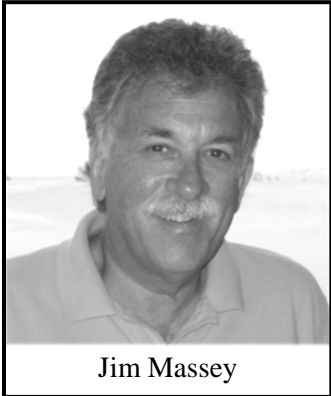


# *Letter from FLAG's Founding Director*

## *James T. Massey*

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### *FLAG – A Quarter-Century*



Jim Massey

Twenty five years, a quarter-century, more than a generation—by any of these human-scale measures, FLAG has been around now for a long time. And, as is often the case, the passage of that time has seen a great deal of change in FLAG, in its work, its personnel and in its stature and role in the national agricultural law community in which it has existed for all these years. The work has branched out and up into new and complex areas of law and policy, new board members, lawyers, paralegals and support staff have brought fresh ideas and energy to the program, and FLAG has firmly established itself as a serious and credible national institution. But much has also stayed the same with FLAG over these years and, in this case, that is a very good thing. FLAG still has very long-term board members—indeed, one returning after a hiatus of some years, highly experienced and long-tenured professional staff and a continuing, rock solid commitment to its mission of helping family farmers stay on their land.

However, and this is the very bad news about the passage of all this time, there has recently been a change in what had seemed a constant, a “forever” at FLAG—the loss of our dear friend, founding FLAG Board member, mentor, colleague, cheerleader and sage, Dale Reesman. Much will be said and written about Dale in these pages and at the anniversary event; I would like to add a few words to what will surely, and rightly, be a chorus raised in praise and memory of this wonderful man.

I was asked by Phyllis and Sarah Reesman, Dale’s wife and daughter respectively, to speak at Dale’s memorial service in his home town of Boonville, Missouri, in September. When I arrived at Dale’s church for the service, I was both honored and humbled to have the opportunity to address the predictably huge gathering of Dale’s community of family and friends where he had spent most of his life. I had spent a great deal of time thinking about Dale in the days preceding the service, days in which I had had the joy of two long telephone chats with Dale, followed by the sadness and grief that came with his death. I thought about Dale the lawyer, the friend, the mentor, the man, and one word kept recurring in these thoughts—“gracious.” For, as all who were privileged to know or work with Dale will agree, he was, above all and to a fault, gracious, in manner, in word and in deed. So I spent a little time looking at this word that so perfectly describes him and at its root, “grace.” Here is a bit of what I found and why it pertains to the event being celebrated today.

One could replace virtually all of the usual dictionary definitions of “gracious”—kindness, courteous, tact, propriety, merciful, compassionate, charm, graceful—with two words, “Dale Reesman.” As to “grace,” one gets the same result: effortless, charm in movement, a sense of fitness or propriety, helpful, goodwill, mercy. And, even more poignant, “a favor rendered by one who need not do so,” this reflecting ancient Greek and Hebrew antecedents of our “grace” which spoke of a person with grace as one who was a “giver of gifts.” And indeed, Dale was truly a giver of gifts, to us his friends and colleagues, to his clients and professional peers, to his family, his church and to his community.

And now, twenty-five years later, FLAG carries on with the gift of Dale’s grace, reflecting always in its work that original compassion and commitment to keeping family farmers on their land while constantly affirming and renewing its work with focus on “fitness, propriety, good will and mercy.” FLAG’s mission began and was de-

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financed rather simply during the depths of the farm crisis of the 1980's a quarter-century ago—save the land, keep the money, feed the kids, feed the animals, pay the light bill and Main Street. Survival was everything in those times. The years since have both broadened and deepened FLAG's mission, adding scores of new, extremely complex issues to the mix—nearly incomprehensible federal milk marketing orders putting thousands of family dairies out of business, constitutionally suspect "checkoffs" imposed on producers, disaster assistance problems continuing as year after year of "punishing weather" has caused devastating effects on agricultural producers, new USDA organic certification procedures for organic farms, food safety issues, production and marketing contract disputes and many more. As each of these issues, struggles and areas of legal challenge has emerged, and visited its consequences on family farmers, FLAG has been there, right on the front edge, learning the problem, entering the arena, defining the issues and making a stand on behalf of its clients and, in the end, changing what would have been history without its work.

And that is exactly what Dale Reesman did, too. For, in addition to being one of the most gracious people I have ever known, he was, at the same time and in equal measure, one of the toughest, truest and most tenacious lawyers I have ever known. Just as Dale carried on with his work for over a half-century, during which time the issues changed constantly and became ever more complex, so too will FLAG for its NEXT quarter-century and beyond. After all, the mission remains fundamentally the same—save the land, keep the money, feed the kids....

Congratulations to FLAG, and to its staff, board, clients, friends and supporters for the extraordinary accomplishments of your first twenty-five years. I am honored to have been a part of it and to be able to share these thoughts with you.

*James T. Massey*

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