

Harvest resources

Introduction

It is without doubt that the Covid-19 coronavirus crisis has affected everyone in ways which have disrupted and changed the very essence of what it means to live our everyday, “normal” lives. The farming community, in the UK and around the globe, has been no exception. New and innovative ways of keeping things going have had to be found quickly, not least in order to continue the supply of food and other materials needed across society.

The [Arthur Rank Centre](#), which specialises in rural ministry and mission, says the farming community is

‘negotiating a triple threat of challenges from changeable weather, new agricultural policy and COVID-19... and needs our support!...[We need to respond in]...very practical ways in which we can demonstrate how much we value it, both through the ways in which we engage directly with farms and farmers across the UK, and in the choices we make as we shop.’

[Walking the Way: living the life of Jesus today](#) is all about joining in the mission of God in our own, everyday realities. The world which God calls us to build is one of love, hope and justice for all. For whole-of-life disciples of Jesus, the task of building this world cannot be seen as an optional extra but must be seen as a crucial priority. This booklet aims to help those who are not part of farming communities to begin thinking about the everyday challenges faced by farmers today, and to consider how disciples of Jesus ought to respond. We can do this by:

- **Reading** the Word of God more closely, thinking about its significance for how we view farming communities
- **Singing** songs of praise with words that carefully reflect what we want to say about farming communities
- **Praying** that God will help us find sustainable, fair and loving ways of living our lives
- **Acting** in our own contexts to raise awareness of the situation faced by farming communities, and by living our own lives accordingly.

The sections in this booklet cover each of the headings above, offering suggestions for you, your family and local church to consider and act on.

If you have any thoughts, stories, resources or ideas to share, please email wtw@urc.org.uk or call 020 7520 2718. We’d love to hear from you.



Reading

[Deuteronomy 26: 1-11](#) (*Offerings of first fruits and tithes*) -- a Bible passage that shines further light on God's view and our required response to farming communities and systems.

In this passage from Deuteronomy, the people of God, who are being led on a long, difficult journey towards the land God has promised them, are instructed on what they should do when they reach that land.

We see right away that things will not be easy for them. They will not arrive into the bounteous harvest season of flourishing fields. Instead, they will need to take possession of the land, tend it and cultivate it, waiting patiently for crops to grow.

When crops do grow, the precious first fruits, the initial signs that the land is ready to bring forth a good crop, are not to be consumed, but rather offered to God as both a sign that everything that is grown in the field belongs to God, and a prayer that God will help the people to use it as God wills. Just as God used the suffering of the people in slavery in Egypt to achieve great things, so God will use the hard work and toil they put into tending the land for great things.

At the end of the reading, when the will of God for the fruits of the land is revealed, we see that it is not only the people of God, but for everyone residing in the land, including foreigners, who will enjoy the blessings of the harvest. This is how God wants the fruits, which belong ultimately to God, to be used.

Like the people of God in Deuteronomy, farmers today work hard to build communities together, tending the land and bringing forth bountiful harvests, not only for themselves, but everyone in society to enjoy. However, the pressures of food production systems in which supermarkets and industry buyers hold much power require farmers to produce large amounts materials in a short space of time, often at unjust prices. Is it fair that farming communities work so hard only to face hardship and challenge due to systems that put economic benefit over human flourishing? More information about how such systems affect farmers and their families can be found at the Sustain Alliance for better food and farming's website [here](#).



It's clear from this Bible reading that the harvest is a blessing of God for all people to enjoy. The produce is for both those who have the knowledge and skill to enable the harvest to happen, and those who need their help. However, in order for this to happen, everyone must work together.

God does not simply give blessings to one group for them to trickle down for others to receive blindly. Rather, God offers the blessings of the harvest to all people. God asks everyone to play their part in making sure that these blessings are used to the glory of God and the building of a world of justice, hope and love for all creation.

How can we, as everyday disciples of Jesus, show our support for farming communities? How can we change our lifestyles to value better God's creation and reduce pressure on our farmers? How can we respond to God's presence in every aspect of our lives, as we seek to build the world we are all called to build?

