

Old Country Lawyer, March, 2009
Lent, and Seed Grain

For the earliest agricultural communities in Northern Europe, the last six weeks of Winter were the Starving Time. By early February, stored surplus food from September's harvest was gone or was about to go bad, so there was a last big meal at Imbolc and very short rations to planting time at the Spring Equinox, Ostara. What leadership there was, focused on keeping very hungry people from eating the seed grain and breeding stock, so the community could plant and grow their flocks in the Spring.

The Romans came, then the Christian missionaries came, then the Romans withdrew and left the Church to manage hungry peasants. Having only Virtue and Sin to work with, the Church announced "Carne, Vale!", declared it a Sin to eat meat and a Virtue to fast for forty days before Easter, and protected the seed grain and breeding stock with promises of Glory and threat of Damnation.

In Ohio during Lent of 2009, we face a fatal threat to our seed grain. When manufacturing resumes, somewhere in the global economy, machine shops and tool-and-die makers will be needed to build the equipment that manufacturers use. For a century and more, that equipment for the world has been built in Ohio, mostly in smaller shops owned by families, or, as family owners retired, acquired as subsidiaries of national or international firms. If there is no work for these small shops, they will close, their own equipment will be sold, and the skilled craftsmen who built the machines that ran the world's factories will be scattered. This is not a resource that can be rebuilt. When a shop's equipment is sold, that seed grain is consumed and can not be replaced. If that happens, there will be no planting when Spring comes and no harvest to follow.

The State of Ohio should protect its seed grain by managing demand for machine tools. For starters, each State Park has some natural resource that, with some mechanical assistance, can produce renewable energy. Most State Parks are built around a lake, artificial lakes at Caesar Creek and Rocky Fork in the South and Punderson in the Northeast, or Lake Erie at Headlands and Geneva and East Harbor. The dams that created the artificial lakes predate the Environmental Protection Act of 1970, so do not require Impact Statements. The State should build a hydroelectric generator at each of those dams, and see that the machinery is built in Ohio. On the Lake Erie shore, build a wind generator at each park, and several picturesque wind generators on the bluff at Geneva overlooking that rocky shore. Use the power on site for park administration. It's not cheap, but it keeps the machine shops from going out of business, maybe for long enough to establish a reputation as experienced manufacturers of renewable power generators for the world market. It is an essential obligation of any community's leadership to keep the seed grain and breeding stock safe through the starving time, so that there may be a Spring planting and another harvest.

- Christopher J. Mallin, Old Country Lawyer