

Table of Contents

Feature

"A Durable Scale"

--- Eric Fryfogle

p. 3

Colloquium

"The Agrarian Standard"

--- Wendell Berry

p. 12

A View from the Field

"Abiquiu, New Mexico"

--- Lisa Hamilton

p. 16

The Break of Day

"Finding Agraria"

--- Courtney White

p. 22

Research

"Amish Farm Economics"

--- Randall James, Ph.d.

p. 28

Coda

Horse Progress Days

p. 31

New Agrarianism



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From the Editor's Desk

With this issue of our Journal, we reach a culmination of much of what The Quivira Coalition has been trying to accomplish since our founding in 1997.

The idea of a new agrarianism encompasses nearly all our work over the past twelve years: grazing in nature's model, the radical center, land health, watershed restoration, bridging the urban-rural divide, progressive stewardship, education, collaboration, local food, and resilience.

For a while, I hoped that environmentalism would embrace these innovations, but as time went on, and new challenges arose, it became clear that we had started down a new path, heading in divergent directions. Not long ago, I came across the term 'new agrarianism' and when I began to explore what it meant, I saw its appeal. This was the unifying whole, the big circle that pulled everything together.

In order to introduce the term, I decided to reprint two essays here, one by Eric Freyfogle and one by Wendell Berry. Both were written around 2001 – too early, in my opinion. Both deserve to be read again – because now the time is right.

But we can't forget about the 'old agrarianism' either. Much of what traditional communities still do, including the Amish and the villagers of northern New Mexico, are still relevant – and can teach the rest of us important lessons.

'New' or 'old' or 'back to the future' – whatever you want to call it, I hope the essays contained here resonate with you and where you live.

Happy reading,

Courtney

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Cover photo by Kirk Gadzia. Seed mix includes radish, red lentil, soybean, flax, pearl millet, Montana millet, mustard, pea, siberian millet, sunflower, pinto and garbazo beans, corn, western wheat and tag team granular. Photo taken during the Great Grazing "Grass & Coctail" tour, June 26, 2008, Goven Family Ranch, Turtle Lake, North Dakota.

Feature

A Durable Scale^{*}

by Eric Freyfogle

With no fanfare, and indeed with hardly much public notice, agrarianism is again on the rise. In small corners and pockets, in ways for the most part unobtrusive, people are reinvigorating their ties to the land, both in their practical modes of living and in the ways they think about themselves, their communities, and the good life.

Agrarianism, broadly conceived, reaches beyond food production and rural living to include a wide constellation of ideas, loyalties, sentiments, and hopes. It is a temperament and a moral orientation as well as a suite of economic practices, all arising out of the insistent truth that people everywhere are part of the land community, just as dependent as other life on the land's fertility and just as shaped by its mysteries and possibilities.

Agrarian comes from the Latin word *agrarius*, "pertaining to land," and it is the land as place, home, and living community that anchors the agrarian scale of values. For contemporary adherents, in cities as well as rural areas, agrarian traditions have provided a diverse set of tools for fashioning more satisfying modes of life. They are making extensive use of those tools, to strengthen families and local communities, to shape critiques of modern culture, and in various ways and settings to mold their lives to their chosen natural homes.

As a collection of practices and principles, agrarianism has enjoyed a long and curious history in recorded Western life, from ancient Greece to the present. Prominent in that history, of course, have been the methods and economies of gaining food from fields, forests, and waters. Just as important, though, have been the ways that farm life has figured in a people's



Greg Judy with Hair Sheep flock and guard dogs, Rucker, Missouri. Photo by Jan Judy.

social and moral imagination. Agrarianism's central image has long been the well-run farmstead that provides the locus and cultural center of a family's life, the place where the young are socialized and taught, where stories arise and are passed down, where leisure is enjoyed, where the tasks of daily living are performed, and where various economic enterprises take place, in garden, orchard, kitchen, woodlot, toolshed, and yard.

Such a farmstead, diverse in crops and livestock, has stood in the agrarian imagination as a model incubator of virtue and healthy families. It has exemplified the traditions and possibilities of essential work, well

* This is a condensed version of the [Introduction](#) to *The New Agrarianism: Land, Culture, and the Community of Life*, edited by Eric Freyfogle. Copyright © 2001 by Island Press. Reproduced by permission of Island Press, Washington, D.C.

done, in familiar settings. It has linked humankind to other forms of life, to soil and to rains, and to cycles of birth, death, decay, and rebirth. In its independence it has provided both a haven from corrosive cultural values and much-needed ballast to stabilize civil states. Generation upon generation, people have retreated to such farms in times of strife, figuratively if not literally, in order to heal, regroup, and set out anew.

Given this history, it is as unsurprising as it is heartening that agrarian ways and virtues are resurging in American culture, prompted by a wide range of public and private ills. To the diseases and degradations of the modern age, a New Agrarianism is quietly rising to offer remedies and defenses, not just to the noise, vulgarity, and congestion that have long affronted urban dwellers but to the various assaults on land, family, religious sensibilities, and communal life that have tended everywhere to breed alienation and despair.

air, physical exercise, and the satisfactions of honest, useful work. Permeating these overlapping concerns is a gnawing dissatisfaction with core aspects of modern culture, particularly the hedonistic, self-centered values and perspectives that now wield such power.

The New Agrarianism of the past generation has pruned key elements from older agrarian ways while nourishing other shoots and stimulating new ones. Gone entirely is the old slave-based, plantation strand of agrarianism; a regional variant to begin with, it deviated markedly from the family-based homestead ideal. Still around but much cut back are the once powerful assumptions about gender roles within the family and the larger household economy. As much as other Americans, agrarians have struggled to promote fairness and individual choice without losing the benefits of specialized labor.

“Agrarianism, broadly conceived, reaches beyond food production and rural living to include a wide constellation of ideas, loyalties, sentiments, and hopes. It is a temperament and a moral orientation as well as a suite of economic practices, all arising out of the insistent truth that people everywhere are part of the land community, just as dependent as other life on the land’s fertility and just as shaped by its mysteries and possibilities.”

Many worries and hopes lie behind this welling up of interest in land-centered practices and virtues. The degradation of nature – problems such as water pollution, soil loss, resource consumption, and the radical disruption of plant and wildlife populations – is everywhere a core concern. Other worries center on food – its nutritional value, safety, freshness, and taste – and on the radical disconnection today, in miles and knowledge, between typical citizens and their sources of sustenance.

Then there are the broader anxieties, vaguely understood yet powerfully felt by many, about the declining sense of community; blighted landscapes; the separation of work and leisure; the shoddiness of mass-produced goods; the heightened sense of rootlessness and anxiety; the decline of the household economy; the fragmentation of families, neighborhoods, and communities; and the simple lack of fresh

On the flourishing side, there is the heightened interest today in land conservation, which has taken on a distinctly ecological cast. Much strengthened, too, has been the New Agrarian challenge to materialism and to the dominance of the market in so many aspects of life. And yet, even with its new shapes and manifestations, agrarianism today remains as centered as ever on its core concerns: the land, natural fertility, healthy families, and the maintenance of durable links between people and place.

Agrarianism is very much alive and flourishing in America today, in ways both new and old and in diverse vocations and avocations. One could not call it a major element of contemporary culture, yet once aware of agrarianism, one stumbles on its outcroppings at many a turn. Within the conservation movement, the New Agrarianism offers useful guiding images of humans living and working on land in ways

that can last. In related reform movements, it can supply ideas to help rebuild communities and foster greater virtue. In all settings, agrarian practices can stimulate hope for more joyful living, healthier families, and more contented, centered lives.

Agrarians have typically been happier to live their lives than to write about them. Reports on agrarian ways tend toward the fragmentary and the narrative, covering bits and pieces, less often analyzing or proceeding by dialectic than illustrating and evoking. Summaries of agrarianism do exist, but they tend to define the agrarian way too narrowly. Thus, one finds summaries confining agrarianism to food-related economic practices, insisting that the "land" in agrarianism means only farm fields, concluding that agrarianism is merely a cloaked special-interest demand by farmers for a greater slice of the economic pie, or patronizing it as nothing more than a Currier and Ives-style retreat from the stringencies of modernity. A faithful characterization needs to cast its net more widely and fairly. It also must remain sensitive to change over time, for agrarianism is very much a living as well as a lived tradition.

What, then, are the principal elements and themes of the New Agrarianism that emerge from its many writings and manifestations?

The place to begin, naturally, is with the agrarian root – the land itself and how it is conceived. For agrarians, land is an organic whole, teeming, when well tended, with an abundance of plant and animal members. Humans are special members of that living community, but they are members nonetheless, not onlookers from afar. They are as linked and embedded as the land's many other creatures. In embracing this view, agrarians reject the conceit that the land is merely a warehouse of discrete natural resources. They reject, too, the claim that humans are or can be autonomous in relation to the natural places they inhabit. Land may not be the source of all wealth, as eighteenth-century Physiocrats claimed: but it remains the essential base of all terrestrial life.

From this recognition of interconnected life comes an overriding attentiveness to the health of the land.



Judith Redmond at the Farmer's Market, Berkeley Calif. Photo by Lisa Hamilton.

In the agrarian mind, the health of humans is dependent in the long run on the well-being of the larger land community. English reformer Sir Albert Howard summed up the point a half-century ago in his work *The Soil and Health* when he urged readers to understand "the whole problem of health in soil, plant, and animal, and man as one great subject." This holistic idea also guided the work of conservationist Aldo Leopold, who was as responsible as any person for bringing ecology to bear on agrarian concerns. The overall well-being of the land community, its "integrity, stability, and beauty," became the focal point of Leopold's influential land ethic. Among contemporary writers, Wendell Berry has been particularly forceful in drawing attention to the health of the natural whole, to "the one value," the one "absolute good," that undergirds our agnostic culture. In its fullest sense, Berry argues, health makes sense only when defined at the land-community level; such a community "is the smallest unit of health."

