



## **“The U.S. Experience with New Generation Cooperatives”**

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I am pleased to talk with you today about new generation cooperatives in America. I bring you greetings from “The Peace Garden State” of North Dakota. The “Peace Garden” is a formal garden located on the U.S./ Canada border. It celebrates the longest unfortified border in the world. It contains a chapel with quotes from world leaders on their great hope for peace. It is an inspiring place that reflects the best of what we in the Northern Prairies would call our values.

I believe the citizens of Alberta and the rural people in North Dakota have deeply held common values. It is common values among investor members that make “new generation” cooperatives work. The lack of common values can also make cooperatives or any other business organization fail.

I am trying to understand the phenomenon of new generation cooperatives from a value perspective as well as the traditional economic perspective. Dakota Growers Pasta Company was organized as a cooperative. The members of that cooperative voted to convert to a “C” corporation. In the debate over that conversion, it became clear that members had different values and had invested in the cooperative for different reasons.

Similar conflict of values is avoidable only if people are clear at the beginning about the reasons they are forming new generation cooperatives. By values I mean “*An enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence. A value system is an enduring organization of beliefs concerning preferable modes of conduct or end-states of existence along a continuum of relative importance.*” (1. “The Nature of Human Values” by Milton Rokeach, Collier Macmillan Publishers, The Free Press, New York, 1973, Page 5)

I want to be clear what I am talking about so you understand its application to Alberta. Rokeach says that there are two types of values—terminal and instrumental. Terminal values are what we want; instrumental values are ways of behaving that we believe will cause us to get what we want. Rokeach says there are 18 of each type of value that explains human values around the world. The 18 terminal values are:

- **A comfortable life**
- **An exciting life**
- **A sense of accomplishment**
- **A world at peace**
- **A world of beauty**
- **Equality**
- **Family security**
- **Freedom**
- **Happiness**
- **Inner harmony**

- **Mature love**
- **National security**
- **Pleasure**
- **Salvation**
- **Self-respect**
- **Social recognition**
- **True friendship**
- **Wisdom**

The instrumental values are:

- **Ambitious**
- **Broadminded**
- **Capable**
- **Cheerful**
- **Clean**
- **Courageous**
- **Forgiving**
- **Helpful**
- **Honest**
- **Imaginative**
- **Independent**
- **Intellectual**
- **Logical**
- **Loving**
- **Obedient**
- **Polite**
- **Responsible**
- **Self-controlled**

Rokeach spent his life understanding how these 36 values predict and influence human behavior. I must tell you that I had never heard of him until about a month ago. As an economic developer I have recognized that the reason people joined organizations or made investments are complicated. But instead of trying to understand those reasons, I would always use the simplest “main” reason.

To save time in organizing cooperatives it seemed advisable to “cut to the chase” and simply help producers know how these cooperatives would make them money. I could appeal to the most basic value—the one Adam Smith called “enlightened self-interest.”

Enlightened self-interest seemed a perfect explanation of the world around me in North Dakota. In North Dakota as in the Prairie Provinces, people formed cooperatives to adjust for “market place failures.” When the merchants of grain wouldn’t give producers a fair return, farmers organized grain-marketing cooperatives. When inputs were not available or too expensive, farmers organized purchasing cooperatives. When investor-owned electric companies wouldn’t serve farmers, farmers organized electric cooperatives. It was easy for me to see that when the marketplace would not provide enough return for a farm commodity the next logical thing to do was to organize a value-added cooperative to gain more income from the system.

I learned about “vertical integration” and “systems thinking” in the late 1980s and early 1990s. I learned that farmers could buy into other parts of the food sector and capture profits by adding value to their commodities. It was and is an intoxicating concept.

To put some perspective on my perspective, I knew that fruit and vegetable cooperatives were organized in California in the 1930s and the 1950s. I knew that grape producers in Michigan bought the Welch label in the late 1950s. I had heard about Diamond Almond, Sunkist and Ocean Spray. I understood the wonderful economic return sugar beet producers in the Red River Valley of Minnesota and North Dakota had achieved by purchasing American Crystal Sugar. I appreciated the powerful position of Minnesota Corn Processing in the corn sweetener market. I learned that cotton farmers bought a Levi-Strauss plant in Texas and contracted with that company for the sale of denim, instead of cotton.

