

Cultivating Community:
Local Business People and Family Farmers
Sharing Values and Mutual Support

by Jo Barrett, King Hill Farm
for a talk given to Blue Hill Area Chamber of Commerce
March 19, 2003

Cultivating Community: Local Business People and Family Farmers Sharing Values and Mutual Support
by Jo Barrett, King Hill Farm
for a talk given to Blue Hill Area Chamber of Commerce
March 19, 2003

Imagine living in a house where there is no food. This house has no pantry, no cupboards, indeed, no kitchen either. Three times a day a truck arrives to deliver ready-made food. Think how vulnerable you would be if a glitch occurred in the system, how hungry you'd get, waiting for it to be fixed. Imagine how frightened you'd be if you suspected someone had access to the system who did not have your health and well-being in mind (or worse, looked upon you as an enemy.) Think of how you would never have that cozy, secure feeling you get when someone is baking or cooking a nice stew. Crazy, right? For house substitute community, and for kitchen substitute farm. Imagine how it would be to live in a community with no farms. We'd be 100% dependent on trucked-in food and we'd never see cows grazing, carrots growing, hay being mowed, or any number of farm scenes. Our children would not have the opportunity to visit the new lambs or discover the joys of digging potatoes from the earth, as if discovering gold. We'd be totally dependent on a food system over which we had no control.

Building Community

Obviously you're not all alike and I don't know all of you but the fact that you're living in a small town, in a rural state, that you run a business, and care enough to come to a Chamber of Commerce meeting already tells me a lot. I suspect that most of us here care about the well-being of the community, the beauty of the surroundings, the education of our children, the well-being of neighbors and neighborliness, clean air and water, humane treatment of animals, delicious food, healthy food, local control, having a voice, supporting American workers, independence, perhaps fishing and hunting, and more. I think that's a lot of really good stuff to have in common. Upholding these values is made easier and more sure if we keep things small and personal – small enough to maintain local control and personal enough so that we are accountable to each other and we stand behind our products as well as our word. “Small and personal, it turns out, is not only more beautiful than big, it's more efficient, equally productive, more adaptable, more secure, and it contributes much more to our communities, our economies, our health, and our lives.” (Estes)

Family farms are disappearing at an alarming rate. There are myriad reasons; globalization and low food prices are chief among them. One of the many hidden costs of “cheap” food is the “widespread and continuing loss of small family farms in the United States.” (Heffern 30) Bishop Raymond Burke of National Catholic Rural Life Conference is quoted saying,

‘This ongoing crisis for family farms is quickly leading to the last days of a system of farming that has contributed greatly to the building of our nation's cultural, economic, social, and environmental fabric. The loss of these farms would be a tremendous loss for us as a nation and a people.’ (Heffern 30)

A recent study, Scale of Agricultural Production, Civic Engagement, and Community Welfare, out of Cornell University and Clarkson University states that the correlation of farm size (or business size) with the well-being of rural communities is supported. (Henning 20)

Communities with small-scale family farms:

- have more economically independent people
- have more civically motivated people

-have greater community vitality (Henning)

Small farms help economic development by:

-circulating income locally

-enhancing local businesses, schools, parks, churches, clubs, newspapers, services, employment, and civic participation

While large, corporate farms:

-mean absentee ownership

-cause towns to die off

-lose jobs to mechanization

-drain off income to distant enterprises (Rossett)

Fitting into the community is valued by small farmers as opposed to industrial farms that cause problems of run-off, manure stench, pesticide drift, etc. Large-scale, absentee owner farms are linked with poverty, unemployment, violent crimes and low birth weight babies. Small, owner operated farms are associated with more middle-class populations who take an active part in their communities. "Politicians, community planners, educators, voters – everyone would do well to promote the development of more small-scale family farms. A community of mainly small farms has more self-employed residents than a community of fewer small-scale farms." (Henning 20)

The bio-diversity of small farms resulting from orchards, livestock, gardens, ponds, crops, etc. enhances the landscape and local natural resources. Owner operators care more about their impact on local ecology as well as on the community.

Keeping \$ in the Community

Food is more than calories, vitamins & minerals. We grow as families with food a central focus. We offer guests a bite to eat as an act of friendship and welcome. There is nothing that builds community like food in the form of pot-luck dinners, bake sales, picnics, pancake breakfasts, and so on. Someone is going to get paid for that food. Maybe your farmer/neighbor – maybe Philip Morris. You can use your food dollars to vote for the kind of world and the kind of food you want.

Economists have determined that money spent locally turns over 3-7 times. They use the term "multiplier theory," which Russell Libby, Executive Director of Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA), helped me understand. What actually gets multiplied is the impact of each dollar. If you spend a dollar locally it will impact 3-7 different local businesses before it leaves the local economy. Obviously that same dollar spent at a national or multi-national chain has very little impact on the local economy. Libby has a term, "Leaky Bucket", to describe the phenomenon of our sending money out of our communities faster than it comes in. He says that Maine's net outflow for food is \$50 million per week. We sell lobsters, potatoes, blueberries, etc., which help fill the "bucket" but every time we send food dollars to out of state suppliers or international suppliers, the money flows out of the holes in the bucket. Food dollars paid directly to farmers keeps the money swirling around in the bucket 3-7 times before it finds a hole.

