



PastorCare
West Michigan
Helping Pastors Soar

August 2017

Praying For Farmers!

Imagine what might happen if every time we drove by a farm we began to pray for that farmer and his family! We enjoy an abundance of food in this country. How often do we remember to give thanks and to pray for God's favor and blessing upon those who grow the food that feeds people around the world?

On Saturday March 18, 2017 I enjoyed the privilege of gathering with a small group of people in Sparta, Michigan who have a passion about praying for farmers and their families.



Saturday March 18, 2017 Farmers Prayer Meeting at Briar Barns 693 10 Mile Rd. Sparta, MI.

When I arrived at the Prayer Meeting I learned that Mike Finkler was the organizer so I went over and introduced myself to him. Mike was so excited when I told him I heard him on WCSG radio 91.3. I canceled my plans to attend a Men's Weekend Retreat so I could attend the Farmers Prayer Meeting. Mike said, "You are the answer to my prayers! I was praying for God to send someone to help me! I can hardly wait to tell my friend Tom Nearing at the radio station!"



Darrel Denham welcomed us to Briar Barns and shared their desire to pray for farmers. Mike Finkler expressed his thanks to all farmers and opened with prayer. David Vander Zanden played guitar and sang a song he wrote many years ago, *There's no Family on the Family Farm*. Debra Schuitema shared a message she received from the Lord. Pastor Skip Meyer shared about his experiences growing up on a farm and then prayed. Art Smith called us to pray for the leaders of our country to embrace Biblical truth and values. Kimberley Mondry sang a solo. Deborah Allison read Blessing verses in Deuteronomy 28.

Please join us in our journey of learning to pray for farmers!



My name is Mike Finkler and I grew up in Sparta, Michigan on the ridge. My family had a small 50 acre farm that we raised multiple crops and cattle. After my father got Alzheimer's, we had to sell the farm but we kept five acres there.

In my early 20's I got involved with the drug world for 25 years. Then one day I attended Resurrection life Church in Rockford and accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord.

One day, after praying, the Lord said, "Once a ridge kid always a ridge kid—pray over them."

I listened and started to pray for the farmers. Farmers are the disciples of the Lord that were put on the earth to feed his flock—not just in the state of Michigan, but worldwide. No matter what you purchase today, it is produced by farmers and it involves your life—whether you work manufacturing making parts for equipment, the food you eat, the clothes you buy—it is all connected. We must pray for farmers. Pray for proper weather, safety of harvest, and non-governmental interference. Without farmers or farm land, none of us will survive. God bless! Mike Finkler



Art Smith, Art Smith Auctioneers

Faith and the Farmer

I don't know of any occupation that relies on faith as much as the profession of farming. I'm sure there are farmers that rely and put their faith in their own ability to make good decisions concerning their farming operations, but I don't think there are that many farmers that believe that the order of the universe is just random and that the one true God is not in control.

Every time I drive down Fruit Ridge Avenue and see farmers planting trees, no bigger in diameter than a pencil, knowing that it will be several years before they get a return on their investment, I think of the faith that they must have in the future to plant a crop that takes several years for a return.

I'm thinking that as believers we need to continue to hold up farmers in prayer that their faith becomes even stronger as they move forward in their farming endeavors. Sure there are times that they might be discouraged due to some setback, but God can and will see them through.



David Vander Zanden, David Vander Zanden Farm, Casnovia, MI.

Isn't it amazing that God said, "let the land produce vegetation, seed bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it according to their various kinds?" (Gen. 1:11-12). And then, just a few paragraphs later, the Bible proclaims that God created us in His image (Gen. 1:26) and we are to be stewards over all of the earth and its livestock. Not to exploit, pillage and destroy it, but to protect, nurture it, care for and to have dominion over it.

Two amazing truths! First, we are created in His image. Second, God made us responsible for the earth. So why pray? This creation thing is all His idea, correct? It was, but sin came into the picture because man wasn't content with what God gave him. Adam and Eve wanted to be God. Now we have a fallen world full of weeds, unstable markets, greedy humans and unpredictable weather.

