

Ten Commandments For Farm Policy – And An Eleventh

Moses gave the Israelites 10 commandments. They are a part of our culture today.

I propose 10 Commandments for the making of farm policy, and add a borrowed eleventh.

- I. Thou shalt design a national policy to provide for human sustenance giving regard first to the providers, secondly to the millions who are provided for, and thirdly, but no less seriously, to the preservation of the natural resources that are fundamental thereto.
- II. Price and income goals in the making of farm and food policy, and instruments for applying them, shall meet the test of reasonableness. These goals are intended not to enrich or impoverish, but to moderate variability and insecurity in all parts of the food and fiber system.
- III. No dispensation, in Treasury dollars or in kind, shall be permitted other than in return for creditable performance on the part of the recipient. This rule does not preclude variable rates of reward where a human welfare purpose is served.
- IV. A price policy for commodities entering world trade shall be based, above all else, on an estimated world equilibrium price. Any other policy basis upsets world balances. Not even a well intentioned nation is justified in wielding economic power in world trade arbitrarily. This commandment is especially applicable to products in which our nation dominates trade and essentially sets its terms.
- V. In years when a world trading price so established is below the production cost for efficient producers, a compensatory payment ought to be made. It shall not be so large as to generate its own rent or be an increment to the price of land.
- VI. Whenever a national policy to influence production and price of a farm commodity is deemed warranted, a national reserve of that commodity shall be a part of that policy. A wisely managed reserve is not only supply stabilizing for both domestic use and exports, but is properly considerate of the nation's citizens who bear most of the costs arising from the policy.

VII. No technology for the production or processing of food and other products of the soil which bears more than a negligible risk to human health shall be tolerated. Any violation of rules governing that technology shall be punished with penalties equivalent to those for assault with firearms.

VIII. Because all God's children are worthy of life itself, the design of our nation's agricultural programs shall take into account the needs of the less fortunate members of our own country; and further, within manageable limits and in conjunction with other food suppliers of the world, it shall take into account the needs of the victims of natural or man-made disasters elsewhere in the world.

IX. Any owner of farmland who voluntarily enters a national program that provides him price or income stabilization shall be required to protect that land against significant damage to its stability or productivity.

X. Any crop farmer who voluntarily enters such a price or income stabilization program shall routinely be given a degree of protection against the natural hazard of deficiency or excess of rainfall. This protection shall be specific to such a voluntarily participating farmer, and to that hazard.

Now for an eleventh commandment. Many years ago a distinguished agronomist, W. C. Lowdermilk, wrote that in Palestine in 1939 he pondered whether Moses "might not have been inspired to deliver another Commandment to establish man's relation to the earth and to complete man's trinity of responsibilities to his Creator, to his fellow men, and to the Holy Earth."

XI. "Thou shalt inherit the Holy Earth as a faithful steward, conserving its resources and productivity from generation to generation. Thou shalt safeguard thy fields from soil erosion, thy living waters from drying up, thy forests from desolation, and protect thy hills from overgrazing by thy herds, that thy descendants may have abundance forever. If any shall fail in this stewardship of the land, thy fruitful fields shall become sterile stony ground and wasting gullies, and thy descendants shall decrease and live in poverty or perish from off the face of the earth." 

Harold Breimyer is Professor and Extension Economist Emeritus, University of Missouri-Columbia.