I was in the office of Farmland Industries in Kansas City and looked at the marble wall containing the words of the founder of the largest cooperative in the world: *“Make no little plans for they lack the power to stir men’s souls.”* I met Lee Egerstrom who quoted Howard Cowden’s words in the title of his book, “Make No Small Plans.” I had the full quote printed on tag board and I put it up in my office in Mandan, N.D.

From 1990 until now, my colleagues with the telephone and electric cooperatives and I have been involved in 104 projects representing more than \$600 million of debt and equity investment. These projects have created thousands of new jobs and are bringing millions of “value-added” dollars back to farmers.

The Associated Press named “Co-op Fever” as the story of the year in 1995. I wrote “Creating Co-op Fever” in 1998. But co-op fever is now old news. The news in 2002 is the story of Enron and World Com. Almost lost in the staggering stories of corporate misbehaving and the largest bankruptcy filing in the history of the world are smaller stories.

The ever faithful observer of cooperatives, Lee Egerstrom, writing in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, notes that Farmland Industries (the only Fortune 500 company in Kansas City) has filed for Chapter 11 protection. *“It is trying to sell fertilizer and petroleum refining assets to restructure the company as a farmer-owned meat processor.”*

Egerstrom reported that *“AgWay Inc., the large Northeastern farm and horticulture co-op based in DeWitt, N.Y., filed for Chapter 11 protection from creditors Oct. 1. It is trying to sell four business units and restructure remaining operations...Tri Valley Growers, a major Northern California vegetable-processing cooperative, is in liquidation after filing for bankruptcy. Southern States Cooperatives, a Southeastern farm supply and marketing co-op in Richmond, Va., has just replaced its executives and is scaling back to crawl out from under debt. Corn farmers from southwestern Minnesota, northwestern Iowa, South Dakota and Nebraska recently voted to sell their Minnesota Corn Processors Inc. co-op at Marshall, Minn., to Archer Daniels Midland.....Dakota Growers Pasta Co. recently elected to convert from a co-op to a public stock corporation...Now, the co-op business world is watching as Ocean Spray discusses a possible sale of that co-op to a soft drink company.”* (2. “Co-ops Challenged” by Lee Egerstrom, *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, October 2002)

Egerstrom didn't report the daily news I face as one of the longest tenured cooperative developers in North America. Spring Wheat Bakers of Fargo, N.D., has shut down operations in Georgia and is trying to sell its bakery. The Enoch Schultz Creamery in Bismarck is shutting down. Bismarck National Bank will take over the assets of the creamery that Enoch Schultz founded in 1934.

Egerstrom didn't report that in 10 years North Dakota has lost 60 percent of the milk cows and a higher percent than that of the dairies farmers. Hog producers can't seem to compete and our second largest confinement operation is on the verge of giving the keys to the bankers. Cattle producers have rejected investing in a meatpacking cooperative three times and now beef cooperatives wonder whether or not they should just quit trying.

To compound this sense of loss, the leading cooperative attorney in the United States, Ralph Morris, died of a heart attack in California while working with Tri-Valley growers. The leading cooperative lender, Lee Estenson, formerly with the St. Paul Bank for Cooperatives, also died from a heart attack while serving as the chief financial officer for Spring Wheat Bakers. These were two of the most admired men in the world of cooperative business. Neither was yet 60 years old.

These were the thoughts on my mind when Ted Darling e-mailed asked if and me I would give a presentation on why new generation co-ops have been so successful in the United States. I was in the middle of a really great pity party of how tough I have it when Ted contacted me. He has knocked me out of that silliness and back into the reality of the assets right in front of me. His request for me to talk with you, the people of Alberta, was a very good thing. It made me rediscover why we have been so successful and why we will very likely fix what is broke and, like a broken bone that gets fully healed, be stronger than ever.

Just as the body has with in itself the DNA code for healing, so to do human organizations. The 18 terminal human values are things we truly do long for—and they will cause us to right tipped- over organizations and heal economic systems that aren't working. They are at play in Alberta and that is why you are holding this conference.

It is still too recent a phenomenon to know why farmers in the United States invested the millions of dollars they have in new generation cooperatives. I am not sure the behavior sciences are good enough to tell us for sure. But as I said in “Creating Co-op Fever,” I think it has something to do with our belief structure and how we think. It has something to do with what we value and how we act on those values.