Guided by their organic perspective, agrarians pay close attention to the way people in their daily lives interact with particular lands, near and far, directly and indirectly. The product cycle looms especially large in this understanding: where raw materials come from and how they are produced, particularly food, fiber, and energy, and where wastes go and with what effects on which communities. "Nothing arises but from death,"

Evidence of the New Agrarianism appears today all across the country, in the lives and work of individuals, families, and community groups:

- In the community-supported agriculture group that links local food buyers and food growers into a partnership, one that sustains farmers economically, promotes ecologically sound farm practices, and gives city dwellers a known source of wholesome food.
- In the woodlot owner who develops a sustainable harvesting plan for his timber, aiding the local economy while maintaining biologically a diverse forest.
- In the citizen-led, locally based watershed restoration effort that promotes land uses consistent with a river's overall health and beauty.
- In the individual family, rural or suburban, that meets its food needs largely through gardens and orchards, on its own land or on shared neighborhood plots, attempting always to aid wildlife and enhance the soil.
- In the farmer who radically reduces a farm's chemical use, cuts back subsurface drainage, diversifies crops and rotations, and carefully tailors farm practices to suit the land.
- In the family – urban, suburban, or rural – that embraces new modes of living to reduce its overall consumption, to integrate its work and leisure in harmonious ways, and to add substance to its ties with neighbors.
- In the artists who helps community residents connect aesthetically to surrounding lands.
- In the faith-driven religious group that takes seriously, in practical ways, its duty to nourish and care for its natural inheritance.
- In the motivated citizen everywhere who, alone and in concert, work to build stable, sustainable urban neighborhoods; to repair blighted ditches; to stimulate government practices that conserve lands and enhance lives; and in dozens of other ways to translate agrarian values into daily life.

Lucretius observed long ago, and it is with constant awareness of this reality that agrarians comprehend their life patterns in cyclical terms. The wheel of life is no mere metaphysical ideal; it is an apt description of how the land's fertility is maintained as plants and animals die and nourish the soil, which in due course yields new life. To the agrarian, the soil is the great terrestrial connector of life, death, and new life, the very medium of resurrection. Indeed, so important is the soil and its fertility that agrarians are sometimes accused of soil worship by those less impressed by its vital, creative role.

The product cycle, from earth to consumer good to waste, traces not just lines of dependence and causation but also lines of responsibility. Dissenting from the modern view, agrarians believe that those who buy products are implicated morally in their production, just as those who discard waste items are morally involved in their final end. Those who hire a trash hauler to take garbage away are not cleansed of their complicity in its disposal, any more than buyers of chemically bathed apples are insulated from the ills of orchard management. Producers and sell-

ers, too, are morally responsible for their work, and in ways the market cannot absolve or cleanse when their products are sold.

This assignment of complicity is part of the larger recognition by agrarians that membership in a land community necessarily entails responsibilities, chiefly to the community as such. One cannot live in a place without altering it, yet alterations differ vastly in their effects on the health of the land. The agrarian aim is not to minimize effects on nature, as if human change were necessarily evil. It is to harmonize them: to craft ways of living in a place that are respectful of the land's long-term fertility and that accommodate, insofar as possible, the human penchant to err and make messes.

Much of agrarian culture has to do with the particulars of these responsibilities, with making the translation in daily life from abstract senses of membership and duty to particular patterns of living. Although the science of ecology now increasingly informs these issues, the challenge at root is an ethical one, dealing as it does with the rightful human role in the order of Creation. Right living on the land is infused with moral dimensions, and sustaining land health is a moral guideline if, indeed, not a moral imperative. Given this moral center, agrarianism stands in contrast to the moral relativity of the modern day, the pernicious illusion that one set of values is as good as another. Agrarianism embraces a responsible form of individualism, what social critic Richard Weaver years ago termed social-bond individualism, as opposed to the anarchic individualism (Weaver's term) or bogus individualism (Leopold's term) that lies behind libertarian calls for maximum freedom and minimal responsibility.

Agrarianism, then, sees hope in the modest resurgence in America of interest in public virtues and moral discourse, insisting only and emphatically that virtue prevail in all aspects of life, not just within the family but also on the job, on the land, in corporate boardrooms, and in legislative chambers.

The infusion of moral concerns into all aspects of



Pastured poultry on the Hjertaas Farm, Redvers, SK, Canada. Photo by Kirk Gadzia

life is a natural offshoot of the agrarian's unwillingness to fragment the human condition. Here, the farmstead provides a continuing reminder. Work and leisure, the secular and the sacred, the functional and the beautiful, all retain an elemental integrity. Life is not starkly divided between work, school, and home; between production and consumption; between means and ends.

Good land use – perhaps the highest agrarian aspiration – is by no means an easy undertaking, as agrarians well know. In demanding it of themselves and one another, they recognize the difficulty of the task they have set. Good land use requires an intimate knowledge of land together with high levels of skill. Farming in particular is as much an art as a science, given the vagaries of nature and the inadequacies of the human mind. Then there is the whole matter of economics and the recognition that sustainable land use is a practical ideal only when financially feasible. To identify these realities is to set forth the prime challenges to which agrarian proposals respond.

As agrarians see things, good land use over time depends on a local culture that is durable and economically successful. Such a culture necessarily crosses generations, and it is sustained, as Wendell Berry has emphasized, by a handing down of wisdom within the local land-using community from neighbor to neighbor and generation to generation. Although book learning and

scientific studies are important, good land use requires the tailoring of general precepts to particular land parcels, work that can be done only by a person attentive to a parcel and committed to its long-term fertility. Long-term perspectives arise most readily when owners feel committed to the lands they own, when they view them less as economic assets – and hardly at all as market commodities – than as homes, livelihoods, and treasures, tended by one generation and passed along in time to the next.

Good labor on the land means working with nature, attending to its possibilities, respecting its mysteries, and remaining alert to its penchant to surprise. Good work, agrarians recognize, often takes time, and some jobs cannot safely or wisely be speeded up. Bad work, on the other hand – bad in terms of adverse effects on the land community and the social order – can happen quickly and leave enduring scars in its wake. In the stock pastoral tale, the fictional hero escapes from a

At the base of agrarian thought about land use is the fundamental recognition that nature is far bigger than humans, bigger than they know or even can know. Human knowledge of nature is limited, encased within layers of mystery. To base land-use decisions solely on empirical data is to invite disaster, given the vast gaps in what even well-skilled humans understand. Good land use requires a mixing of the empirical and rational with the intuitive and sentimental. Embedded within nature are whole realms of wisdom that humans have hardly noticed, much less mastered. “Nature as measure,” a phrase first offered by Wendell Berry, has become a widely used agrarian. Good land use everywhere is undertaken with humility, in a type of trial-and-error or conversational interaction that respects nature as a wise and full partner.

Because good land use often results in lower short-term yields, agrarians are painfully aware of economic realities. No land use can endure if it makes no eco-

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corrupted city and flees to a pristine, wholesome wild, there to begin life in a new Eden. Agrarian writers of recent decades have had a far different story to recount. Not Eden but a battle-weary land commonly greets the agrarian pilgrim today, a land marred by eroded hills, polluted rivers, and biologically impoverished forests.

Success in such a challenging life necessarily depends on a constant and careful attentiveness to the land. Each land parcel is unique, to cite a bedrock agrarian adage, which means that good land use necessarily varies from place to place. To work with the land responsibly is to converse with it in a type of dialectical interchange. Such a conversation begins, among the best of agrarians, with close attention to what nature would do in a place when left alone. What does nature have to offer in a given place? What will nature allow human users to do? What will it help them do?

economic sense, and in the short run at least, good land use is more costly than bad land use. In the short run, plowing hillsides raises yields while eroding soil. Inorganic fertilizers, chemical pesticides, fossil fuels, expansive monocultures, and extensive subsurface drainage all cut costs on the farm while sapping overall land health. Predictably, agrarians are sharp critics of cheap-food policies that push landowners to abuse land by cutting corners. They condemn, too, free-trade policies that pit landowners in one part of the globe against landowners in another, policies that in practice test not so much who is the most efficient (although that factor plays in) as whose lands are most naturally endowed and whose land ethics are lowest.

Agrarians fight back by promoting collective agrarian efforts, recognizing that the individual landowner alone has little chance of effecting change. For more than a century, cooperative buying and marketing efforts have been a staple agrarian response. In recent

years, agrarians have sought local outlets for their produce, particularly specialty outlets that pay premiums for fresh, chemical-free crops. If production controls appeared more feasible, agrarians might support such measures, too, as a way to reduce destructive competition and assure farmers of sufficient income to allow them to use the land well.

The agrarian concern for economic stability and durability accounts in part for agrarians' insistence that the household remain what it typically was in the United States until well into the twentieth century – a center of economic production, meeting its needs from within so as to reduce dependence

on the market. Agrarians also foster market independence by producing multiple crops rather than a single market staple; by lowering purchased inputs insofar as possible; and, when feasible, by resorting to barter or cash substitutes.

Independence not possible within a single household can increase within a neighborhood of like-minded agrarian households through exchanges and sharing. What is good for the neighborhood is, to the agrarian mind, good for a larger community as well. A community, too, should reduce its dependence on the outside market by adding value to outgoing products, by purchasing needed materials as raw goods rather than as fully processed ones, and by fostering internal economic diversity. All these measures, of course, cut against the free-traders' ardent call for specialization and interdependence. But free-traders, as agrarians painfully know, care little about the health of particular households and communities, just as in their quest to lower market prices they discount ecological scars. Conflict is inescapable.

