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The Farmer Sells at Retail

By James M. Decker

"[The farmer] is, after all, the only man in our economy who must buy everything he buys at retail - sell everything he sells at wholesale - and pay the freight both ways."

This is a famous (and mostly accurate) line about the difficulties of farm economics. It comes from a speech by then-Senator John F. Kennedy at a Democratic campaign gathering in Bismarck, North Dakota in 1958. It has largely been treated as a foregone conclusion of economics and government agriculture policy. In the speech, Kennedy himself treated it as a foregone conclusion.

If it is a foregone conclusion, that is a perpetually difficult situation. Other businesses do not want to sell to the farmer below retail. In that case, the economic difficulty simply gets transferred to them. The other side of that equation - improving the wholesale price - is the central idea of much government farm policy over the last 75 years. I do not want to get into that topic, because people far more qualified than me (including my own wife) spend much of their time working on those topics as a full-time job. They do not need me as an armchair quarterback.

But what if those rules did not have to be a foregone conclusion? What if, instead of being forced into a game with difficult rules, we could change the rules of the game entirely?

We have talked in recent weeks about the idea of

strengthening local economies. As I observed last time, the local economy starts with food, clothing, and shelter, because those are the most basic necessities in each of our lives. What if the farmer could sell some of those basic necessities for retail prices and do so locally?

I am always suspicious of good ideas (even my own) if they do not have a market. Sure, an idea might seem good, but if nobody will actually put it to use, it is merely academic. But the idea of farmers selling at retail and doing it locally? That DOES have a market!

Have you ever heard phrases like "farm-to-table" or "local food"? This is exactly what we are talking about. In 2015, the National Restaurant Association reported that four of the top ten trends in the restaurant business related to the idea of eating local food. Those trends have only increased since that time. There are a variety of reasons why this works. I am not here to make value judgments on why certain people have jumped on this trend, but I do know that their money spends well and it goes into the pockets of the farmers that have produced that local food.

I also know some objective facts. If you have ever eaten fresh, homegrown produce, meat, or eggs, you know how good it tastes. And if you grew it yourself, there is an enormous amount of fulfillment. Over the

weekend, I ate a salad that had store-bought lettuce, but the onions came from Tommy Bearden at the Jones-Haskell Farmers Market in Stamford and the tomatoes, cucumbers, and bell peppers were grown in our personal garden. It was a good salad, but it tasted better because so much of it was fresh and because our family grew so much of it.

There is a reason why much of America's produce is grown in places like Florida, the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, and California. The weather is much more conducive. We are not going to grow lettuce on a large scale in Stamford. And that is okay. That is not what I am proposing.

What I am proposing is that local leaders think deeply about how they can tap in to local and regional markets for the items that they CAN grow. Whether it be produce, cereal grains, fiber crops, or meat, there is a growing world of opportunity for the American farmer to change the rules of the game and sell at retail. It will strengthen local economies, create new rural jobs, and create prosperity across rural communities.

James Decker is the Mayor of Stamford, Texas and the creator of the West of 98 website and podcast. Contact James and subscribe to these essays at westof98.substack.com and subscribe to West of 98 wherever podcasts are found.

Obituaries



Hartman

Michael Palmer Hartman went to be with his Lord and Savior on August 8, 2022.

Born in Monahans, Texas, in 1945 to Elton and Oma Dee Hartman, he grew up in Pecos, Texas, along with his brother Randall Hartman. He later met Velva Freeman, his wife of 56 years, and my how things changed once Velva came into his life. He attended college at Angelo State University and received his Master of Education from Sul Ross State. Michael and Velva raised a family of three, moving from Pecos, Llano, Loraine, and then settling in Bronte, Texas. Michael first worked as a Principal at Bronte ISD and later became a Superintendent for 14 years at Bronte.

After leaving the school business he came to work with his sons where he was instrumental in starting Hartman Roofing. His teaching continued in the roofing business by showing the company the meaning of integrity, honesty, and most certainly a hard days work. Michael had a way with customers making them happy in all circumstances. Wow, how he could bring a smile to their faces. You only had to spend a short amount time with him before he would share his love

and faith in his Savior Jesus Christ with you. This was our Dad, he deeply cared about showing the light to the lost. His faith was taught to him by his mother at an early age and it was never forgotten.

Michael spent his last 23 years living in Fredericksburg, Texas, (God's Country). This was a place he loved dearly, where he made many friends, and his family loved to come and visit. Michael was an educator, horseman, church elder, computer guru, pilot, gunsmith, animal/dog lover, but most of all a loving father and husband. He will be missed and we want to honor him today for all the contributions he made to this world. We love you Daddy.