If we could compare the ranking of values between Canadian and American farmers I suspect we would give high scores to family security, world peace, freedom, a sense of accomplishment, a comfortable life and true friendship.

**Family security:** It is because of your desire for family security you want to do what you can to enable families to increase their income from farming.

**World peace:** I would guess you have a strong desire for world peace because as a political science student I am still impressed that you became an independent nation without a war.

**Freedom:** I would guess that you value, like those of us who live south of you, the very idea of freedom. And we know, like you know, that political freedom without economic and religious freedom is not enough.

**Sense of accomplishment:** I know firsthand what you will learn—that building a sustainable producer-owned enterprise contributes to a true sense of accomplishment, and that sense of accomplishment on the part of the founders does reach the nurturing water table of human values.

**A comfortable life:** I would guess that you value, like I do, a comfortable life. Not stress free, but a life that is comfortable in its portions. Balanced between work and play, family, and reasonable physical comforts such as a good house and a car that runs well.

**True friendship:** And I would guess you value true friendship—the kind that exists between neighbors who visit, whose kids grow up together, who farm next to each other, the kind of friends that will put your crop in for you if you can’t, before they seed their own.

These and other terminal or end values drive you forward to consider New Generation Cooperatives in Alberta. Undoubtedly, they have played important motivational roles in the United States as well. I warn you now about the instrumental values and their influence on new generation cooperatives in Alberta. I warn you not to discourage you—only to prepare you for what is coming. People value certain behaviors sometimes more than the end values they are designed to meet. They can sometimes value the means more than the ends.

In alphabetical order again the instrumental values are: **Ambitious, Broadminded, Capable, Cheerful, Clean, Courageous, Forgiving, Helpful, Honest, Imaginative, Independent, Intellectual, Logical, Loving, Obedient, Polite, Responsible and Self-controlled.**

Any of those values can be distorted by over-emphasis when applied to leadership in a new generation cooperative. Ambition, courage and imagination, unchecked by honesty, responsibility and self-control, will lead to get-rich quick schemes that can cost investors millions of dollars. It has happened often in the United States. The very nature of a cooperative enterprise allows it to be pirated by leaders who appear helpful, intellectual, broadminded and capable but have personal ambition as their dominant value. Kahlil Gibran once said, “What is evil but good longing for itself?”

As I prepared this presentation the elections in United States had just taken place. Perhaps the desired end of those campaigns were to elect the best persons to guide our country and our state and local governments. It didn't feel that way. Negative campaigning seems to work and many campaign ads were designed only to attack the reputation of candidates. This common practice in American politics has left the electorate cynical. It makes organizing a new enterprise that is group owned more difficult.

Because new generation cooperatives have at their heart democratic governance, we too are caught in the tide of overt cynicism. Alan Ehrenhalt, writing an editorial for the *New York Times*, said, “*Every so often in American politics, we come upon an ethical problem more delicate and more depressing than the existence of outright evil. It is the problem of mackerels in the moonlight. John Randolph, the eccentric Virginia aristocrat, invented this phrase in the 1820s and used it against at least two of his Congressional colleagues. Henry Clay, he complained, was so brilliant, so capable and yet so corrupt that, ‘like a rotten mackerel in the moonlight, he both shines and stinks.’ The phrase has lived on not only because of its cleverness, but because it defines a moral ambiguity most of us find very hard to understand. We look for heroes to represent us, although we rarely find them. We take a certain perverse pleasure in unmasking hypocrites and dispatching blowhards who fail to deliver on their promises. The leaders we have trouble dealing with are those of obvious talent and genuine achievement who turn out to have displayed appalling ethical insensitivity—or worse.*” (“The Paradox of Corrupt Yet Effective Leadership,” Alan Ehrenhalt, *The New York Times*, Sept. 30, 2002)

If new generation cooperatives are to provide for producer-owned enterprises that benefit the Alberta economy, some of the leadership will eventually abuse this methodology for inappropriate personal gain.

I warn you about this problem that will emerge but cannot provide you a solution. As a farmer and potential investor in a new generation cooperative simply answer one question first—would I personally go into business with the leader or leaders of this proposed enterprise? It is asking the credibility and character questions first.

