Farmland Seasons

Summer 2026

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Founding Farmer: How George Washington Shaped America and Agriculture

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Founding Farmer: How George Washington Shaped America and Agriculture

As our nation celebrates 250 years, few figures embody the promise and hope of America more than George Washington, who considered himself a farmer first and a statesman second. Nowhere is this more evident than Mount Vernon.

"You gain a much deeper appreciation for George Washington when you visit his estate," notes Mark Mommsen, President of Martin, Goodrich & Waddell, Inc., whose family toured Mount Vernon this spring. "This is an amazing story of legacy, preservation and America's remarkable heritage."

Located in eastern Virginia, Mount Vernon came into the Washington family in 1674. Washington inherited the property in 1761. The estate was divided into five farms that encompassed nearly 8,000 acres of land during Washington's lifetime.

"Washington was an exceptional farm manager," Mommsen says. "His five farms included a diverse array of enterprises, from a grist mill to a whiskey distillery."

(It's interesting to note that whiskey-making was far and away Washington's most profitable ag business. By 1799, the year he passed away, Washington's distillery was one of the largest in America.)

Washington also had the mind of an accountant, says Mommsen, who notes that America's first president was a stickler for detailed farm records and skillful farm management.

Washington himself would have agreed, based on his writings. "I shall begrudge no reasonable expense that will contribute to the improvement and neatness of my farms—for nothing pleases me better than to see them in good order, and everything trim, handsome, and thriving about them."

"I'd rather be on my farm than be emperor of the world"

This included the horse barns and pastures at Mount Vernon. Thomas Jefferson once referred to George Washington as "the best horseman of his age." One of Washington's favorites was Nelson, a hard-charging chestnut horse.

After the Revolutionary War, Nelson lived out his days as a pampered celebrity at Mansion House Farm, one of the five farms at Mount Vernon. Washington's affection for Nelson was reciprocated. When the general would stop at Nelson's paddock, "the old war-horse would run, neighing, to the fence, proud to be caressed by the great master's hands," according to Mount Vernon historians.

Washington viewed agriculture as the backbone of a successful nation. While he proclaimed he'd "rather be on my farm than be emperor of the world," he was away from Mount Vernon for nearly nine years during the American Revolution. Then he was gone again for another eight years (1789-1797) while he served as America's first president.

Washington always harbored a deep desire, though, to return to his beloved Mount Vernon and his private life as a farmer. There he could study and implement farming innovations and devote his life to the improvement of American agriculture. "Agriculture is the most healthful, most useful, and most noble employment of man," Washington stated.

"Freedom and property rights are inseparable"

Washington's rural roots ran deep. He was born February 22, 1732, at Popes Creek Plantation in the Tidewater region of Virginia in Westmoreland County.

He was only 11 years old when his father, Augustine, died, leaving young George with a 580-acre farm along the Rappahannock River near Fredericksburg, Virginia. From then on, land ownership became an important part of Washington's life.

By the time he was 17, Washington pursued a lucrative career as a surveyor. He surveyed tens of thousands of acres during the next 50 years, from Virginia's western frontier to Mount Vernon itself. At one time, Washington owned nearly 70,000 acres between the Potomac and Ohio Rivers. He continued to survey land into early November 1799, five weeks before his death.

More than any other founding father, Washington understood the importance of private property and its unique place in American society. "Freedom and property rights are inseparable," Washington wrote. "You can't have one without the other."

This helped drive Washington's willingness to turn against the British crown. Washington despised Parliament's oppressive taxation without representation. As a landowner, Washington also felt the pain of British trade policies, which disrupted the colonists' agricultural and business interests.

Innovating with crop rotations, compost

Washington's ag business interests included tobacco, which was the main cash crop at Mount Vernon for decades.

In the 1700s, Virginia tobacco was in great demand in England. Tobacco even functioned as currency. American colonists—particularly in the Chesapeake colonies of Virginia and Maryland—frequently paid their taxes in pounds of tobacco.

Tobacco production was labor-intensive, however. Repeated planting depleted the soil and contributed to erosion. New ground was regularly broken to avoid crop failures. By the 1760s, Washington knew tobacco was an unsustainable crop. As he studied alternatives, he focused on crop rotations and soil regeneration.

