Striving to preserve tomorrow: How faith influences Quantum Dairy’s daily operations

By Trey Foerster

You’d expect an owner of a dairy farm to drive a big pickup. The first time I met Richard Wagner he got out of a Toyota Prius. Later that day, he showed me a photo of a John Deere electric-powered tractor and indicated he’d like to buy it for his farm. This wasn’t going to be a typical ag interview in so many ways!

Richard and Kathy Wagner bought into Quantum Dairy in 2002. The farm was founded in 1891 by the Buchholtz Family, the town road still bears their name, and they had it for four generations. There were several interim owners until Richard and Kathy Wagner bought it in 2002. At that time, the farm boasted 500 cows. Later, other families bought into the Quantum Dairy LLC ownership: Kurt and Anna Duxbury, with children Luke (13), Noah (10) and Kate (5); and Brandon and Josey Schmoldt, with children Owen (6), Ryan (4) and Tessa (1).

Quantum Dairy LLC

The first thing to know about the family owners is that they have a faith-based approach to their dairy operation, crop and woodland management. It permeates their daily routines.

The scope of their business is large: 3,000 milk cows which produce 250,000 pounds of milk (butterfat 3.8% and protein 3.12%) per day; corn silage of 1,750 acres, alfalfa on 1,000 acres, soybeans on 750 acres. The farm employs 40. The milking is done 24/7 with a double-45 parallel Delaval system.

The farm, that the owners’ faith in God influences their dairy operations and outlook on farming.

“By having faith and trust in the Lord, it is possible to pursue farming with less anxiety about all the factors that we cannot control – such as the weather and the price of milk,” indicates Richard. “At the same time, we focus on the factors that we can control, such as decisions involving new technology, land purchases and staff development. A primary factor that we do have control over is the amount of time that we take basking in the light of the Lord’s love. During that time, the Lord strengthens us spiritually, emotionally and physically.”

Kurt puts his farming in God’s hands. “If there is any industry in the world that requires faith it is farming,” he notes. “So much is out of our control that you truly do put it in God’s hands. Weather, animal well-being, faith in employees, stewardship of the land and personal health all are in God’s hands.”

“As difficult as farming can be,” Kurt continues, “when you look at it as this is God’s will for us to fight this battle to feed the world, it all becomes worth it. Raising kids in a home filled with Christ also gives us great confidence that, when our time has come, and we pass it on to the next generation, they will be able to thrive having faith that they too can succeed.”

Ag has its low points, from business challenges and setbacks to crop losses and stock deaths. Their faith helps each of them to cope with the losses and keep positive about the future.

“Having faith in God means that we have a strong belief in God’s presence in our lives. Therefore, we can communicate with God as we envision God being present beside us as a wonderful partner in our farming endeavors,” Richard indicates. “We are not alone, and we do not have to deal with our burdens alone or carry the load alone.”

Josey Schmoldt notes, “It is no secret that the past few years have been tough for the dairy industry. We have broken down every process at our farm to see how it can be done better and more efficiently, but there are still so many situations that are out of our control. If our team didn’t have such a strong faith, most of these situations would leave us panicked and scared. Instead, we take each day and task at a time and trust in the Lord.”

“I think without that ability to pray and receive communion each week I would feel overwhelmed and alone,” Josey explains. “I think one of the greatest parts of our farm is all the partners are practicing Catholics belonging to the same parish along with some of our employees. Taking
on the day surrounded by people with great faith and the same goals creates a strong force and trust in each other and God."

Community involvement
St. Brigid, the Irish saint who became the patron of dairy farmers, was known for her generosity. The Wagner, Duxbury and Schmoldt families epitomize this generosity not only in their faith-filled business operations but also through their involvement with the communities in which they live and belong.

Richard and Kurt have been active in various ways in the Weyauwega community for decades. Both have done stints on the school board and Richard is running again for a post on that board. For them, their involvement is tied to their faith in God and the rural community life they are a part of.

"It has been said that it takes a village to raise a child. It certainly also takes a community to run a school and even operate a farm," Richard explains.

He has led the music at church services, worked with the local food pantry, volunteered to deliver Meals on Wheels, served on a bank board, served on the board of the Wisconsin Dairy Products Association, is a life member of the local Future Farmers of America (FFA) Alumni, and gives speeches to a variety of audiences about agriculture, cheese making and other experiences.