Prayer brings us in tune with the Creator. Farmers should go to God when mapping out strategy, to know what to grow, to choose what seed to purchase and what kind of animals to raise. He is a practical God, and He is interested in your farm. God is reliable in an unreliable world. Turn your farm over to Him. It's His anyway.



Nick Schweitzer, Schweitzer Orchards, Sparta, MI.

I'm Nick Schweitzer and I'm a fifth generation farmer here in Alpine Township. I farm with my Dad and we farm about 215 acres of apples and pears. Our family has been in this township for over 150 years and I look forward to carrying on with this tradition and passing it on to the next generation eventually one day.

I remember as a teenager there were a lot of times when we were growing strawberries and we had to get up at 4:30 or 5:00 in the morning.

My Dad would come upstairs and pull my bedsheets off to wake me up. At that time I wasn't sure if I wanted to continue in farming. There is a lot of work involved with early mornings and late nights. When I started college I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. I was more interested in computers and programming. But I always had this thought in the back of my mind, what if I did want to come back to the family farm? What skills would be necessary? What did I need to learn in order to come back and be successful in doing that, even though I wasn't sure I wanted to come back to the farm.

I was originally going to take German, but before the first day of class I asked myself what value that would be to me if I wanted to come back to the family farm to help? That same day I switched over to Spanish class. I started my Spanish classes and general business. I went from general business to international business because it was a little more challenging and a little more work, and just generally more interesting thinking about things on a global scale rather than a single small business. From there economics played into that and I ended up graduating from Grand Valley State University with degrees in international business, economics, and Spanish. They are things that I think have helped me significantly on the farm. Especially Spanish and economics because to be able to run a business you need to be able to think about things and how they play a part overall and in the direction you are going in terms of how you are growing your business and moving as an industry and think about it on a wide scale.

I worked at State Farm and at Menards during college to get some experience. I even did an internship with the U.S. Department of Commerce in Grand Rapids helping local businesses figure out how they wanted to export and where they wanted to export to, and how to get over those barriers.

After I graduated from college I went to Hershey, PA for a job interview. I was offered a very good job. It was hard for me because it was reality at that point. Do I really want to move away from the farm? Do I want to stay and help grow the farm? To change it according to the changes in the industry of how we farm and the methods we use to farm in terms of row spacing, varieties, and new techniques? I was afraid that if I left the farm for a few years that maybe things would change and by the time I got back the changes that we needed to be competitive in the future wouldn't be there.



I decided to turn down the job offer at Hershey and stay on the farm. Unfortunately that year was 2012, and as many people know, we had an early spring with 80 degree temps in March for about two weeks. And that really pushed development of the fruit. It was on April 27 that morning when temperatures dipped to about 22 degrees. I went out the next morning and cut some of the buds and young fruit developing open and they were just black inside. The whole crop was gone. That year we only picked about 100 bins of fruit. Normally we can harvest between 4,500 and 6,000 bins of fruit in our orchard.

To decide to come back and work for his dad and farm full time and not have a crop that year was a weird year! But I'm glad I stuck with it and decided to farm. Farming is a lot harder with long hours and you don't always meet social obligations due to the need to get the job done. It's not just a 9 to 5 job like some people have. It's here all the time and when something needs to get done, you just go out and get it done.

Over the past decades there have been less people in family farms. Agriculture and family farms make up less than two percent of the population, but 97 percent of farms are owned by families. Family farms have gotten a little bigger than they used to be but they are still run by families and some families can farm from 50 to over thousands of acres of land. The family farm is important. It is one generation building on the next. Not only are they growing and advancing the farm, they are growing and advancing the family. Lessons learned on the farm, the ethics, morals, and hard work that are involved in that is important. Not everyone has that opportunity to grow up on that family farm and learn the value of hard work and that work ethic. It is one thing that I cherish, even though there were times when I was growing up that I didn't enjoy getting up at 4:30 or 5:00 in the morning to go to the strawberry patch and pick berries or pack berries. But now I look back at those times and laugh at myself for not enjoying that. Even though it was hard work, it helped to shape me into who I am today. My family was a big part of that. You learn multiple lessons on the farm. There are days that nothing goes right and you feel you have fixed things more than gotten any work accomplished. But it's just part of farming. You have your good days and your bad days.

