



a matter of spirit

This issue: Food Sustainability

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Healthy Food for Everyone

Michael Schut

Ric, my best friend from high school, visited me the summer I lived with my grandparents in Pella, Iowa. Grandpa and Grandma had moved into town after a life spent farming the rich, black soil of Southeast Iowa. I took Ric out to the farmstead; we poked around the barn, hayloft, corn cribs and chicken coop where my cousins and I romped as kids.

The buildings, baked in a century's worth of summer heat, still gave off one of my favorite aromas: a mix of corn-feed, dust, manure and hay.

Something felt so right—so balanced and rooted. “It all comes back to farming, Ric,” I mused. Which I think was my paraphrase of Wendell Berry’s words: “How we eat determines to a considerable extent how the world is used.” Perhaps I felt on a gut level what the Union of Concerned Scientists’ (UCS) research¹ has shown: of all our daily activities, only our transportation choices outweigh food choices in terms of environmental impacts.

This issue of *AMOS* begins to unpack UCS’s research and Berry’s simple, profound statement. If Berry is right, eating becomes a moral act because it places us in

daily contact with a wide web of relationships: with farmers and truck drivers, with soil and water, with pollinators and policy-makers.

Estranged Relationships

Let’s take the following as relational guidelines: first, our tradition’s understanding that God’s creation is “very good” (Genesis 1:31) and belongs not to us but

to God (Psalm 24:1); second, our tradition’s “preferential option for the poor.” When I eat in ways that

honor creation’s value and the poor’s needs, I feel as if I belong to, and am welcome within, that web of relationships. When I eat otherwise, I don’t feel quite as welcome, like an interloper throwing my weight around.

“How we eat determines to a considerable extent how the world is used.”

honor these relational guidelines. This is especially true for those of us living in the United States, where the average morsel of food travels 1,500 miles to reach our plates. When my grandparents farmed, most all their food came from within fifty miles. At the time of their birth (1911), one third of Americans lived on farms; today, there are more full-time prisoners in America than there are full-time farmers (less than 1% of the population).²

As a result, we are estranged from the relationships embodied in our food choices. Many of us do not know, or pause to consider, the impact of our agricultural system and whether it provides healthy food for everyone.

Healthy Food for Everyone

This seems like a straightforward goal, one we can all embrace. And, lest we forget, “everyone” includes all of creation. That is, farming, and our food choices, ought to protect biodiversity and water, build up topsoil, and provide a living wage for farm workers. What hinders our pursuit of healthy food for everyone?

Many would argue that it is



Today it is often difficult to know whether our food choices

Wall Street, our relentless pursuit for ever more money, and a related characteristic of our economy: the privatization of profits and externalization of costs.

Let's take beef cattle. My grandparents' cattle grazed on pasture and were fed grains and hay grown on their farm. The nutrient-rich manure was spread on the fields, becoming a valuable soil-input. The animals were butchered, processed and eaten locally.

Today, cattle are raised on factory-farms: thousands held on a single feedlot. Their feed is comprised of grains—purchased from anywhere and nowhere at the lowest price available—and antibiotics made necessary by keeping the animals in such crowded environs. The nutrient-rich waste, formerly a valuable farm input, now becomes a pollutant. The “finished product” is butchered, packaged, and frozen—primarily by migrant workers in unsafe conditions—and trucked or flown thousands of miles.

The school lunch program is not designed around children's health but to help dispose of surplus agricultural commodities. . .

Assume the factory-farm is owned by ConAgra. ConAgra's management is under pressure to increase profits. They, understandably, internalize all their profits and externalize as many costs as they can. Carbon dioxide is one of the primary externalities in this example (from transporting and growing feed-grains, from freezing and transporting the beef). The methane emitted from the vast piles of manure is another. Both carbon dioxide and methane contribute to global warming, the

costs of which we are only now beginning to face.

Take almost any food, whether plant or animal, and it's possible to spin a similar scenario: our food is transported great distances, is dependent on petroleum-based inputs, and is increasingly owned by a small clutch of mega-corporations.

