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Media Invisibility and the Industrial Food System: “God Made a Farmer” and the Erasure of Workers and Animals

“And on the eighth day, God looked down on his planned paradise and said, ‘I need a caretaker.’ So God made a farmer.” Spoken by legendary radio broadcaster Paul Harvey, those words were matched with pristine still photos of American farm life, providing the driving force for one of the most talked about Super Bowl commercials of 2013 -- an advertisement for the Dodge Ram truck, part of their corporate social responsibility campaign for the “Year of the Farmer.” Absent from the narrative, however, were any mentions of some of the true drivers of the modern agricultural system. In particular, the ad failed to depict even shades of the widespread economic marginalization that has beset small-scale farmers, the persistent exploitation of migrant farmworkers, or the treatment of non-human animals in factory farms. Such oversights were parodied in a variety of online videos that went viral in the days following the ad’s initial airing. This work uses the case of Dodge Ram’s “God Made a Farmer” to think through broader issues about the role of media visibility, corporate brand culture and participatory online culture in shaping and reshaping American perceptions of industrial agriculture.