If every household were to spend \$10 per week on local food, (\$10 earmarked for food anyway) we'd keep \$100 million every 6 months circulating within Maine. Libby uses a 6 month season to reflect the Maine growing season; if you factored in meat, eggs, milk, winter greenhouse products, etc. we could keep more than \$100 million working for us in our state every year – all for \$10 per week.

Survey Says...

I surveyed 16 farmers in the Blue Hill area about their buying habits to see if they support local businesses. In terms of general habits, at least ten of them said they buy local most of the time and another four said some of the time. They all make a point of buying some things locally and many consider things other than price in their buying decisions. Two have never been to big box stores and most of the others avoid them in favor of owner-operated businesses. Many were willing to pay a bit more to support local enterprises. Most were frustrated that they could not shop locally to a greater extent because of products being unavailable at a local level, and to a lesser extent, because of prices. Overall the farmers I talked to make a point of supporting their neighbors' businesses. When asked why local business people should buy from their farms most cited quality, freshness, strengthening community and our local economy, and mutual support as reasons. As Flossie Howard of Ken-Rose Farm put it, "Turn around's fair play!"

The Economics of Local (It's the economy, stupid!)

Of every food dollar, it is estimated that:

9 cents goes to farmers

10 cents goes to Philip Morris

6 cents goes to Con Agra (Heffern 34)

This drives farmers out of business and makes local food less and less available, forcing communities to export money in order to eat. Rather than food dollars recirculating in the community, the greatest part of them goes to distributors, processors, and multi-national corporations. While food is perceived as low cost, the money is immediately leaving the community and enriching those who don't care about us, our community, our schools, our water quality, our kids, and so on. "The real price of a market basket of food has increased by only 2.8% since 1984...During that same time, the amount farmers get for that food has fallen by 35.7%." (Christisen)

For years small farms have been marginalized with the argument that we have to feed the world. This led us all to believe that large farms, that is to say industrial farms, are more efficient. But small farms are actually more productive by far per acre. They produce "from 200 – 1000% more per acre than large farms." (Rossett) The monocultures of large farms produce big yields but make poor use of space, require heavy equipment, and heavy use of pesticides & herbicides. Small farmers rotate crops, incorporate livestock, and use diversity to make efficient use of space. Total production is far greater with less damage to the environment.

There are many hidden or invisible costs behind our seemingly "cheap" food. Great amounts of tax money go into corporate welfare for the huge industrial food growers and processors. They use public money to support their endeavors and are then able to price their products low. Farmers charging the real cost of raising food seem to have higher prices but aren't tapping into public funds for hidden costs. The grain traders and exporters got more gain from the \$30 billion farm emergency payments in 2000 than the farmers did. This bailout only covered a small portion of the farmer' losses. (Andrews)

"Cheap" feedlot beef is another example of hidden costs in food pricing. Consider the costs of:

- antibiotic resistance due to routine use of antibiotics in raising livestock
- environmental degradation from concentrated manure, drug, and fertilizer run-off
- heart disease from eating animals raised in unnatural circumstances

- E.coli poisoning brought on by animals raised on unnatural diets in tight confinement
 - corn subsidies that artificially lower feed costs
 - imported oil (Pollen 76)
- The public, not the ranchers or processors, pays these costs in taxes, health insurance, lost wages while ill, etc.

Kathleen Kelley of the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP) reports that we in the U.S. imports 40% of our food, including many foods that we can and do grow here such as wheat, corn, beef, pork, peppers, onions, and so on. These often come from countries that are not feeding their own people because they are selling commodities on the world market at prices below the cost of production. This practice destroys competitors who charge the real cost of production.

New Zealand and Australia did this with sheep products

China with honey and almonds

Canada & Mexico with beef (soon Brazil & Argentina will too)

Argentina with honey

Here's a thought: If U.S. honey producers are starved out, where will we get enough bees to pollinate our vegetable and fruit crops? Where is the sense in this "food swap" practice? We are at the point where trucks and planes are crossing each others' paths loaded with the same products, importing a product such as milk into an area that is exporting milk. Here in Maine we do it with potatoes.

Food travels great distances. Estimates range from 1200 – 2500 miles. The figure most often used is 1500 miles. Most states buy 90% of their food from somewhere else. It is estimated that 10 calories of fossil fuel energy go into producing, processing, and transporting every calorie of food. (Heffern) The average 18 wheeler gets 6 miles per gallon and 50% of the trucks on the road are carrying food. Imagine the cost of road upkeep alone. Now factor in climate change and ill health from CO2 emissions. People are falling ill and dying from air pollution. How much of it could we avoid by switching our buying habits to local to the greatest degree possible? The other question to ponder is: How much better could we afford the true costs of local foods if we weren't tapped out, paying hidden costs for subsidies and health care costs?

Some say organic is the answer. Certainly "...non-organic food uses more energy in the production process. Non-organic milk, for example, needs 5 times more energy per cow than organic milk." (Jones) This is due to the high energy demands of producing fertilizers, pesticides, non-grass based feed systems, etc. Yet, if organic milk is shipped great distances, that energy advantage is lost. Again, local seems the logical choice.