By raising crops other than tobacco, Washington realized that the soil remained healthier for future harvests. He implemented a seven-year crop rotation of wheat, grains, pasture, and other crops on Mount Vernon's farms.

Washington's grain processing and storage innovation–a 16-sided barn.

Washington also focused on finding a fertilizer that would invigorate the lackluster soils at Mount Vernon. Nothing seemed to work as well as a mixture of manure and plant material that he allowed to "brew" together in a simple structure strategically located next to his stables.

Constructed around 1787, this dung repository (which Washington called a "stercorary") was likely the first building in America devoted to composting.

Designing a 16-sided barn

Washington's switch from tobacco to grain was emblematic of America's pivot away from an eroding relationship with England and America's natural resources (soil, in particular), towards self-sufficiency and land stewardship. To Washington, America's success relied on advanced agricultural science and the sustainable harvest of the land's natural resources.

There are countless examples of Washington's dedication to agricultural innovation, efficiency and profitability. By the fall of 1792, he planned a new barn complex at Dogue Run, one of five working farms at Mount Vernon. He designed a 16-sided barn for grain processing and storage.

Washington was familiar with using animals to tread grain from stalks, but he transformed the process with a simple innovation: a circular wooden treading floor sized for horses, with gaps between the boards so separated grain could fall directly into a granary below. The result? An efficient building that was as much a machine as it was architecture.

"The greatest man in the world"

Washington's passion for farming, which guided his life choices, left a powerful legacy that transformed America.

The general had the opportunity to seize complete power at the end of the Revolutionary War in 1783. Many people in America and Europe thought he would possibly become a king. Yet he relinquished his command of the Continental Army, insisted on a presidency instead of a monarchy for the new nation, and voluntarily retired after two terms. He longed to return to his farms at Mount Vernon after serving his country.

When King George III of England heard that Washington planned to resign, he couldn't believe it. "If he does that, he will be the greatest man in the world," the monarch said.

Throughout his two terms as the first U.S. president, Washington consistently viewed his public service as a temporary duty. Following his presidency, he chose to step down, solidifying the precedent of the peaceful transfer of power. He returned immediately to Mount Vernon, proving that true power lay in being a private citizen.

In his later years, Washington admitted that if his country hadn't called, he would have been content to live a quiet life, farming his own land. But Washington's destiny required more—and the republic he helped forge still stands as his enduring legacy.

MGW at 50: A Legacy Built on People and Progress

As America marks its 250th anniversary this year, MGW is celebrating a milestone of its own: 50 years of serving clients and caring for the land. Looking back, it's amazing how much has changed through the years. To provide some insight on those changes, we sat down with MGW associates Josh Waddell, Vice President, and Steve Diedrich, Accredited Farm Manager and Designated Managing Broker.

Josh, you've been full time at MGW over 20 years. What was the business environment like when you first started?

Before the late 1990s, the pace of business moved along much like I believe it had since the 1970s. As with most businesses, the internet changed everything. Looking back, it was exciting to see this evolution firsthand. Our goals and expectations were the same 25 years ago, but the day-to-day operations looked very different. Much of the work happened face-to-face, often right on the farm. We did a lot more business in combine and tractor cabs. At times I miss the slower pace, but there is no doubt that advances in technology allow us to provide more efficient and personalized service to landowners.

Steve, what has technology made simpler over the years?

It was a different era years ago—one without GPS, drones, or digital mapping technology. Even something as routine as mapping soil types was a painstaking process. MGW staff relied on huge soil books, a glass screen with a light shining underneath, and sheets of tracing paper to get the job done. It required Renaissance-era tools and a full-time staff member. What used to take a lot of time can now be completed in a matter of seconds.

In the old days, we had to mail everything—printed photos, contracts and brochures. Technology makes things much more efficient and allows us to focus on helping clients make the best investment and management decisions for their land.

As much as things change, Josh, does anything stay the same?

While technology changes, the essence of what we do hasn't changed. This is still a people business, and continuity is important to us. We have countless long-term relationships that started with the grandparents, continued with the parents, and now extend to the grandchildren. We've always been blessed to work with great people, and we're very appreciative of the past leaders and staff that started and continued MGW on this 50-year journey!

