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General Church Budget Implications: None

Global Implications: Yes

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## 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.

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General Church Budget Implications: None

Global Implications: Yes

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Indeed, the concept of equal access to community resources according to one's need formed the basis of the covenant the community was expected to embody. Caring for one's neighbor, especially a poor neighbor, is a religious obligation. Jesus both inherits and fulfills this tradition when he says the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself is second only to the commandment to love God (Matthew 22:38-40). The prophets viewed patterns of economic exploitation, social class consciousness, judicial corruption, political oppression, failing to care for the land, and exclusiveness as in opposition to God's desire for full life and wholeness for all (Amos 2-8; Isaiah 5:1-13; 58:3-7; Jeremiah 2:7-8; Hosea 4:1-3). Some would suggest that both the contemporary world and Israel under the monarchy came to worship "bigness" more than God. Today, rural parts of our world suffer from many of the same maladies as ancient Israel. Land holdings are increasingly concentrated in the hands of fewer owners. People pursue material wealth as the solution to other spiritual and economic problems. Creation itself groans under a burden of eroding topsoil, toxic waste and polluted waters. Neither the land nor most of the people who work the land can celebrate the wholeness God intended. The US Farm Crisis Agriculture is a major component in the US economy. Through the production of goods and services, agriculture has added about \$90 billion annually to the national economy from 1995 to 2000. About 18 percent of all civilian jobs are in agriculture and related input and marketing industries. In addition, the agricultural sector regularly has a positive balance of trade. Women and ethnic minorities, including African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Asians,

have contributed immensely to the country's food production.

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General Church Budget Implications: None

Global Implications: Yes

The benefits of the agricultural economy are widely skewed. Agriculture is recognized as an inherently volatile industry, especially for family farmers.

## The Crisis Affecting Agriculture Is:

- 1. The Loss of Family Farmers—Amid chronically difficult rural economics, the patterns of land ownership and control are ever less diverse. The US Department of Agriculture National Commission on Small Farms reported in 1998 that there are 300,000 fewer farmers than in 1979, and farmers are receiving 13 percent less income for every consumer dollar spent. The loss of ethnic-owned and small-scale farms are even greater. Today there are 2.1 million farmers and ranchers. About 94 percent of US farms are small, but they receive only 41 percent of all farm receipts. Most disappearing farms are family-sized units. A family farm is not defined by acreage but as an agricultural production unit and business in which the management, economic risk, and most of the labor (except in peak seasons) are provided by the family and from which the family receives a significant part, though not necessarily the majority, of its income. Family farms vary by region and commodity.
- 2. Increased Concentration and Corporate Agriculture—US government policy choices have perpetuated the greater concentration of assets and wealth into fewer larger farms and agribusiness firms. Federal farm programs and tax policies have historically benefited large farms the most. Large farms that depend on hired farm workers receive exemptions from federal labor laws allowing them the advantage of low-wage costs. (See 2008 Resolution #4134, "Rights of Farm Workers in the US") The ownership and control over agricultural assets is increasingly concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. Factory farms (Confined Animal Feed Operations [CAFO]) have become the dominant method of raising meat in the United States. Four firms

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General Church Budget Implications: None

Global Implications: Yes

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

and fiber products in an increasingly global processing and distribution system.

- 3. Farm Income—Net farm income and net farm operator household income are two measures of the relative ability of farmers to finance and sustain their farming operations and provide for their families. By either measure, it is apparent that the combination of plummeting commodity prices, high input expenses and production risks continue to threaten the economic sustainability of family farmers. Without government farm programs and disaster assistance as a partial replacement for adequate commodity prices, even more producers would be forced off their farms.
- 4. Ecological Damage—Factory farms (Confined Animal Feed Operations [CAFO]), especially those that produce livestock such as hogs, are poisoning their communities. These farms have taken root mainly where zoning laws were weak or nonexistent or in states that prohibited lawsuits against agricultural operations. The inevitable byproduct of huge concentrations of animals is huge concentrations of manure that is stored in open lagoons. The water is eventually sprayed on farmland, although there is usually far more manure than local fields can absorb. In such quantities, manure becomes a toxic substance. Spills and groundwater

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General Church Budget Implications: None