Some propose "environmental taxes...to show the real cost of using oil and its products, which are not currently reflected in the price" of petroleum or the food it produces and transports. (Jones)

Not only do we bring food in from farther away these days, we also drive farther to shop. Our community is diminished when we no longer meet at the local market, main street, or downtown and visit. If we are driving 20, 30, or more miles to shop for food, it is more likely that we'll also spend our hardware, clothing, entertainment, and other dollars farther from home. Again, if we drive that far to shop, our dollars are falling into someone else's pockets rather into our neighbors'. Think: Leaky Bucket. Small businesses create spin-offs that bring positive effects to other small businesses; farms fit within that system. I like to imagine the powerful positive effect of small business people (including farmers) forming a pact with one another to shop locally and make a point of keeping our dollars as close to home as possible.

Locally grown food has been looked upon as an elitist phenomenon in the recent past. Part of that negative image is due to comparing prices; there is also a certain demographic group that has been in the vanguard of buying locally. Many programs are being created or adapted so that low-income people can afford to eat locally grown food. Urban gardens, food stamps acceptance at farmers' markets, CSAs, work scholarships, Senior Farm Shares Programs, and others are bringing fresh, local foods to more people these days.

Local farmers could lower prices if the cost of production went down. If more people could make a living farming nearby, more entrepreneurs would open tractor implement and many other farm-related businesses. What is now a half-to-full-day trip for a bailer part would be reduced dramatically. The cooperative bulk buying of seed & feed that already goes on would become more cost effective with more of us in the pool. The more the community supports local farms, the more competitively we can price. We'd be in good, healthy competition with each other – all to the benefit of the community.

Right now 4 firms control over 80% of fed cattle processing and almost 60% of hog processing. Cargill, Archer Daniels Midland, and ConAgra dominate the grain trade. Philip Morris owns General Foods and Kraft. R.J.Reynolds owns Nabisco. Many such firms practice “vertical integration” so that they can control, by ownership, suppliers and processors. The nation's largest pork packer recently bought the largest pork producer. This may seem like savvy business practice but it violates many of the values of competition and fair business practices. It forces efficient and competitive business people, who uphold anti-trust ideals, into bankruptcy. “Such concentrations raise concerns about noncompetitive and unfair trade practice. Small farmers possess much less bargaining power in such a system.” (Heffern 34)

The answer for small farmers is to feed their neighbors. Local communities can have great food and all the benefits of working farms in their midst. People can start with \$10 per week of their food budget spent on local farm products. Maybe it will be spent in large chunks such as on a side of beef bought from a neighbor farmer. Maybe it will go out at \$10 per week, year 'round for local eggs, milk, and butter. Maybe it will be concentrated in the summer months on local fruits and vegetables. No matter, it will enrich our community in many ways and be a great thing for our families too.

Good Eats

“Some studies show that, specialization and standardization, coupled with long distance transport is diluting the nutritional potency of our food. Some nutrient losses, in particular vitamin C, vitamin A, riboflavin, and vitamin E, will occur even with excellent storage conditions.” (Jones) According to the USDA, spinach loses 50% of its nutrients in 5 days from harvest. Food processors try to make up for losses of nutrients in processed foods by adding back a few vitamins and minerals. The trouble is that they only add back the major few nutrients; micro- or trace nutrients are missing and new evidence is revealed daily about the interplay of trace nutrients in our health. (Vogtman)

The joy of gorgeous flavor is available to everyone. Local produce matures on the vine and bursts with all the flavors and nutrients nature intended. Trucked-in tomatoes are picked green and exposed to ethylene gas, which turns them red. (Heffern) If your children don't want to eat their vegetables, try serving them farm-ripened veggies that they have a connection with. Take the kids to the farm or farmers' market and let them see the source of their food. Between feeling connected to their food and having the palate to taste the sugars and nutrients in locally grown fruits and veggies, they'll be far more likely to eat well and enjoy it. They'll like it because it's fun and delicious; you'll like it because it's better for their health.

Meat is controversial these days on many levels. Both health concerns and ethical issues make people nervous. Local farmers base their animals' diets largely on grass and other forage. This is sensible since we grow grass well in our climate and don't have to truck it in. More important is the fact that these animals are designed to forage and digest grass.. Grassfed meat, milk, and eggs are far healthier for human consumption, rich in beta-carotene, omega-3 fatty acids (essential fatty acids, including alpha-linolenic acid), conjugated linoleic acid (CLAs), and other anti-carcinogenic properties. Grassfed animal products are lower in E. coli (especially the most virulent strains) and salmonella. As mentioned earlier these benefits are realized partly because the animals are eating a more natural diet and partly because they are not held in tight confinement. Their bodies get to function naturally and they are not over-stressed by the social and disease factors of over crowding. Grassfed beef is lower in fat and the fat it does have is health promoting. Grassfed livestock doesn't need antibiotics or growth hormones. They are living the way they were meant to live. (Robinson) Meat itself isn't unhealthy, it is all in how it is grown. "A growing body of research suggests that many of the health problems associated with eating beef are really problems with cornfed beef." (Pollan 50) The animals are unhealthy due to an unnatural diet and so their meat is unhealthy too. Locally grown animals are far more likely to live in health-promoting circumstances.