The Farmland Market Remains Strong — Here's Why

The supply of farms available for sale has remained remarkably limited again in 2026. "However, there was a brisk start to the year in certain markets, and overall, there's no shortage of interested land buyers," says Mark Mommsen, President, Martin, Goodrich & Waddell, Inc.

In many areas, land values are still reaching record highs. In other areas, some farm sale prices are slightly lower than during the boom years of 2021 to 2023. Even with tighter margins in the farm economy, there have been very few stressed farm sales.

"We continue to see strong 1031 exchange activity coming out of the Chicago area," Mark notes. "High-quality properties near growing communities are attracting developers, from data centers to commercial projects and residential expansion."

Here at MGW, the pace has remained strong, and given the world's current state of affairs, that's likely to continue for the foreseeable future. "During periods of geopolitical uncertainty or broader economic volatility, farmland often becomes even more attractive to investors seeking stability and income potential," Mark says. If you would like to discuss your farmland ownership goals, you're welcome to give us a call at (815) 756-3606 or (563) 659-6565.

Managing Through Challenging Times, From a Farmer's View

Good management is a key driver of farmland profitability. The same land can produce very different financial outcomes, depending on the decisions a farmer makes.

We recently caught up with two experienced farmers from northern Illinois—Jeff Becker, 54, and Darren Bedeker, 52—to get their thoughts on what 2026 and beyond might hold for agriculture and farming.

Jeff Becker
Ogle County, Illinois

Darren Bedeker
LaSalle County, Illinois

Where do you farm, and what crops do you raise?

Becker: I raise corn and soybeans near Baileyville in Ogle County, Illinois, west of Rockford.

Bedeker: I raise corn and soybeans in LaSalle County near Seneca, Illinois. I farm with my brother, Dan. Our farming operation also includes the fourth generation of our family.

How many years have you farmed full-time?

Becker: 38 years

Bedeker: 32 years

Each crop year brings new opportunities and challenges. What are you focusing on in 2026?

Becker: There are so many things going on in the world that the traditional rules don't seem to apply. Inputs have become so expensive that sometimes you wonder whether the juice is worth the squeeze. I'm always looking for ways to be more efficient. I also want to learn new things every day. That's what keeps farming fun.

Bedeker: All the market volatility, plus the war in Iran, have created a whole new ball game, especially with higher fuel prices. The wildcard is the longevity of the situation. While some people say "we've been through times like this before," that's only true to a certain degree. With inputs, prices never go down as fast as they go up.

With tighter margins, what management changes are you implementing (or considering)?

Becker: This is our first year of using strip-till. Reducing passes across the field means less fuel and less wear and tear on the equipment. In 2025, I bought a See & Spray™ machine, which is great for ROI. Along with precision spraying, we're also using more generic chemistries in our crop protection program.

We've also been looking at ways to reduce the amount of synthetic fertilizer we use. For a couple years we've been trying several different biologicals to improve soil biology and access the organic fertilizer that's already in our soil.

Bedeker: You have to be aware of your costs in every aspect of your farming operation. I'm looking hard at crop inputs and have reduced my soybean planting populations. This has helped save on seed costs and manage white mold and lodging, without sacrificing yield.

With spraying, how the products are applied is important, and application timeliness matters. Decide what you're going to outsource and what you'll do in-house. I think you need to have a closed-loop system as much as possible, because your return on investment (ROI) is far greater.

When you reflect on your farming career, what lessons have you learned that are useful in times like this?

Becker: Years of experience give you more patience. I see farmers who are freaked out about everything, including the price of equipment, chemicals and fertilizer. Just control the controllables, and do the best you can with what you've got. Keep learning, and be able to adapt to change.

Bedeker: Good management hinges on data-driven decisions to help minimize waste and maximize productivity. We have enough tools today to get this data. Find someone who can help you make sense of the data.

Look at every field individually. Don't treat every acre the same. Satellite-based weather apps and crop scouting apps have been game changers for us. They help track weed escapes and measure ROI for fungicide passes and other management practices, especially on the more marginal acres.

Anything else you'd like to add?

Becker: Don't spend more than you can afford. New paint isn't essential.

Bedeker: Don't make rash decisions that are quick fixes or short-term gains. Those usually aren't the right decisions. Take the long view, especially on value-added decisions like ag drainage. Investing in tile has improved our yields more than we thought possible.