That is one thing that I want to be able to pass on in the future to my kids. I want to build the farm so they have those same memories and enjoy the unique opportunity of growing up on a farm. I want to make the changes necessary to keep it sustainable so it can continue to pass on from generation to generation.



Carl & Debra Schuitema, Kent City, MI.

My name is Debra and we live on Fruit Ridge. We have a little ten acre hobby farm. I was raised in Grant, Michigan and went to a little Christian School there. My Dad was a 100 percent farmer. He raised onions and carrots and sometimes parsnips. I was the oldest daughter and his helper. He taught me everything he knew about land and he taught me to love and respect the land. He taught me all about trees and the names of trees. He instilled in me a love for the land.

We came together earlier this year to pray and acknowledge our Creator God, the One who made the heavens and the earth. We thank Him so much for this creation. There is not a day that goes by that I do not look at the trees, the grass, and the flowers and say, "Thank You Lord. You made this."

The message that I am getting is that we are in a time of warfare in the land. Growers of the food for our land need to acknowledge God and get our direction from Him each day for what we need to accomplish.

The word the Lord gave me this morning is “Lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths.” Now this is a big thing, to provide food for the whole nation. It is imperative that we receive God’s direction for every single day.

Pray for your families, pray for your church, pray for your government, pray for your country, pray for your president. The word I got from the Lord is that He didn’t bring us this far to let us down. But we need to press in to what His desires are. We need to pray the Lord’s Prayer. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Your name. We have to have an attitude of gratitude. Be grateful for what he has given us. Plant seeds wherever you go. Seeds of praise to the Lord. Our deeds and our voice are seeds going out and God will reap a mighty harvest with them.

Just trust the Lord in everything we do, because His Word says He won’t leave us. He is right here. He is our refuge and our strength. An ever present help in the time of trouble. I bless this land and I pray Your Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.



Father Fred Brucker, Pastor
St. Catherine's, St. Francis Xavier's and St. Joseph's Churches

HOW I PRAY FOR FARMERS

I am the pastor of three rural parishes. We have one Catholic school with two campuses. All three parishes have a majority of parishioners who run farms. As is typical, some farmers also work in some kind of factory job to make ends meet. Farming is a family effort. The husband and the children work the farm itself and the wife usually runs the business (bills, payroll, etc.). One of my three parishes is heavy into orchards (mostly apples), with some grain and animal farming. The other two parishes are mostly grain and animal farms.

Having grown up “in town,” that is, in a small town, I have since childhood been aware of the part farmers play in the world. Not only do they provide the food we eat, but they contribute some special features to society. Farmers are very dependent on the weather. For those with Faith, they are grateful for what the Lord sends them in rainfall and proper temperatures. Their faith is deep and strong.

I say all this because it plays into how I pray for farmers. In my personal prayer, I ask the Lord each day to bless them all and keep them safe. When I see a tractor going down the road, I ask God to give that driver safe travel.

Each spring, I have a general blessing of fields and orchards at Sunday Mass. When asked, I go to the farm and bless the fields, orchards, animals, etc. We have a little ritual, then I travel, usually in a four wheeler (a golf cart upgraded for off road service), and sprinkle the fields and orchards with holy water. When someone buys a new piece of land, often they will ask me to bless the new purchase. When someone erects a new building I bless it. When the migrants finish bringing in the harvest, they have me bless them and their vehicles before they depart south. Everyone is always very appreciative.

This past spring, a family had arranged for me to bless their orchards on a certain evening and join them for dinner. This is an annual event and I love it. Quite a few of the extended family join us. This year there were about 40 people in attendance. Unfortunately, the two nights before the scheduled blessing we had frost both nights. About ten percent of the apple crop was lost. When I mentioned that I thought maybe I was too late, the mother said simply, “Don’t worry, God will provide.” Such faith.

In the autumn, we have a special celebration of Adoration before the Blessed Sacrament – usually called “40 Hours Devotion.” This is in thanksgiving for the harvest. Adoration is all day Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. People sign up for half hour sessions. All three parishes participate. It is a beautiful experience just to sit in silence in the presence of the Lord and let him speak to you. I have spiritually felt

Jesus reach out and pull me into his presence to fill me with all kinds of blessings and graces. I have listened over the years to so many people who have deep spiritual experiences just “being” in the presence of the Lord.