Likewise, Kurt gives back to the community because he is aware of the many people who have given back to him over the years. "Coming from a small town and being raised by a single mother after my dad passed away when I was 8 years old, it always stuck with me the things my mom would say. 'God raises a lot of kids.' 'It takes a village to raise a child.' 'God provides!' Those simple phrases are so true. "I can’t list all the men that helped me get through this life, and my mom always made sure that we understood God was with us, and she had faith that He would take care of us," said Kurt.

"Being involved in the community whether it be on the school board, coaching my kids and their teams, or just being a positive role model are opportunities I treasure," he said.

"My passion for the outdoors is my favorite thing to share with the next generation. The woods and waters that God has created are two of the most important things in my life that bring me peace and where I see Him most. I love passing that on to my kids, their friends, relatives and almost anyone I meet. Our home has become the playground they can’t get enough of," Kurt notes.

The bedrock of the farm family
The bedrock upon which the family farm is secured and nurtured are the wives and mothers.

"As every farmwife knows, the farm requires long hours, crazy hours, and unexpected hours of our husbands’ time," Josey explains.

"That leaves a lot of the home responsibilities and caring for our children up to us. Trusting in the Lord and trying to have a heart like His is something I work towards every day and know I wouldn’t be able to take on these responsibilities at home without."

“We are lucky enough to be able to show our children every day how the farm life and living a faith-filled life require a lot of the same qualities,” she continued. “We want our children to be committed to God daily, just like we show up to the farm through all weather and all situations every day to care for our animals. "We want our children to trust in the Lord and thank him, not only in the good times, but in the extremely challenging and hard times. Farming has so many beautiful times and times to be thankful, but it also has plenty of tough times that bring you to your knees," said Josey.

"I think, as parents, we try to show our kids that, no matter what each situation brings, we need to find the positive, be thankful for the amazing blessings we have, and trust that God will bring us through in His way. The farm life is so simple and beautiful, but so complicated all at the same time. It gives us so many opportunities to help build strong, faithful characteristics in our children,” Josey stresses.

Faith and sustainability
Ag has its highs such as the joy of seeing a calf born and crops grow. Faith influences the way they use and care for the earth in which crops are grown and the practices used for sustainability.

“Our faith causes us to realize that we are stewards of the animals and the land. Also, we realize that, as stewards, we are not the real owners, but rather the caretakers of God’s blessings,” Richard stresses.

“Our time on Earth is finite, and we will eventually be judged on the level of care and compassion that we disperse as caretakers.”

This philosophy, Richard says, is based on love.

“Our faith instills in us the belief that we were put on Earth to love God and love God’s people. We love our fellow man by farming in a way that will help and not hurt them, including the environment in which we all live. We have a symbiotic relationship with microscopic life farms in the soil, which are a gift from God. The better we treat them, the better our crops will grow.”

Kurt agrees. "It is so easy to take care of the earth when you recognize that your time here is just a snapshot of what God wants from you. ‘Leave it better than you found it’ is how we manage this magnificent property,” he said.

“I don’t see my job as being anything more than making sure the land is here when I am gone and that I am teaching the next generation to love it, so they will want to improve it for their kids. There is nothing more satisfying than knowing God’s blessings through our hard work, conservation practices and faith.”

The Compass
Quantum Dairy LLC has 3,000 milk cows which produce 250,000 pounds of milk (butterfat 3.8%, protein 3.12%) per day.

Quantum Dairy’s sign features an adult with a child and the motto “Striving to Preserve Tomorrow.”

RURAL LIFE

Top concerns for rural life

Faith again is a valuable tool for the Quantum Dairy families to deal with agriculture’s concerns. “In 1940, in Waupaca County, 45% of people lived in the country and most farmed. Today 51% of our county’s people live in the country, and 8% farm. The country has offered rural life and, in the past, primarily farming (including forestry). When there are too many houses in the country, it’s not country anymore. It’s city. That’s a concern, as we try to farm efficiently, but must adapt to the growing presence of nonfarming people who want to experience ‘rural life,’” Kurt surmises.

“We do have faith that a balance will be achieved, especially with the help of land use planning. Maintenance of open space is our greatest concern, and, fortunately, a desire shared by most,” he added. “My greatest concern for rural life and especially farming is how poorly we are represented by the media,” Kurt relates. “The marketing schemes today for food and farming are so false that it saddens me. I will be praying for a more positive light to be put on who provide food for that world, and I will be praying that people educate themselves to truly understand what we do.”