What excites you about the future of farming?

Becker: I farm with my youngest son, Cole, and enjoy helping him start his farming career. He's 22 and is all farmer. He's all about technology, too. He figures it out and shows me how to use it.

Bedeker: I'm excited that young people like my two boys Justin and Bryce, and my nephew Max, want to farm. Everything in our business still comes back to relationships.

2026 Master Farmer Mike Pratt Shares a Lifetime of Wisdom

Mike and Susan farm with their sons, Andy and Peter; their wives, Katie and Emily; and grandson Ethan. They also have four other grandchildren. (Photo: Holly Spangler)

Around Dixon, Illinois, Mike Pratt is known as someone who gets things done. But behind the growth of the Pratt family farm is a long story of smart management, generational planning, and building a land base, one field at a time.

"There was never any doubt I wanted to farm," says Mike, 72, one of five Illinois producers honored as 2026 Master Farmers by Prairie Farmer magazine. "I'm truly living the dream."

The Master Farmer award is Illinois agriculture's lifetime achievement award. For more than 100 years, this honor has recognized exceptional agricultural production skills, a commitment to family and service to community.

Mike's farming career started right after high school. In 1972, he rented 80 acres and raised beef cattle and sows alongside his father, Ron. Mike came from a line of conservative farmers who operated mid-sized farms.

"My grandpa farmed for 60 years and always rented the land," Mike says. "Previous generations of my family had the mindset you can't afford to buy land. I figured if I was going to farm full-time, I needed to buy land."

Mike purchased his first 40 acres for $1,250 an acre in 1975, shortly after he married his wife, Susan. Today, the couple farms 9,200 acres of corn, soybeans and seed corn in Lee County, along with their sons, Andy and Peter, the boys' wives Katie and Emily, and grandson Ethan.

"There are three generations working on this farm, and they all live within five miles of us," notes Mike, who says all three Pratt grandsons are interested in farming. "It doesn't get any better than that."

Measuring success beyond acres and yields

While it might seem like there was an easy path to growth and success for the Pratts, nothing could be further from the truth. It required courage, a willingness to take strategic risks, and a commitment to investing in land.

This focus never wavered, even during the 1980s Farm Crisis. When northern Illinois farms that once brought $3,000 an acre plunged to $1,500 an acre, Mike continued to buy land when he could. "We have a lot of good Muscatune/Tama soil," he notes.

Adopting new technology to maximize this productive land has been a key part of the process. When new seed genetics became available to help manage corn borers, the Pratts tried a few bags of this Bt corn. "When my son came home from the University of Illinois that Thanksgiving, the Bt corn was still standing," Mike says. "We decided we needed to plant more of this."

Modern seed genetics play a big role on the family's farm. The Pratts, who have worked with Wyffels Hybrids since 1995, manage 2,000 acres of seed corn for the family-owned company.

Farming in Lee County creates some interesting situations, due to the close proximity to Chicago, Mike adds. "Some urban people don't realize we raise crops for money and don't understand what the Wyffels signs by our fields mean." That's why the Pratts installed yellow signs below the Wyffels logo that read, "This is a family farm."

"You can't beat paid-off farmland"

Beyond the farm, Mike has played an active role in his community, serving on the finance council at St. Patrick's Church, the Lee County Zoning Board, and the 1st Farm Credit Services Board. Mike served 16 years on the 1st Farm Credit and Compeer Financial boards, where he prioritized fair loan policies, especially for young farmers.

Helping the next generation of farmers succeed is vital. "It's important to turn over the reigns of power to the younger generation," says Mike, who practices what he preaches. "To me, success is making a place for my kids to farm. Now I'm trying to make a place for the grandkids, too."

You just never know where opportunities will come from, he adds. He thinks back to 1995, when a neighboring farmer's wife was sick. That neighbor farmed 1,200 acres for six different landlords, but he knew he needed to slow down. He decided he wanted the Pratts to farm this land—and all the landlords agreed.

"He had it all worked out before he approached us," says Mike, who was shocked by the offer. "This allowed our sons to start farming while they were still in high school."

This extra farm income helped pay for college at the University of Illinois, where Andy earned his economics degree and Peter earned an animal science degree.