The system is not designed to provide better nutrition, promote sustainability, or advance humane treatment of animals. To change that system is indeed a complex proposition. However, when guided by the relational guidelines suggested above, a number of possibilities come to mind.

From School Lunches to Stakeholders

First: farm policy. Every five years the United States passes a new farm bill. That bill affects us every day.

“The farm bill determines what our kids eat for lunch in school every day. Right now, the school lunch program is not designed around children's health but to help dispose of surplus agricultural commodities, especially cheap feedlot beef and dairy products, both high in fat. . . The farm bill determines what crops the government will support—and in turn what kinds of foods will be plentiful and cheap.... These crop subsidies are the reason that the cheapest calories in an American supermarket are precisely the unhealthiest.”³

Second: Wall Street. Corporations wield great power. However, that power has been given to them, and it can be taken away. Perhaps the most effective means to address their influence would be to publicly finance political campaigns. Or, amend the corporate charter to make corporations

answerable not only to *stockholders*, but *stakeholders*. ConAgra would be required to include small farmers, environmentalists, nutritionists and others within their decision-making processes.

What Can We Do?

Of the many avenues for engagement, three suggestions come to mind.

First, influencing farm policy and/or the corporate charter would be very tough to do on your own. Join with organizations and coalitions that represent your values on the national policy stage. *Voice your concerns about the 2007 farm bill.* (see page 9)

Second, most all of us can take gradual steps toward food choices that support the goodness of all creation and the preferential option for the poor.⁴ For meat-eaters, the most effective change is to eat less meat. Many of us can support local farmers by purchasing local foods. Most of us can ask our grocer to stock such foods. Others of us can afford organics.

Finally, in this individualistic, consumer-focused society, our alienation from one another and the rest of the natural world is unprecedented. Seek out ways to restore those connections. Pray, meditate, volunteer, get outside and notice the wonders that daily surround you.

1 See *The Consumer's Guide to Effective Environmental Choices*, Union of Concerned Scientists, 1999.

2 Brian Halweil, “Where Have All the Farmers Gone?” *World Watch*, September/October 2000.

3 Michael Pollan, p.16, *The Nation*, September 11, 2006.

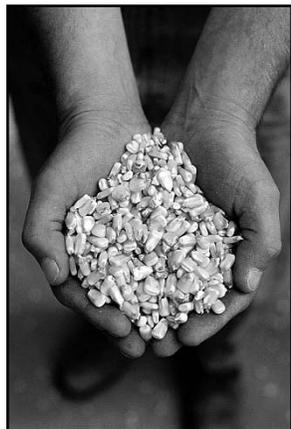
4 For further reading, see Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, Bill McKibben's *Deep Economy*, and Barbara Kingsolver's *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*.

Agrofuels: Amber Waves of Grain

Robert Gronski

Using Plants to Fuel the Future

The fuel of the future is looking like amber waves of grain and fermentable sugars. Henry Ford said it himself in a 1925 article in the *New York Times*: “There is fuel in every bit of vegetable matter that can be fermented. There’s enough alcohol in one year’s yield of an acre of potatoes to drive the machinery necessary to cultivate the field for a hundred years.”



(*New York Times*, Sept. 20, 1925)

Of course, the fuel of the 20th century turned out to be fossil fuels. The low cost of refined petroleum products pushed ethanol and other plant-based fuels to the sidelines. But the 21st century is causing industries, not to mention state governments, farmers and environmentalists, to look once again at plant matter to fuel our machines. The world, however, has grown more complex and no easy solutions will simply grow out of the ground. The current generation of agrofuels competes with our

The current generation of agrofuels competes with our daily human diet.

daily human diet. Will the next generation find a sustainable balance of food and fuel production?

Agrofuels, sometimes referred to as biofuels, are combustible

fuels made from organic material: living plants. In the United States, this predominantly means corn for ethanol and soybeans for biodiesel. In other parts of the world, wheat, sugarcane, sugar beets, palm oil, and cassava are used for ethanol production. Palm oil can also be used for biodiesel, along with sunflowers, canola, vegetable oils, and animal fat. When Rudolf Diesel demonstrated his new-fangled engine in 1898, he used peanut oil.

