

Right Relationships in Farming, Community, and Creation

Just
Getting it Right

By Kara Storey



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There are many ways to live out right relationships. Much depends on a person's gifts and desires God has placed in his or her heart. For Dave and Florence Minar, having right relationships with fellow man and fellow animals is part of being a good Catholic.

The Minars, of New Prague, Minn., own an organic dairy farm where they milk approximately 140 to 150 cows. The couple also owns about 420 acres, 180 of which are used for pasture and the rest is used

for growing forages.

They take very seriously their care of their animals and expect their employees to do so as well.

"[We must] treat them and feed them in such a way that's not det-

rimental to their livelihood and health," said Dave, 71.

Not only do the Minars employ workers on their farm in New Prague, but they also have extensions of their farm in the surround-

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Dave and Florence Minar of New Prague, Minn., believe happy and healthy animals will result in a better product and a better life for themselves and their livestock.

and happy will also produce a better product, said Florence, 70, which is why it’s important that they’re well-cared for from birth through processing.

“When we have our animals processed it’s important that they’re processed in such a way that a lot of hormones and stuff aren’t released into the meat,” she said. “If they’re frightened or scared the meat and the milk is going to be different because

“We were concerned about the health of our children and what effect that had on them,” Dave said. “It’s also happening now. A lot of our customer base is young families with children that are concerned about what their children are eating.”

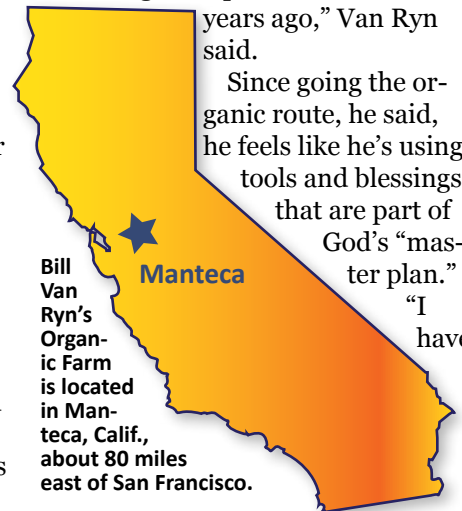
Finding Balance in Relationships

Just like the Minars, Bill Van Ryn has found that right relationships in one area of his life spills over into others. Van Ryn, 53, an organic dairy farmer and almond grower from Manteca, Calif., said that with all things in life, balance is needed to keep him centered in his Catholic faith, and in his familial, social and business responsibilities. By farming organically, his right relationship with the environment has evolved into a right relationship with Christ and His Church.

“I have been farming my whole life since I was a little boy with my dad, and have not felt so close to the land and God’s creation until I started in the organic operation almost five years ago,” Van Ryn said.

Since going the organic route, he said, he feels like he’s using tools and blessings that are part of God’s “master plan.”

“I have



New Prague

ing area. With not enough space and resources to accommodate all of

the cattle, the Minars send the young females and steers to other farmers in the surrounding area who are willing to raise them.

“If you treat the animals well, they do you well,” Dave said. “They grow better and will thrive.”

The Minars’ right relationship with their animals extends to a right relationship with their neighbors. The farm sells grass-fed beef and also bottles milk under their own label for the upper Midwest and so the couple is mindful of the health impact of their farming practices on others. Animals that are healthy

there are hormones in it and adrenaline that will affect the product.”

However, striving for right relationships with creation, their animals and their neighbors doesn’t come without sacrifices. While raising grass-fed cows is a worthwhile decision for the Minars due to health benefits of the meat and milk, it does have its detriments. For example, Florence said, their cows produce half as much milk than if they were corn-fed. It also takes more ingenuity to farm organically, as they can’t use chemicals or treat animals used for food production with antibiotics.

But the reason the Minars decided to farm organically back in 1974 is the same reason their customer sales keep growing.

always felt responsible for the animals and the land put in my care,” Van Ryn added. “I am called to do stewardship rather than constantly take and not put back. It is not until you farm organically that you start to realize the grandeur of God’s creation, how intricately everything has been designed to work together as a system that can feed us and make us more healthy.”

The process of farming for a living is not an easy one, he said, but his life is driven by a love and respect for the land, which in turn is a driving force in his faith journey. Organic farming is very challenging for Van Ryn, who said he believes it’s not for everyone, but that for him, concern for his neighbor helps inform his decision.

“I am very worried about what goes into our food on the processing side and I think that education and awareness are very important for everybody’s future,” Van Ryn said. “I feel very strongly about using food for fuel and how some of the larger companies in the world are trying to control it through power and genetic engineering. I believe science and genetic engineering have its place, but there is no moral compass anymore that’s guiding us forward.”

Faith, Family & Farming

For Ed and Helen Luersman, finding a moral compass to guide their daily lives is easy when staying in

right relationship with the Catholic Church. The Luersmans, retired organic dairy farmers from Ottoville, Ohio, stayed true to Church teaching on being open to life, which resulted in 13 children, 43 grandchildren and 17 great-grandchildren with another on the way.

“Our faith has blessed us so much,” said Ed, 85, a member of NCRLC since 1947.

The couple found that the farm was a wonderful place to raise their children. Ed can’t recall ever hearing the children say they were bored, for if there wasn’t work to do, there was playing to do, he added.

Helen, 83, believes that the responsibilities of farm life were beneficial for their children.

“It’s good for them to go to the barn and feed the calves and also to go to the fields and pick up corn and drive the tractor,” she said. “It gives them something to do and is more natural.”

Their children did recognize how enjoyable a life it was. The Luersmans’ son, Ralph, and his family, now own the family farm, and four of their other children and their spouses are either full- or part-time farmers. Several of their grandsons are to various degrees involved in farming or farm-related business.

Through times of plenty and of want, the Luersmans have always felt that a right relationship with their family was of the utmost importance. It’s a belief that stretched back to Ed



Helen and Ed Luersman (above, center; below, reading) believe raising their 13 children on the farm in Ottoville, Ohio, helped instill values they enjoy today.



and his own family.

“My father was still in debt at his death and there was no farm for my younger brother, so we all mortgaged our farms enough that we were receiving to buy a farm for him and enough to pay off my dad’s debts and to give our one sister her inheritance, while leaving some land in our mother’s name,” Ed said.

Today, Ed and Helen still live on their farm, but have built a retirement home down the lane from the original homestead. Ed also still finds time to help Ralph out daily.

“It’s very seldom I miss,” he said. “Very seldom.”

Together through right relationships to the land by organic farming, with the Church and with family, the Luersmans have found peace and joy throughout their lives.

“With the help of God’s grace, the cooperation of our families and the dent of hard work of intensively farming only the 120-acre farm,” Ed said, “we sustained a very enjoyable family life.”

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