Although I can suggest you asked these questions first, often farmers and others will not ask. They will assume that if the leaders appear to be personally successful (capable), they will trust them. It is easy to imitate “servant leadership roles” while simply advancing personal ambition.

In new generation cooperative development, weeds will be sown with the good grain. It is only over time that the true intent can be known when the dominant values of the leadership ripen. The only thing you can do is to let them grow.

**The old game:** I have been engaged in development work for 27 years. As I have said, I worked out my own shorthand for development strategies that allowed me to “cut to the chase” and tell the benefit of cooperation in simple terms. I want to bring that ability to you in Alberta in order that you will generate thinking about possibilities. What types of cooperative enterprises can you form that will add significant value to the products you already produce? I had an opportunity to meet with lobster producers in the state of Maine. As a brand of lobster, those harvested off the coast of Maine had a reputation for quality in the marketplace. Yet Maine fishermen competed with each other when selling into the national market, thereby driving down the value of the lobster. A simple solution would be to organize fishing cooperative. The major problem—one of the predominant values of the fishermen—is independence.

Sometimes the promise of family security or profits can overcome dominant values such as independence. What if producers could earn 10 percent above market price for hogs, sheep, cattle, milk—what then? What if through cooperation you could get \$1 above market price for durum wheat—year in and year out? If through cooperation you could raise the value of a bushel of corn from \$2.15 to \$3.15 by converting it first into ethanol and then into cattle feed—are you interested?

The main point of these types of questions is positive significance. The benefits must be clear and big enough to attract attention. They cannot be “*little plans that lack the power to stir men’s souls.*”

And the benefits need to be in producers’ language. Bison growers don’t want to know return on investment (ROI) or return on equity (ROE) they want to know dollars per animal. A producer responds from a producer’s perspective—not from an investor’s perspective. A rancher once said about a beef cooperative that you already own the land, and the cattle, we need only now to own the packing plant. It’s like putting a 3-point hitch on a tractor you already have.

It has to create a significant advantage in what you are already doing. Let me show you a direct comparison of market prices for durum and value achieved through Dakota Growers Pasta—at the time a cooperative.

(Source—Manitoba Agriculture, North Dakota Wheat Commission, USDA Ag Statistics, Dakota Growers Pasta Company’s 1998 annual report) This comparison is in U.S. dollars and compares No.1 hard amber durum with Western Canada Amber durum. The



Canadian grain is nearly identical quality but with slightly less dockage. The value received from Dakota Growers includes both cash payments and allocated patronage retained by the cooperative.

Dakota Growers Pasta was deemed feasible processing 3,000,000 bushels of grain per year. It has expanded its capacity to 12,000,000 by expanding its mill at Carrington, N.D., and purchasing two pasta plants near Minneapolis. Its annual production capacity is now the third largest in the United States.

**What will work in Alberta?** Alberta already has a good number of processing facilities. While the presence of those facilities owned by multi-national corporations does create jobs and is welcomed in any economy, the benefit to farmers may not be as clear. Processing plants depend on low-cost inputs to survive tough competition. Dakota Growers is now seeking to buy Canadian durum as it struggles to meet its competitors' price for pasta. Moving additional plants to Alberta would not necessarily raise the price of durum wheat. As the illustration provided earlier indicates, owning the plant might.

I would guess that your cattle kill plants are busy in Alberta, killing and fabricating cattle that come from the western provinces. Yet the price cattle producers receive seems close to break even. What advantage is there in cattle producers owning processing and marketing facilities? I don't know, but a good study would help you find out.

What about owning processing and marketing facilities for hogs? In Arkansas, the home state of Don Tyson, Tyson foods is quitting the practice of contracting with individual producers to raise hogs. Those producers are now stuck with empty barns wondering what opportunities there may be to actually own hogs and market them as pork products. I don't know, but a good study would help them find out.

What about oil seeds and canola oil? Would it ever make sense to own a processing and marketing company? I don't know, but a good study would help them find out. This purposed practice is very simple—just ask honest questions about opportunities.