Food Safety

"What gets a beef calf from 80 – 1200 pounds in 14 months are enormous quantities of corn, protein supplements – and drugs, including growth hormones." (Pollan 47) Old-time farmers (local farmers) take longer to raise their animals so that they can live more naturally and be more healthful. Virulent strains of E. coli are a danger in hamburger because manure contamination is occurring in huge slaughter houses. The burger from hundreds of carcasses gets mixed together when ground, so even if one carcass was contaminated the bacteria would spread throughout the batch. In contained animal feeding operations (CAFOs) these strains of E. coli are most likely to have high degrees of antibiotic resistance due to the prevalence of antibiotic use in the raising of the animals. So, if you get sick from the pathogens in the industrially-raised meat, our known arsenal of antibiotics may not help you. Compare this to the extremely unlikely event of getting E. coli from locally grown meat – the E. coli will not be antibiotic resistant and so your illness will be easily treated. Animals raised on grass don't need antibiotics. It is the CAFO diet that causes illness by disrupting normal digestion and nutrition. (Pollan) Local farmers don't use growth hormones. The meat they sell you is the meat they feed their families. You can visit the farm, see the conditions, ask questions, and see for yourself how your food is being raised.

Food borne disease is on the rise. (Ritchie) 9 out of 10 U.S. consumers are concerned about food safety. One-third of them are concerned enough to buy organic and 54% would if they could afford it. (Estes) Big industry's answer to those fears is to irradiate food. They euphemistically call it "cold pasteurization." Food is irradiated to increase its safety and lengthen its shelf life. "In the United States, irradiation is approved for beef, pork, poultry, shell eggs, fruits, vegetables, flour, seeds, herbs, and spices." This is the food industry's way of dealing with the fact that the way food is produced is unhealthful. Rather than changing dangerous or unhealthful practices, they irradiate. "Long-term health effects of consuming irradiated foods are unknown; irradiation reduces the antioxidant vitamins in vegetables." (Heffern)

Woe betides anyone who speaks out about food safety concerns. 14 states have food disparagement laws. Anyone pointing out problems with food safety faces costly law suits. If you want to speak out about tainted

meat, pesticide residue on fruits, salmonella in eggs, etc. you may be dragged into court. In a celebrated case, Oprah Winfrey had to spend \$1 million to win a suit brought by the beef industry after she said, on her show, that she'd never eat a hamburger again. These gigantic corporations, who'd rather spend money on lawsuits that keep people quiet than to clean up their dangerous food factories, limit our freedom of speech. (Heffern)

In Farming Magazine, Rick Heffern writes that, "According to a Roper Starch Worldwide survey released last year, 40% of Americans said organic meat and produce, food that is produced in a more earth-friendly and socially just way, will be a bigger part of their diet within one year... That was a ten percent jump from the year before." Heffern goes on to say that people associate organic with freedom from synthetic hormones, pesticides, and fertilizers. He cites Ben Kjelshus of Midwestern Food Circles Networking Project saying, 'Buying organic, though, is not enough. In order to preserve family farms and insure real food safety and quality, a regional food system is absolutely necessary too. Nothing can substitute for that close connection between consumers and growers. If you want your food free of poisons, antibiotics, and alien genes, if you want it fresh and produced at the lowest possible ecological cost, then it must be local.'

Regarding the use of rBGH in dairy operations, Heffern quotes the publisher of Consumer Reports saying, "because of increased udder infections, it is more likely that milk from treated cows will be of lower quality – containing more bacteria – than milk from untreated cows." That bacteria in the milk is likely to be antibiotic resistant.

When is the last time you heard of someone getting sick from E. coli in local beef? How about salmonella in local eggs? Has anyone you know gotten sick with antibiotic strains of bacteria in local milk?

Recent World Trade Organization (WTO) rulings leave us exposed to food problems we'd thought were eliminated in this country. The WTO only backs a country refusing goods based on price. That means if we want to turn away food products because they have residue from pesticides that have been banned in the U.S. for safety reasons, we'd be smacked with "barrier to trade" sanctions. Social concerns such as fair wages or unsafe working conditions don't justify refusing foreign goods either – only price. (Vogtman) Since our government can't keep foods out of our system, even if they are laced with pesticides we'd outlawed years ago, we could join together to reduce demand for that "inexpensive" food by eating local foods instead.

What Happens If...?

"The real threat to U.S. food security is the inability to produce our own food, close to our homes. Military terrorism is in all our minds, but what happens when terrorists are able to corrupt large food and water systems or destroy bridges and transportation systems on which our present globalized and vulnerable food security depends?" (Mann) 46% of respondents in a recent survey thought about food supply pre 9/11, but 91% were very concerned after the attack. 85% agree our food supply could be a possible way for terrorists to attack. (Berry)

Tyson Foods produced more than 7.2 billion pounds of chicken at only 66 plants. (Heffern 33) This reality is an example of how vulnerable we are to terrorist activity. Imagine how much harder it would be to disrupt a food system if that amount of chicken were produced at ¼ - ½ million family farms. It wouldn't be hard to target 66 plants. "4 giant meat packing companies...now slaughter and market more than 80% of the beef cattle born in this country.." (Pollan 46) These are among many examples that illustrate how much more secure a dispersed, as opposed to concentrated, food production system is. Huge, centralized storage facilities, roadways,

and bridges are all at risk. We'd get hungry fast if a few 30-50 thousand acre vegetable operations were contaminated.

