

1 ***Amend and readopt Resolution # 3392 Rural Communities in Crisis as follows:***

2 **3392. Rural Communities in Crisis**

3 The United Methodist Church has long witnessed to rural peoples and their concerns. Each
4 General Conference since 1940 has suggested responses for improving rural church and
5 community life and the economic and environmental well-being of rural peoples. The 1988
6 General Conference accepted a study on US Agriculture and Rural Communities in Crisis, yet
7 the crisis continues. Today we reaffirm that historical study and call The United Methodist
8 Church to continue its commitment to rural church ministry and advocacy for agricultural and
9 rural community concerns.

10 *Theological Statement: Land, People, and Justice*

11 God is the owner of the land (Leviticus 25); thus it is a gift in covenant that involves the
12 stewardship of keeping and tending the land for present and future generations. As God's
13 creation, land must be regenerated that it may sustain life and be a place of joy. It is a common
14 gift to all of life, requiring just patterns of its use.

15 Social, economic and ecological justice with regard to the use of land is central to biblical
16 law. The land itself is to receive a rest every seven years (Leviticus 25:4). Voluntary charity or
17 occasional care of the land is not enough. Israel's failure to follow the laws related to the land
18 was counted a cause of their exile to Babylon (2 Chronicles 36:21). Care of the land and the
19 rights of the poor and needy are at the center of the Law. Adequate food is considered an
20 inherent right, such that the poor could eat grapes in a neighbor's vineyard or pluck grain when
21 passing by a field (Deuteronomy 23:24-25). Land owners are urged not to be too efficient in their
22 harvest (Leviticus 19:9-10), so that it is possible for the needy to glean the fields.

67 now control over ~~80%~~ 85% of the beef market. Farmers have little to no control over the prices
68 set for their products. Many family farmers are caught in a web of contracts with large,
69 vertically-integrated agribusiness conglomerates that dictate almost everything farmers do:
70 erecting farm buildings, choosing feed, installing lighting. Emerging agricultural technologies
71 use ever greater levels of capital to enable fewer people to produce food. As a result, income and
72 opportunities have shifted from farms to the companies that produce and sell products to farmers.
73 The dominant trend is a few, large, vertically-integrated firms controlling the majority of food
74 and fiber products in an increasingly global processing and distribution system.

75 3. Farm Income—Net farm income and net farm operator household income are two
76 measures of the relative ability of farmers to finance and sustain their farming operations and
77 provide for their families. By either measure, it is apparent that the combination of plummeting
78 commodity prices, high input expenses and production risks continue to threaten the economic
79 sustainability of family farmers. Without government farm programs and disaster assistance as a
80 partial replacement for adequate commodity prices, even more producers would be forced off
81 their farms.

82 4. Ecological Damage—Factory farms (**Confined Animal Feed Operations [CAFO]**),
83 especially those that produce livestock such as hogs, are poisoning their communities. These
84 farms have taken root mainly where zoning laws were weak or nonexistent or in states that
85 prohibited lawsuits against agricultural operations. The inevitable byproduct of huge
86 concentrations of animals is huge concentrations of manure that is stored in open lagoons. The
87 water is eventually sprayed on farmland, although there is usually far more manure than local
88 fields can absorb. In such quantities, manure becomes a toxic substance. Spills and groundwater

89 contamination are always a risk as is airborne contamination of water from ammonia, which rises
90 from the lagoons and falls into low-lying rivers and estuaries. More than five billion tons of
91 topsoil is lost every year and the intensive use of pesticides results in more than 14 million
92 Americans drinking water that routinely contains pesticides.

93 5. Pervasive Discrimination—African American and other racial ethnic farmers are even less
94 likely than white farmers to benefit from any changes in the rural/farm economy. Surveys of
95 Native American farmers suggest that their situation may be nearly as bleak. Farming is the
96 leading occupation among Native Americans living on reservation lands. Asian and Hispanic
97 Americans have historically been excluded from significant farm ownership. African Americans,
98 Hispanics and Native Americans have not received fair and equitable service from the US
99 Department of Agriculture. The USDA has long tolerated discrimination in the distribution of
100 program benefits and has misused its power to influence land ownership and farm profitability.
101 Farm program regulations shut out racial ethnic farmers from the benefits that have helped larger
102 white producers survive the changes in agriculture. The USDA remains insensitive to the needs
103 of racial ethnic farmers and neglects its responsibility to reach out and serve all who need their
104 services. (*See* 2008 Resolution #4133, “Rights of African American Farmers.”)

105 6. Trade—Trade agreements have brought few benefits to family farmers. Current trade
106 negotiations fail to address the causes of and needs for the many types of practices that
107 characterize agricultural trade: domestic food safety, security for all countries, agricultural
108 commodity/supply demand imbalances that results in adequate returns to producers, and the
109 concentrated market power that exists among a limited number of agricultural market
110 participants.

