

# Symposium S

*One symposium, many perspectives*

Fr. Michael Czerny, SJ  
Cardinal Peter Turkson  
Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace



*MFU president Doug Peterson at the public lecture*

**T**he challenges facing rural communities and contemporary agriculture are diverse. As a result, it makes sense that solutions to these challenges must be informed by a variety of perspectives and areas of expertise. This is a fact that was recognized at the Faith, Food & the Environment symposium, where 70 leaders with a range of backgrounds—from philosophy to farming, public policy to theology—gathered to address the same set of questions. Here are some of their stories from the symposium:

## The Farmer – Eric Bergman

As the saying goes in Montana regarding farming, you either married into it or inherited it. Neither is the case for Eric Bergman and his wife, Audra, who have been farming for about five years and own and operate Groundworks Farms. Before that, Bergman had worked in environmental education and his wife was a forest ranger. “Farming sort of represented the confluence of many different things in my life,” says Bergman, explaining his attraction to a way of life he had never before experienced. “It brings together energy, ecology, and economy.”

As a relatively new farmer, Bergman says he was impressed with the symposium’s focus on the need for a more diversified agricultural market, with opportunities for newcomers to not only gain entry, but flourish. “That

was definitely a point of consensus at the symposium, and it’s a very consistent theme across farming.”

Bergman says he was also inspired by how the Catholic Church was represented at the symposium, and he especially appreciated the Church’s focus on justice in the food system. The connection between faith and its integration to environmental and agricultural questions has always excited him, and he was glad that this was not only understood by Church leaders like Fr. Michael Czerny, SJ, of the Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace, but passionately articulated.

As a farmer, Bergman is looking forward to the development of *The Vocation of the Agricultural Leader*. “I think it will be very practical and very valuable, and farmers will enjoy reading and gaining wisdom from it.”

# Snapshots

Feature Story

## The Philosopher - Dr. Deborah Savage

Dr. Deborah Savage admits that her participation in the *Faith, Food, & the Environment* symposium was partly professionally motivated. After all, her colleague at the Saint Paul Seminary School of Divinity, Dr. Christopher Thompson, was a keynote speaker and had asked her to attend. So Savage, busy with a multitude of other commitments, thought she'd make a brief appearance before slipping out.

"I ended up going for the whole time," she says. "I couldn't leave."

For Savage, the symposium helped remind her that many of the challenges facing contemporary agriculture have their roots in philosophical ideas that have divorced man from nature and rejected the idea of any objective order or purpose. She shared this insight on the final day of the symposium, and found many farmers interested and intrigued with her observations.

"The assumption that farmers can't think in philosophical terms is such crap," she says. "Farmer can absolutely think in these terms. There's a natural metaphysics that's accessible to everyone, especially farmers, who know that there is an order and a nature to things."

Dr. Savage believes that philosophy needs to play a role in discussions of food systems and environmental stewardship, because modern society operates under destructive philosophical assumptions that are rarely examined.

"So many people are disillusioned with modern agricultural practices, but they don't realize that the framework they're looking for is found in St. Thomas Aquinas!" she noted. "If the Catholic Church can convince Millennials and environmentalists of this truth, then we can take the culture by storm."

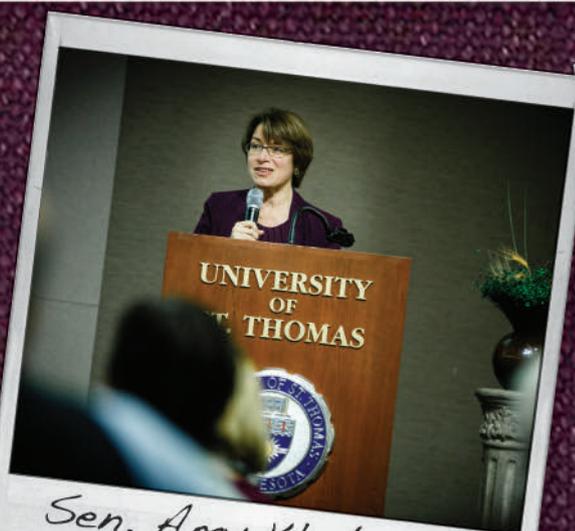
## The Rural Advocate - Mike Callicrate

He may make his living as the owner and operator of Ranch Foods Direct, a meat packing facility and local farmer's retail market in Colorado Springs, Colo., but Mike Callicrate has made his name as a rural advocate and defender of family farms. For years he has been drawing attention to the need for a more just farming and food system, but has admittedly had difficulty conveying the importance of these issues to faith leaders. "I came to the symposium looking for better ways to engage with the faith community," Callicrate said. "I was thankful for the opportunity to inform the group about how predatory the marketplace is and the importance of law enforcement and a shift in government policy."