Global Implications: Yes

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

- 5. Pervasive Discrimination—African American and other racial ethnic farmers are even less likely than white farmers to benefit from any changes in the rural/farm economy. Surveys of Native American farmers suggest that their situation may be nearly as bleak. Farming is the leading occupation among Native Americans living on reservation lands. Asian and Hispanic Americans have historically been excluded from significant farm ownership. African Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans have not received fair and equitable service from the US Department of Agriculture. The USDA has long tolerated discrimination in the distribution of program benefits and has misused its power to influence land ownership and farm profitability. Farm program regulations shut out racial ethnic farmers from the benefits that have helped larger white producers survive the changes in agriculture. The USDA remains insensitive to the needs of racial ethnic farmers and neglects its responsibility to reach out and serve all who need their services. (See 2008 Resolution #4133, "Rights of African American Farmers.")
- 6. Trade—Trade agreements have brought few benefits to family farmers. Current trade negotiations fail to address the causes of and needs for the many types of practices that characterize agricultural trade: domestic food safety, security for all countries, agricultural commodity/supply demand imbalances that results in adequate returns to producers, and the concentrated market power that exists among a limited number of agricultural market participants.

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General Church Budget Implications: None

Global Implications: Yes

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7. Biotechnology/Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs)—The rapid introduction of commercial genetically engineered animals, seeds and crops with inadequate research, testing and regulation may cause unintended ecological, health, social, economic and cultural consequences. GMOs affect the entire food chain and pose an indirect threat to the future wellbeing of farmers and nations hoping to ensure food security. The majority of genetically engineered crops currently on the market are produced and marketed by large private companies seeking primarily to generate a return on shareholders' investments. Private control of genetically engineered agriculture, coupled with emerging global trade policies that protect the interests of patent rights holders, makes food systems more vulnerable to shifting global economic trends and threatens the sovereignty and very existence of local food systems. Nonsegregated and unlabeled genetically engineered crops put farmers at risk of losing highly profitable markets, fail to protect the consumers from agricultural products whose safety is not yet proven, and deny consumers the right to choose. Genetically engineered seeds and crops are promoted as a solution to world hunger and malnutrition. Moral, consumer and producer concerns, informed by independent scientific knowledge, need to be addressed.

## Rural Community in Crisis

The rural United States today is a contrast between beauty and desecration, isolation and industrialization, wealth and poverty, power and oppression, freedom and exploitation, abundance and hunger, individualism and dependence. US Census data and other sources count the overall rural poverty rate at 14.6 percent, while 33 percent of African Americans, 27 percent of Hispanics, and 30 percent of Native Americans in rural areas are poor. More children in rural areas live in poverty than children in urban areas. Of the 50 counties in the US with the lowest

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General Church Budget Implications: None

Global Implications: Yes

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

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

- Call for Change: What Needs to Be Done?
- 148 A. Local churches and annual conferences are called to:
- 1. Develop specific ministries to meet major needs that exist today in rural United States.
- including:
- a. taking responsibility for assisting with mending the brokenness of community life in rural society;
- b. strengthening their ministry and mission with rural churches and communities;
- 154 c. lifting up the responsible stewardship of natural resources; and

- d. building bridges of understanding and partnership between rural, suburban and urban
- 156 congregations and communities.
- 2. Place personnel strategically in order to respond to rural needs; insist that pastoral
- appointments be made with the needs of entire communities in mind, and not just the needs of
- the congregation.
- 3. Become public policy advocates, speaking out as a church, creating awareness and
- understanding, and bringing about positive change.
- 4. Be in partnership with seminaries to develop programs, including "teaching" parishes and
- internships, to equip ministers to serve in rural areas.
- 5. Develop programs to invest conference foundation funds in rural economic development
- needs.
- 6. Discover ways to enable the racial ethnic ownership of farmland.
- 167 B. The general church is called to:
- 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
- areas where there is a new "language," a new lifestyle, a new culture.
- 2. Cooperate ecumenically and with other groups beyond the church to develop responses to the
- 172 problems of rural areas.
- 3. Better learn the skills of personnel placement so that appointed ministers in rural areas will
- tenure long enough to build trusting, understanding relationships necessary for pastoring the
- community. Place more mission (and similar) personnel in rural ministries.