He leaves behind his wife, Velva Donn Hartman, who has been by his side through all the many health issues. He is also survived by three children, Kimberly Braswell and husband Blane, Kirby Hartman and wife Misty, and Cody Hartman; six grandchildren, Reese Braswell and wife Ashley, Case Braswell and wife Devin, Taylor Schmidt and husband Jacob, Mason Braswell, Savannah Hartman, and Sawyer Hartman; and three great-grandchildren, Severin Schmidt, Lucy Braswell, and Paxton Schmidt, with 2 more on the way. What a loving legacy you leave to us.

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Area Churches

Invite You to Worship

Bronte

Bronte Church of Christ

PO Box 346
 118 S. Jefferson • Bronte
 Sun. 10 am & 6 pm, Wed. 7 pm

Central Baptist Church

324 S. Franklin • Bronte
 (325) 473-4811
 Dale Patterson, Pastor
 Sun. 10 am Sunday School
 11 am & 5 pm Worship

First Baptist Church

424 S. Washington • Bronte
 (325) 473-2331
 firstbronte@gmail.com
 Pastor George Cooper

Sunday 9:45 am Sunday School,
 10:30 am Worship

Wednesday 6 pm - 8 pm

Children and Youth

First United Methodist Church

Corner of Washington & Holmes
 Bronte • (325) 473-3281
 Rev. Stacy Sprinkle, Pastor

Sun. 10:00 am Sunday School
 11:00 am Worship

St. James Catholic Church

215 N. Washington, Bronte
 (325) 365-2687
 Rev. Yesu Mulakaleti, Jr., Pastor

Sunday Bilingual Mass 8 am

4C Cowboy Church

Drawer R • Bronte • (325) 895-4080
 Robert Lemmond, Pastor

Sunday, 10:30 am - Texas Theater
 Wednesday Bible Study 6 pm -

4C Feedlot Youth Building

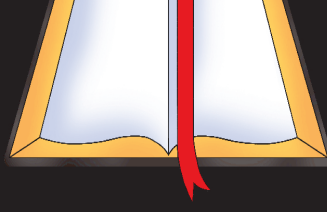
Coke County

Pecan Baptist

PO Box 542 • 12 miles West of
 Robert Lee on Sterling City Hwy
 (325) 453-2065, Bill Hood, Pastor

www.pecanbaptistchurchrl.com
 Sun. 10 am, Sunday School

11 am & 7 pm, Worship



Robert Lee

Bible Baptist Church

PO Box 938 • 9th & Austin
 Sunday 10 am Sunday School,
 11 am and 5 pm Worship,
 Wed 5 pm Bible Study

Emmanuel Pentecostal

PO Box 794 • 1004 Hillcrest
 Pastor Brantly Robertson
 (972) 841-2009

Sundays 10 am, Wednesdays 7 pm

First United Methodist Church

PO Box 144 • 9th & Chadbourne
 Robert Lee • (325) 453-2417
 Cyndi Weidner, Pastor

Sun. 10 am Sunday School

11 am Worship,

5 pm Choir Practice

Iglesia Bautista Betel

101 Houston • Robert Lee

Sun. 9:45 am • Sunday School

11 am Service • Bible Study Wed. 6 pm

Southside Church of Christ

PO Box 698 • 8th & Houston
 Robert Lee (325) 453-2176

Recardo Reyes, Preacher

Sun. 10 am, Sunday School

11 am & 6 pm, Worship

Wed. 6 pm, Worship

Northside Church of Christ

PO Box 508

9th & Chadbourne • Robert Lee

(325) 453-2685, (325) 763-2118

or (325) 473-1053

Services: Sun. 10 am

Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church

601 W. 10th, Robert Lee

(325) 365-2687

Rev. Timothy Hayter, Pastor

Saturday Vigil Mass 6 pm

Robert Lee Baptist Church

PO Box 493 • 22 W. 11th

(325) 453-2724

Chris Walls, Pastor

Sun. 9:45 am, Sunday School

11 am & 7 pm, Worship

Wed. 7 pm, Prayer Meeting

Victory Assembly of God

(325) 453-2208, PO Box 638

202 E. 6th Street, Robert Lee

Rev. Rocky Youngblood, Pastor

Sun. 9:45 am, Sunday School

10:45 am & 6 pm, Worship

Wed. 6 pm, Bible Study

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