The Pratt family continues to work together, focusing on slow, steady growth. It all comes back to the land, Mike says. "Farmland produces generational wealth. Few other businesses can do that. You can't beat paid-off farmland."

BOONE COUNTY, IL
20 ac. Stilke Farm, NE of Capron. $315,000. SOLD
51 ac. Carlson Road Farm, SE of Belvidere. $15,275/ac. SOLD

BUREAU COUNTY, IL
80 ac. Croisant Farm, NE of Princeton. $16,950/ac. SOLD

CLINTON COUNTY, IA
156 ac. Petersville Farm, SW of Charlotte. $14,075/ac. SOLD
60 ac. Petersen Trust Farm, E of Wheatland. $3,975/ac. SOLD
10.5 ac. Calamus Farm, NW of Calamus. $9,000/ac. SOLD

DEKALB COUNTY, IL
92 ac. Airport Road Farm, S of Sycamore. $13,500/ac.
155 ac. Malta Road Farm, S of Kirkland. $14,350/ac.
150 ac. Schoppe Farm, NE of Rochelle. $17,500/ac.
873 ac. Sycamore Farm, city of Sycamore. $21,500/ac.
54 ac. Brickville Farm, contiguous to Sycamore. $16,900/ac. PENDING
320 ac. Bork Trust Farm, N of Shabbona. $18,400/ac. PENDING
200 ac. MC Evers Farm, E of Sycamore. $17,350/ac. SOLD
77 ac. Bloomfield Farm, NW of Malta. $16,800/ac. SOLD
155 ac. Shabbona Farm, S of Shabbona. $13,400/ac. SOLD
153 ac. Kehm DeKalb County Farm, N of Shabbona. $16,350/ac. SOLD
40 ac. Milan Farm, N of Shabbona. $16,350/ac. SOLD
39 ac. Winter Farm, contiguous to DeKalb. $17,900/ac. SOLD
139 ac. Mary Walter Trust Farm, contiguous to Cortland. $16,850/ac. SOLD
204 ac. Shirley M. Snyder Farm, contiguous to Maple Park. $12,450/ac. SOLD
533 ac. Henke Farm, N of DeKalb. $16,950/ac. SOLD

HUMBOLDT COUNTY, IA
100 ac. Cougar Farm, SE of Gilmore City. $14,950/ac. SOLD

GOLDEN VALLEY COUNTY, MT
5,400 ac. Golden Valley Farms, N of Lavina. SEALED BID AUCTION.

JO DAVIESS COUNTY, IL
708 ac. Shellady Farm, NE of Galena. $7,900/ac. SOLD

JONES COUNTY, IA
207 ac. Borhart Farm, N of Mechanicsville. $15,900/ac. SOLD

KANE COUNTY, IL
50 ac. Big Rock Farm, S of Big Rock. $16,950/ac. SOLD
40 ac. Middleton Road Farm, S of Burlington. $1,195,000. SOLD
1035 ac. Burlington Farm, village of Burlington. $13,600/ac. SOLD
73 ac. Benchley Farm, contiguous to Hampshire. $13,900/ac. SOLD

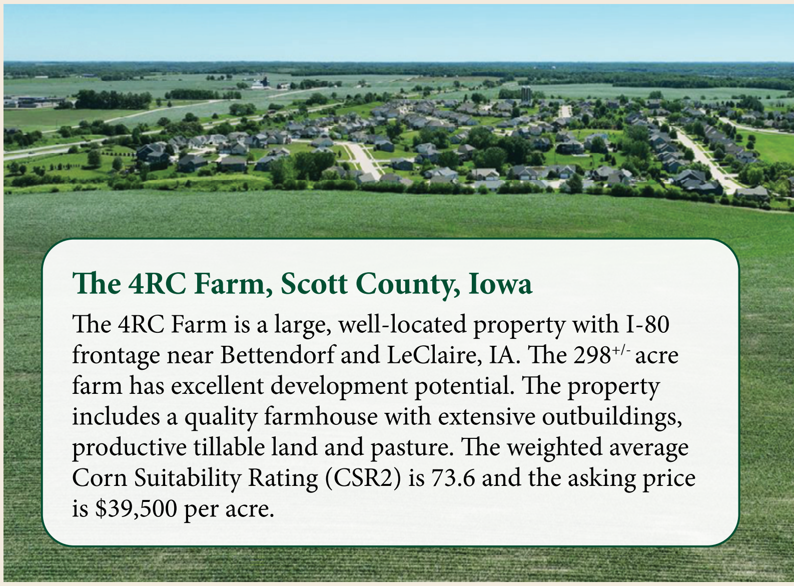
KANKAKEE COUNTY, IL
118 ac. Rockville West Farm, W of Manteno. $13,500/ac. SOLD
91 ac. Rockville Farm, NW of Manteno. $12,750/ac. SOLD