“Farmers are becoming fewer and we have a big job in front of us to feed the world. God grant us the strength to do this. God bless the few farm kids that are left and let us guide them to take care of all You have provided us,” Kurt prays.

Ultimately, it is their faith that gives them hope despite the challenges that they see on the horizon. Richard cites Habakkuk 3:17-18 as an expression of faith: “Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.”

Rural Life Days Postponed

Due to the current outbreak of COVID-19, and following recommendations for social distancing, the Diocese of Green Bay has decided to postpone Rural Life Days, until a later date (to be determined). We will provide more information to parishes and communities when new dates have been determined.

Please check gbdioe.org/rurallife for updated information regarding Rural Life Days.

We are a part of rural life

One lesson is the importance of family and community. In small towns and rural areas, people rely on the support of their families and neighbors, especially in challenging times. This creates bonds, forged over generations, that give strength and structure to the community, and everyone benefits as a result. Though there are more people in our cities, people are not in touch with others in the busyness of life. Despite our closeness, we can become separated and isolated.

Perhaps we can look to our rural communities to help us regain a sense of community and restore the bonds that make our lives richer.

A second lesson that we can learn from our rural communities is the close connection to the land. Farmers must work with the land in order to yield a harvest. They are true co-laborers. In many cases, too, farmers feel a strong connection to a specific piece of land that has been in their family for generations. Because of this history, they feel an obligation to care for and support the land. Pope Francis has made care for our common home a hallmark of his time as pope. In a 2015 letter to the educators when he visited South America, he said, “We are not only invited to share in the work of creation and to cultivate it, to make it grow and to develop it. We are also invited to care for it, to protect it, to be its guardians.” May we follow the example of our farmers in caring for our land and ensuring its protection for future generations.

A final lesson I want to highlight is that we might learn from our rural communities the necessity of faith. Anyone who has tried to grow vegetables in a garden knows that we cannot grow anything through our own will. We must rely on the goodness of God to provide the necessary growth. Farmers know well to expect the unexpected. This allows them to give up a sense of control and instead rely on God.

But it is not only the proximity to our rural communities that makes all of us part of rural life. It’s also the key contributions that our rural communities make to our diocese. Some of these contributions are obvious, even if they are easy to take for granted. All of us rely on farmers for our food, including meat, vegetables and dairy products. Likewise, the logging operations that take place in northern regions of our diocese supply essential materials for building and for making paper. These are just a few of the daily essentials that come from our rural communities.

At the same time, there are other aspects of rural life which touch us all that might be less obvious, but no less important. We might think of these as lessons we can learn from our rural brothers and sisters, and I would like to highlight a few of them.

One is the importance of family and community. In small towns and rural areas, people rely on the support of their families and neighbors, especially in challenging times. This creates bonds, forged over generations, that give strength and structure to the community, and everyone benefits as a result. Though there are more people in our cities, people are not in touch with others in the busyness of life. Despite our closeness, we can become separated and isolated. Perhaps we can look to our rural communities to help us regain a sense of community and restore the bonds that make our lives richer.

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So I hope that no matter where you live in our diocese, you can recognize your connection to rural life. I would encourage you to find some way to show your gratitude for the positive impact that our rural communities have on our diocese. As you are reading the items in this section, you could find a way to give support for these communities, especially for people within them who are struggling. Or find a time on your own to visit a rural parish, pray with all the people there, and take some time to learn from their way of life. However you decide to do so, may we all thank God this year for our rural communities and the blessing they are to each of us!
**How Does Faith Impact Farming?**

### 2020 RURAL LIFE CONTEST WINNERS

**GRADE 1-3 ESSAY WINNERS**

**Cal Derricks – 3rd Grade**

*All Saints Catholic School, Denmark*

Faith impacts farming in all different ways. Right now, my grandpa is building a barn for me. I have faith that it will work out well. When my grandpa has faith, it works out. When I have faith, it works out. One time, my grandpa’s farm started on fire. The fire burned most of the farm and killed most of his livestock. He had faith and rebuilt. His farm is still running today with 30 cows and other livestock. That’s how faith impacts farming, and my family is an example.