On Sunday afternoon we have what is referred to as a Solemn Closing of 40 Hours. This is not a Mass, it is a devotional service offered in thanksgiving for the harvest that year. This traditional devotion attracts many priests from the area as well as a full church of parishioners and visitors. We have a guest speaker talk about thanksgiving and the Eucharist (which comes from the Greek word for “thanks”). Most people find this a very enriching and fruitful experience.

This is how I pray for farmers. It is not only part of my ministry but also a real joy for me.

I give special thanks to Daniel Fagan who lives in the farmstead house on 9 Mile Road in Sparta, where Mike Finkler grew up. Daniel encouraged me to interview Father Fred Brucker and Max Dunneback for this Newsletter about praying for farmers.



Max Dunneback, Sr., Dunneback Dairy Farm, Alpine Township, MI.

My great grandfather bought this farm in 1886. Then My grandfather, then my father. I bought it in 1988. I'm pushing 60 years old and my boys are about to take over. Fifth generation—same house, same farm.

I started milking cows in 1982 and I did it until last May. Decided we had to change direction and I'm not sure where that is going right now.

I don't know why, but I've always loved cows ever since I was a young boy. I told my parents and my brothers that I was going to milk cows and they all thought I was crazy. But I've enjoyed working with animals. The greatest thing about a family farm is that my wife and kids were either in the house or out here helping us. We would have breakfast, lunch and supper together. You learn to work with each other. You learn to care for animals: cows, pigs, hogs, horses. One of the best things my kids did was to go to the Berlin Fair through 4H every year. They started showing a dairy cow or calf. Then they went into feeder steers, then fat steers and hogs. One year my daughter lost her hog and a few years later her steer died. But I guess there is reality in that. Not every animal you get is finished or marketed.

The hardest thing for a kid 10 years old—they name this animal, they feed it every day, they work with it and love it—and then sell it. That was always difficult the first year. Then their pay check would come from the auction.

There were a few rules that I have, and this is just me. I bought them their first animal and when they got their money they could buy something small like a video game or a bicycle. They had to give ten percent to the church and the rest into savings for a car or a truck, and once they became of age, college. They all bought their own vehicles when they were sixteen, and they have ever since. They all paid their way through college. And when they were done with college they didn't owe anybody any money. They worked for me mostly on the weekends because we had a hard time with help on weekends.

I remembered when my oldest son was in fifth grade and he was on the basketball team. They all went to Holy Trinity and onto West Catholic. And he wanted a pair of Michael Jordan tennis shoes. They were \$150. I said, “Wow, I don't know. I'll tell you what. I'll give you a time card and I'll pay you to start working.” He said, OK. Back then he was only making \$3 an hour. He worked for about a month and I

gave him his first pay check of about \$150. I said, "There you go, now you can buy those tennis shoes." He said, "Are you kidding me? Do you know how long I worked for that!" And he never asked for another pair again.

My other two kids, when they entered the fifth grade they each got a time card. They had to be down in the barn at a certain time and stay until we were finished. That also taught them that everything doesn't always go your way. Sometimes if there was a cow down or a cow was birthing a calf, you had to stop and attend to that and then you would get done a little bit later. But through that they learned to care for animals.



Right now we are growing corn, soybeans, alfalfa, and wheat. My two boys, Max Jr. and Paul are doing that. I honestly didn't think either one of them would go into farming full time. Max Jr., when he was a junior in high school he went on a college visitation at Michigan State and he went into the dairy tech program. I asked him if he was sure he wanted to do this? He was probably 15 or 16. He said, "Dad, that is all I've ever done, that's all I know." But I didn't want to discourage him. I think you have to follow your heart. Myself, that's what I did. I thoroughly love this.

Through the 4H they fell in love with farming, tractors, planting, watching crops grow, and harvesting them. We've all learned to work hard which is a good thing for the kids. My kids know how to work and how to work hard. My daughter worked just as hard as the boys. She probably worked harder. On Sunday nights all four of us would work. I would give my daughter the chance to be the boss and tell everybody what to do, including myself. If she didn't give me something to do, I would move over to the side. If she said, "Dad, what are you doing?" I would say, "What do you want me to do?" I wanted her not only to be the boss but to know that women can lead, women can be in charge and teach. But I wanted her to learn that if you don't tell people what to do—you are going to get them standing there leaning and waiting.