He also appreciated the chance to engage in dialogue with representatives from major food producers. Although the two-sides didn't always see eye to eye,

Callicrate says the opportunities for conversation are infrequent; the symposium was a rare forum for such discussions.

Callicrate believes that disconnect between the average person and the way in which their food is produced is the biggest underlying challenge to a more just and equitable food system. In his opinion, the symposium furthered a deeper understanding of how interconnected our faith and ethics should be with our approach to food and farming. "Without people of faith supporting fair markets for farmers, agriculture will continue to focus on maximum profits; not a vocation and not a way of life," he said. "Young people interested in farming need to know they have a chance for success. I pray that with faith and understanding, good actions will follow."



Sen. Amy Klobuchar addresses attendees



Farmers played a central part

# Symposium Snapshots



*Making a point during table discussions*



*Engaged tables follow the proceedings*



*Reception connections*

## The Priest - Fr. Gregory Mastey

Fr. Gregory Mastey wasn't sure what he was getting himself into when he agreed to participate in the Faith, Food & the Environment symposium. "This was really the first of its kind, so it was kind of hard to get an appreciation for how significant it was beforehand," he said.

However, he certainly left with a great appreciation of the discussions and presentations that took place in St. Paul in early November. "I actually preached about the ideas raised at the symposium at all of my Masses that weekend, and talked about it on my half hour radio shows," says the parish priest of the Diocese of St. Cloud, Minn.

Fr. Mastey says he left the symposium appreciating the sacredness of farming—and its importance to the well-being of everyone else. "I'm a priest in a farming area, but I think we take farmers for granted some-

times," he said. "In my homilies, I made a point to let all my farmers know how incredibly thankful I am for their work, but also how greatly the Church values their way of life."

But it works both ways, he says. Just as the Church needs to be more appreciative of farmers, farmers themselves need to think more deeply about how their work relates to their faith.

"The symposium helped me realize that we need to get back to the basics," he said, noting that too often attention and energy is focused on addressing "practical problems" instead of more deeply rooted philosophical errors. "I told my parishioners that we really need to be more intentional about thinking about farming as a sacred vocation. It was an "Aha!" moment for many of them; I saw a lot of lightbulbs go on."

## The Policymaker – Anthony Granado

As the US bishop's policy advisor on agricultural and rural issues, Anthony Granado appreciated immensely the opportunity to meet with and hear from such a diverse crowd. "I thought it was an excellent idea to not only bring together the faith community, but also others as well, especially farmers who are in the trenches," he said. "Without them, a symposium can be just an abstraction, an academic exercise."

Granado says that the symposium provided him with new information and stories that will help him convey

the significance of the issues discussed to the bishops he advises at the USCCB. He also said it helps that a number of Catholic bishops were participants in the symposium itself, and will be able to relate the pressing need for Church leadership on issues of food production and environmental stewardship.

Granado noted that many of the problems in modern agriculture stem from a "consumer mentality" that views natural goods as merely commodities, which can be manipulated to maximize profit and pleasure. "When we

*Continued, next page*

## The Policymaker – Anthony Granado, continued

talk about agriculture, we need to focus on promoting the flourishing of human society globally,” he said. “Our current system doesn’t operate under the right assumptions.”

Granado views the conversation started at the symposium as an important part of getting this understanding

right. “It left me feeling confident,” he said. “This is a unique time. There are great challenges, but between the development of *The Vocation of the Agricultural Leader* and Pope Francis’s attention to the environment and the economy, we’re on the right path.”

## The Millennial - Katelyn Roedner Sutter

At 27 years of age, Katelyn Roedner Sutter may have been one of the youngest attendees at the symposium, but she certainly brings her own impressive qualifications. She is the director of the Diocese of Stockton, Calif.’s Environmental Justice Program, an initiative that focuses on the connection between environmental degradation and vulnerable communities, while also educating parishes about the application of Church teaching to ecological issues. Roedner Sutter says the symposium presentations affirmed the connection between faith and environmental stewardship, while the table discussions provided her with “concrete knowledge” that will help her with her role at the Environmental Justice Program.

However, Roedner Sutter was representing more than just the Diocese of Stockton—she was representing her generation, the “Millennials.” During reflections on the final day of the symposium, she stood before her fellow participants—most in their forties and fifties—and underscored the importance of including young adults in discussions pertaining to food and faith. “We’re the ones who will live out the impacts of decisions made now,” she pointed out.

Roderner Sutter also said that while many people her age may be falling away from religion, they still maintain a deep-seated care for social justice issues and issues related to the environment and food production. She suggests that the Church has an incredible opportunity to reach out to this “lost generation” simply by articulating its own teachings concerning the environment and social justice. “If young adults see that the Church really does care about these issues (and it does!), church participation will be more appealing to Millennials.”



Academic and Church Leaders connect



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