

Farmers and Ranchers Are Losing Everything

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A farmer's job is hard, but exactly how hard is it. In Fast Food Nation, by Eric Schlosser, Schlosser describes the difficulties of being a farmer and/or a rancher in a nation that thrives off fast food and the products produced in America's farms and ranches. Land development and low income leads to: farmers and ranchers out of work, aggravated farmers and ranchers, and high suicide rates and high depression rates among farmers and ranchers. Possible fixes are vertical farms and more farmer suicide hotlines.

Farms are a detrimental part of providing the world with food and other amenities, and farms are being closed to be used for land development. Keith Collins says "Properly managed farms protect the urban watersheds, provide the visual amenity of open space and protect the farmers who bring their locally grown fruits and vegetables to farmers markets" (Becker par. 13). Farms provide the world with the food that gives humans energy and aid urban watersheds that hold water for potentially millions of people in each watershed. By 2050, the world's population is expected to reach over nine billion (Vertical Farming par. 2). To be able to feed an astounding nine billion people in 2050, farms must stay operational. "Keith Collins . . . said that the loss of farmland has been a concern for years because it destroys open spaces and local food production" (Becker par. 12). Land development is destroying the food supplies that feed the nation, and food production is essential for our survival. Two acres of farmland is lost to development per minute (Becker par. 1). The world needs farms to feed the fast rising population, but the farms needed to feed the world population are closing operations at a surprising rate. Tim Kavanaugh says about two hundred dairy farms are lost every year (Merlo par. 17). Dairy farms provide milk, cheese, and other products for human consumption, and a very large amount of dairy farms close production of human amenities. "While the nation's population grew 17 percent from 1982 to 1997, the amount of land turned into urban areas

increased 47 percent” (Becker par. 9). Instead of increasing farms to feed the growing population, farms decreased in number (decreasing the potential amount of food that could be produced) and were turned into urban areas. “Between 1992 and 1997, the United States paved over more than 6 million acres of farmland, an area roughly equal in size to Maryland” (Merlo par. 4). Farms that provide essential products are being replaced by development the size of Maryland. Land development is replacing the farms that produce the world food supply that keeps the human race alive.

Land development replaces farms, agitates farmers, and places farmers out of their jobs. “Urban sprawl is the toughest problem we face -- with its energy cost, pollution cost for the air and water and for the loss suffered by farmers and wildlife” (Becker par. 17). The land being developed in an urban sprawl is replacing farms, and it is polluting the air and water in a once low polluted area. “[A] population explosion in Southern California led growers in Los Angeles County and Orange County to bulldoze out their citrus groves to make way for new houses, factories, schools and freeways” (Merlo par. 60). Bulldozing citrus groves to make room for development put citrus farmers and processors out of jobs. While taking a tour of Hank’s ranch, Schlosser said, “I looked down and saw an immense oval structure . . . The grandstands around the track were enormous, and so was the parking lot. Acres of black asphalt and white lines now spread across the prairie, thousands of empty spaces waiting for cars” (Schlosser 135). The enormous track and parking lot developed potential farm land into land that cannot be used for growing crops. “It was the practice runs that bothered Hank and Susan most. In the middle of the day, in one of America’s most beautiful landscapes, they would suddenly hear the drone of stock cars going round and round” (Schlosser 135). The drone of the stock cars agitated and distracted hank and his wife during farming hours, and the drone could have decreased productivity during

the days of practice runs. “[Bill] Rohrbaugh has seen prime farmland turn into shopping centers and housing tracts” (Merlo par. 30). The land development placed farmers out of jobs and took precious farmland once used for crop production. “[F]ruit farms are being replaced by houses on large lots” (Becker par. 2). Fruit farms are being shut down in order to build houses, and it inadvertently takes jobs from the farmers. “Old-timers pinpoint the arrival of Interstate 71 as the beginning of Medina County's urbanization” (Merlo par. 25). The arrival of the interstate initiated land development, and it placed farmers out of work. Agitation of farmers, closing farms, and placing farmers out of jobs are the effects of land development.

High suicide and depression rates among farmers and ranchers are due to land development and low income. “The suicide rate among ranchers and farmers in the United States is now about three times higher than the national average” (Schlosser 146). Widespread land development and low income contributes to the highest farmer and rancher suicide rate than any other occupation in the United States. “‘The farm crisis was so bad, there was a terrible outbreak of suicide and depression,’ said Jennifer Fahy . . . Today, she said, ‘I think it's actually worse’” (Ivanova par. 4). Not only was the suicide and depression rates so high among farmers and ranchers, the rates are getting worse due to worsening land development and low income. After Hank's Death, Schlosser discovered that one driving force of Hank's suicide was the new highway El Paso County planned to place through the middle of Hank's ranch (Schlosser 146). Schlosser encounters the pressure due to land development and low income fist hand with Hank, and Hank was lead to suicide by a new interstate through his ranch. Another reason for Hank's death is the lowest cattle prices in more than a decade (Schlosser 146). Hank also was pressured into suicide by a low income from his cattle, and the ability not to be able to fix his debt and loss of land. “‘Think about trying to live today on the income you had 15 years ago.’ That's how