable distribution of prosperity and for families to choose to live and work in our farming and rural communities, are clearly ahead of us and are not to be found only in our past.

The Grange at all levels has an opportunity to participate in the shaping of the future. It all cannot and will not be done from Washington DC. We each, as members of the Grange and as members of our local communities, have a vital role to play.

For now, the role is that of reviewers and developers of the policies and programs of the National Grange. The hour has come, and I ask each of us to assume his or her responsibility.

Fraternally,
William A. Steel,
National Master

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