The next week it was all different because she came down and said you do this, and you do this, and you do that. When you are done you do that. She cracked the whip and I was so proud of her. Just being able to take charge and to lead. This wasn't an 18 year old kid, this was a 12 year old girl. She did four years of college and three years of graduate school and got her masters. She worked very hard.

One of the current challenges is finding good help. My son works for High Tech Dairy and just about every farm he goes to asks him, "Do you know anybody who wants a job?" The problem with dairy farming is its seven days a week, two or three times a day. And that includes weekends and holidays.

The challenge is profitability. As farmers we are very good at what we do. We over produce. It's the same old rule of supply and demand. When the supply is up and the demand is down the money isn't as good. So we are all waiting for the next good thing to come along and a lot of us jump on it and that kills the price right away.

A lot of it is borrowed money. But it all has to be paid back. Ever since the banks crashed, it has been tougher to get loans. You have to know your numbers: profit, loss, projections.

Farmers could all use your prayers. There are days when I have no idea what's going to happen, or how it's going to happen. But I do know at night when I say my prayers, God has a plan. More than anything for us to keep our faith and to believe in ourselves and what we are doing.

In the early years of our marriage, when our kids were very young, we had help issues again. The kids I had working for me were no good and I fired both of them. I had enough. I went to see if a dairy farmer

with a large farm wanted to buy my cows. "Not right now," he said. "Two weeks and I will buy them all." "Fine, we'll do it." I came home and prayed every night because I didn't know if I was making the right decision. A couple of days before I was supposed to sell all my cows, my neighbor came down. He had two kids who had worked for him and they were looking for a job. So I hired them both.

One of those boys was a wonderful young man. He stuck with me for eleven years. He would work mornings, nights, and weekends. He was just as faithful. We had almost exited early, but through him, we stayed. We started out milking four cows in station barns and carrying the milk. Then we got a pipe line and a cleaner, and then we put this parlor in. He became best friends with my boys and my daughter and they still see each other. I was actually in his wedding as his best man. I guess I was kind of like a father figure to him. His parents had divorced and I tried to teach him right from wrong.

One of the wonderful things of working in here when your kids are mad or there are just two of us—they are stuck with me for an hour and a half. If they didn't want to talk, I'd talk. Maybe they didn't want to listen, but I'm sure they heard.

I see God at work in a lot of things around here. Animals that you think are going to die—suddenly they are okay. Does every animal do that? No. We experience loss just like everyone else does. I'm not silly enough to believe God is going to save every cow, or pig, or beef animal that we have. But that's life, that's reality. There is loss in everything.

I would like to do more with my boys here. We are going to see what direction that will take us. Their ultimate goal is to be at home, farming full time. They work off the farm right now. I'm sure as everyone knows, we pay our own health insurance. They have jobs that are helping with that. They farm after hours and on weekends here.

We don't farm on Sunday. When we were milking cows we farmed on Sunday—but only the basics. We milked in the mornings and evenings, fed them and scraped the barns, but that was it. I had a neighbor tell me years ago when I was young and working seven days a week. Charlie Alt said to me one time, "You know it seemed like whatever we did on Sunday we undid on Monday." And I thought about that. So many times in my life when I look back I did something on Sunday, broke it, smashed it, then worked on it on Monday, and didn't finish until Tuesday. So I thought, why don't I take Sunday off. Remember to keep holy the Sabbath. So we didn't work on Sundays. Maybe three times in thirty years. Sunday is a day for the family. Sunday is a day for church. Sunday is a day to refresh yourself.



I have often asked myself, "Would I do this again?" Yes, I would. I thoroughly love what I do. Working with the animals and equipment. More importantly, I enjoyed the summers, Christmas break, Easter break because my kids were out here with me. When my son was three days old, I had him in a backpack while I was milking cows and feeding calves. When I was on the mower, they were on the mower with me. They went on the tractor with me when I was planting or working the fields or spraying the crops. I'm guessing that's where they caught the bug and fell in love with farming. I got to spend so much time with my family.