133 per capita income, only one is in a metropolitan area; of the other 49, many are very rural with
134 income based on agriculture. For six years in a row (1996 to 2001), the people living in the great
135 plains of the United States had the lowest income regionally. Only 6.3 percent of rural
136 Americans live on farms. Farming accounts for only 7.6 percent of rural employment, which is
137 dominated by low wage industries. Rural incomes remain lower than the urban median. Among
138 poor families, those in rural areas are more likely to be working poor.

139 Nearly 30 percent of nonmetropolitan households—more than 6.2 million—have at least one
140 major housing problem, most often the burden of cost (paying more than 30 percent of income
141 for housing). A 2000 survey found eighth-graders in rural schools were 32 percent more likely
142 than those in metropolitan areas to have used marijuana, 52 percent more likely to have used
143 cocaine, 29 percent more likely to have used alcohol, and twice as likely to have smoked
144 cigarettes. Rural residents tend to have poorer health care access, lower health insurance
145 coverage, and little or no managed care availability. Rural communities have little or no public
146 transportation.

147 *Call for Change: What Needs to Be Done?*

148 *A. Local churches and annual conferences are called to:*

149 1. Develop specific ministries to meet major needs that exist today in rural United States,
150 including:

- 151 a. taking responsibility for assisting with mending the brokenness of community life in rural
152 society;
- 153 b. strengthening their ministry and mission with rural churches and communities;
- 154 c. lifting up the responsible stewardship of natural resources; and

155 d. building bridges of understanding and partnership between rural, suburban and urban
156 congregations and communities.

157 2. Place personnel strategically in order to respond to rural needs; insist that pastoral
158 appointments be made with the needs of entire communities in mind, and not just the needs of
159 the congregation.

160 3. Become public policy advocates, speaking out as a church, creating awareness and
161 understanding, and bringing about positive change.

162 4. Be in partnership with seminaries to develop programs, including “teaching” parishes and
163 internships, to equip ministers to serve in rural areas.

164 5. Develop programs to invest conference foundation funds in rural economic development
165 needs.

166 6. Discover ways to enable the racial ethnic ownership of farmland.

167 *B. The general church is called to:*

168 1. Use its seminaries to prepare clergy to be more effective pastors in rural areas, using the
169 “missionary training” model, knowing that many ministers not accustomed to rural life enter into
170 areas where there is a new “language,” a new lifestyle, a new culture.

171 2. Cooperate ecumenically and with other groups beyond the church to develop responses to the
172 problems of rural areas.

173 3. Better learn the skills of personnel placement so that appointed ministers in rural areas will
174 tenure long enough to build trusting, understanding relationships necessary for pastoring the
175 community. Place more mission (and similar) personnel in rural ministries.

176 4. The General Board of Church and Society and the General Board of Global Ministries work
177 with family farm organizations to address the crisis facing family farmers and rural communities
178 and monitor agricultural genetically engineering developments and educate United Methodists of
179 its impact on the food chain.

180 5. Recognize Rural Life Sunday as a special day in the church year, combining in the one day the
181 emphases of Rural Life Sunday, Soil Stewardship Day, Earth Day, World Environment Day, and
182 Rogation Sunday.

183 *C. Federal legislators and administrators, as they develop farm and rural policies, are called to:*

184 1. Develop national agricultural policies that enable farmers to significantly increase net farm
185 income, improve the quality of rural life and increase the number of family farmers so that
186 farmers may continue to provide a reliable supply of food and fiber and serve as stewards of the
187 nation's resources. These new policies would:

- 188 a. reverse the loss of family farms;
- 189 b. ensure a fair price at the marketplace;
- 190 c. provide credit to family farmers at affordable interest rates;
- 191 d. develop a marketing and government support system that will guarantee the cost of
192 production to farm families;
- 193 e. initiate participatory democratic processes with farmers to determine if mandatory
194 production goals, which would discourage overproduction of some commodities, are
195 needed to move toward a balance between supply and demand;
- 196 f. reform government payments to benefit family farmers, rather than large corporate and
197 wealthy farming interests;

- 198 g. create programs that would enable new families to enter farming as a vocation;
- 199 h. create incentives for family farmers to shift from current production-oriented modes to a
200 sustainable and regenerative agriculture;
- 201 i. ensure the participation of family farmers regardless of race and sex; and
- 202 j. implement the recommendations of the reports National Commission on Small Farms and
203 the Civil Rights at the United States Department of Agriculture.
- 204 2. Discourage concentration in ownership and control of land and money and move toward land
205 reforms that broaden ownership of land by stronger anti-trust laws and enforcement, a ban on
206 corporate meatpacker ownership of livestock, and create safeguards and amend laws for growers
207 involved in contract agriculture to give them the bargaining power they need to demand fair
208 contracts.
- 209 3. Require soil and water conservation practices as well as increased funding for farm operations
210 that participate in federal programs; include farmers in the planning of such requirements and the
211 enforcement of national organic standards.
- 212 4. Reform federal tax laws to remove unfair competition and discourage tax shelter-motivated
213 capital in agriculture.
- 214 5. Maintain an emphasis on direct loan activity, resist attempts to reduce the level of direct loans
215 in favor of guarantees, and increase the Limited Resources Loan program for qualified farmers.
- 216 6. Provide for commodity reserves, isolated from the market, to be established at a level adequate
217 to protect consumers from supply disruption and meet domestic agricultural disaster and global
218 humanitarian food aid requirements.