**Henry Woodbury – 3rd Grade**

*All Saints Catholic School, Denmark*

Farmers who have faith will be more successful when it comes to running a farm. Farmers must grow crops, help baby animals, and watch the weather.

I live on a little old farm. The animals we have are 3 goats and 5 cats. My grandpa lives on a farm and my mom grew up on that farm. My grandpa has 42 cows, 36 chickens, 25 guinea hens, 3 goats, 2 cats, 4 tractors, and 2 wagons. My grandpa has woods and a pond. The things I do there are clean the barn, feed the cows, chickens, ducks, goats, and guinea hens. Another one of my jobs is to help cut wood. I also help catch the guinea hens and chickens.

Everyday I pray for my grandpa and his farm and my own farm.

**Peter Smies – 1st Grade**

*St. John Paul II Classical School, Green Bay*

Farmers have faith for God to give them what they need for their animals.

### GRADE 4-5 ESSAY WINNERS

**Skylyn Baxter – 4th Grade**

*St. Thomas Aquinas Academy, Peshtigo*

In the Bible Jesus talked about two farmers who prayed for rain, but only one prepared his field for it. The farmer who prepared his field received the rain and his crops grew. Without God, crops, animals, and the farmers themselves would not be here. A farmer’s faith in God helps them to keep the animals well fed and healthy. Also, it helps them to grow their crops.

A farmer’s faith in God helps them to believe in themselves so that they can do all the work that they need to do. If farmers did not have faith or believe in themselves, they would not grow corn, pumpkins, milk their cows or collect eggs. Without farmers who would grow food and raise cows for meat? A farmer’s faith is what helps them to get up in the morning and do their work to help us. Farmers grow a lot of our food. Their faith helps them to do that. That is how faith impacts the work of farmers.

**Jaxon Lisowe – 4th Grade**

*Holy Family Catholic School, Brillion*

Have you ever thought about how faith impacts farmers? Farmers have a lot to do everyday on the farm. They need to feed their animals, maintain their machinery, and tend to their crops. Faith helps farmers get their work done.

Farmers need faith in the one true God because things don’t always work out as planned on a farm. Farmers need to be able to improvise when things go wrong and God provides those different ideas. Faith in God will also help crops grow knowing that God has allowed the seeds to be planted with enough space to sprout. When harvest season comes, faith in God is important so the farmer can celebrate their successful crop which allows them to feed their animals. So they can get products from those animals.

The farmers are people who take care of the things that God has given them. When they take care of an animal, they are taking care of God’s creation. Faith can impact the work of farmers by giving them courage to continue with things that don’t always work out their way.

**Veronica Martin – 4th Grade**

*All Saints Catholic School, Denmark*

Faith impacts farmers by praying to St. Francis so an animal stays healthy and does not die. Farmers also pray to have good weather to have good crops.

Farmers pray for good helpers so they can help take care of their animals and crops. They need to have faith in themselves so they can fix things and get everything done. They also need to have faith in
themselves so all of the animals are healthy and people will buy their crops.

Farmers are really grateful that God made land, animals, and weather to help with all that they need to be farmers. Farmers always have something to do. Farmers have many duties to take care of. Feeding the animals, mowing the lawn, cleaning the barn, fixing the gates, picking the crops, and doing field work. That's not all, farmers don't just work outside, they work in the house helping with preparing meals and helping their children with homework. Farmers also have to keep up their buildings by repairing or building new barns. They also have to fix broken equipment.

God needed someone to take care of his animals that were on Earth so he created a farmer.

GRADING 6-8 ESSAY WINNERS

Natalie Sunita – 8th Grade
St. Rose-St. Mary School, Clintonville

Without faith and family my dad would not be with us today. Suicide is very real, and highest among farmers. Last year my uncle and grandpa who farmed with my dad died of cancer. My dad felt hopeless, paralyzed and defeated. The two people who loved our land as much as him were gone. My dad was left to take care of it all.

Thinking of losing our farm consumes him. He doesn’t sleep, decisions run through his mind all night. My family is close, and we have always known God will provide.

There is always so much to do and never enough time. He appreciates the beauty of our land that God has provided each day. He takes time to look at the sunrise and sunset and thank God for the blessings he has provided. We pray a lot as a family.

My dad told us he is the saddest he has ever been. We hug him and love him. There is help for farmers through counseling now. My dad knows that someday we will all be in Heaven together again. My dad’s faith in God and love of farming keep us close as a family.

