

GUEST COLUMNIST

The Million Dollar Speech

by Lex McCorvey, Executive Director, Sonoma County Farm Bureau

On February 3, the late American radio broadcaster Paul Harvey delivered perhaps his most powerful speech ever, "So God Made a Farmer". It was a decades old speech from a radio broadcaster who passed away in 2009. The original speech was delivered by Harvey in 1978 at a President Jimmy Carter-era address at the National Future Farmers of America Convention in Kansas City, Missouri. Over 100,000 FFA members from across America and Puerto Rico listened intently. Ironically, President Carter who grew up on a farm in Georgia and is the only president to have been an FFA member gave the keynote speech at that convention. But it's Harvey's words and message that live on. Harvey's words were condensed and delivered as the audio backdrop for a Dodge Ram Trucks ad during the second half of Super Bowl XLVII in New Orleans on Feb 3. The ad was promptly uploaded to Ram's YouTube channel, as Dodge agreed to donate up to \$1 million to the National FFA Foundation if one million viewers watched. In twelve days, the video amassed over 18 million viewers and the

number is growing. Dodge has donated the full \$ 1 million for the FFA Foundation's leadership programs.

During that Super Bowl as viewers watched, many have said how powerful and gripping the message and imagery impacted them. People said they were mesmerized and speechless. Some were brought to tears and others filled with emotion of America the beautiful, the land of rugged individualism, country and old time family values. It was simply a glimpse back into the past and heritage of families across America – their roots, their families. In this 2013 reincarnation of a powerful 1978 speech, Harvey introduced the world to the character, resolve and determination of the American farmer in a way that few had heard or seen before.

The lives of those American farmers depicted through Harvey's words also live here in our own community. The myriad of stories of local farmers may be different, but their love of the land, the soil, life's creations and their kindred spirit to produce food and farm products is growing stronger and deeper. Every

day throughout Sonoma County, farmers exhibit the heart and hope to cultivate in faith, knowing it may end in failure, and then start all over again with greater hope and determination. It's a journey of faith that never seems to end.

From that November day in 1978, I believe we can all benefit from Paul Harvey's original words, so here they are:

"And on the 8th day, God looked down on his planned paradise and said, "I need a caretaker." So God made a farmer. God said, "I need somebody willing to get up before dawn, milk cows, work all day in the fields, milk cows again, eat supper and then go to town and stay past midnight at a meeting of the school board." So God made a farmer.

"I need somebody with arms strong enough to rustle a calf and yet gentle enough to deliver his own grandchild. Somebody to call hogs, tame cantankerous machinery, come home hungry, have to wait lunch until his wife's done feeding visiting ladies and tell the ladies to be sure and come back real soon -- and mean it." So God made a farmer.

God said, "I need somebody willing to sit up all night with a newborn colt. And watch it die. Then dry his eyes and say, 'Maybe next year.' I need somebody who can shape an ax handle from a persimmon sprout, shoe a horse with a hunk of car tire, who can make harness out of haywire, feed sacks and shoe scraps. And who, planting time and harvest season, will finish his forty-hour week by Tuesday noon, then,

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pain'n from 'tractor back,' put in another seventy-two hours." So God made a farmer.

God had to have somebody willing to ride the ruts at double speed to get the hay in ahead of the rain clouds and yet stop in mid-field and race to help when he sees the first smoke from a neighbor's place. So God made a farmer.

God said, "I need somebody strong enough to clear trees and heave bails, yet gentle enough to tame lambs and wean pigs and tend the pink-combed pullets, who will stop his mower for an hour to splint the broken leg of a meadow lark. It had to be somebody who'd plow deep and straight and not cut corners. Somebody to seed, weed, feed, breed and rake and disc and plow and plant and tie the fleece and strain the milk and replenish the self-feeder and finish a hard week's work with a five-mile drive to church.

"Somebody who'd bale a family together with the

soft strong bonds of sharing, who would laugh and then sigh, and then reply, with smiling eyes, when his son says he wants to spend his life 'doing what dad does. So God made a farmer."

As we celebrate this year's Petaluma Butter & Eggs Day Parade & Festival on Saturday April 27, let us not forget those who toil in our fields in the heat of the day or on a cold and foggy morning. Let us appreciate the day-in-day-out determination and life commitment that goes into sowing the seeds, producing the eggs, milking the cows, baling the hay, churning the butter, protecting the land and nurturing our blissful resources. At the end of the day, the work of the farmers is just beginning for the next day.

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