Singing

Traditionally, harvest is a time to think about and be grateful for all that grows from the ground and needs to be gathered (harvested) in order for us to use and enjoy. Harvest doesn't have a particular time or date; it's a season. This is because many foods and materials grow at different times, but are generally ready to be harvested at the end of the summer, when Harvest is usually celebrated.

The images, symbols and activities we use in worship during the Harvest season still tend to reflect this; Communion tables are piled high with fresh produce; prayers are offered for labourers in the fields; we sing harvest hymns.

Today, shops are stocked constantly with fresh produce. Things we would otherwise need to wait until harvest to enjoy are now available throughout the year. If there are no fresh, locally grown tomatoes, for example, we can have some transported from another part of the world. The same applies to just about every fruit and vegetable.

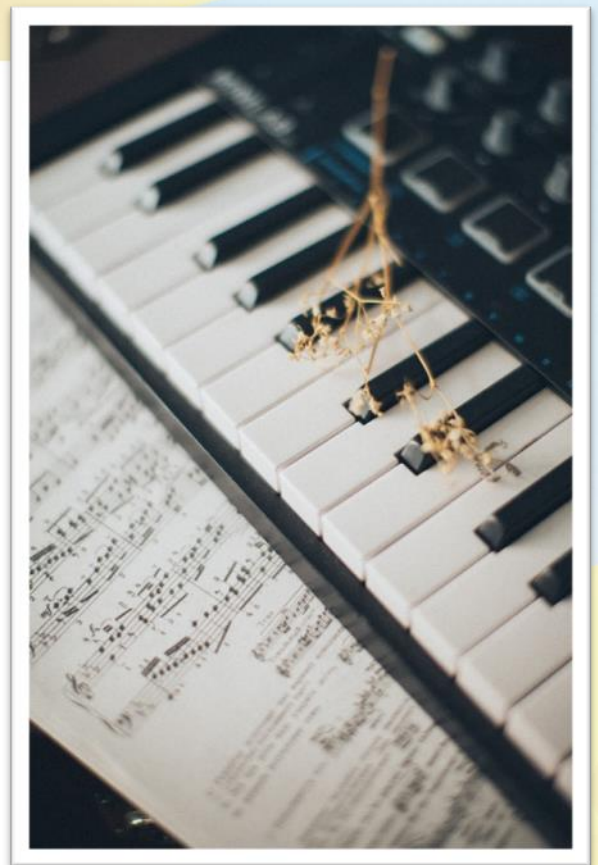
Changes to how we now source our food have had a major impact how we live our everyday lives. The more that systems have emerged to enable us to purchase things globally, regardless of the season, the more we've wanted to buy. This growth in demand is not least due to powerful marketing and influence used by suppliers. Some of the changes that modernised food production have helped to ease pressure on farming communities, saving time, money and energy. Modernisation has encouraged efficiency, and the growth of technology, science and innovation. However, many of these developments have been damaging to our farming communities. Such damages have been acutely revealed during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. Sara González and Paul Waley, academics from the University of Leeds, argue that local food markets must be supported amid lockdown restrictions easing (see [here](#)).

How should we, as whole-of-life disciples of Jesus, be responding? How does God want us to live our lives in terms of our engagement with nature, farming and food? Christian responses must begin with growing an awareness of the effects of our ways of living on the world around us. We must realise that everything we do, no matter how big or small, can play a part in achieving God's vision of justice and joy for all creation.

One popular hymn which tends to be sung at Harvest is 'We plough the fields and scatter'. There is much in this hymn which connects with our experience, but it also has words which we can consider in new, fresh ways, as well as words we might like to change. Let's look at the first verse and chorus:

We plough the fields, and scatter

Today, it is much more likely that fields will be measured by a computer and ploughed by tractors. Seeds are carefully planted at optimum distances and depths rather than scattered everywhere. Farmers need to get the maximum yield from their land, so that they can earn the money they need to keep their local business going and look after their families, especially when faced with competition and subsidised imports undercutting them. This Nature Food [article](#) speaks of the importance of building redundancy and diversity in today's food market.