One challenge of the New Agrarianism is to promote healthy families and communal structures without resorting to the unfair social constraints and discriminatory practices that have characterized the agrarian past. Agrarianism's history has not been un-



The Great Grazing “Grass & Cocktail” agricultural tour, June, 2008, SunnyBrae Farm, Wawota, SK, Canada. Photo by Tamara Gadzia.

checked, any more than has America's history generally. One cannot turn to it uncritically, that is, to find an innate set of embedded virtues. The New Agrarianism is out to rectify patriarchy and racism, yet it strives to do so without crushing communal structure in the process – without resorting to a radical individualism that, on the other side, can itself be pernicious. The challenge for agrarians on this issue is the challenge faced by all citizens who value families, neighborhoods, and healthy communities: to promote virtue and responsible behavior without casting people in unfair and unyielding roles.

Although limits, responsibilities, and worries infuse the agrarian way, to dwell on them is to distort the overall picture, for a flourishing agrarian life is first and foremost a life of positive joy. Nature gives rise to much of that joy, with all its splendors and surprises and even its occasional terrors. Just as important are the pleasures that come from exercising a variety of skills to meet basic needs. At its best – and its best, to be sure, is often not fully attainable – the agrarian life is an integrated whole, with work and leisure mixed together, undertaken under healthful conditions and surrounded by family. As best they can, agrarians spurn the grasping materialism of modern culture; they define themselves by who they are and where

they live rather than by what they earn and own.

Agrarians have long celebrated the amenities of life, hospitality, conversation (especially storytelling), and good manners without professing extraordinary skill in them. Such amenities center on the home, and one of the chief contentments of agrarians is the sense of having a distinct home, knowing that home, and feeling centered by it.

Home food production, an agrarian preoccupation everywhere, can be a particular source of pleasure, as generations of gardeners have known. Pleasure comes from exercising skill to meet basic needs and participating in the processes of natural growth. Pleasure also comes from knowing that food is fresh and uncontaminated. Unlike commercial growers, agrarians select seed lines more for nutrition and taste than for external appearance or ease of shipping. They favor plants that produce over as long a season as possible, not ones whose yields ripen all at once. Food and other items produced by the household economy are rated chiefly for their use value within the household rather than for any exchange value.

The true livelihood farm begins by addressing as many of its own needs as possible, turning to the market chiefly to meet needs that cannot be satisfied internally and to dispose of extra produce. Consistent with this focus, land is valued highly for its fertility and its ability to meet such needs, not just for the price it might fetch when sold. Fertility is best maintained through natural processes, and lands that flourish in their natural fertility are the most beautiful of places. In the agrarian aesthetic, the natural and the native rate high. Beauty is not a functionless decoration tacked on but rather an integral characteristic of appropriate, well-crafted elements of a working land.

When all the pieces of the agrarian life come together – nutrition and health, beauty, leisure, manners and morals, satisfying labor, economic security, family and neighbors, and a spiritual peacefulness – we have what agrarians define as the good life. This image, of course, stands apart from the Faustian concept of progress so dominant in the modern world. Not high consumption nor the fastest speed, not the amassing of toys or wealth, but the healthy household stands as the agrarian ideal to which all other goals are subordinate.



Upland erosion control structures installed May 2, 2009 by volunteers during a workshop on Red Canyon Reserve, N.M. Photo by Avery C. Anderson.

When speaking of the good life, however, agrarians tend to avoid generalizations and to turn instead to the particular. The lived agrarian life is full of specific, familiar, tangible things – tools, sheds, barns, tables, fences, gardens, porches, woodlots, shade trees, garages, birdhouses, rock outcroppings, and the like. The people of the household, too, are recognized for their particularities; they are members who belong, for better or worse, not labor and management or producers and consumers. Louis Bromfield was one such agrarian voice, proud of his Ohio farm, Malabar, and pleased to tell people what he had learned there. True significance in life, he came to see, arose not in a romantic retreat to the past but in a tangible world of great and insistent reality, made up of such things as houses, and ponds, fertile soils, a beautiful and rich landscape and the friendship and perhaps the respect of fellow men and fellow farmers.

Writing late in his life, Aldo Leopold bemoaned the reality that the average modern of his day (the 1940s) had “lost his rootage in the land.” The “shallow-minded modern,” he penned, “assumes that he has already

discovered what is important; it is such who prate of empires, political or economic, that will last a thousand years. It is only the scholar who appreciates that all history consists of successive excursions from a single starting-point, to which man returns again and again to organize yet another search for a durable scale of values."

Pondering the challenges of promoting healthy landscapes, as he did for many years, Leopold came to see that the core problem lay within the human heart and soul. People simply did not perceive the land and recognize their ties to it; they failed to love the land as they ought; they failed to understand that their dealings with the land were, at bottom, not matters of expediency alone but of ethics as well. It was

a sobering conclusion that Leopold reached, for the transformation of ethics, he knew, was hardly the work of a single lifetime. And, as he knew, "no important change in ethics was ever accomplished without an internal change in our intellectual emphasis, loyalties, affections, and conviction."

On every page, the essays here gathered reflect these yearnings, and in them one approaches the heart and soul of the New Agrarianism: yearnings to regain society's rootage in the land; yearnings to stimulate sounder loyalties, affections, and convictions; yearnings, in the end, to craft a scale of values more likely to endure 2



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Colloquium

The Agrarian Standard*

by Wendell Berry

The Unsettling of America was published twenty-five years ago; it is still in print and is still being read. As its author, I am tempted to be glad of this, and yet, if I believe what I said in that book, and I still do, then I should be anything but glad. The book would have had a far happier fate if it could have been disproved or made obsolete years ago.

It remains true because the conditions it describes and opposes, the abuses of farmland and farming people, have persisted and become worse over the last twenty-five years. In 2002 we have less than half the number of farmers in the United States that we had in 1977. Our farm communities are far worse off

an writer has certainly involved me in such confusions, but I have never doubted for a minute the importance of the hope I have tried to serve: the hope that we might become a healthy people in a healthy land.

We agrarians are involved in a hard, long momentous contest, in which we are so far, and by a considerable margin, the losers. What we have undertaken to defend is the complex accomplishment of knowledge, cultural memory, skill, self-mastery, good sense, and fundamental decency – the high and indispensable art – for which we probably can find no better name than “good farming.” I mean farming as defined by agrarianism as opposed to farming as defined by in-

“I believe that this contest between industrialism and agrarianism now defines the most fundamental human difference, for it divides not just two nearly opposite concepts of agriculture and land use, but also two nearly opposite ways of understanding ourselves, our fellow creatures, and our world.”

now than they were then. Our soil erosion rates continue to be unsustainably high. We continue to pollute our soils and streams with agricultural poisons. We continue to lose farmland to urban development of the most wasteful sort. The large agribusiness corporations that were mainly national in 1977 are now global, and are replacing the world’s agricultural diversity, useful primarily to farmers and local customers, with bioengineered and patented monocultures that are merely profitable to corporations. The purpose of this new global economy, as Vandana Shiva has rightly said, is to replace “food democracy” with a worldwide “food dictatorship.”

To be an agrarian writer in such a time is an odd experience. One keeps writing essays and speeches that one would prefer not to write, that one wishes would prove unnecessary, that one hopes nobody will have any need for in twenty-five years. My life as an agrari-

anism: farming as the proper use and care of an immeasurable gift.

I believe that this contest between industrialism and agrarianism now defines the most fundamental human difference, for it divides not just two nearly opposite concepts of agriculture and land use, but also two nearly opposite ways of understanding ourselves, our fellow creatures, and our world.

Industrialism begins with technological invention. But agrarianism begins with givens: land, plants, animals, weather, hunger, and the birthright knowledge of agriculture. Industrialists are always ready to ignore, sell, or destroy the past in order to gain the en-

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tirely unprecedented wealth, comfort, and happiness supposedly to be found in the future. Agrarian farmers know that their very identity depends on their willingness to receive gratefully, use responsibly, and hand down intact an inheritance, both natural and cultural, from the past. Agrarians understand themselves as the users and caretakers of some things they did not make, and of some things that they cannot make.

If we believe that the existence of the world is rooted in mystery and in sanctity, then we would have a different economy. It would still be an economy of use, but it would be an economy also of return. The economy would have to accommodate the need to be worthy of the gifts we receive and use, and this would involve a return of propitiation, praise, gratitude, responsibility, good use, good care, and a proper regard for future generations. What is most conspicuously absent from the industrial economy and industrial culture is this idea of return. Industrial humans relate themselves to the world and its creatures by fairly direct acts of violence. Mostly we take without asking,

farmer or husbandman who leads an abundant life on a scrap of land often described as cast-off or poor. This figure makes his first literary appearance, so far as I know, in Virgil's Fourth Georgic:

I saw a man,
An old Cilician, who occupied
An acre or two of land that no one wanted,
A patch not worth the ploughing, unrewarding
For flocks, unfit for vineyards; he however
By planting here and there among the scrub
Cabbages or white lilies and verbena
And flimsy poppies, fancied himself a king
In wealth, and coming home late in the evening
Loaded his board with unbought delicacies.

Virgil's old squatter, I am sure, is a literary outcropping of an agrarian theme that has been carried from earliest times until now mostly in family or folk tradition, not in writing, though other such people can be found in books. Wherever found, they don't vary much

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use without respect or gratitude, and give nothing in return. Our economy's most voluminous product is waste – valuable materials irrecoverably misplaced, or randomly discharged as poisons.

To perceive the world and our life in it as gifts originating in sanctity is to see our human economy as a continuing moral crisis. Our life of need and work forces us inescapably to use in time things belonging to eternity, and to assign finite values to things already recognized as infinitely valuable. This is a fearful predicament. It calls for prudence, humility, good work, propriety of scale. It calls for the complex responsibilities of caretaking and giving-back that we mean by “stewardship.” To all of this the idea of the immeasurable value of the resource is central.

We can get to the same idea by way a little more economic and practical, and this is by following through our literature the ancient theme of the small

from Virgil's prototype. They don't have or require a lot of land, and the land they have is often marginal. They practice subsistence agriculture, which has been much derided by agricultural economists and other learned people of the industrial age, and they always associate frugality with abundance.