- 4. The General Board of Church and Society and the General Board of Global Ministries work
- with family farm organizations to address the crisis facing family farmers and rural communities
- and monitor agricultural genetically engineering developments and educate United Methodists of
- 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
- 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:*
- 1. Develop national agricultural policies that enable farmers to significantly increase net farm
- income, improve the quality of rural life and increase the number of family farmers so that
- farmers may continue to provide a reliable supply of food and fiber and serve as stewards of the
- nation's resources. These new policies would:
- a. reverse the loss of family farms;
- b. ensure a fair price at the marketplace;
- c. provide credit to family farmers at affordable interest rates;
- d. develop a marketing and government support system that will guarantee the cost of
- production to farm families;
- e. initiate participatory democratic processes with farmers to determine if mandatory
- production goals, which would discourage overproduction of some commodities, are
- needed to move toward a balance between supply and demand;
- f. reform government payments to benefit family farmers, rather than large corporate and
- wealthy farming interests;

- g. create programs that would enable new families to enter farming as a vocation;
- h. create incentives for family farmers to shift from current production-oriented modes to a sustainable and regenerative agriculture;
- i. ensure the participation of family farmers regardless of race and sex; and
- j. implement the recommendations of the reports National Commission on Small Farms and
   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.
- 3. Require soil and water conservation practices as well as increased funding for farm operations that participate in federal programs; include farmers in the planning of such requirements and the enforcement of national organic standards.
- 4. Reform federal tax laws to remove unfair competition and discourage tax shelter-motivatedcapital in agriculture.
- 5. Maintain an emphasis on direct loan activity, resist attempts to reduce the level of direct loans
- in favor of guarantees, and increase the Limited Resources Loan program for qualified farmers.
- 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.

- 7. Ensure that most federally-supported programs of research and education in agriculture focus
- on small and medium-sized family farm operations, with special attention paid to racial ethnic
- farmers, and that county committees, which administer these programs, be inclusive of women
- and racial ethnic farmers.
- 8. Fund major new research initiatives and programs through the federal land-grant institutions,
- including black land-grant colleges, to ensure the development of long-term, sustainable, and
- regenerative agriculture.
- 9. Develop farm policies that will encourage farm-owned and controlled businesses and
- 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
- peoples.
- 230 11. Develop and support programs in cooperation with community-based organizations and
- cooperatives to improve the quality of life in depressed rural areas, with attention given to health
- care, transportation, education, employment, value-added agriculture, law enforcement, housing,
- job training, and environmental protection.
- 234 12. Develop national and regional water and energy policies that assure that those who benefit
- 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
- choosing, to be covered by minimum wage laws, and to receive adequate benefits, including
- social security, health care, and unemployment.
- 239 14. Develop a fair trade policy that stabilizes domestic markets, ensures consumer access to an
- adequate, safe and affordable food supply, discourages dumping, allows all countries to develop

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General Church Budget Implications: None

Global Implications: Yes

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farm programs that provide fair prices, reduces agricultural subsidies by rich countries, and respects each country's needs and traditions for food security, policies on the importation of genetically modified food, conservation of natural resources, and fair distribution of economic opportunity. 15. Prohibit the importation of produce containing residues of pesticides or other chemicals that are banned for US producers, and revise permitted residue levels when the pesticide is banned. 16. Seek out international cooperation in developing an international food policy. 17. Address GMOs/genetically engineered agriculture by prohibiting patents and exclusive rights to products and processes by companies and individuals that are in the public domain; ensuring that protecting the reward system for innovations does not impede the distribution of the necessities of life; not requiring a country to import genetically engineered seeds and crops; and requiring truthful and accurate labeling so that dietary needs and nutritional considerations can be attended to and, if warranted, epidemiological studies can be done. Three Ethical Guidelines Food is not merely another market commodity. Food is essential to life and is sacred culturally to all people. We can change the direction of US agriculture and rural development, but we need guidelines. A preferred agriculture must have three attributes: 1. It must be just. A just society and a just agriculture provide the means whereby people can share in the inheritance of the earth so that all life can fully be maintained in freedom and community. The purpose of a just agriculture should be for the maintenance and renewal of the

necessary resources for food, clothing, and shelter, for now and for the future.

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General Church Budget Implications: None

- 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
- justice. Participation requires recognition of everyone's right to be consulted and understood,
- 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
- be consulted about such issues as expenditures for armaments, nuclear power, forms of
- 268 employment, social services, and so forth.
- 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,
- industrial activity) are measured by whether or not they are sustainable rather than by the criteria
- of yields per acre or profits. In a sustainable agriculture, waste products can be absorbed back
- into the ecosystem without damage.
- 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
- 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
- stewards of God's creation.
- 280 Rationale:
- The rural crisis continues and the United Methodist Church must continue its commitment to
- rural church ministry and advocacy for agricultural and rural community concerns
- 283 *Date:* May 4, 2015
- 284 Submitted by: United Methodist Rural Advocates