Nor do we want our food availability to depend on the whims of OPEC. 2/3 of the world's oil reserves are in the Middle East. "The political and economic conditions which led to the first oil crisis of 1973, remain largely the same [in the Middle East]." (Jones) We need to create a situation in which we do not depend on events beyond our control to secure our food supply. "Every community should be able to produce at least a third of the food required by its residents. At present, in many cases, less than five percent is produced." (Mann 38)

The National Catholic Rural Life Conference (NCRLC), a 77 year old group, joined forces with the National Family Farm Coalition and the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture in a 2 year project to influence the 2002 farm bill. They stated that "the control of the food system is at stake due to the increasing concentration and globalization of our food supply." (Andrews) The time to act is now because once farmland has been developed, covered with houses, paved, and filled with septic tanks it will be extremely hard to restore it for food production again. It would behoove us to keep our existing farmland productive, feeding the community to the greatest extent possible.

Food with a Face

Just as the farmers I surveyed repeatedly mentioned local businesses "standing behind their products" or similar sentiments as a reason for shopping locally, so too do the farmers stand behind their products. You drive by our farms and are welcome to stop by. You see us in town at farmers' market or shopping at your businesses. You see us at civic and social events. If, for some reason, you are not satisfied with our products, you know we'll replace or refund with a sincere apology. As mentioned before, we sell the same food we feed our families and as reflected in the survey comments, we want to feed you well and contribute to your good health.

70% of people trust farmers regarding the safety of food, 57% university professors, 20% elected officials, 12% celebrities, and (sorry) 11% business executives. (Berry) There is a yearning for what I call "Food with a Face."

Industrial-sized food producers can't really respond to what you, the consumer wants. They can spend millions of dollars on ad campaigns to convince you that what they have is what you want. Rancher Sue Jarrett reports that in the case of beef, ranchers make decisions based on what packers want, not what consumers want or need. That includes implanting growth hormones. In the case of produce, corporate growers select varieties that will ship and store well, sacrificing flavor and nutrition. Local farmers base their livelihood on growing what their neighbors want to eat. They pay close attention to what sells and which items get rave reviews. If a few people requested a specific variety of tomato, you can bet the farmer would grow it. The "suggestion box" is always out and it gets checked frequently.

Regional Identity/ A Sense of Place

In the documentary, *Livable Landscapes*, the term "A Sense of Place" is used to illustrate why we should think into the future about how we want our home surroundings to be, and start taking action now to ensure that our vision comes to pass. The point is that we need to actively foresee and plan so that we don't wake up some day, having let events simply unfold, and be full of regrets about irreversible and unpleasant changes in our

landscape and community. In our situation, in the Blue Hill area, not only do we have to please ourselves, we also have to consider the impact of summer residents and tourists on our economy and community well being.

We have always depended to a great extent on the income generated by summer visitors. Eco/Agri-tourism is on the increase nationwide and we have a great opportunity to figure that into our business plans. Regional identity is what draws visitors here. The ocean, clean air, low crime rate, cozy community, open land, beautiful views, and many other wonderful features of our home provide a much needed respite for our visitors. In order to attract them and help them enjoy their stay we need to be different from their home states and towns/cities. Working family farms fit into this scenario. Tourists seek out restaurant menus that state which ingredients are from local sources. They want to have a regional experience, and eating local food is part of that. The color and neighborly atmosphere of farmers' market is popular with summer residents. Driving down Route 15, on the way to Blue Hill from parts south, passing open fields with crops, farmers working, or animals grazing is an important part of that regional experience.

2 acres of farmland are lost to development every minute in the United States. In the past 20 years developed land grew 5 times faster than population growth in New England. (Paly) Family farmers are forced to sell land if they can't establish a local market because the national and international markets are so inaccessible to them – the deck is stacked against their competing with corporate agri-business. Local farmers receive little or no government assistance compared to industrial-sized farms; so they have to find a local niche where they get paid the true cost of production.

It is in a community's best interest to keep family farms alive. Small farms employ more soil-improving practices such as cover crops, green manures, erosion control, etc. (Rossett) They keep fields cleared. Owner-farmers have every reason to care about the land. To visitors this translates into a sense that someone cares; the place has a good feel to it that is hard to define but obvious. Some communities and individuals recognize the value in preserving farmland with conservation developments, assuring that open land and woods always remain a part of our landscape. Let's not forget the value to our own quality of life – the joys of open views and other beautiful sights in our daily excursions.

United Voices

It is interesting to note that this “keep family farms alive” ethic is shared by conservatives and progressives. How wonderful to find such a point of agreement! Some may have guessed that preserving family farms is a liberal notion. Jeremy Beer writes in re:generation online that up until WW II it was the conservatives who sought to preserve farmland and farms as an integral part of communities. He makes the case that liberal movements picked up the cause when conservatives began focusing their energies primarily on anti-communism. He suggests that traditional conservatives and Greens share values such as local, community, and traditional. He cites traditionalist writer Russell Kirk as lauding Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* and Wendell Berry's *The Unsettling of America*, along with condemning pesticides, as well as writing in favor of protecting endangered species and preserving farmland. Beer goes on to cite John Bliese, in *The Greening of Conservative America*, who gives “evidence [which] is proof that conservatives can comfortably approach environmentalist issues from within their own intellectual tradition.”