the good seed on the land,

If seeds are good, there is more likely to be a good harvest. This is fine if you can afford the best seeds and grow them in good conditions. However, many farmers struggle, especially subsistence farmers in developing countries, where growing enough crops to sell, eat and replant again the next year can be particularly challenging. In this [article](#), Jonathan Brooks, Koen Deconinck and Céline Giner of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) address some of the challenges facing global agriculture in these times.

but it is fed and watered

Today, strong fertilizers are often needed to produce crops from overworked land. This is due to heavy demand for produce and the financial need of farmers to continually grow materials. If there isn't a natural source of water available, farmers also need to pay hefty water bills. In poorer parts of the world, watering comes through sheer hard work, involving walking long distances to fetch water from a safe source. Anne Mullen, writing for Nature Food, shares more in this [article](#) about the suffering of farmers worldwide as a result of systems and policies which do not support them.

by God's almighty hand:

Despite all these challenges, we must not forget that God is still involved. God is the giver and sustainer of all life. Earthly injustice may make things difficult, but God is always there in the midst of it, suffering with us, guiding us through.

**God sends the snow in winter,
the warmth to swell the grain,
the breezes and the sunshine,
and soft, refreshing rain.**

A problem for many farmers is that, because of the climate crisis, they can no longer be sure what each season will bring. While we must thank God for all that is provided, we must also pray and work for humankind to realise that we cannot continue to damage God's world in the ways our current patterns of living do.

***All good gifts around us
are sent from heaven above;
then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord,
for all God's love.***

This is what Harvest is about. We are expressing our thankfulness to God for loving us and providing us with everything we need to enjoy the produce of God's world, knowing that, because we have been loved, so we must love God and all creation, looking after it with care and compassion.

What do you think of this hymn's words? What parts stand out to you? What parts remain relevant? What needs updating for today's world? The Arthur Rank Centre has collated contemporary words and verses for this hymn, titled "We plough the fields with tractors". You can download it [here](#).



Praying

Consider this prayer from the Arthur Rank Centre. As you pray, think about your own, everyday reality, and the roles that the people mentioned play in helping or shaping your life. How can we, as disciples of Jesus, love and support these people better? Consider this prayer from the Arthur Rank Centre:

We pray

For farmers, their families and communities and all who depend on them,

For all who are worried about tomorrow and facing difficulties today,

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer

For agricultural chaplains, support groups and rural churches

For the communities in which they work and the people to whom they minister

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer

For retailers and suppliers

For all involved in the processing and transporting of food;

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer

For urban communities far removed from food production

For children and young people with little knowledge of where their food comes from

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer

For those that go hungry and those who endeavour to feed them,

For relief agencies and aid workers

Giving help and healing to those in need,

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer

For restraint and fairness in the use of economic power;

For discernment and a long view in farm policy and decision,

For justice in world trade,

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer

For ourselves that we may eat with joy and with care;

For land and livestock and love for those who care for them,

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer



For the ability to appreciate your generosity
And a readiness to recognise our dependency on
each other
And on you.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer

Amen

@Germinate: The Arthur Rank Centre



You can find more prayers for Harvest from the Arthur Rank Centre [here](#).

Acting

Now that some of the challenges faced by farmers today have been identified, it's time to think of actions that we, our families and churches, can take to make a difference. Consider taking one or more of these actions:

- Print the [‘Thank you Farmers’ poster](#), made by the Arthur Rank Centre, and display it in home and church windows.
- Find ways of sharing food, such as supporting foodbanks. You can also campaign to change things, so that foodbanks are no longer needed. Visit the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) [website](#) to find out more.
- Cook together as a family, thinking about where your ingredients come from.
- Shop for food locally and seasonally. Check out [Living Lent](#) for more information on how you can do this.
- concentrate on reducing food waste.
- Buy products with the [Fairtrade](#) mark, which ensures a fair price for producers and farmers.
- Enrol with the [Eco Church/Eco Congregation \(Scotland\)](#) scheme, which offers resources and support in becoming more environmentally aware.
- Consider supporting [Commitment for Life](#), the United Reformed Church’s global justice programme.
- Visit a farm. One of the best ways of loving and serving farmers is to get to know them, so why not arrange a visit to your local farm?



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