LASALLE COUNTY, IL
114 ac. Mendota Farm, city of Mendota. AUCTION
126 ac. South Somonauk Farm, contiguous to Somonauk. $15,850/ac. PENDING
154 ac. Mohan Wilsman Farm, NW of Streator. $11,850 ac. SOLD
36 ac. Mosbach 36 Farm, contiguous to Oglesby. $16,450/ac. SOLD

LEE COUNTY, IL
80 ac. Brooklyn Road Farm, E of Amboy, $14,900/ac. PENDING
80 ac. Ranken Farm, SW of Rochelle. $12,950/ac.
253 ac. Bingham Road Farm, NW of Paw Paw, $14,350/ac. PENDING
21 ac. Flewellyn Farm, village of Lee. $10,900/ac. SOLD
150 ac. Paul V. Herrmann Estate Farm, W of Shabbona. AUCTION. SOLD
84 ac. Route 251 Farm, SW of Compton. $12,950/ac. SOLD
75 ac. Kehm Lee County Farm, W of Paw Paw. $16,350/ac. SOLD
109 ac. Steward Road Farm, S of Steward. $12,800/ac. SOLD
424 ac. Harmon Farm, village of Harmon. $12,900/ac. SOLD

MARSHALL COUNTY, IL
323 ac. Wenona Farm, N of Wenona. PENDING

MCCONE COUNTY, MT
2,560 ac. McCone Farm, NW of Circle. SEALED BID AUCTION.



The 4RC Farm, Scott County, Iowa

The 4RC Farm is a large, well-located property with I-80 frontage near Bettendorf and LeClaire, IA. The 298$^{+/-}$ acre farm has excellent development potential. The property includes a quality farmhouse with extensive outbuildings, productive tillable land and pasture. The weighted average Corn Suitability Rating (CSR2) is 73.6 and the asking price is $39,500 per acre.

MCHENRY COUNTY, IL
396 ac. Interstate 90 Farm, NW of Hampshire. $12,400/ac.
496 ac. Richmond Farm, W of Richmond. $12,950/ac. SOLD
396 ac. Woodstock Farm, NW of Woodstock. $12,500/ac. SOLD

MERCER COUNTY, IL
79 ac. Beelow Farm, S of Aledo. $16,950/ac. PENDING

OGLE COUNTY, IL
638 ac. Creston Farms, N of Creston. AUCTION. PENDING
152 ac. Rochelle West Farm, W of Rochelle. AUCTION. PENDING
65 ac. Deckard Farm, contiguous to Davis Junction. $8,700/ac.
53 ac. Rochelle Farm, city of Rochelle. $19,450/ac.
58 ac. Tower Road Farm, N of Byron. $13,700/ac.
41 ac. Ivy Road Farm, S of Monroe Center. $11,900/ac. SOLD
189 ac. Pine Rock Farm, W of Rochelle. $12,950/ac. SOLD

ROCK COUNTY, WI
77 ac. Rykowski Farm, W of Beloit. $8,850/ac. & 259,500. SOLD

SCOTT COUNTY, IA
298 ac. 4RC Farm, E of Bettendorf. $39,500/ac.
41 ac. Dewall Family Farm, N of LeClaire. $29,500/ac.
399 ac. Anderson 400, city of Princeton. $36,215/ac.