Rod Dreher writes for the respected conservative publication, *National Review*. Dreher identifies himself as a “crunchy conservative.”

We are as suspicious of big business as we are of big government...d disdain modern architecture and suburban sprawl, avoid shopping malls, and spend our money on good food we prepare at home...And yet we are almost always the most conservative people in the room...Much of our crunchy conservatism...is grounded in basic attitudes we've long held. That generally speaking, Small and Local, and Particular, and Old are better...that we are citizens before we are consumers. (Dreher "Meet the Crunchy Conservatives")

Conservatives and progressives find common ground in appreciating "authenticity." Frederica Mathewes-Green is quoted by Dreher as explaining that by authenticity we might mean a "distrust of mass produced sentiment or materials." The Dreher's subscribe to a vegetable service which delivers a weekly bag of organic vegetables to the city from outlying farms. They thought their "leftie" friends were silly for doing so until they tasted the produce – then they subscribed themselves. Dreher's wife, Julie, laughs at the fact that "she's the only housewife in the neighborhood who carries home her organic vegetables in a National Review Online totebag." (Dreher "Birkenstocked Burkeans")

Eat Your Values

In Europe there's a bumper sticker that says, "Eat Your View." Food choices go way beyond view. It is true that you can save beautiful views by making certain food choices. There are many other values that carefully made food choices can uphold.

Control of our food system is a contentious struggle where multilateral free-trade agreements and transnational corporate profits are at odds with family farmers' interests, community food security, land stewardship and animal husbandry, and consumers' access to healthy, environmentally sound food supply. In the absence of strong civic participation, agribusiness and large-scale commodity organizations have been dictating farm policy. The results of these corporate-led policies are proving to be disastrous. (Ritchie)

One value worth upholding is Old Wisdom. This could also be called Local Know-how. By those terms I mean the wisdom and skills that are particular to this place. How to best do a certain job or raise a certain crop, given the local landscape and conditions. Keeping family farms a vital part of our community will assure that the wisdom and know-how will continue to benefit us all. Local and old wisdom shows us how to make a living in the place we call home, caring in a way that only owner-operators can.

"Industrial agriculture now accounts for over half of America's water pollution." Industrial giants are able to get regulations passed that are favorable to their way of business because they're able to make huge political contributions. Swimming is prohibited in parts of northwest Arkansas; shellfish fisheries have been closed in Maryland. Atrocities like this are found wherever CAFOs exist. (Kennedy)

If you care about animal welfare and such things as clean water and breathable air, give careful thought to where you buy your meat. A cattle feedlot is like a pre-modern city of as many as 100,000 head "crowded, filthy and stinking, with open sewers, unpaved roads, and choking air." (Pollan 50) CAFOs are the source of most meat. The intensive confinement means that the same product that is an invaluable resource to the family farmer – manure – becomes an industrial waste crisis for the environment and people living nearby. "According to Dave Andrews, a new hog plant will produce more animal waste than the animal and human waste created by the city of Los Angeles." (Heffern) Likewise confinement dairies, as well as beef and chicken operations, produce waste that is too voluminous to deal with properly. This manure is full of toxic disinfectants, antibiotics, pesticides, etc. They affect fish, poison soils, pollute waterways, and make life unbearable for people who have

bad air and contaminated wells to deal with. . A microbe, *Pfiesteria piscicida*, that gets into North Carolina waterways by leaking out of ten-acre hog manure lagoons kills fish – up to a billion in one case. Fishermen, swimmers, and bridge workers have been sickened. (Kennedy) Compare this scenario to a small, diversified operation that carefully uses every bit of its manure to properly enrich the soil.

Animals are treated with cruelty in CAFOs due to extreme confinement. Sows are “locked in a narrow metal gestation crate, 24 inches wide and long enough so that she can move forward and backward only a few inches...She lives in a constant state of stress...[and] is often found frantically and repeatedly biting the metal bars.” Chicken and beef operations are similarly overcrowded. “If a private citizen confined a dog or cat in conditions such as those that prevail at factory farms, that person would be pilloried in the local paper and hauled into court.” (Heffern)

Workers don't fare much better in the industrial meat model. In huge meat processing plants, workers are horribly mistreated. Child labor laws are broken too. Rick Heffern reports in *Farming* that 41 Catholic Bishops published a letter called “Poultry Pastoral.” In it they document that:

-90 chicken carcasses per minute come to a worker.

-The workers get one bathroom visit per shift.

-Knife accidents are common.

-Repetitive motion injuries are common.

-Workers earn around \$6.00 per hour.

-Chicken quarters frequently sell for around 59-99cents per pound at supermarkets.

“Working in these processing plants has been called the most dangerous job in America.” (Heffern 38) Do we want to have “cheap” chicken if this is the reality of how its price is set so low? Would we put up with these conditions in our own community? Horrid conditions exist for harvesters of vegetables as well as for meat plant workers.