My faith is deeper now than it has ever been over some issues of the past few years. Looking back I'm sure there are things I would change. We all would change something. But I firmly believe God has a plan for everyone. Where that plan is going to take me right now I'm not sure. I'm trusting the Lord is all I can tell you. From here, we will have to see where it goes.



Bruce & Colleen Gregory, Gregory Asparagus Farm, Rodney, MI.

Established in 1972 by Marvin and Barbara Gregory, Gregory's Asparagus Farm is a family business committed to providing premium grade fresh picked asparagus. The farm continues in the family with Bruce and Colleen Gregory as owners and operators. We are Global Primus Certified for Good Agricultural Practices.

Our harvest crew is made up of high school and college students, who hand harvest close to 50 acres. We desire to glorify God and His Son Jesus Christ in all we do.

Regarding prayer, ask that we are faithful to Jesus Christ and consistent with His teachings regarding our business practices. That Colleen and Bruce would respond in a Christ like manner to every issue that arises both good and bad. Like a bountiful harvest or loss to a freeze such as in May 2017.



Dale & Lisa DeLange, DeLange's Redberry Farm, Hudsonville, MI.

There is nothing special about us. We don't need to be honored or put in the spotlight. Our missionaries and pastors are our heroes! Brenda Vander Schuur, missionary to West Africa, and Wanda Kuzi, lifetime missionary to China are our heroes. We had them over to our house as our kids were growing up because we wanted our kids to know them and learn from them. We also thank God for our Pastor Nate and Kristin Meldrim.

Kids learn about giving from their parents. They watch and learn the priorities in life. Prayer, personal devotions, and family devotions are passed on when the kids see that it is important to Mom and Dad.

We personally enjoy the early mornings, seeing the sunrise and getting tasks done. It is fun to see things grow. You plant a seed and then 6 or 7 days later it pops up. The miracle of growing things!

Not being a believer in the Lord and being a farmer would be really tough. So many things are not in our control. We are continually fighting weeds, mold, bacteria, fungus, etc.



Photo: Martin Haeuser

According to Michigan State University, The Spotted Wing Drosophila (SWD) is a vinegar fly of East Asian origin that can cause damage to many fruit crops. This small insect has been in Hawaii since the 1980s, was detected in California in 2008, spread through the West Coast in 2009, and was detected in Florida, Utah, the Carolinas, Wisconsin and Michigan for the first time in 2010.

The flies have a preference for softer-fleshed fruit like strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, and peaches. They multiply rapidly and they are relentless. We are dealing with it daily.

You can look back at a season and always see how God has provided. It is not always the way we would have desired. But God's care always comes through.

The blessing of being a Christian farmer is that we follow God's loving instruction to take a day off and enjoy a day of rest, worship, and family time. If we didn't have that, we probably would have croaked by now.

We experience God in the gardens and in the fields. It makes Scripture come alive for us when we plant seeds and experiences the miracle of growth. We have also learned that you can have an abundant looking harvest, but when you get closer you discover the berries are mush, and there is only a good one here and there. Like the sin in our lives that breaks God's heart. The parable Jesus' told about the four kinds of soil become very real and tangible in the daily context of farming.



Tamryn Bartman, Austhof's Farm, Byron Center, MI.

We have been in business for two years now. We have been growing produce all of our lives. We learned from my Dad. We started going to the farmers markets in 2011.

And that's really when I discovered that this is my passion. I have some really great family members and friends here with me that love to do this and love to help out. This is what we are passionate about!

Some of the challenges and obstacles we face are early in the season when the weather is really hot and we start to plant some small plants and seeds and we need to keep up on watering and weeding and hoeing to keep the plants healthy so they will thrive.

Prayers for farmers would be for rain, and sunshine. Pray for crops to be abundant and for bugs to stay away. We really rely on God providing rain and sun to grow the beautiful crops. I always say plants are miracles! Starting something from seeds so small that can turn into a plant and produce fruits that we are all able to consume.

This year we added two farmers markets so we have four farmers markets where we are able to provide the community with one hundred percent home grown, spray free, produce. It is picked by people you know and trust.