In my various travels, I have seen a number of small homesteads like that of Virgil's old farmer, situated on “land that no one wanted” and yet abundantly productive of food, pleasure, and other goods. And especially in my younger days, I was used to hearing farmers of a certain kind say, “They may run me out, but they won't starve me out” or “I may get shot, but I'm not going to starve.” Even now, if they cared, I think agricultural economists could find small farmers who have prospered, not by “getting big,” but by practicing the ancient rules of thrift and subsistence, by accepting the limits of their small farms, and by knowing well the value of having a little land.

In any consideration of agrarianism, this issue of limitation is critical. Agrarian farmers see, accept, and live within their limits. They understand and agree to the proposition that there is “this much and no more.” Everything that happens on an agrarian farm is determined or conditioned by the understanding that there is only so much land, so much water in the cistern, so much hay in the barn, so much corn in the crib, so much firewood in the shed, so much food in the cellar or freezer, so much strength in the back or arms – and no more. This is the understanding that induces thrift, family coherence, neighborliness, local economies. Within accepted limits, these virtues become necessities. The agrarian sense of abundance comes from the experienced possibility of frugality and renewal within limits.

This is exactly opposite to the industrial idea that abundance comes from the violation of limits by personal mobility, extractive machinery, long-distance

dependents of an industrial economy too easily suffer the consequences of having no land: joblessness, homelessness, and want. This is not a theory. We have seen it happen.

I don’t think that being landless necessarily means owning land. It does mean being connected to a home landscape from which one may live by the interactions of a local economy and without the routine intervention of governments, corporations, or charities.

In our time it is useless and probably wrong to suppose that a great many urban people ought to go out into the countryside and become homesteaders or farmers. But it is not useless or wrong to suppose that urban people have agricultural responsibilities that they should try to meet. And in fact this is happening. The agrarian population among us is growing, and by no means is it made up merely of some farmers and some country people. It includes urban gardeners, urban consumers who are buying food from local farm-

“The agrarian population among us is growing, and by no means is it made up merely of some farmers and some country people. It includes urban gardeners, urban consumers who are buying food from local farmers, organizers of local food economies, consumers who have grown doubtful of the healthfulness, the trustworthiness, and the dependability of the corporate food system – people, in other words, who understand what it means to be landless.”

transport, and scientific or technological breakthroughs. If we use up the good possibilities in this place, we will import goods from some other place, or we will go to some other place. If nature releases her wealth too slowly, we will take it by force. If we make the world too toxic for honeybees, some compound brain, Monsanto perhaps, will invent tiny robots that will fly about, pollinating flowers and making honey.

To be landless in an industrial society obviously is not at all times to be jobless and homeless. But the ability of the industrial economy to provide jobs and homes depends on prosperity, and on a very shaky kind of prosperity too. It depends on “growth” of the wrong things such as roads and dumps and poisons – on what Edward Abbey called “the ideology of the cancer cell” – and on greed with purchasing power. In the absence of growth, greed, and affluence, the

ers, organizers of local food economies, consumers who have grown doubtful of the healthfulness, the trustworthiness, and the dependability of the corporate food system – people, in other words, who understand what it means to be landless.

Apologists for industrial agriculture rely on two arguments. In one of them, they say that the industrialization of agriculture, and its dominance by corporations, has been “inevitable.” It has come about and it continues by the agency of economic and technological determinism. There has been simply nothing that anybody could do about it.

The other argument is that industrial agriculture has come about by choice, inspired by compassion and generosity. Seeing the shadow of mass starvation looming over the world, the food conglomerates, the machinery companies, the chemical companies,

the seed companies, and the other suppliers of “purchased inputs” have done all that they have done in order to solve “the problem of hunger” and to “feed the world.”

The primary question for the corporations, and so necessarily for us, is not how the world will be fed, but who will control the land, and therefore the wealth, of the world. If the world’s people accept the industrial premises that favor bigness, centralization, and (for a few people) high profitability, then the corporations will control all of the world’s land and all of its wealth. If, on the contrary, the world’s people might again see the advantages of local economies, in which people live, so far as they are able to do so, from their home landscapes, and work patiently toward that end, eliminating waste and the cruelties of landlessness and homelessness, then I think they might reasonably hope to solve “the problem of hunger,” and several other problems as well.

But do the people of the world, allured by TV, supermarkets, and big cars, or by dreams thereof, want to live from their home landscapes? Could they do so, if they wanted to? Those are hard questions, not readily answerable by anybody. Throughout the industrial decades, people have become increasingly and more numerous ignorant of the issues of land use, of food, clothing, and shelter. What would they do, and what could they do, if they were forced by war or some other calamity to live from their home landscapes?

It is a fact, well attested but little noticed, that our extensive, mobile, highly centralized system of industrial agriculture is extremely vulnerable to acts of terrorism. It will be hard to protect an agriculture of genetically impoverished monocultures that is entirely dependent on cheap petroleum and long-distance transportation. We know too that the great corporations, which now grow and act so far beyond the restraint of “the natural affections of the human mind,” are vulnerable to the natural depravities of the human mind, such as greed, arrogance, and fraud.

The agricultural industrialists like to say that their agrarian opponents are merely sentimental defenders of ways of farming that are hopelessly old-fashioned, justly dying out. Or they say that their opponents are the victims, as Richard Lewontin put it, of “a false nos-

talgia for a way of life that never existed.” But these are not criticisms. They are insults.

For agrarians, the correct response is to stand confidently on our fundamental premise, which is both democratic and ecological: The land is a gift of immeasurable wealth. If it is a gift, then it is a gift to all the living in all time. To withhold it from some is finally to destroy it for all. For a few powerful people to own or control it all, or decide its fate, is wrong.

From that premise we go directly to the question that begins the agrarian agenda and is the discipline of all agrarian practice: What is the best way to use land? Agrarians know that this question necessarily has many answers, not just one. We are not asking what is the best way to farm everywhere in the world, or everywhere in the United States, or everywhere in Kentucky or Iowa. We are asking what is the best way to farm in each one of the world’s numberless places, as defined by topography, soil type, climate, ecology, history, culture, and local need. And we know that the standard cannot be determined only by market demand or productivity or profitability or technological capability, or by any other single measure, however important it may be. The agrarian standard, inescapably, is local adaptation, which requires bringing local nature, local people, local economy, and local culture into a practical and enduring harmony. 22

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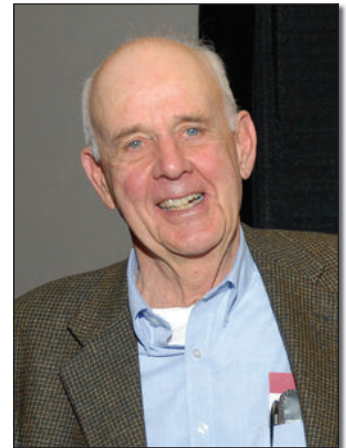


Photo by Gene Peach from The Quivira Coalition's 6th Annual Conference.

A View from the Field

Abiquiu, New Mexico: Chapter 5*

by Lisa Hamilton

Across the street from the pretty adobe church on the Abiquiu plaza is a gray brick building that no tourists notice. It is the José Ferran Gym, the community center where Virgil learned to roller skate four decades ago. On a Sunday in August 2007, just after church and lunch, it is the site of the annual meeting of El Merced del Pueblo Abiquiu, known here as “the Merced” or simply “the grant.”

Even after the U.S. government ratified the grant’s claim in 1894, the community has had a challenging time holding on to the land. Into the 1920s the land grant was still owned communally by the descendants of the original *genízaros*. While these people had never fit neatly into a single ethnic category, the government had erred on their native side and designated Abiquiu an Indian pueblo—an entity separate from the state but also subject to its caretaking and direction. After years of watching the poor treatment of their full-blooded Native American neighbors, in 1928 the community voted to give up their pueblo status and become a village of the state of New Mexico.

In Virgil’s explanation the decision was coerced by land speculators. These vulturous outsiders knew that when the pueblo became a village it would have to begin paying taxes. They hoped that a combination of ignorance and poverty would cause the community to default on those payments, at which time the state would take possession of the land, and in turn the speculators could buy it. It nearly happened in the 1930s: taxes had been paid on private holdings within Abiquiu, but the monies for the *ejido* mysteriously never made it to the state. When the government moved to seize the land, the community wrangled an extension. In 1942, they formed a cooperative to govern the grant, the membership dues of which paid off the delinquent taxes. Disaster was averted.

By and large it was a victory for the community. They got to keep their land and have ever since—that’s

why there’s an annual meeting today. The downside was that when the cooperative was formed, membership was opened to anyone who lived in Abiquiu and had twenty dollars cash to join. This let in people who weren’t descendants of the original grantees—according to Virgil, even some of the speculators themselves. It also shut out a number of true descendants who were too poor to pay. Today there are seventy-three members, only about 60 percent of them original descendants.

Despite the change in structure, in most hearts the grant is still the grant it always was. Membership is inherited and can be passed to only one person, most often a blood relative. (Virgil’s father, descended from one of the original grantee families, still retains his membership; Virgil received his from his grandfather Benjamin.) While most of the grant members still live in town, some have traveled here for this meeting from Española, Albuquerque, or farther afield. Beforehand there’s the air of an extended family reunion, with women hugging and kissing on the steps of the gym, men shaking hands.

Inside the gym there is a bathroom and a kitchen, but otherwise it is a single room with corrugated tin walls and old, wooden floors, most of it marked as a basketball court. A heavy fan in the wall rattles hard, churning the hot afternoon air. Fifty folding chairs have been set up, and they’re filling from the back; the front row is empty. Facing the audience is a line of folding tables with five chairs behind them, where the board members will sit.