**The new game:** I have been a developer for a long time. I am familiar with the traditional planning model used by governments and private sector planners alike. In most cases, planners start with what you don't have. They do what is called a "needs assessment." I emphasize asking appreciative questions because it is the first step. It is the first step in turning around the way we do things. Agriculture is use to problem solving—how do I get a better price? How can government help solve the farm crisis? Our expertise has been developed in problem solving and our training is in problem identification. In conducting needs assessments we often use words like leveling the playing field, getting to the starting line and helping producers compete. In agriculture we are already defensive when we talk about retaining farms. We focus on stopping the loss of farmers, holding on to market share against the Europeans and competing with Americans and Australian farmers. We talk about wrongs done by our governments, programs that hurt us and the lack of political influence.

**Appreciative inquiry:** New generation cooperatives are new when they are based on “appreciative inquiry.” They are based on resources already at hand—ranchers have the cattle and they have the land. They only lack the processing and marketing components. Farmers already own most of the required assets to control the food industry for their benefit. Farmers already have leaders, research institutions, networks, relationships and, more than most other economic sectors, they have time to think about their own futures.

Applying appreciative inquiry in Canada is not new. I have had the opportunity to read “An Appreciative Inquiry into the Factors of Culture Continuity During Leadership Transitions: A Case Study of Leadshare, Canada” by Mary Ann Rainey. Rainey published her case study in 1996. Here is how she defined appreciative inquiry:

*“Appreciation is a selective perceptual process which apprehends ‘what is’ rather than ‘what isn’t.’ It represents a capacity to be selectively attentive to the lasting, essential, or enlivening qualities of a living human system. Appreciative management, as a process of valuing, consists of a rigorous ability to disassociate all seeming imperfections from that which has fundamental value (Cooperrider 88, p.4). Appreciative Inquiry is a form of organizational study that selectively seeks to locate, highlight, and illuminate the ‘life-giving’ forces of a firm’s existence.” (1987)*

(“Appreciative Inquiry,” David L. Cooperrider, Peter F. Sorensen Jr., Diana Whitney, Therese F. Yaeger, Editors, Stipes Publishing L.L.C. Champaign, Illinois, 2000, Page 144)

We know that farmer dependence on government is to some extent a situation of their own making. With appreciative inquiry, there are few barriers to farmers organizing enterprises that create for them the type of future they desire. Philip Morris owns Kraft Foods, the largest food company in the world. Could it be owned by farmers? It is the largest buyer semolina flour made from durum wheat, so should durum growers be in the mix of those who buy it? It is the largest buyer of sugar, so should sugar beet growers be in the mix of those who buy it? It is the largest buyer of milk, so should dairy farmers be in the mix of those who buy it? Would the equity needed to own that company, based on a percent of the commodities used, be affordable?

If we used appreciative inquiry could we find out whether or not it makes sense for cattle producers to buy the processing facilities at Brooks Alberta from IBP and contract back with IBP for marketing?

Appreciative inquiry works at smaller levels as well. Sometimes big companies get smaller by selling off those parts of their business that may be profitable but no longer fit their main focus. The fifth annual Farmer Cooperatives Conference was held in St. Louis this past November. Its title was “Restructuring for Troubled Times.” Farmland Industries is planning on selling off parts of its company to reorganize as a meat company. CHS (Cenex Harvest States) Cooperatives has sold its milling division to Cargill and is buying grain elevators from Cargill. Land O’Lakes Cooperative sold its fluid milk division to Dean Foods. Appreciative inquiry asks the question: “What parts

of the food system can farmers own that will make more economic more sense to them than to its current owners?”

In my home state of North Dakota, Quest Communications sold more than \$100 million worth of phone lines to telephone cooperatives owned primarily by farmers. Basin Electric Power Cooperative (a regional electric generation cooperative) bought a coal gasification plant. Basin now sells synthetic natural gas and a whole host of other specialty gases like Xenon and Krypton as well as electricity. Burlington Northern and Santa Fe Railroad sold off track to a company that is now profitable operating a shortline railroad.

Lost in the debate about de-mutualization or the conversion of cooperatives to privately-held companies is the fact that for every conversion of a cooperative to a private company, there are three private companies purchased by cooperatives.

(“Cooperative Conversion and Restructuring in Theory and Practice.” U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Business-Cooperative Service, RBS Research Report 185, Patrick Mooney, and Thomas Gray, January 2002, page V)

It doesn't take a genius to know that in difficult times, big companies get smaller and small companies get bigger. In every difficulty there is opportunity.