American Farm Bureau and National Cattleman's Association lobbied to kill a measure that would keep competition alive in meat packers' bidding. They have worked to weaken legislation that would require reporting of prices that would expose sweetheart deals between huge meat producers and packers, at the expense of small producers. (Christisen) Buying locally grown meat and paying farmers their true cost of production would be one way, a grassroots way within our control, to subvert this type of corruption.

Industrial chicken, egg, hog, and beef producers, as well as industrial vegetable growers drive family owned businesses out at alarming rates. They set up their operations in the most poverty stricken areas because anyone with any economic clout would not allow them into their area. They then pay minimum wage and no benefits to a workforce that does dangerous and unhealthy work. “...Vertical integration has bankrupted 5 out of 6 of America's hog farmers over the past 15 years and hammered the final nail into the coffin of Thomas Jefferson's vision of democracy rooted in family owned freeholds.” (Kennedy)

Hold on to that last nail for the coffin of family owned freeholds. We have the power and ability to do some serious C.P.R. and breathe new life into the family farm model of food production. You can vote with your wallet for the kind of food system you want – you do it every day.

Our Children

Every parent wants to feed the most safe, healthful, and nutritious food to his/her children; that goes without saying. Parents also want their children to grow up in safe places and nurturing communities. The loss of neighboring family farms affects these values and more. A shocking number of students in elementary schools have no idea where food comes from. Milk comes from the store. When asked where green beans grow kids guessed trees, in the ground, and many just said at the store. More shocking is that these aren't just urban kids. Children growing up in rural areas are remarkably disconnected from their food, a fact that has motivated teachers across the country to have gardens at school.

Having operational farms in the nearby community is a wonderful thing for kids. School field trips are welcomed at most family farms. Teachers and parents notice that children's eating habits improve after they connect with their food by raising it at school and visiting farms. If a kid has a hand in growing or picking food, she'll try eating healthful things that would have gotten left on the plate before. Children become recipients of the Old Wisdom mentioned earlier. This knowledge carries into school subjects such as science and social studies too. If a child is interested in how food is grown, he will pay more attention to the hows and whys of chemistry, nutrition, world trade, economics, cultures, photosynthesis, and so many other concepts that come up in lessons. Finally, at the risk of sounding overly sentimental, I'll point out that spending time on a farm is simply a wholesome thing for a child to do.

Ride the Tide

Most of the successful, long-established, small businesses I can think of in this area have these things in common:

- They know what customers want now.
- They understand the specific demands of local customers
- They keep up with trends and developments so they look alive and "with it" to their customers.
- They remain deeply rooted in core values.
- They contribute to the community.

If you and a competitor offer similar product quality and service, discerning customers will consider how you will make use of their carefully spent dollars to create and sustain the kind of community they value. Research shows that they may be willing to spend more for that.

There is a phenomenon known as the "Slow Foods Movement" that is spreading across the world and taking hold in local communities. As is evident in the title, it is a bit of a backlash against fast food, but it also values regional food, family dining, uniqueness of restaurants (as in regional identification), carefully prepared food, and community. People are going to want more locally grown food. In seeking a place to visit or live will find areas with active farms. It will be similar to the phenomenon of good schools attracting people to live and do business in your area.

The organic market is on the rise and for many reasons. One that isn't often mentioned is that a vote for organic is actually a vote for family farm style attention to soil, attention to livestock, and local character. 71% of people would pay more for food produced in ways that would protect the environment and 77% say that government policies should favor family farms as opposed to corporate farms. (Berry)

“Farm tours, bed and breakfasts, farmers’ markets, and other tourism enterprises can help to diversify local farm operations and strengthen the region’s homegrown economy in an ever-changing world dominated by non-local influences.” (“Country Heritage Adventures”) There are agri-tourism organizations that create tour packages for an area. Farms buy annual memberships in the organization. This agri-tourism stimulates lots of other local business.

Other evidence of a movement back to the local includes coalitions and alliances of many descriptions. The Community Food Security Coalition was created as part of the 1996 Farm Bill because “increased funding to local food projects can improve the vitality of local agriculture, provide access to affordable nutritious food for low income residents, create jobs and job training programs, [and] beautify neighborhoods, as well as enhance the sense of empowerment and self-reliance among communities.” (www.foodsecurity.org) The Food Alliance (TFA) has a label that farmers can put on their food. Farmers must pass inspection on sustainable farming methods and fair labor practices. “73% of consumers will look for products that say they are environmentally...” (Estes) Mini-mills are on the increase. They are “cited as a preferred alternative to mammoth, highly centralized, capital-energy-and-chemical-intensive manufacturing facilities.” These mini-mills are making paper and paperboard, focusing on both local resources and local markets. So the paperboard made in one state may be made of different raw materials than in another state. They are cleaner and adapt more easily to local needs and trends, as well as utilizing local resources. (Imhoff 18)

Community planners across the country are addressing the issue of sprawl and incorporating farmland preservation into their plans. Farmers’ markets are often included in the plans as well. This is not to say that as business people you should necessarily make decisions based on nation-wide trends. These examples are offered to illustrate the thought and caring that people are putting into bringing money, control, community pride, and a sense of place back home.