Virgil is on the board, holding the position of range manager, which means he is in charge of the *ejido*. There’s a briefcase at his chair, but right now he’s

* This is an excerpt from *Deeply Rooted: Unconventional Farmers in the Age of Agribusiness* Copyright © 2009 by Lisa Hamilton. Reprinted by permission of Counterpoint Press and the author.

standing by the entrance, greeting and talking. He's up for reelection today. (When I asked him last night at the auction if there would be any campaigning, he said no. They either like you or they don't.) He's talking with a younger, skater-looking guy who's wearing a black T-shirt that reads high society against a picture of a green marijuana leaf. Next, he talks to an older man, the only one aside from him who is dressed in rancher uniform.

Surveying the room, I find it odd that the crowd here looks nothing like the cowboy crowd at the county fair. Virgil is dressed as usual, in boots, black jeans, and white hat. He wears a long-sleeved, collared shirt with a Southwest design on top and along the bottom; across the middle is an image of a man on horseback, looking over the range and toward white mountains. The board members all wear boots and jeans, but otherwise people here might as well be from Iowa or New Jersey for the way they dress: shorts and T-shirts, khakis and sneakers.

The grant's meetings use parliamentary procedure, which begins with a smack of the gavel and a roll call. Present. Presente. Sí. Right here. Forty-six members in attendance; the secretary enters it into the logbook. Two more people walk in and he changes it to forty-eight. The president reads aloud the minutes from last year.

When he finishes he calls for a perfunctory motion to approve the minutes as read. Instead people start standing up and letting bullets fly. One woman is furious about the limitless water rights she believes are being given to the man in the row in front of her, who will use them to build a hotel on the highway. She has a letter to prove her assumption, and has made copies for everyone in attendance. Another woman is demanding that the board—and if not them then a mutiny of the members—reverse the injustice that

has taken place with her sister's death, which passed membership in the land grant to her sister's husband rather than to her, which was what was directed by their mother's will. Others stand to defend the speakers or defend themselves, and before long it's a free-for-all—people formally address the group or just call out from their seats or whisper loudly to their neighbors. The bottle has been corked for twelve months and finally, suddenly, it is exploding. Thunder rolls above. The president patiently, tiredly, explains that there will be time to discuss all of this, but first they just need to get a motion to accept the minutes from last year as they were read. Yea? A lackluster chorus sounds. Nay? The two women with the original grievances dig in their heels.

The next six hours is a marble cake of chaos and order, with dozens of motions and votes to approve the proceedings and a record of it all written in careful longhand by the secretary. They debate whether the road through town should get pavement or speed bumps, discuss how to disburse permits for elk hunting on the grant, argue whether the final word on who inherits a membership lies with the grant members or the Rio Arriba County probate court. Rain beats down on the roof,

and thirty minutes later sun scorches the yard outside. The fan is turned off because it's too noisy to hear with it on, then it's turned back on because the stuffy heat is unbearable. Some members make impassioned pleas for family and land, others read magazines and eventually wander outside. When things go bad there are a handful of nasty comments but mostly the result is just plain communication breakdown. At one point an eloquent man in a sleeveless gray T-shirt rises and suggests that because the communication is so poor, perhaps they should discuss implementing a system that can better disseminate information between meetings, so that when they do meet it feels less like a firing range.



Virgil Trujillo. Photo by Lisa Hamilton.

No outsider could untangle the disputes that take place at this meeting, saddled as they are with layers of history both public and private. What is clear to even the newest of newcomers, though, is that owning this land together is not as obvious a task as it once was. No doubt the forefathers that Virgil invokes did their share of bickering, but at least they had a common vision of what the land was for. They all needed it to survive, so they had to work together in using it. Today, Virgil is one of just five people who still graze cattle on the ejido. He puts as many of his cows on the grant as he is allowed; it's an essential part of how he keeps his herd of eighty cattle alive. But he's the sole person with a significant economic interest in the land. The others with cows have no more than ten apiece, as a hobby. For the rest of the people in the grant, the original meaning of the land has become abstract. Or worse, Virgil fears, it has been forgotten.

The community's transition away from the land began before anyone who is alive today can remember. Many northern New Mexico historians date it to

Virgil told me, "but it's the well-to-dos who have all the sheep. It's the same as it is now: you have the well-to-dos and you have everyone else. There's not really a middle class."

Whereas survival before had been based on sourcing the raw materials of life, the new capitalist economy required cash. Families continued to raise gardens and livestock to feed themselves, but increasingly they moved away from subsistence agriculture and became dependent on incomes from jobs in the mining and logging industries, as well as in commodity agriculture. By the 1920s, up to 85 percent of men in a northern New Mexico village would leave to work elsewhere for six months of the year. In tiny Abiquiu, that was more than one hundred men, gone.

In many ways, Abiquiu's story is the story of rural America. The particular details of the community are unique; the early history of its capitalization brings to mind a tropical colony rather than a region of the United States. But in terms of Abiquiu's fate as a traditionally agricultural community, the story has parallels

“In many ways, Abiquiu’s story is the story of rural America. The particular details of the community are unique; the early history of its capitalization brings to mind a tropical colony rather than a region of the United States.”

the very end of the nineteenth century and the arrival of American capitalists, who introduced a new style of land use based in extraction. They saw the land as a sum of its resources, "virgin and almost unoccupied territory ripe for capitalizing." They brought a whole new set of business practices and technologies, most notably the railroad, which allowed minerals, lumber, and livestock to be shipped to industrial centers back East.

The profits went back East as well. Take the sheep industry, for instance. Most locals had a lifetime of experience raising sheep, but in small quantities. The new economy dealt in the tens of thousands. Because they didn't have the money to invest in big herds, locals instead sharecropped livestock owned by investors. Or they were hired as herders, the way Virgil's grandfather Benjamin was. "I guess you could say there was some money in Abiquiu during that period,"

from Georgia to Montana. After World War II, people started leaving and not coming back. In many cases it was a matter of necessity; Abiquiu was too poor to support them, even as part-time residents. At the same time there was so much growth elsewhere—Salt Lake City, Sacramento, even just over the mountains at Los Alamos National Laboratory—that it was hard to pass up the opportunity.

For those who stayed, agriculture increasingly lost its importance. Partly it was practical: it's hard to work a forty-hour week and still be on the land. But in addition to that, food production, once the daily existence of this community, was evaluated differently in the new cash economy. Considering all the labor that goes into growing a garden or raising livestock, the risk that weather and insects pose, it no longer seemed worth it. In the eyes of each new generation, there was no longer reason to struggle with the ten-inch rainfall.

Virgil puts it plainly: "Why bother? There's food at Bode's."

As people ceased to care about agriculture individually, the community aspects fell away as well. Every year fewer cattle graze on the grant's land. People stopped hunting there, stopped using it for much of anything other than collecting firewood. With individual jobs that take them to separate places each day, there's less reason to collaborate, less incentive to care for the land as a group. I'd guess at least half the members in that annual meeting haven't even been to the ejido in years.

This practical and emotional separation from the land is just the sort of transition that the Committee for Economic Development (CED) recommended in "An Adaptive Program for Agriculture," its report from 1962 that argued there was an "excess of resources" in agriculture; that the exodus from agriculture had been large, but not large enough. The CED advocated a facilitated migration of two million farmers out of agriculture, partly in the name of giving those people a chance at the "attainment and maintenance of high and secure standards of living" that the industrial system enabled. The problem is, nothing ever replaced agriculture in Abiquiu. As wage labor has become ever more scarce, only welfare has filled in.

This story of rural decline is particularly familiar in the interior West, where the wide-open spaces between cities make it less likely that former agricultural communities will fall under the suburban wing of an urban neighbor. Instead, towns shrivel up or they metastasize with the infections that poverty brings: alcoholism, drug abuse, despair. On one day while I was visiting Virgil, the front-page stories in the Rio Arriba County newspaper included a string of robberies, a

stabbing, a suicide—and a shortage of police officers. Inside: major layoffs at Los Alamos; a park ranger shot; a woman busted for bringing her boyfriend in jail a green chile hamburger from McDonald's with a baggy of heroin inside. For years, Rio Arriba has earned the dubious distinction of having the most drug-related deaths per capita of any county in the United States.

Ben Tafoya, who runs a nonprofit addiction recovery organization based in Española, traces the county's drug use directly to people's separation from the land. He begins by explaining that drug use nearly always stems from a personal loss. In a healthy grief process, a person goes through stages that include denial, anger, and eventually acceptance. The problem comes when a person gets stuck in one of those stages and

turns to drugs or alcohol to medicate the bad feelings.

"In northern New Mexico, what you have is entire communities that got stuck in one stage of grief," he told me. "And those feelings have been passed through generations now." As he sees it, the loss began with communities being robbed of



Virgil moving livestock through the pens. Photo by Lisa Hamilton.

their land grants after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, resulting in a sense of disenfranchisement and disillusionment with the new system in power. The loss continued when people were further disconnected from agricultural life in the twentieth century. In the past few decades the loss has multiplied, in part because of its own cure: as agriculture has become an untenable occupation, many people have turned to the state. But in order to qualify for general assistance in New Mexico, a person cannot own more than two thousand dollars' worth of land or other "non-liquid real property." In other words, if a person has managed somehow to hold on to some land, it's likely that to be eligible for welfare he or she will have to sell it. The cycle of loss and despair becomes self-perpetuating.

Most of the local newspaper's stories of drugs and violence take place in Española and involve players from the more heavily populated towns on the south side of the county. Abiquiu and other towns in more rural areas do seem more intact and secure, although according to Tafoya drug abuse is no less prevalent there, it's just less visible. Either way, Virgil, in any conversation about Abiquiu's woes, is sure to stress that goodness still prevails. "We have peace of mind and peace of heart," he says. "We don't have big money here, but we have big people."

Still, for those people in town who want to create better lives for themselves—the promise of the "Adaptive Plan for Agriculture" that was never delivered—every day is a struggle to pull Abiquiu away from the cliff over which so many rural communities have fallen. There has even been talk of Abiquiu regaining its designation as an Indian pueblo. Virgil explained that as a pueblo Abiquiu could build a casino like the one down the highway in Tesuque. Some like the idea of the fast dollar, he thinks, the "put in a nickel, pull out a million bucks" approach to life. But Virgil reminds them that becoming a pueblo means becoming a ward of the state; that back when Abiquiu was a pueblo, his grandfather—and probably theirs, too—was sent to Indian school. He believes it would be a step toward further dependence, and that is a step in the wrong direction.