- 219 7. Ensure that most federally-supported programs of research and education in agriculture focus
220 on small and medium-sized family farm operations, with special attention paid to racial ethnic
221 farmers, and that county committees, which administer these programs, be inclusive of women
222 and racial ethnic farmers.
- 223 8. Fund major new research initiatives and programs through the federal land-grant institutions,
224 including black land-grant colleges, to ensure the development of long-term, sustainable, and
225 regenerative agriculture.
- 226 9. Develop farm policies that will encourage farm-owned and controlled businesses and
227 cooperatives for processing, distributing, and marketing farm products.
- 228 10. Develop policies that will respect the guaranteed land and water rights of all racial ethnic
229 peoples.
- 230 11. Develop and support programs in cooperation with community-based organizations and
231 cooperatives to improve the quality of life in depressed rural areas, with attention given to health
232 care, transportation, education, employment, value-added agriculture, law enforcement, housing,
233 job training, and environmental protection.
- 234 12. Develop national and regional water and energy policies that assure that those who benefit
235 from energy and water projects pay a substantial portion of those costs.
- 236 13. Recognize and protect the right of farm workers to organize into unions of their own
237 choosing, to be covered by minimum wage laws, and to receive adequate benefits, including
238 social security, health care, and unemployment.
- 239 14. Develop a fair trade policy that stabilizes domestic markets, ensures consumer access to an
240 adequate, safe and affordable food supply, discourages dumping¹, allows all countries to develop

241 farm programs that provide fair prices, reduces agricultural subsidies by rich countries, and
242 respects each country's needs and traditions for food security, policies on the importation of
243 genetically modified food, conservation of natural resources, and fair distribution of economic
244 opportunity.

245 15. Prohibit the importation of produce containing residues of pesticides or other chemicals that
246 are banned for US producers, and revise permitted residue levels when the pesticide is banned.

247 16. Seek out international cooperation in developing an international food policy.

248 17. Address GMOs/genetically engineered agriculture by prohibiting patents and exclusive rights
249 to products and processes by companies and individuals that are in the public domain; ensuring
250 that protecting the reward system for innovations does not impede the distribution of the
251 necessities of life; not requiring a country to import genetically engineered seeds and crops; and
252 requiring truthful and accurate labeling so that dietary needs and nutritional considerations can
253 be attended to and, if warranted, epidemiological studies can be done.

254 *Three Ethical Guidelines*

255 Food is not merely another market commodity. Food is essential to life and is sacred
256 culturally to all people. We can change the direction of US agriculture and rural development,
257 but we need guidelines. A preferred agriculture must have three attributes:

258 1. It must be just. A just society and a just agriculture provide the means whereby people can
259 share in the inheritance of the earth so that all life can fully be maintained in freedom and
260 community. The purpose of a just agriculture should be for the maintenance and renewal of the
261 necessary resources for food, clothing, and shelter, for now and for the future.

262 2. It must be participatory. For agriculture to be just, everyone has the right to be consulted.

263 Participation in society and in the ongoing process of creation is the necessary condition for
264 justice. Participation requires recognition of everyone's right to be consulted and understood,
265 regardless of that person's economic, political, or social status.

266 Participation is not possible without power. In such decision-making, everyone has the right to
267 be consulted about such issues as expenditures for armaments, nuclear power, forms of
268 employment, social services, and so forth.

269 3. It must be sustainable. A sustainable agriculture is one where the idea of permanent carrying
270 capacity is maintained, where yields (agriculture, energy production, forestry, water use,
271 industrial activity) are measured by whether or not they are sustainable rather than by the criteria
272 of yields per acre or profits. In a sustainable agriculture, waste products can be absorbed back
273 into the ecosystem without damage.

274 A just, participatory, and sustainable agriculture would meet basic human needs for food and
275 fiber, regenerate and protect ecosystems, be economically viable, enhance the quality of life for
276 farm families, be supportive of rural communities, be socially just, and be compatible with
277 spiritual teachings that recognize the earth as a common heritage and responsibility. For
278 Christians, the idea of sustainability flows directly from the biblical call to human beings to be
279 stewards of God's creation.

280 ***Rationale:***

281 The rural crisis continues and the United Methodist Church must continue its commitment to
282 rural church ministry and advocacy for agricultural and rural community concerns

283 ***Date:*** May 4, 2015

284 ***Submitted by:*** United Methodist Rural Advocates