Christopher Cullen – 8th Grade
Holy Rosary School/Parish, Kewaunee

Faith impacts the work of farmers, because farmers need to have faith in God that their plants will grow, animals will be safe from harm, and their barns and material goods (tractors, tools, silos) will not get damaged. Farmers do a lot of hard work and face many challenges, and sometimes keeping one’s faith as a farmer is hard to maintain. It’s important though that Christ is at the center of a farmer’s life to help them through the challenges of the agricultural year. Especially, if there is bad weather and their crops get damaged.

I thank farmers for supplying us with nutritious items we need such as meat, grain, eggs, and milk. I’m thankful to the Lord for all my family has to eat and our ability to give needed food items to the local food pantry because of crops that farmers harvest. Therefore, I thank farmers for having faith in God, and I offer a prayer to Saint Isidore the Farmer to watch over and guide all farmers in their care of animals and land.

Saint Isidore, please help my Grandpa’s farm, and all farmers to have good crops and healthy animals. God Bless our Farmers.

Wren Kunesh – 7th Grade
Holy Rosary School, Kewaunee

Faith helps farmers continue even when times are tough. From what I hear, farming is difficult. Farmers can’t just decide, “Oh, it’s too hot/cold out, I’m not going to feed the animals and harvest my crops today.” They have to go out and take care of their farm, even in the semi-harshest of weathers. They have to wake up before the sun rises, and work most of the day, then go to sleep after the sun sets. Then, they start over again, summer, fall, winter, and spring. Even though they do this each and every day, they still deliver food to the stores and eventually, to our tables. While we are eating, the farmers are starting the process all over again. Each and every day, they do this, over and over again.

When they work, they could use their faith as a reminder to keep going. They could pray a blessing when the crops are being planted, for a good harvest. Even as they milk their cows, they could sing songs of praise to make the time pass quicker. When they feed animals, they could praise God by thanking him for all the wonderful animals He gave them.
What rural life means to me

“I am so happy to be able to live so closely to creation. We are stewards of the land. We get to see sunrise, sunset, seeds grow to harvest. From birth to death, we get to raise a family in that environment is so great!”
— Kathy Schmidt, Brillion (Holy Family-Brillion)

“Rural Life is a mindset that rejects the city’s fast pace, anonymity, and somewhat impersonal lifestyle in favor of a slower, genuine, and involved lifestyle in tune with and appreciative of people, wildlife and nature.”
— Tony Pfeister, Waukesha (St. Mary Magdalene, Waukesha)

“Living the rural life for me means having a deeper understanding of the miracle of life in various forms. The fragility of it as well. Mankind’s part in creation and the effects on it, both good and bad. Daily reminders that God provides all the time even though we are looking for it so much of the time what we are given is for us. We are given what we need.”
— Dale Birenbaum, Newton (St. Thomas the Apostle Parish)

“We are stewards of God’s creation for the benefit of all.”
— Mary Lou Kugel, Shawano (Sacred Heart Parish)

“Having the chance to spread my wings and the friendships that small, rural communities can bring.”
— Barbara Koster, Ogdensburg (St. Mary Magdalene, Waupaca)

“Rural life means getting up before dawn and in some cases working well past sunset to use our time and talents to care for and nurture the earth and the food-producing animals entrusted to our care, and still finding a few moments during the day to thank God for the opportunity and privilege to do so.”
— Tony Bos, Waukesha (St. Wenceslaus, Neva)

“Rural Life is a mindset that rejects the city’s fast pace, anonymity, and somewhat impersonal lifestyle in favor of a slower, genuine, and involved lifestyle in tune with and appreciative of people, wildlife and nature.”
— Trey Foerster, Waupaca (St. Mary Magdalene)

“Having the chance to spread my wings and the friendships that small, rural communities can bring.”
— Barbara Koster, Ogdensburg (St. Mary Magdalene, Waupaca)

“On any given day if someone stops by, you take time to step back from the fast-paced world and take time to sit on the porch, or at the kitchen table, or on a bale of hay and share each other’s life experiences! Society calls that an old-fashioned thing? I think it’s not only a rural thing, it’s a ‘true’ thing!”
— Chuck Feider, New Holstein (Holy Rosary Parish)

“To those who work in acres, not in hours... WE THANK YOU.