Virgil has a solution of his own: the land. It is the one great resource they have in Abiquiu. Yes, it is dry, even desiccated in years of drought. In only two of the last ten years did the area get its ten inches of precipitation; in 2000 it had less than seven. And yet for two centuries the land sustained this community, with food as well as something more. "It was only on government paper that Abiquiu and its extended community was called poor," one historian wrote. "Abiqueños never thought of themselves as destitute or anything resembling poor, even in the Depression years." Because they had land, they were independent and proud—they were in charge of their own destiny.

Virgil insists that this could be true again. As range manager of the land grant, he is trying to implement all kinds of new actions that would get agriculture back on its feet and make it worthwhile to people

again. He'd like to improve the land's yield by planting more native grazing plants, like shrubby green winter fat, which offers cows something to eat even when snow covers the ground. He'd like the board to dip into its funds and buy fifty cattle, which could then be given to grant members who lost their cattle during the drought but want to get back in the game. And with more cows on the grant, he'd like to implement progressive land management techniques to get maximum production from the land.

"I'm just concerned that there aren't enough people up on the grant," he told me. "I'd like for people even to just ride their horses up there and say, That's the boundary, this is my land. Take their kids and say, This is going to be your land. What if every year we get everyone up there and go to the four corners of our property. Or do a ceremony like they used to do when the King would give them land, Oh, thank you, King! Oh, God, thank you." His eyes light up with the idea. "And why just once a year? Why not every month?"

It's not about food—Virgil isn't envisioning a return to subsistence farming. It's about the deeper rewards the land offers: Independence. Purpose. Continuity. The notion is so clear to him he can't believe no one else seems to feel this way.

"It's our home," he said, his voice straining. "You have to take care of your home, because if you don't pretty soon it's just a place. In Spanish we say, At least you have somewhere to drop dead. Ni siquiera tienes donde caerte muerto. Meaning, at least you have a home, a place to call your own. Just imagine when your generations come after you, and they're struggling like heck. Think of when they're having to bow to somebody else because they don't have a home. Those are the days when we're gonna be really sad."

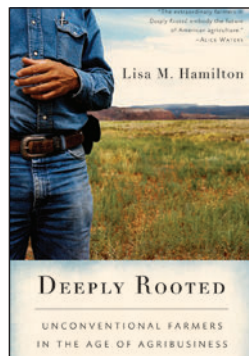
At the annual meeting, Virgil mostly sat patiently in his chair in front of the room, raising his hand to be called on in the midst of the chaos. When it came his turn to report as range manager, he stood before the members and made a plea in both English and Spanish, hands clasped before his chest. It ended with these words: "We're so small now, and the concerns are so big. I would encourage anyone to participate." He put out a legal pad and asked people to sign up for a committee that would take action toward using the ejido to its full potential.

The crowd responded with a spray of bullets. Some of the shots Virgil may have deserved, some not—again, the dealings of a community this tightly woven are too intimate for an outsider to judge. Though no one said it overtly, it seemed clear that people saw Virgil’s initiative as self-serving: invest in the land at the grant’s expense so that his herd—huge, to their eyes—could get even bigger. When the members voted to reelect or replace the board members, Virgil lost his seat. At the end of the meeting, his sign-up sheet was blank.

The next day, Virgil was right back in the groove, coming up with new ideas and wishing people would get involved. “You know, I had a good upbringing. A lot of seeds were planted, so I feel like I have to keep them going. That’s why I have the cattle. Could I be doing something else? Could I be going home on the weekend and relaxing and watching TV all day long, resting, so I can actually be my best at work when I come back on Monday? I could.” He takes a long pause. “But I can’t. I could, but I just can’t.” *W*



Photo by Madeleine Tilin



In this narrative nonfiction book she tells three stories, of an African-American dairyman in Texas who plays David to the Goliath of agribusiness corporations; a tenth-generation rancher in New Mexico struggling to restore agriculture as a pillar of his community; and a modern pioneer family in North Dakota breeding new varieties of plants to face the future’s double threat: climate change and the patenting of life forms. In unique ways, these “unconventional farmers” reject the passive role that modern agriculture has insisted they accept and instead reclaim their place as stewards of the land and leaders within society.

Deeply Rooted was published in May 2009 by Counterpoint Press (<http://www.lisamhamilton.com/book/DeeplyRooted.html>).

Writer and photographer Lisa M. Hamilton focuses on food and agriculture, particularly the stories of farmers. Her work has taken her from castration time on a Wyoming sheep ranch to a meeting of radical plant breeders in Iowa; from dairy farms in the highlands of Bavaria to sacred rice paddies along the coast of Japan.

*She is the author of two books: *Deeply Rooted: Unconventional Farmers in the Age of Agribusiness* and *Farming to Create Heaven on Earth*. Her work has also been published in *The Nation*, *Harper’s*, *National Geographic Traveler*, *Orion*, and *Gastronomica*.*

The Break of Day

Finding Agraria, Part 1

by Courtney White

I believe environmentalism is dying and will be replaced within fifteen years by a resurgent agrarianism, focused on food and led by youth.

In this essay I argue that after fifty years of strenuous effort environmentalism has failed in its mission to avert the ecological crisis now confronting the planet. Furthermore, its strategies and goals, forged in the twentieth-century, are badly misaligned for the challenges of the present Age of Consequences. As a result, the environmentalism is being supplanted by a new effort based on local food economies and motivated by the goals of stewardship, coexistence, and resilience. This effort both rectifies the shortcomings of environmentalism and builds on the movement's successes. It also meets the challenges of a post-industrial future. This hopeful effort is called a new agrarianism, and it will be led, as all genuine progress is, by young people.

I

Movements are organized efforts that work toward a particular goal or end. Almost by definition, sooner or later they either succeed or fail or fade away over time. Some succeed or fail outright on their merits, while others are required by changing circumstances to evolve in order to accomplish their goals. Some movements ultimately succeed thanks to this evolution, and some fail despite it. Many more simply never gain traction and eventually exit the stage of public affairs.

Examples of outright success include the abolition and suffrage movements of the 19th century, which after long struggles culminated in clear victories: the Emancipation Proclamation of 1862, followed by the 13th Amendment in 1865 abolishing slavery, and the 19th Amendment, signed into law in 1920, which finally granted women the right to vote. A modern example is the anti-smoking movement, which, while

not wholly victorious, overcame long odds and tenacious opponents to successfully ostracize tobacco use in America and thus improve the health of its citizens. In each case, the goals of these movements were focused and their success easy to measure.

Other successful movements had broader aims. The reforms of the Progressive movement at the turn of the previous century, for example, were diverse, including the direct election of U.S. Senators, creation of the political referendum process, implementation of the income tax, the first food safety laws, and the conservation achievements of President Teddy Roosevelt. These were important developments with a demonstrable record of success. So too with the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s, which had legislative, political, economic, and social objectives. With the election and inauguration of Barack Obama as the 44th president of the United States, the movement can now add a metrical punctuation mark to its long list of successes.

Some movements were outright failures by any measure. The Constitutionally-mandated prohibition on alcohol during the 1920s, for example, not only failed spectacularly but required an additional amendment to the Constitution to undo its lofty intentions. And some good ideas never took off, such as the periodic attempt to create a third political party in America – an effort that has failed repeatedly to create a viable alternative to Republican and Democratic hegemony.

Some movements had to evolve over time in order to maintain early success or to remain relevant. An example is the labor movement. Born in a very different era, it has struggled to remain vital, enduring many ups and downs over the decades. Despite continued hardship, its metrics of success suggest that the labor movement continues to see progress in its overall

goal of improving conditions, pay, and career opportunities for American workers.

Some movements, despite their attempts at evolution, are ultimately forced to pull over to the side of history's highway and watch the world speed by. Communism comes to mind, as does laissez-faire capitalism (disastrously reincarnated recently on Wall Street). Some movements never manage to merge with the heavy traffic despite their merits, such as pacifism and various brands of anti-consumerism. But in each case, the metrics of success and failure are plain to see.

Which brings me to environmentalism.

The movement to protect nature has also evolved dramatically over time, walking a long and eventful road in America from Henry Thoreau to John Muir to Aldo Leopold to David Brower and beyond. For most of the first half of the 20th century it went by the appellation of 'conservation' and focused on resource scarcity and nature preservation. With the publication

Of course, environmentalism is not the cause of this situation, far from it. Furthermore, from the start it had to struggle uphill against mighty adversaries. But if the goal of the movement was the prevention of these global trends, then it has abjectly failed.

In his most recent book, *The Bridge at the End of the World*, Gus Speth, the Dean of Yale University's School of Forestry and a well-known 'insider' environmentalist, writes: "Our efforts have not succeeded...the evidence is in. We have won many victories, but we are losing the planet."

He blames the decline of the global environment on the systemic failure of capitalism to consider the long-term ecological costs embedded in its pro-growth ideology. But he has harsh words for his fellow environmentalists too. "My generation is a generation of great talkers, overly fond of conferences," he writes. "We have analyzed, debated, discussed and negotiated these global issues almost endlessly. But on action, we have fallen far short."

“There are two spiritual dangers in not owning a farm. One is the danger of supposing that breakfast comes from the grocery, and the other that heat comes from a furnace.”

- Aldo Leopold

of Rachel Carson's exposé *Silent Spring* in 1962, conservation was replaced by environmentalism, which expanded the movement's work to include human as well as animal welfare, tackling important issues such as industrial pollution, urban sprawl, nuclear power, and, now, global warming.

Unlike the evolving labor movement, however, environmentalism must be judged today, despite its valiant and energetic efforts, to be a failure.