Appreciative inquiry is a powerful force in and of itself. It has helped me understand that the future is both more fragile and more durable than we imagine. I could not have imagined the success of Dakota Growers when I called the first meeting with two other people on Aug. 9, 1990, and asked the question, “Could durum growers profitably own their own pasta plant?”

Alberta can not imagine the power you have to change the economic and cultural destiny of this beautiful province—and make it more fully what you want it to be. You have opportunities in tourism (you know that Best Western is a cooperative) and you have opportunities in forestry for loggers and owners to cooperate for mutual benefit. You have amazing opportunities in agriculture.

I ask you not to dwell on what America has that you don't—what programs, what leaders, what history, what culture, what systems? Instead, I ask you to focus on what you have. The Canadian way, the power, the beauty, the hope that is Canada.

I ask you to look to your own accounting and legal professions for talent that is affordable and deployable. Design accounting and legal structures that can enable small new generation cooperatives to know where they are at financially comply with securities regulations and govern themselves with competence.

I ask you to tap into the dreams and aspirations of the rural people of Alberta. Find out from them what it is they want to create as a future for themselves and their communities. Find out what it is they hope for.

I cannot ever do without hope. Mumford said that “*we can live three weeks without food, three days without water, and yes, we can even live three minutes without air, but we cannot live without hope.*”

(“Appreciative Inquiry,” David Cooperrider, Peter Sorensen, Diana Whitney, Therese Yaeger, Editors, Chapter 18. “From Deficit Discourse to Vocabularies of Hope: The Power of Appreciation” by James D. Ludema, Benedictine University, published by Stipes Publishing LLC, Champaign, Illinois, 2000, page 265)

I hope that the things I value most about my beloved North Dakota will live beyond my lifetime and extend far into the future. I hope that the values of true friendship, beauty, wisdom, freedom and excitement will last as long as humans dwell on this planet.

David Cooperrider captured this blend of value-based thinking in his organizational theory called the positive principle of appreciative inquiry.

*“Put most simply, it has been our experience that building and sustaining momentum for change requires large amounts of positive affect and social bonding—things like hope, excitement, inspiration, caring, camaraderie, sense of urgent purpose, and sheer joy in creating something meaningful together. What we have found is that the more positive the question we ask in our work the more long lasting and successful this change effort. It does not help, we have found, to begin our inquiries from the standpoint of the world as a problem to be solved. We are more effective the longer we can retain the spirit of inquiry for the ever-lasting beginner. The major thing we do that makes the difference is to craft and seed, in more catalytic ways, the unconditional positive question.”*

(“Appreciative Inquiry,” David Cooperrider, Peter F. Sorensen, Jr. Diana Whitney, and Therese F. Yaeger, Editors, published by Stipes Publishing LLC, Champaign, Illinois, 2000, page 210)

I close with a final thought about the work of cooperative development on the Northern Prairies. Everywhere on the prairies are things you don’t expect to find. Twenty-nine years ago this month my wife Marcia and I left our home in Noblesville, Ind., to travel to Alberta Bible College at Camrose. We had been married one month. We stopped near Heaton, N.D., to talk with my folks and my great Uncle LeRoy Flaughter. He was 97 years old. He said we should stop at Banff. He and his brother had driven from North Dakota to Banff on gravel roads in the 1920s in a model A Ford. He said it would be warmer than we expected and he told us about the hot springs. We had borrowed Marcia’s folks’ car—a 1969 Ford LTD with 30 weight motor oil in it—and they gave us a credit card for gas as a wedding present. We got to Banff in great order—did some crazy skiing for flat landers and found out that we had to replace the starting motor on the car since it couldn’t crank that thick oil. Once we got the car running we changed the oil, too!

We have been back to Banff and Calgary and Edmonton since that trip. We have marveled at the beauty and, like my Great Uncle LeRoy Flaughter, we have told people that Alberta is warmer than you would expect.

I have come back to Edmonton knowing I cannot change the world by one speech, I cannot stop my nations warring intentions by appealing to the hope for peace, I cannot preserve forever the things I value most. But I can hope that we will meet again. That together the people of these great and vast and wintry plains will build an enduring agricultural-based civilization that feeds, entertains and nurtures the world. I hope a positive discussion of what can be will be started today by your questions and that somehow I can be a part of building that future with you.

On behalf of the peace loving people of the Peace Garden state—thank you for inviting me! I will be glad to take your questions.