What You Can Do

Neil Ritchie of Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy calls on consumers, workers, and environmentalists to join forces with farmers to shape sustainable policy. Business leaders should be added to that list. You have the visibility, the collective power, and vital interest needed to make sure family farms remain a part of our region. Farmers can’t fight huge agribusiness alone. We need non-farmers to join us in getting farming policies passed that support community and the environment. These same policies will promote sustainable economic growth here in our area as well as promote food quality and safety. Business people can:

- Buy directly from a farm.
 - through a CSA (community supported agriculture) membership
 - purchase a side of beef, eggs, vegetables, or whatever from a neighbor farmer
- Buy at a farmers’ market or farm stand.
- Ask produce, dairy, and meat department managers to carry local goods.
- Support legislation that helps family owned and operated farms.
- Support community events that include farms.
 - feature local eggs or grains at community pancake breakfasts
 - include farm demonstrations and exhibits at festivals
- Talk to your neighbors about the value of local farms and their products.
- Invite farmers to speak (You’re already checked out on this one!)
- Make a point of patronizing restaurants that feature locally produced foods.
- Make some of your land available to ambitious young farmers who can’t afford land.

- Make the town farmers' market friendly and lively.
- Visit your farmer-neighbors and establish a relationship.

Do I Have to Give Up Bananas and Avocados?

We can strike a balance between the new, world-market way of getting food and the old, reliable ways. We aren't going to undo globalization or the industrial food system. We can, however, pay more attention to a food system that has sustained us for many hundreds of years. As in so many cases, business people can lead the way. Food production can be happening in our midst if we support it. We can have the best of both worlds: fresh, nutritious, vine-ripened food, open vistas, strong communities, and all the advantages that come with local farms. At the same time we can still enjoy bananas in Maine, olives to garnish our salads, and other joys of the worldwide food system. If community members make a point to buy what is available locally, more farmers will be able to stay in business and everyone will receive the benefits. Vote with your wallet. Start with \$10 per week.

References

Andrews, Brother David, CSC. "A Farm Bill That Works for Rural Communities." HYPERLINK <http://www.familyfarmer.org> www.familyfarmer.org (2000)

"Bayfront Community Harvest Festival." HYPERLINK <http://www.countryside.org> www.countryside.org

Beer, Jeremy. "Why Aren't Conservatives Conservationists?" re:generation online. HYPERLINK <http://www.regenerator.com/8.1/beerhtml> www.regenerator.com/8.1/beerhtml

Berry, John. Agricultural Marketing Educator. Penn State Cooperative Extension – Lehigh County, Allentown, PA HYPERLINK <http://lehigh.extension.psu.edu> <http://lehigh.extension.psu.edu>

Christisen, Bill. "Family Farms in Trouble." HYPERLINK <http://www.defenders.org> www.defenders.org

"Country Heritage Adventures." HYPERLINK <http://www.mncountryside.org> www.mncountryside.org

Dreher, Rod. "Birkenstocked Burkeans." National Review Online. HYPERLINK <http://www.nationalreview.com> www.nationalreview.com (July 12, 2002)

Dreher, Rod. "Meet the Crunchy Conservatives." Utne. March/April 2003. 70-75

Estes, Carol. "New Life at the Roots." HYPERLINK <http://www.futurenet.org> www.futurenet.org

HYPERLINK <http://www.foodsecurity.org> www.foodsecurity.org

Heffern, Rick. "The Ethics of Eating." Farming. Fall 2002. 30-34

Heffern, Rick. "Putting Local Food on the Table." *Farming*. Winter 2002. 30-34

Henning, Bill. "The Role of Farm Scale in the Well-Being of Rural Communities." *Farming*. Winter 2002. 20

Imhoff, Daniel. "Thinking Outside of the Box." *Whole Earth*. Winter 2002. 18

Jarrett, Sue. "Consumer Quality versus Packer Quality." HYPERLINK <http://www.familyfarmer.org>
www.familyfarmer.org

Jones, Andy. "Eating Oil – Food in a Challenging Climate." www.sustainweb.org

Kelley, Kathleen. "Where on Earth Did That Come From?" HYPERLINK <http://www.familyfarmer.org>
www.familyfarmer.org

Kennedy, Robert F. Jr. "Doing Well, Eating Right." HYPERLINK <http://www.familyfarmer.org>
www.familyfarmer.org

Mann, Peter. "Homeland Security Must Include Food Security." *Whole Earth Review*. Fall 2002. 38

New Economics Foundation. [sustainweb.org/pdf/briefing/pdf](http://www.sustainweb.org/pdf/briefing/pdf)

Paly, Melissa. *Livable Landscapes: By Chance or By Choice*. Bullfrog Films. 2002

Pollan, Michael. "Power Steer." *The New York Times Magazine*. March 31, 2002. 44-77

Ritchie, Niel. "The New Challenge of Farm Policy: Engaging Farmers, Consumers, Labor, and Environmentalists in Shaping the Future of Food and Agriculture Systems." HYPERLINK <http://www.familyfarmer.org> www.familyfarmer.org

Robinson, Jo. *Why Grassfed Is Best*. Vashon: Vashon Island Press, 2000

Rossett, Peter. "What's So Beautiful About Small?" HYPERLINK <http://www.futurenet.org>
www.futurenet.org

Vogtman, Hardy. Germany's Deputy Minister for the Environment. MOFGA's Farmer to Farmer Conference. November 1-3, 2002