Take just two important metrics. The first is the condition of the planet. I won't go into a litany of distressing news here, but it is safe to say that the consensus among scientists, researchers, and activists is that our global environment is deteriorating to the point where human and non-human well-being is in serious jeopardy. All important trend lines point downward for the good stuff, and sharply upward for the bad; and with climate change now underway, these trend lines will likely steepen.

Of course, there has been plenty of action over the years, as Speth notes. His list includes: regulations of various stripes, positive and negative subsidies, cost-benefit analyses, citizen lawsuits, government enforcement, international treaties, parks and protected areas, species protection plans, ecolabeling, "sustainable development" strategies, green architecture, and even the marketplace.

But none of it, he writes, fundamentally altered those planetary trend lines.

The second is more qualitative, though some hard data is beginning to trickle in. I'm referring to the slow but steady dissolution of the bond between people and nature. This bond, once strong, has eroded over the years to the point where most Americans have just a fleeting relationship with the natural world today. Aldo Leopold fretted about this decades ago when he wrote in the *Sand County Almanac* that "there are two

spiritual dangers in not owning a farm. One is the danger of supposing that breakfast comes from the grocery, and the other that heat comes from a furnace." These dangers came true. There is little doubt today that Americans rarely think twice about where their food or their heat comes from.

The trend lines on our bond with nature point downward as well. Not only has the population of farmers and ranchers dwindled to 2% of the nation's total population (down from 40% in 1920), new research shows decreasing participation since the 1990s in outdoor pastimes, including hunting, fishing, and camping, particularly by young people. A recent report in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* said these trends could curtail conservation efforts as a general appreciation for nature declines among the next generation.

Recently, author Richard Louv raised this alarm to a new level by calling attention to a spreading malady he calls "nature deficit disorder," which he defines as the human cost of alienation from nature. He chronicles its consequences in his book *Last Child in the Woods*, which begins with a quote by a fourth-grader who likes to play indoors because "that's where all the electrical outlets are."

"A kid today can likely tell you about the Amazon rain forest," writes Louv, "but not about the last time he or she explored the woods in solitude, or lay in a field listening to the wind and watching the clouds move."

For a new generation, nature is more abstraction than reality, he says, something to watch, to consume, and to ignore. As the young spend less time in nature, their experiences narrow, physiologically and psychologically, thus reducing the richness of their lives. This is important because the health of the planet will likely depend on how the young today respond to nature, how they will raise their own children to think about the natural world, and how each chooses to live their daily lives.

Louv likens the current situation to the passing of a frontier in which Americans romanticized, protected, and destroyed nature. "Now that frontier – which existed in the family farm, the woods at the end of the road, the national parks, and in our hearts – is itself

disappearing or changing beyond recognition," he writes. "In the space of a century, the American experience of nature has gone from direct utilitarianism to romantic attachment to electronic detachment."

While environmentalism didn't cause this downward trend either, it obviously had little effect in stopping or reversing it. Therefore, taken together with the condition of the planet, these metrics indicate to me that this particular movement, after fifty years of noble effort, has failed in its primary missions.

II

In my opinion, the environmental movement failed to accomplish its goals for three main reasons:

The first is Wendell Berry's long-standing criticism that environmentalism never developed an economic program to go along with its preservation and health programs. It had no economic retort, in other words, for industrialism. And without an effective alternative, the average American had no choice but to participate in a destructive model of economic growth. Wallace Stegner, Berry's mentor, voiced a similar complaint years ago when he wrote that westerners had not yet "created a society to match the scenery."

I saw this played out during my experience within the Sierra Club, where I learned that most activists considered environmental problems to have environmental solutions, ignoring their economic sources. This meant we spent too much time and energy on symptoms instead of causes. Aldo Leopold flagged this problem as well when he cautioned us against trying to "fix the pump without fixing the well." We didn't heed his advice, however, and for fifty years focused our attention on the pump while the well ran dry.

Many environmentalists might argue, in contrast, that they did have an economic alternative: tourism and recreation. This is true – and for a while the benefits of both looked generous. But over time recreation and its associated side effects – congestion, exurban sprawl, transitory populations – began to take on darker hues, especially as it became clear they weren't doing much to reverse the trends mentioned earlier, and may have even made the situation worse in some places. More importantly, as the twenty-first century progresses, with its concerns about climate change,

carbon footprints, peak oil (\$7-a-gallon gasoline), food-miles, and sustainability in general, an economy based on tourism looks rather shaky.

Second, environmentalism failed because it left the land behind. The movement lost the feeling of “the soil between our toes,” as Leopold put it, meaning it lost an intimate understanding of how land actually works. As a result it lost what Leopold described as the role of individual responsibility for the health of the land. “Health is the capacity of the land for self-renewal,” he wrote, and “conservation is our effort to understand and preserve this capacity.” But by losing the feel of soil between our toes, the movement lost the ability to understand, and thus preserve, land health – the foundation on which all health depends.

For example, I learned that while activists and others could recognize poor land use and rightly worked to correct it, they lost an understanding of good land use, particularly those for-profit activities such as logging and ranching that could be conducted sustainably. Instead, as the movement drifted away from land it began to equate non-use with the highest and best use of land, especially on the public domain. The exception was recreation, of course, though as historian Richard White has written in reference to our global environmental predicament it is clear that “play can’t handle the weight.”

Third, environmentalism failed to walk the talk of a land ethic. While trumpeting Leopold’s famous call to enlarge our ethical sphere to include plants and animals, environmentalists ignored his insistence that people and their economic activities be included too. “There is only one soil, one flora, one fauna, and one people, and hence only one conservation problem,” Leopold wrote in the *Sand County Almanac*. “Economic and esthetic land uses can and must be integrated, usually on the same acre.” Or

this from his essay *The Ecological Conscience*: “A thing is right only when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the community, and the community includes the soil, waters, fauna, and flora, as well as people.”

A land ethic encompassed it all. But environmentalists didn’t listen. Instead, they engaged in a form of environmental isolationism. Work was segregated from nature, and nature was largely put off-limits in parks, wildernesses, refuges, and other types of protected areas. Under this preservationist paradigm, not only was there no attempt to integrate people into nature economically, an energetic effort was made by some activists to curtail certain land uses, such as ranching,

whether they preserved the integrity, stability and beauty of the community or not. The land, in their mind, had to be “saved” apart from the people, and their pitch to the public emphasized dehumanized landscapes – pretty pictures of wild country and images of charismatic wildlife. In general, while activists were quick to invoke Leopold in their campaigns to ‘save’ this or that, they ignored his holistic view that “bread and beauty grow best together.”

This led environmentalists, from mid-century on, to take a colossal gamble: that a vision of a peopleless wilderness could motivate the public to save the natural world.

A classic example is the recent BBC documentary series *Planet Earth*. It is a stunningly beautiful look at wild animals in their wilderness homes, including snow leopards, Bactrian camels, African dogs, and polar bears, many of which teeter on the edge of extinction. At the end came an impassioned plea from the filmmakers to help save these magnificent species. However, there were no people in the series (other than the filmmakers themselves), and barely any sign of human activity. In other words, the series offered



Aldo Leopold. Photo courtesy of The Aldo Leopold Foundation (www.aldo-leopold.org).

no clues about coexistence, about integration, about how bread and beauty might grow together. Instead, nature was presented, as it has been for decades now, in isolation from the dominant species on the planet.

The colossal gamble failed. Isolationism did not alter the downward spiral of ecological degradation and loss. Now with the onset of global warming – a consequence of bad economic behavior by the dominant species – the idea of “protection” has been rendered mostly meaningless. A national park won’t save the pika or the polar bear. We must try something else.

In retrospect, Leopold was right all along – we need to find a place for people in nature, not outside of it.

Which brings me to the new agrarianism. Indisputably, it’s on the rise. Across the nation, there is a resurgent interest in local, family-scale, sustainable food, fiber, and fuel production. It began slowly in the 1980s, but has gathered a great deal of speed recently. Local food is the focus and key to this new movement, but it’s more than food systems – it’s collaborative watershed groups focused on restoring health to riparian areas; it’s the innovative use of livestock to combat noxious weed infestations; it’s the carbon-sequestering practices of good land stewardship; and much more.

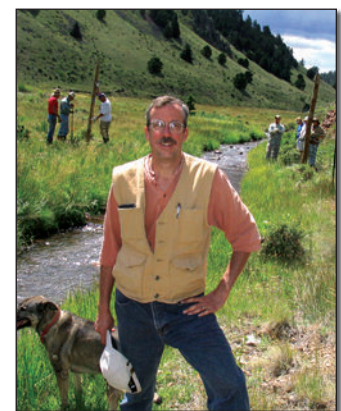
Agrarianism is on the rise for a simple reason: it effectively corrects the three failures of environmentalism that I described, and thus addresses the challenges of the 21st century. First, it’s economic. By implementing sustainable profit and work at local scales, it creates a viable alternative to the industrial economy. It’s not theoretical either – it exists and it works. Second, by definition it puts our toes back into contact with the soil again. The new agrarianism’s emphasis on stewardship, coexistence, and resilience requires daily contact with the earth-digging, planting, herding, sawing, working. Third, it walks the talk of a land ethic. It encompasses soil, plants, animals, and people and strives for a harmonious balance between all. Perhaps just as importantly, a new agrarianism sparks joy and laughter. It requires care and affection and love to succeed, including affection for one another. It gives not merely takes.

New agrarians practice what Aldo Leopold called a unifying force, something, as he put it, “more univer-

sal than profit, less awkward than government, less ephemeral than sport; something that reaches into all times and places, where men live on land, something that brackets everything from rivers to raindrops, from whales to hummingbirds, from land estates to window-boxes. I can see only one such force: a respect for land as a living organism; a voluntary decency in land-use exercised by every citizen and every land-owner out of a sense for and obligation to that great biota we call America.”

