



Wanted: A Farmer

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Reading 'Help Wanted' sections in local rural newspapers, I am moved to smiles or tears, or both, at one advertisement that appears more and more often these days. It goes like this: "Looking for a good, full time, all around farm assistant to drive modern farm equipment and trucks for all farm operations including planting, spraying and transporting crops. Must be self-motivated and willing to learn. Must take responsibility for maintaining and repairing equipment. Must be willing to work long hours and weekends during peak seasons. Wage based on experience."

There is so much irony involved here. Let me count the ways.

Here is the big farm that needs a real farmer that the big farm drove out of business.

Here is the big farm that knows how to get more land or machinery to continue to grow but can't hire a real farmer to do the work.

How I would love to know what the 'assistant' who answers this ad, if anyone does, will be offered as a starting wage. (As soon as the word, wage, is used instead of salary, you know it won't be much.) The employer is asking for someone with more brains than banking requires, as much stamina as professional sports demands, almost as many people skills as it takes to run a university and the dedication of a sainted doctor. But here in my neck of the woods, the going pay rate starts at minimum wage to about \$15.00 an hour and for sure no time and a half or double time for after hours work. There is no such thing as after hours in farming. Sometimes an enlightened big landowner is willing to match whatever a promising prospective employee is making elsewhere but the promising, prospective employee turns down the offer because he wants his after hours to be his own.

This is the history of farming at least back to the time of Land Enclosures in England. Economic evolution, or devolution, says that the land, the only real worldly treasure, will eventually go to the rich and the rich you have with you always. The small, dedicated farming landowner of a country's early days becomes serf, slave, hired man, renter, sharecropper, etc., displaced as owner by the wealthy who demand in paper stocks or rent more return on the land than the dedicated small farmer ever received or wanted to receive. The galling detail in this process is the investor saying piously that he is trying to save the world from starvation when he buys or forces the little guy out of land ownership. He will add pompously that the little guy is not competent enough to run a farm in modern times anyway, and then turns around and tries to hire him.

How many bushels of job displacements does big farm machinery harvest every year?

Agricultural history can be written in a few words: displace love of farming with love of money. Displace farmstead homes with high rises jutting into the sky or hovels sprawling in the ghettos, where the displaced are forced to live while utterly dependent on money for food and water. Displace fertile soil with compacted surfaces for large machinery to speed over or for huge reservoirs of water to keep the displaced people in their snaggle-toothed high rise chimneys or dilapidated ghetto sheds alive enough to do the work.

Then when the wealthy landowner can't find real farmers to do his farm work, he must in desperation hire displaced nine- to- five chimney or hovel dwellers without enough

knowledge or love of farming to be able to drive a staple into a post. Then the landowner moans and groans when the "assistant" wrecks his half million dollar tractor. But what the hell. He was going to displace that tractor with a bigger one anyway.

Displace, displace, displace. How many bushels of job displacements does big farm machinery harvest every year?

Of course, all this can be looked at positively as economic and social progress. Big agribusiness farming allows for a whole new cadre of displaced rural people to get educated and work as "assistants" for the factory farms and make a lot more money than they ever made farming on their own. Yep. Now they've achieved the American dream—except the freedom to live their own lives in their own way. Just keep your mouth shut and do what your corporate boss tells you to do and all will be well. ☺

GENE LOGSDON BLOG, SEPTEMBER 10, 2014 [HTTPS://THECONTRARY-FARMER.WORDPRESS.COM/](https://thecontrary-farmer.wordpress.com/) BY KIND PERMISSION.