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Rural Life Scholarship recipient update

By Tyler Schmidt

Through your generosity, I, Tyler Schmidt, am able to attend University of Wisconsin-River Falls majoring in Agricultural Business in pursuit of a career in the agriculture industry. I was chosen as the 2019 scholarship recipient for Rural Life Scholarship. Thank you for making college less of a financial burden; it is greatly appreciated!

As I have had the chance to reflect on my college career so far, I have come to realize how much different it is out in the world. I have had the opportunity to meet many new people and discover the vastly growing industry that agriculture is. The amount of technology and variety in agricultural processing I am learning about is quite extraordinary, and I can’t wait to dive into more about how we as an agricultural community are able to feed the world. On campus, I have joined the Agricultural Business Management Society (ABMS) and have been elected as a leadership officer for the club. This club is like the FFA program I was heavily involved in when I was in high school, supporting agriculture as well as developing leadership qualities. Along with this, I have been fortunate in my professional career, having been hired as the credit analyst intern at a local financial institution for the summer of 2020. These milestones in my life could not have been possible if not for the support of scholarships like the Rural Life Scholarship.

Most importantly though, I have been able to keep my faith. Going off to college and living four hours from home is very difficult without knowing and trusting in God to guide me and help me on my journey as I leave home and write my own story. My “Grandma” Rita gave me a cross necklace for my Confirmation and I wear it every day to remind me that God is always with me, has a plan for me, will watch out for me, and that God and my family are always close to my heart.

“To those who work in acres, not in hours... WE THANK YOU.

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Lessons for the priesthood learned on the farm

By Fr. Mark Mleziva

“Rise and shine Jerusalem!” To this day, I still cringe when I hear this response used at Mass. Not because there is anything inherently wrong with it, but because it takes me back to my teenage years. Most Saturday and Sunday mornings, my father would come into my and my younger brother’s bedroom saying the line as he would pull our sheets off our bed. Maybe not the best instance for reciting Scripture, but when it came to waking up teenage boys on the weekend, it was quite effective.

After we would begrudgingly get out of bed, we would get dressed and drive the four miles to my grandpa’s hog farm. It was the farm where my father grew up, just a mile north of St. Joseph Church in Pilsen, and it had been in the family for over 150 years. My grandpa had a dairy operation until he sold the cows in the early ‘90s opting to raise hogs instead. It was the early 2000s when I started to become a more regular helper as my grandpa could no longer farm due to his age. It was pretty much the same routine... My brother and I would clean and bed the pens, while my father would feed the squealing swine. Depending on the day, once we were done, we would either sit down and have something to eat and drink with grandpa, or, if it was Sunday, quickly shower to get to 9:30 a.m. Mass in Pilsen. My grandpa was instinct that we arrive to church by 9 a.m. but his normal spot in the front pew be taken by some other elderly early bird. This was the routine for much of my upbringing, and I wouldn’t change a thing.

I learned much during these formative years. Many life lessons were imparted to me, and I have carried them with me into my adult years and into my vocation as a priest. The first is the importance of hard work. Both my father and mother came from farm families, and their tireless work ethic was instilled into my siblings and me. Work was important, and not only work for the sake of work, but also doing a good job. When it came to farming, there isn’t much incentive to doing a good job. If you clean every square inch of the pen, it would inevitably happen that as soon as you stepped out and looked back, one of the animals had already tarnished the spotless work. Nevertheless, the satisfaction came from the fact that you did a good job, and nothing more. Nobody was there to congratulate you, and that was fine, and tomorrow I would do the same thing over again.

This is something that I have seen in my few years as a priest. There are oftentimes when you complete some priestly task, or get asked to do something at a moment’s notice, and nobody is there to notice or nobody is there to say “thank you,” and that too is fine. The satisfaction comes from the fact that you did God’s will in that moment, even if no one acknowledged it. And tomorrow, the same thing will probably happen as well, and praise God for it! The second lesson is the importance of family. I’m very blessed to come from a close family. We aren’t a perfect family, but the love among our immediate and extended family runs deep. When my grandpa was no longer able to farm, it truly became a family operation. Other family members had been helping when grandpa was still able to farm, but afterwards, more uncles, aunts and cousins were quick to pick up the slack. I had many memorable conversations with my family members in the barn or outside on the picnic bench once the work was done, and though I can’t recall all of them, it’s a memory I think back on often and smile. The farm truly brought the family closer together, and we wouldn’t be the same without it.

