

education, so that they are moral, informed, free citizens of Church and world? What if the family that directly puts food on your table begins each day in God's Word, then goes forth to steward God's creation? I think it is a recipe for healthier soil, healthier food, healthier communities, and healthier congregations. ✨

The Lutheran Institute of Regenerative Agriculture (LIRA), located in southern Iowa, provides summer work and apprenticeship opportunities for Lutheran young people. LCC students have opportunities to work, to learn, and to teach, with subject matter ranging from regenerative farming techniques to the Lutheran liberal arts. For updates concerning the development of LIRA's programs, visit [www.luthersinag.org/the-plan](http://www.luthersinag.org/the-plan) or contact Rev. Maronde at [luthersinag@gmail.com](mailto:luthersinag@gmail.com).

## PREPARING LUTHERANS FOR LIVES OF FAITH AND VIRTUE

**LCC Patrons** donating \$10, \$25, \$50, \$100, or \$250 a month are vital in providing for our students a premier classical Lutheran education. If you are not already a Patron, please consider donating monthly today at [www.lutherclassical.org/patron-program](http://www.lutherclassical.org/patron-program).



**Congregations** are also helping students by becoming Scholars' Congregations, donating \$2,500 or \$5,000 annually to LCC for institutional scholarships for their students. Learn more about Scholars' Congregations today at [www.lutherclassical.org/give-congregation](http://www.lutherclassical.org/give-congregation).



**Enrollment** of LCC's first students ("gap year" students) is expected to be finalized by May 1 for the inaugural Fall 2025 term. Learn more about LCC's next application window starting August 1 at [www.lutherclassical.org/apply](http://www.lutherclassical.org/apply).



Have thoughts on this month's Ad Fontes? Contact us at [support@lutherclassical.org](mailto:support@lutherclassical.org) or (307) 216-5294.



LUTHER  
CLASSICAL COLLEGE

AD FONTES  
April, 2024



## CAN RURAL AMERICA BE SAVED?

BY REV. DR. CHRISTOPHER A. MARONDE

*Rev. Maronde is pastor at St. Paul in Oakland, IA, and St. John's in Hastings, IA, founder of the Lutheran Institute of Regenerative Agriculture, and vice-chair of LCC's Board of Regents.*

RURAL AMERICA, AND THUS THE RURAL CHURCH, IS at a point of crisis. We took on the noble goal of feeding the world, but we forgot to feed our neighbors. Our rural communities became food deserts, as incapable of feeding ourselves and as tied to the grocery store as any suburban community (indeed, in many cases, more so). Family farms were squeezed out, one by one, overwhelmed by the pressure of government regulation, falling commodity prices, and skyrocketing input costs. Our young people, by and large, moved to the city. With the demise of the small family farm came dried up, burned out towns, consolidated or closed schools, and smaller and smaller congregations. Rural pastors keep adding additional parishes to their list of responsibilities, and some must find additional work to make ends meet.

That's a dark picture. But, though that sad story must be told, I would much rather think about the future. Those who founded Luther Classical College looked at a world gone mad and said, "Let's build something." There are many, including more

Lutherans than you may think, who are taking the kind of steps to build something, to rebuild rural community and congregations. The homesteading movement has been described as a “tidal wave” and the local food movement isn’t far behind. There are people learning how to raise their own food, regaining skills that have skipped a generation or two. There are young people with an entrepreneurial impulse (I’ve met some of them!) to raise local food for their neighbors, who are not terribly interested in commodity agriculture, but would love to have a market garden and a yard full of chickens. There are people going back to the land, or they are looking to go back. For them, *Ad Fontes* is more than a clarion call to return to the teaching and learning of Latin, to the sources of Western civilization. *Ad Fontes* is a call to return to the land, to work with the hands, to all that stewarding God’s creation can teach one who is willing to learn.

There is an insightful book by Victor Davis Hanson called *The Land was Everything: Letters from an American Farmer*. Victor Davis a professor of classics and a farmer. Like his father and his father’s father before him, Dr. Hanson tends the vines and orchards on a southern California farm, feeding New Yorkers on the other side of the country with fresh fruit. He makes the fascinating argument that the Greeks recognized a universal truth, that a connection to the land is vital for both individual men and society as a whole. “The Greeks, who unlike us were seldom obese and occasionally even were hungry, knew that man farms not merely to be fed, but also to learn how his society should be organized” (pp. 148-149). Only the rugged, self-sufficient, land-owning and land-working farmer, not easily duped or swayed, can provide the proper balance to the impulsiveness of the city. Dr. Hanson again: “Does a man understand the universe because he can read Descartes, or does such insight arise only after he has lost his ripe crop a day before harvest” (p. 143)? We have lost the connection between hard work, between the land and our intellect, theology and philosophy. It is time to regain that connection, for our good, and the good of both Church and world.

If rural America, if the rural Church, is worth “saving,” then how do we do it? We need congregations, and land owners, who are willing to welcome young farmers into their midst, entrepreneurial people who have the desire to not only grow their own food, but provide for others and simply need the land and encouragement to do so. What if a congregation with farmland, or a pious Lutheran farmer, offered ten to forty acre tracts to young families, giving them a place to put down roots, to

produce food for their families, or even for their neighbors?

It’s hard to know exactly what might happen, but I think the future is bright. Imagine a small, rural congregation, which burst at the seams from the 20’s through the 60’s, now seemingly dried up, with 20 people in pew on a Sunday, suddenly



A Crowned One Sitting in Clouds Sends Sickles, Virgil Solis, 1514-1562.

experiencing a resurgence. Young families, homesteaders, local food producers, those with a remote job in some city and an acreage in the country, filling that little church with children. Suddenly there are baptisms again, weddings too, and confirmations. Suddenly a congregation that hasn’t had a Sunday school in fifteen years is looking for teachers.

Maybe things will be that dramatic. Maybe not. But imagine the benefit for the Church and world if more people are directly connected with the land. What if people know exactly where their food comes from, and they know their farmer by name (and kneel beside him at the Holy Supper)? What if those who produce our food have also been formed by a robust classical Lutheran