

Get Back To Me

Yeah, get back to me. I know you will. And when you do, we farmers will stand amused at your little rant...

The rally was large and vocal, protesters young, exuberant and willing. Called for changes to agricultural policy.

At the back, a lone farmer stood. Hat pulled down, hands in pockets, his left boot gently rising and falling as if helping him think. The swarming mass of colors, banners, slogans, brands, shouting... cameras and phones transmitted its message to the world.

As the crowd hit fever pitch, the farmer's presence was noted. First a hushed murmur, then a pointing a finger before building their accusations, disgust, threats. The green university art student with microphone in hand found a way to the nonplussed farmer who had barely stirred. The microphone thrust before him, the question was put: Could he justify his existence? His animal-slaughtering, ground-ripping-chemical-using existence? What did he have to say for himself?

A slight backward head tilt revealed an experienced eye below an arched eyebrow. He sucked his teeth, scratched his unshaven neck, and simply said into the microphone, "Get back to me."

Some stood stunned, others riled, most confused. The student's expression asked the question before her mouth did and so he went on.

"Get back to me when you've found a way to feed a family with touch screens and cables.

"Get back to me when you are happy to wear something other than those cotton-protest shirts whose materials needed planting, growing and harvesting.

"Get back to me when the imported powdered milk in your sugar-free eight-dollar latte doesn't cut it because the farmer who supplied the raw milk saw no future in two dollars a litre.

"Get back to me when the bread in your health wraps comes from wheat downloaded from a website. Or you're happy to enjoy virtual avocado and digital pepper.

"Get back to me if you can name three bird, grass or tree species within your own 300-square-meter plot. Let alone every one on 10,000 acres and how you'll develop the wildlife corridors to ensure your children will know them as well.

"Get back to me when one of you comes up with a way to replace the leather, swap the steak and exchange the mince patties within the industries maintaining the world, while you stand here trying to change it.

"Get back to me when your day-out trench coats and fashionably heavy scarves are made from rabbit fur or human hair because cotton and wool are no longer.

"Get back to me when you agree to use synthetic eggs in your health shakes or organic face masks.

"Yeah, get back to me. I know you will. And when you do, we the farmers will stand amused at your little rant before resaddling, closing the harvester door, picking up the shovel and washing out the stalls, and getting back to what we do, which is maintaining you—the people who would have us not be.

"Yeah...so get back to me." ■



*Doug Manning, apples and sweetgrass,
Empire, Michigan. © Paul Mobley*

Paul Mobley is an award-winning photographer who lives in New York City. This photo is from his book "American Farmer," which is available at www.welcomebooks.com/americanfarmer.

Transcribed from YouTube, via Queensland Country Life. Producer: Ashley Walmsley. Farmer/speaker: Terry O'Hanlon. Link sent to RANGE by Australian subscriber Chris Davison, who says, "The message is loud and clear, but only if you are listening."

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JrQYJMGc7RU&feature=share>