

Resilience To Survive

Farmers Can Be Big Part Of Restoring America's Economy

BETTY VALLE GEGG-NAEGER
MidAmerica Farmer Grower

MURRAY, KY

Farmers have an enormous resilience and will recover from the economic downturn, said John Phipps, host of US Farm Report and a contributing editor for *Farm Journal* and *Top Producer Magazine*, in an upbeat presentation at the 5th Annual Soybean Promotion Day held at Murray State University recently.

"We know from studies that you have an enormous resilience within you to find happiness and satisfaction, and regardless of what happened on the Board of Trade yesterday or

cause there's a new level of transparency in competition in agriculture that requires some responsible judgements. Considering what's good for the community and what's good for an individual and ways to trade this off takes good judgement.

"In my part of Illinois it's a different set of circumstances than in North Dakota, and it's different than it is in Kentucky or Tennessee," he said. "There are community values involved and there's no one great answer but we are stretching and having to re-evaluate what my rights are and what are my responsibilities to others. So we have to learn to rebalance



Photo by John LaRose, Jr.

Visiting during a break at the 5th Annual Soybean Promotion Day are producers Davey Stephens and Jerry Perry, John Phipps

tomorrow, the day afterwards our bodies will take over and we'll have the ability to adapt," he said. "We still will find ways to be happy. One of the primary ways is to remember the first line in a book by Rick Warren, the controversial first invoker. It was the greatest first line since the Tale of Two Cities, and that line is 'It's not about you'."

He said that fear causes one to start centering inward. People think about themselves and this becomes self fulfilling.

"This is one of the reasons our confidence in our economic system is the way it is," Phipps said. "There's the fear FDR was right. I don't credit him on many of the things he did, but fear itself is the problem and right now it's rampant."

He said the way to break that is, instead of thinking of oneself in little details, think of others, think of the future and think of all things.

"When I say this people just are stunned, but now is the time to think about greatness and to talk about greatness and devote ourselves to achieving – not just to surviving – but achieving greatness," he said. "It's in these hours of greatest trials, and this will be one of America's great trials, that we can be a big part of the restoration, the regrowth and the reshaping. It's not wrong now to think something great can happen here and I have it within me to be a part of that."

One realization, he said, came about in a group discussion when someone suggested that maybe the challenges of the past few years is the new normal. The thought just stunned everyone.

"What if 2007 and 2008, God forbid, is what 2009, 2010 will be like," he suggested. "If that's true, and I'm not saying it is, but if we have gotten to where normal doesn't look like normal to us anymore there are some things that we can do to help us make better decisions, but most of all, to find more job satisfaction and happiness on our farms."

Phipps talked about three things, the first being the changes in communication.

"We have to be very careful trying to evoke emotions because emotions are right at the surface," he said. "I mean everybody is a little bit nervous, and even if farmers are fairly confident because we've been on the outer ridge of things, we're drawn into the economic meltdown simply because someone we know or love or care about, their job is threatened or they've lost their health insurance. Nobody is untouched. It's now everybody's recession, regardless of prices."

People are anxious and he urged everyone not to add to the anxiety level. It's also important when it comes to communication that America hears a competent, confident voice from agriculture.

"We've lost trust in everything else and people need to hear somebody out there say, 'listen, you can count on me.' I think it should be agriculture that offers that assurance," Phipps said.

His second point was about competition. He said farmers are really struggling with this be-

those."

That led him to the third point, a discussion about community. He said the unfortunate thing that will occur from the recession is the loss of manufacturing jobs and that will hit farmers inordinately hard.

"Any number of guys who got the 200 acres their family left them found there wasn't enough to farm full time but they can work at a parts supply store," he said. "We've got this in Edgar County, they work a 48 hour week, then on the weekends they take the old 4020 or 7700 or something and they love that. The loss of that job is going to be devastating. The farm is not large enough; so the community will feel the effects of the consolidation, which is just going to be accelerated regardless of what prices do, simply because of that high dependence on outside income."

Usually, as manufacturing moves out, many learn to balance farming with another job, or the wives get a job somewhere that provides the healthcare.

"Still, people are scared to death," Phipps said. "For many of them the bad news has already come about. What does this mean for communities? Well, suddenly community is not something that occurs because you have the same zip code. Communities occur because people genuinely make the effort. They're committed to making a community happen. They reach out, they don't wait to have someone approach them, they don't ask what they can do, they do what they do. We've always depended on this idea. We're all farmers and we get together and tell farmer stories and go from there. But there aren't enough farmers anymore. We're going to have to build our communities out of people who share our interests or we're going to have to find new ways of bonding. Just depending on farmer gatherings, Farm Bureau meetings and soybean meetings to create the community won't do it anymore. We're excluding too many people to make our rural communities viable."

Phipps offered some ideas for 2009 in case life as it has been the past two years is the new normal.

"If this is normal, what can we do to be hopeful, to be helpful, to be the kind of people that not only does our job but helps pick America up," he asked. "We always talk about being the backbone of America, it's time for that spine to stiffen and we can carry America for awhile, I think, simply because we haven't been hit quite as hard. Also we are well thought of and trusted, and maybe we can start rebuilding trust in rural America and we'll slowly over the next decade, get back to where we can get along and have a much more efficient economic system."

"We need to take that job seriously, just as seriously as producing corn and soybeans," Phipps said. "We can produce something else for America and that is an anchor that ties the people to the land and that job needs to be Job One."

△
BETTY VALLE GEGG-NAEGER: Senior Staff Writer, MidAmerica Farmer Grower



Link Directly To: **AGVENTURE**



Link Directly To: **PIONEER**



Link Directly To: **VERMEER**