When it comes to being a diocesan priest, the size of the family is much larger, and the barn is replaced by the church. When we come to worship our Lord at Mass, it should be like a big family reunion. A place to recall memories of what Jesus did and continues to do for us, as well as an opportunity to grow in community through the partaking of the Eucharist, and after Mass, the conversations that occur on the way out. The Church recognizes this truth as there is a much familial language used through the Mass. My prayer is that when we refer to one another as brothers and sisters at Mass it truly becomes the case, and the Body of Christ is strengthened because of it. Last, but certainly not the least, the final lesson is the importance of faith. I would argue that farmers know more than anyone how dependent we are on God. On our own, we cannot make it rain, or make it stop raining, or scatter the clouds so the sun can shine. We are at the mercy of Him, and so, it seems that the farming life lends itself quite naturally to remaining close to God. I noticed this firsthand in our parishes as intercession after intercession asked for favorable conditions for farmers. Going to school at St. Mary’s in Luxemburg, Fr. Suess would yearly offer a novena to St. Isidore the Farmer asking for his intercession for a successful planting season, and my guess is that he continues to do this to this day.

One of my roles as a priest is to help others know how dependent they are on God as well. Because we have practically everything we need in our world today, this important truth can sometimes be lost. Unfortunately, it’s often when something bad happens that we run to offer our prayers so that the situation is quickly remedied. Rather, we always need to approach our heavenly Father as His beloved children, asking daily for all that we need. Farmers know this, and because of my upbringing, I’ve learned it, too...

Though we have no control over where or when we come into this world, I am grateful for my rural background, and how it has shaped me to be the disciple and priest of Jesus Christ I am today. Though I don’t do much farming anymore, and my hands are about as soft as they have ever been (much to my chagrin), I continue to labor in God’s field praying that through His grace, I may help to bring in a bountiful harvest of souls to the banquet of eternal life in heaven. Fr. Mleziva is the Vocation Director for the Diocese of Green Bay.

I am a Farmer
A Poem by Darel Boston

I am a farmer;
I’ve seen the seedling buried,
The time of burial and shriveling dormant nothingness…
And I’ve seen the new life come…
Not once or twice, but endless times,…
And the seed that was planted is a mere pittance
Compared to that which is poured into the bin at harvest.
I am a farmer;
I’ve seen the cycle of life in the hog lot,
The cattle feed yard,…
I’ve seen new life begin from the joining of animals…
And I’ve seen the newborn piglet or calf come into the world,
And stand on its own for the first time.
And I’ve asked the farmer’s question
More than once or twice,…
Can it all be chance? Can it all just happen?
I am a husband and father;
And I’ve seen, yes experienced, love and care and hope;
I’ve seen the dreams of a young child grow into
Real and concrete accomplishments…
And have had the joy of helping them become so.
And I’ve asked the parent’s question;
Can these little ones really have come from my origins?
Can I really have been the one who, alone, sired these new lives?
What causes the wife and me to pass our life
To the precious children we call our own?
I am an aged man, full with years.
My health is leaving; my mind no longer is sharp and clear.
And still the question is asked… but no longer by me.
For I KNOW the answer now; it eludes me no longer.
I am not my own. I never was.
I did not cause crops to grow, cows to calve,
Or myself to be born.
I am only the child of God…
The perpetuator of His great scheme of life.
In Him I trust…to live, to die and like the seedling—
To live again!

Courtesy of Catholic Rural Life

I am a Farmer
A Poem by Darel Boston
Due to the current outbreak of COVID-19, and following recommendations for social distancing, the diocese has decided to postpone Rural Life Days until a later date. We will provide more information to parishes and communities when new dates have been determined.

Please check GBDIOC.ORG/RURALLIFE for updated information regarding Rural Life Days.

QUESTIONS? Contact Peter Weiss at the Diocese of Green Bay Office of Living Justice at (920) 272-8321.

As a farmer, you know the value of cultivating your resources. Your assets place you in a unique position to accomplish your financial, tax and charitable goals.

Contact us to learn about planning strategies that can help you make the most of your resources while leaving a legacy to continue the work of the Catholic causes you love.

Make your gift today at catholicfoundationgb.org/legacy