WHITESIDE COUNTY, IL
13 ac. Shaver Property, city of Sterling. $18,500/ac.
19 ac. Como Interstate Farm, SW of Sterling. $7,000/ac. SOLD

WILL COUNTY, IL
240 ac. Green Garden Farm, contiguous to Frankfort. $14,900/ac.
94 ac. Monee Farm, contiguous to Monee. $39,500/ac.
36 ac. Frankfort Property, village of Frankfort. $42,500/ac.
146 ac. Peotone West 45/52 Farm, W of Peotone. $15,300/ac. PENDING
78 ac. Brandt Property, contiguous to New Lenox & Joliet. $31,500/ac. SOLD

WINNEBAGO COUNTY, IL
39 ac. Rockford Farm, W of Rockford. $12,700/ac.
76 ac. Fidanza Farm, N of Durand. $6,950/ac. SOLD
290 ac. Route 75 Farm, E of Durand. $10,750/ac. SOLD
76 ac. Savala-Anders 76 Farm, NE of Pecatonica. $6,950/ac. SOLD
60 ac. Cook Farm, village of Cherry Valley. $29,900/ac. SOLD

For additional details on these properties, please scan the QR code to the right, call us at (815) 756-3606 or (563) 659-6565, or visit our website at www.mgw.us.com.

Land Ownership Remains the Foundation of Freedom

Remember the Artemis II mission lunar flyby back in April? This was the first time in over 50 years that astronauts journeyed to the far side of the moon.

Americans have always pursued new frontiers. It's part of our national DNA. As we celebrate 250 years of American independence this summer, it's worth reflecting on how deeply that pioneering spirit is tied to something that connects us all—the land.

Long before space exploration, the great American frontier was the West—a vast expanse filled with opportunity, promise, and the chance to build something of your own. That vision has inspired generations of Americans, including George Washington himself.

Washington had surveyed lands of the Ohio Valley. He had led a Virginia regiment in the French and Indian War, fighting primarily on the frontier. At the war's end, he expected to capitalize on this experience by gaining legal title to thousands of acres in the west, which he would sell for a profit.

But then the British government proclaimed that all territory west of the Appalachian Mountains was closed to settlement. For Washington, this wasn't just political frustration—it was personal. He had invested heavily in western land and believed those opportunities belonged to free citizens, not distant rulers.

Washington was already bristling under British rule. His colonial origins limited his advancement in the British army. Now the British government was depriving him of land he had fought for and won.

That growing resentment helped spark something much bigger. A critical mass of Americans joined Washington to demand a government of their own. They fought and won a revolution to create a new republic, which President Lincoln would later call "government of the people, by the people, for the people."

Life, liberty and the pursuit of property

When you think about it, the story of America has always been intertwined with land. Land inspired independence. Land fueled opportunity. And land helped transform a young republic into one of the most prosperous nations in history.

From generation to generation, land has symbolized freedom, opportunity and financial security. Many key moments in American history have revolved around land. Take the Louisiana Purchase. The United States acquired roughly 530 million acres from France in 1803 for $15 million, amounting to a historic bargain of about 3¢ an acre.

President Thomas Jefferson's "deal of the century" helped the young nation grow and become a great continental power. It nearly doubled the land area of America, secured permanent access to the all-important Mississippi River, and included vast natural resources.

For many early Americans, owning land meant owning your future. That was a dramatic contrast to Europe, where land was concentrated in the hands of nobility. Ordinary people spent generations working property they could never own.

Those serfs were obligated to work on their landlords' acres, always perpetual tenants, with no legal right to leave. These duties and restrictions were enforced across generations, over centuries—well into the 1800s.

Martin, Goodrich & Waddell, Inc. (MGW), with offices in Sycamore, Illinois and DeWitt, Iowa, is a leading agricultural real estate services company. Since 1976, MGW has sold, appraised, and managed farms for thousands of clients across the U.S., with a special focus on Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin.

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In America, abundant land and strong property rights created something entirely different: opportunity for everyday people. People treasured this God-given right, integral to the pursuit of happiness.

Legislation like the Homestead Act of 1862 gave families the chance to acquire free or cheap ($1.25 an acre) land. These pioneers built farms, businesses, and communities of their own. Hundreds of thousands of independent landowners became the backbone of rural America.

These courageous, ambitious men and women also helped shape the independent spirit our country is still known for today.

Land remains a symbol of freedom

When you put it into perspective, land ownership has attracted all kinds of people, from farmers to entrepreneurs to investors, throughout America's history.

While times have changed, one thing endures: the lasting value of land. Whether it's farmland that's been in the family for generations, hunting ground, or an investment for the future, land remains the foundation of freedom. That's a legacy of liberty worth celebrating.

Mark

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