A new agrarianism is that decency. And as we begin to tip over on the other side of the bell-shaped curve called Industrialism the issues of decency, food, hope, joy, and good land use couldn’t be more important. 20

[Finding Agraria - Part 2 will be published in the next issue of the Journal]



Courtney White is the Executive Director of The Quivira Coalition.

Research

Amish Farm Economics^{*}

by Randall E. James, PhD

Small highly diversified Amish farms relying on traditional draft horse powered equipment have remained surprisingly competitive even in a market dominated by huge farms with massive machinery investments (Bender, 2001; Stinner et al. 1999, 1989).

The machinery and farming methods used on Amish farms is largely dictated by the *ordnung* or spoken rules of each church district (Kraybill and Olshan, 1994) (Drake and James, 1993). There are over 1400 church districts, or congregations, of old and new Amish in at least 33 states in the United States and one Canadian province. Church districts typically contain between 20 and 40 families and are clustered geographically into more than 250 settlements of various sizes. The total Amish population exceeds 170,000 and more than doubles every 20 years (Kray-

bill and Hostetler, 2001). Amish farms often have between 60 and 100 acres. A dairy herd of 16 to 20 cows is common and often provides the major source of farm income. Larger herds are common in church districts that allow milking machines. Diversity is very important and most farms have a wide variety of other agricultural enterprises. Most of the feed for the livestock is produced on the farm (Zook, 1994).

Many universities, including Ohio State University, annually produce farm enterprise budgets that estimate costs and returns for various crops and livestock (Moore et al., 2003). These budgets can be help-

ful to large-scale conventional agriculture but are of only marginal use to Amish farmers. Portions of these budgets, like seed costs and fertilizer, are similar for Amish and non-Amish farms, other portions are completely different. Estimating the cost of machinery, farmer and draft horse labor involved in various farm operations is particularly difficult.

Studies conducted in 2002 and 2003 on Amish farms estimated the major machinery costs and draft horse hours needed for a variety of farm tasks. The typical

number of horses hitched for common farm operations was also documented. Estimating human hours involved can be calculated using the number of horse hours and the typical hitch. These studies were conducted in the Geauga Amish Settlement, which is centered in Geauga County, Ohio. The set-

tlement is the fourth-largest Amish settlement in the world with approximately 1,800 families and over 80 church districts (Miller, 2001).

Methodology

In 2002 the researchers conducted group interviews on machinery costs with three separate small groups of Amish farmers in the Geauga Amish Settle-

^{*}Paper Presentation: American Society of Agricultural Engineers, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, August 10, 2004 [source: <http://sustainableag.osu.edu/education/2005FarmScienceReview.htm>]



Amish country near Mt. Hope, Ohio. Photo by Courtney White.

ment. Each group interview lasts approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was conducted in three different Amish homes. An Amish farmer host invited neighboring farmers (normally 6 to 10 people) to participate in each meeting.

Using a set interview guide each group was asked to discuss and agree upon the average cost, average useful life, salvage value and annual maintenance costs of 23 common pieces of machinery used on Amish farms. The participants were encouraged to discuss each piece of equipment and to reach consensus on the various values. A maximum average life of any piece of equipment was set at 30 years. It was recognized that some equipment may last longer, however, the farmers themselves often retire and the equipment is resold after approximately 30 years.

Most equipment used on Amish Farms is no longer manufactured, therefore the farmers were asked

three interviews took place in different host Amish homes with different sets of farmers than the 2002 study. Using a set interview guide each group was asked to discuss and agree upon the amount of acres/day a typical horse hitch would be able to work for various field operations. In two cases, manure spreading and firewood cutting, the estimates were made in the hours/day and hours/cord respectively, instead of acres/day.

Results and Discussion

A set of means was calculated for all the values from the three group interviews in 2002. The total mean purchase price for all of the major machinery on Amish farms was found to be less than \$24,000. Depreciation for the entire line of machinery was approximately \$740. Mean annual maintenance costs for all of the machinery was approximately \$980, op-

“Most of U.S. agriculture gave up farming with horses at least a generation ago and it is easy to view the Amish as an anachronism, a part of our rural past. However, it is interesting to note that while farm numbers nationally are declining, the Amish continue to establish new successful farming communities. Specific data is not available but it is likely that in terms of farm numbers the Amish represent one of the fastest-growing segments of our agricultural industry.”

to establish values based on good, serviceable, used equipment that a full-time farmer might buy. Some pieces of equipment like hay wagons, forecarts, and hay tedders are routinely bought new, and the farmers developed values based on new equipment in these cases. At the end of the study, the researchers realized that two important pieces of equipment, a broadcast fertilizer spreader and a pesticide sprayer, had been omitted. Both of these are ordinarily purchased new, so the researchers visited and interviewed an Amish equipment dealer who supplies these to the community, to obtain the necessary values.

In 2003 the researchers conducted a second study designed to estimate the amount of horse labor needed and the typical number of horses hitched to accomplish various farm operations. Again, utilizing a group interview process, as discussed above, three separate small groups of Amish farmers were interviewed. The

portunity costs were approximately \$970, and total annual cost was slightly over \$2,200.

Mean values for all of the information gleaned from the three group interviews conducted in 2003 on horse labor needs and the typical hitches for Amish farm operations is found in Table 1[†]. Based on discussions with Amish farmers a normal horse working day was set at 6 hours, consisting of three hours in the morning, a noon break, and three hours in the afternoon. The final column in Table 1 is a calculated estimate of the amount of human labor involved in each operation. Since each team, regardless of the number of horses in the team, is driven by one farmer, it is possible to divide the 6-hour horse and driver day by the mean acres/day to calculate the amount of farmer la-

[†]. Table 1 can be seen from the original document at <http://sustainableag.osu.edu/education/2005FarmScienceReview.htm>

bor required. In a few cases such as corn silage hauling, small grain hauling and hay hauling two people are assigned to each horse team, and the value is adjusted accordingly.

Discussions with Amish farmers and local auction prices indicate that a serviceable two-year-old draft horse mare or gelding, broke to harness, can be purchased for approximately \$1,100. Most draft horses have a working life of approximately 12 years. After this time they are often kept for light work until they die or are euthanized. Horse depreciation can be calculated as \$1100 divided by 12 years = \$91.61/yr. or approximately \$0.25/day. At current market values for hay and grain it should cost approximately \$675/year to feed a single working draft horse (Kline, Porr and Cardina, 2000). An additional cost of approximately \$25/year should be added for vaccines and health care.

Draft horses normally sleep standing up so bedding costs are trivial. In addition, they are normally not shod. They are generally co-mingled with the other livestock in the barns and pastures. Therefore it is reasonable to charge the costs of pasture and housing to the other livestock, since the horses are primarily used to grow the feed and haul the manure of the other livestock.

The total annual cost of owning and maintaining a single draft horse can be estimated as \$92 for depreciation plus \$700 for feed and health care for a total of \$792/year or \$2.20/day. The total annual cost of harness for a single horse was found in the 2002 interviews to be \$36 or \$0.10/day. So the total daily cost of a draft horse including harness is approximately \$2.30.

Information in Table 1 can be used to allocate the amount of operator time and horse labor, converted to 6-hour horse days, and costs, at \$2.30/day needed

for each crop in an Amish rotation. For example, one acre of ear corn requires 7.5 "horse days" or approximately \$17 for field operations including plowing, disking, harrowing, planting, fertilizing, spring, cultivating, and picking. Corn production does not require other operations such as hay raking, mowing or baling.

Conclusions

Information from these studies was used to produce a series of crop enterprise budgets for horse-drawn/Amish practices. The format for the budgets was made to be similar to the format used for non-Amish enterprise budgets available through the Ohio State University Extension (Moore et. al., 2003). Because the formats for both the Amish and non-Amish budgets are similar, direct comparisons between these radically different agricultural systems can be made.

Many items such as seed, fertilizer and chemical costs were held the same in both sets of budgets. Some items were changed in the Amish budgets based on the research. For example, the conventional agriculture corn budget, based on 1000 acres, estimates a

machinery charge of \$59/acre. The Amish corn budget, based on 7.5 acres, has an estimated machinery charge of \$19 and a draft horse charge of \$17 for total of only \$36/acre. Items such as drying costs and trucking costs are not included in the Amish budgets because all of the ear corn produced is dried on the stalk and fed to owned livestock.

Comparisons of the budgets for the two systems found that on a per acre basis, return to labor management (net return above all costs except labor and management) was consistently higher in the Amish farming systems. Return to labor management for the Amish farming system was estimated to be \$126/acre



Amish farmer and author, David Kline with grandson. Photo by Courtney White.

for small grains, \$233/acre for alfalfa hay, and \$65/acre for corn. Compare to return of only \$28/acre for small grains, \$124/acre for alfalfa and a loss of \$9/acre for corn using conventional farming practices.

Operator labor/acre was consistently higher on Amish farms compared to non-Amish farms. On Amish farms approximately 12, 25 and 17 hours of labor/acre were required for small grains, alfalfa hay and corn respectively. Non-Amish farms required approximately 3.5, 6.5 and 3.6 hours of labor/acre respectively for the same crops. However, the Amish farm far less acres. The typical Amish farm rotation of 15 acres of small grain, 15 acres of corn and 20 acres of alfalfa hay would have an estimated total labor requirement of only 920 hours/year. In most cases, this labor requirement can easily be met in an Amish family by the operator and older children. In contrast the 1000 acres of corn on which the non-Amish budget is based would require 3600 hours. This large time requirement often necessitates hiring labor and return to the farm operator is reduced by the total cost of the hired labor.

Which system is ultimately viewed as "better" is a value laden question, heavily dependent on individual goals. Most of U.S. agriculture gave up farming with horses at least a generation ago and it is easy to view the Amish as an anachronism, a part of our rural past. However, it is interesting to note that while farm numbers nationally are declining, the Amish continue to establish new successful farming communities. Specific data is not available but it is likely that in terms of farm numbers the Amish represent one of the fastest-growing segments of our agricultural industry. 2

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- Courtney



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