



Westhope: Life as a Former Farm Boy

Dean Hulse

University of Minnesota (Apr 29, 2009)

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What has happened in Westhope has also happened all over the Midwest, and perhaps the entire country. Author Dean Hulse provides many of the usual elements of memoir-recollections of childhood, tales of family, his own coming-of-age stories-but these are intertwined with irony and regret at the loss of a way of life. Even the title, *Westhope*, is ironic: hope is the last thing that the authors hometown has experienced. Instead, it has seen the loss of community, a diminished farm population, and the after-effects of the shortsighted agricultural policies and practices that have led to these circumstances.

Some of the books chapters are deeply rooted in the agricultural life, the cycle of hard work, and the relationship the young boy has with the barn on his family farm. Some are focused on community; they discuss the long-standing relationship his mother has with the Avon lady and the authors relationships with his parents. Details make the memoir deeply honest rather than merely a nostalgic reflection on an idyllic past.

A freelance writer and activist for better agricultural and land use policies, the author shares his internal conflict about his role in the agricultural life. He writes openly about the two years he farmed. After experiencing failure in farming and disagreements with his father over farming philosophy, he abandoned farming to move to the city, thereby turning his back on the very life he wishes to sustain.

His experience has given him, however, an innate understanding of the challenges of sustainable agriculture. As Hulse weaves the tale of his journey from blithe youth to struggling farmer to city-living writer, the reader comes to understand the complexity of the world in which he lived and which he has not quite left. In spite of all the obstacles, the author ends with his vision of what might be possible.

ALINE SOULES (April 13, 2009)

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