The social benefits of small farms

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Goal

To comprehend the social and ethical importance that small farms have on communities and their social structure.
Objectives

- What is a small farm?
- Why are they important?
- What role do they currently play in the agricultural industry?
- Moral, ethical, and social benefits of small farms.
- What can we do to promote them?
What is considered a small farm

Small Farm Today® defines a small farm as a farm that is 179 acres or less in size, or earns $50,000 or less in gross income per year. This definition is based on data from the Bureau of Census and USDA Census (1987-1997), results of the Small Farm Today® magazine survey of readers (1993-1998), and data from the New Farm Committee of the University of Missouri and Lincoln University (1989).
Interpretation

A small farm is a farm that generates enough gross profit to support a family.
FIGURE 10
Share of California Farms and Market Value of Agricultural Products Sold, by Total Sales Category, 1997

Percent

- Market Value of Agricultural Products Sold
- Farms

Less than $10,000: 0.4%
$10,000-$49,000: 1.6%
$50,000-$99,999: 2%
$100,000-$249,000: 8.8%
$250,000-$499,999: 10.2%
$500,000-$999,999: 6.5%
$1,000,000-$2,499,999: 9.6%
$2,500,000-$4,999,999: 19.7%
$5,000,000 or more: 38.3%
Farming practices of small farms

- Pesticide use
- Intercropping
- Cover crops
- Product distribution
- Labor conditions
- Management structure
Physical Attributes

- Acres
- Workers
- Location
- Efficiency

- Making more with less
Why are small farms better for society

Ethical and Social justification
Catholic Perspectives

“The earth is the Lord’s, and all it holds” (Ps 24:1)
Catholic Social Teaching

- Large farms degrade the environment.
- Small farming is less strenuous on the environment.
  - Less pesticides
  - Intercropping
  - Less degradation of soil and its nutrients
  - Etc.

- Small Farms assimilate the catholic values of stewardship in their farming practices
Farm workers’ rights

“While its land has its Sabbath, all its produce will be food equally for you yourself and... for your hired help and the tenants who live with you...”

(Lv 25:6)
Catholic Social Teaching

- Protecting human life and dignity
  - “Every person has a right to life and to the material and spiritual support required to live” (Catholic Bishops)
    - Large farms do not have socially acceptable labor conditions and compensation
    - Small farms promote economic equality and safer labor conditions
      - Alba
Why are small farms better for society

Economically
Operating Statistics

Generally speaking, the smaller the farm the more efficient the output.

Figure 2. Typical forms of the relationship between farm size and total output.
“Large farmers tend to plant monocultures because they are the simplest to manage with heavy machinery. Small farmers on the other hand, especially in the Third World, are much more likely to plant crop mixtures -- intercropping -- where the empty niche space that would otherwise produce weeds instead is occupied by other crops. They also tend to combine or rotate crops and livestock, with manure serving to replenish soil fertility”
The Disadvantages of Small Farms

- High initial start up cost
- Lack of market share and product distribution
- High priced outputs relative to competition (From larger farms)
Advantages of Small Farms

- Environment
- Polyculture

- “the smaller farm can grow several crops utilizing different root depths, plant heights, or nutrients, on the same piece of land simultaneously… it is this polyculture that offers the small farms productivity advantage.” (Schut 101)
Advantages of Small Farms

- More efficient
  - Irrigation
  - Land use
  - Output Quality
    - “Small farms are more productive than large ones- by as much as 200 to 1000 percent greater output per unit of area.” (Schut 100)

- Direct relationship from producer to consumer.
  - More personal. Ex: Farmer’s Market
Advantages of Small Farms

**Labor**

- “I have a little daughter... the reason I'm here [at ALBA] is because I want a better future for her. My plans are to work hard here, farm more land, and become successful... I love it, I love agriculture!”

- Working for the betterment of yourself and your family.
“Freedom, stewardship, fidelity, family, community, are all casualties of a mechanism that selects only for cheapness and a narrowly measured efficiency that turns a living farm into a mechanized, chemicalized, one-product factory.” (Schut 105)
The difficulties small farmers face

“Larger farms can almost always produce high volume, uniform products more cheaply than smaller farms. While small farmers cannot effectively compete with large scale operations on price, their businesses are uniquely positioned to compete on other, non-price factors...Differences can include: convenience, flavor, variety and novelty” (Schut 100)
The difficulties small farmers face

“Some leaders suggested that this missing knowledge about food, along with the lack of relationships between consumers and farmers, causes consumers to under value food and therefore be unwilling to pay its ‘true price’...
The difficulties small farmers face

... they saw this as reducing the viability of small farmers, who cannot survive in a cheap food system.” (page 6)
The difficulties small farmers face

- Large farms have greater market power than smaller farms
  - Can set prices
  - Offshore
  - Distribute goods to distant locations

- No political power
  - The industry is an oligopoly
How we can make a change

Education

- Educate the public about the methods used to produce the food consumers purchase
  - Let people know what they are supporting
How we can make a change

- The power of the consumer dollar
  - When you buy produce you are voting for a farm
    - Each time you buy food from a small farm you are increasing their market share
      - This increase in market share leads to an increase in political power within the industry
How can we make a change

- Support your local farmer’s market
- Take part in your local CSA
  - Community supported agriculture – Every week they supply buyers with small farm produce.
Conclusion

Importance of small farms

- Environment
- Human dignity
- Local Economy
- Industry as a whole
Conclusion

Future of small Farms
Education
Consumer power
Supporting organizations like ALBA
Conclusion

While small farms may not fit the economic rational of the current agricultural industry, they establish communities that promote healthy family life and foster a social structure that is ethically and morally cohesive with the Catholic Church.
For More Information

Visit:
Small Farm Center
ALBA Farms
Food First
Small Farm Direct Marketing
Pictures
Slide 3
http://www.naylor.net/andrew/pictures/start.html
Slide 6
Slide 7
www.dhi.dk/images/WaResMan/fertiliser.gif
Slide 8
http://www.naylor.net/andrew/pictures/start.html
Slide 9
http://www.naylor.net/andrew/pictures/start.html
Slide 10
http://www.cleanfunny.com/i/s/farms-valley.jpg
Text

Slide 4
http://www.smallfarmtoday.com/about.asp

Slide 16
http://www.foodfirst.org/pubs/policybs/pb4.html#productivity

Slide 21
http://www.albafarmers.org/

Slide 24-25
http://www.scu.edu/envs/whoweare/whoweare-facultyandstaff-kwarner.html