My vision and hope is to be able to do this full time someday. Being passionate about something is what I wish everyone could experience. This to me isn't even work. This is fun to me. Coming here to the farm just about every night is something that I love to do. I pray that others will be able to find their passion as well because it's just a really good feeling to be able to pour your heart into something that you really love to do.

We provide our produce to local restaurants in the area that are some farm to fork restaurants. You go downtown Grand Rapids and you are eating at restaurants that have produce that is sourced only miles away versus who knows how far away. It's just a really great opportunity that we are able to provide in that way as well.

We started something last year that is called CSA—Community Supported Agriculture. We got this idea from a lot of other farmers in the area. Families or couples buy into getting a share of produce—a crate of produce that has a nice variety every week in the summer for 10-12 weeks. You get to know these people and make relationships with them. You are able to share what comes out of little miracle seedlings. Anything from beans to corn to broccoli, lettuce, tomatoes, squash, zucchini, cucumbers, and fresh cut flowers.

Some people think I'm crazy, but if you have a dream and a passion you are going to do whatever it takes to get there. This past week my family has said that I'm a slave driver—that they never get to do anything fun. I don't make them come here, but they know it's not just me doing this. It's a family thing and we all work together. We are still able to have some fun on the side—maybe not as much as we would like. But we all work together to keep this place looking good as a unit—from planting to weeding to hoeing to harvesting and washing the crops and then setting up displays at the market, and putting on a smile for all the customers who are coming. It's picked fresh one or two days before hand and you can taste the difference.



Rev. Daren Penwell, Lead Pastor, Bailey Christian Church, Bailey, MI.

Growing up, I used to visit my grandpa and grandma's farm in Buchanan, MI. Though I didn't know much about farming—having lived in the suburbs—I loved when my grandpa would lift my brother and me up in the bucket lift of his tractor. I enjoyed watching him as he fed the pigs and cows and as he put the corn in the silo. However, I never had a real passion for the farming life. Looked like work!

Living in the country meant you were miles from...civilization! Where were the sidewalks and dime stores and movie theaters? Little did I know that one day God would call me to full-time ministry in rural, farming communities. My first experience was in central Illinois. A beautiful setting, with corn and soy bean fields spreading out as far as the eye could see. It was also hog country. And, man, did they stink! But, as one farmer would inform me, "That smell...is money!"

A few years later, I would go on to minister in my current setting of Bailey, MI, which is also a rural community surrounded by orchards and dairy farms. Over the years I have come to appreciate the vital role farmers play. Their hard work of raising a crop and a herd so that others can eat is so important for a healthy economy, nation and world.

Moreover, I am inspired by their faith. There are few vocations that require as much faith as farming. Cultivating, planting...praying....praying...harvesting. There is so much that is out of a farmer's control. They are at the mercy of the elements, and from season to season, you never know what you're going to face. Seems to me, farming is a good place for a believer because I don't know how you would make it as a farmer without believing in a Creator God who provides and protects, even in those seasons that are lean.

This all brings me to this conclusion: we need farmers, and farmers need prayer! Won't you join with me in lifting up the farmers in our communities throughout this season? As you drive by a field of corn or a red barn full of cattle, throw up a prayer of blessing and provision upon that farmer? And pray that the farmers in your area would continue (or begin!) to look to the Creator/Provider who longs to be their source of strength in the season ahead!

I have a growing list of farmers that I pray for daily. If you know a farmer who would like to be included on my prayer list, please send me an email with the farmer's name, name of the farm, and the farmer's contact information.

We are experiencing the miracle of growing food in the soil!

It has been 42 years we had a garden during our first couple of years as newlyweds. There is only one spot in the yard of our rental house that receives a few hours of sunshine.



I decided to limit myself to using only hand tools like many of the folks in developing countries.



It was fun clearing the area, digging out the stumps and roots—and getting my hands in the soil!



My decision to plant 12 tomato plants has resulted in an abundance of fresh tomatoes to share with our extended family and friends.



Thank you for joining us in the adventure of praying for farmers and their families, as well as the pastors and priests who shepherd them.

We thank God for each person who helps make our ministry to pastors and families possible.

Please make checks payable to: PastorCare West Michigan PO Box 2938, Grand Rapids, MI 49501.

Or PayPal online contributions on the website.

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