Over the past few years, the demand for agrofuels has skyrocketed, resulting in industrial-size refineries requiring vast amounts of biomass stock and water. It takes up to six gallons of water to produce one gallon of ethanol. The distillation process takes large quantities of coal, or similar burning fuel, to cook the starches and boil off the ethanol. Refineries are becoming more efficient, but inputs will continue to be significant.

How are agrofuels used? Whereas biodiesel is used directly in diesel engines, ethanol is commonly blended with gasoline and widely sold in the United States for our vehicles. The most common blend is 10% ethanol and 90% gasoline, which can readily fuel existing vehicle engines. For greater blends of 85% ethanol and 15% petrol (E85), only modified “flexible fuel” vehicles can be used.

In states like Washington, Minnesota and Iowa, plans are underway to greatly expand agrofuel production. Besides economic opportunities for farmers and rural communities, societal benefits are a lessening dependence on imported fossil fuels, particularly from volatile parts of the world, and mitigation of the severity of global warming.

Challenges and Implications

In the U.S., per capita consumption of fossil fuels is more than five times the global average. Americans hold onto a standard of living that is dependent on industrial growth, which in turn relies on cheap fossil fuels. Agrofuels, once joked about a decade ago, now



are touted as the solution to the most pressing problems facing industrial society: dependence on foreign oil supplies, rising energy prices, and environmental consequences of greenhouse gas emissions. Agrofuels are promoted as sustainable, renewable, and capable of increasing U.S. energy security while reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

A second look at this agrofuels euphoria tends to reveal some consequential problems. If agrofuel production is pursued along the lines of an industrial model—that is, replicating the same model we now have for fossil fuels—then what will be the impacts on the environment, farmers and food prices?

Converting all of the arable land of the United States into



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agrofuel production can only begin to replace what the U.S. demands in daily fossil fuel use. This assumes we find another way

When energy crops become more profitable than food crops, how does a free society answer this question of ultimate sustainability?

to meet food needs. Given these natural resource limits, industrial societies must first reduce energy consumption and create energy efficiencies. Agrofuels can still be part of the promised solution, but only if such production provides a net energy gain, benefits the environment, competes economically, and produces in reasonable quantities—all without reducing food supplies.

This is easily said, considering a debate still rages over whether growing, producing, and distributing agrofuels ultimately requires more energy use than it is worth. Most of the current generation of agrofuel crops require petroleum-based pesticides, fertilizers, and other chemical inputs to produce on a competitive scale. Some fear the high demand for agrofuels will lead producers to overlook environmental practices in the name of energy security—but really because of greater profits. All this compromises sustainability, which is the real name of the game.

Questions are also raised about who truly benefits. Farmers are currently receiving higher prices, but they know the meaning of boom-and-bust cycles. The primary beneficiaries seem to be the large corporations: agribusiness giants like ADM (Archer Daniels Midland) and Cargill, and oil companies like BP, Chevron and Shell. They are the ones grabbing market

shares in bioenergy production.

Notwithstanding these extrinsic questions of agrofuel production and who wins or loses, the more intrinsic question—food versus fuel—keeps coming back. When energy crops become more profitable than food crops, how does a free society answer this question of ultimate sustainability? Competition between food and fuel can only intensify. Whether from agrofuel production or higher fossil fuel prices, food prices will rise. Does this mean that making ethanol from food is a crime against humanity, as some advocates for food rights claim?

Agrofuel advocates counter that the next generation of ethanol production—cellulosic—will resolve these concerns. Cellulosic ethanol is derived from grasses, crop residue, trees, woody debris and other plant material, most of which do not compete with the need for fertile crop land. Whether through government incentives or private sector efforts, there is a need to quickly shift from edible crops like corn to other plant or organic material. The fuel of the future may be some version of cellulosic ethanol, but even then new questions will arise.

Before Technology, an Ethos

As noted, the push for agrofuels is driven by rising fossil fuels costs and the growing concern of global climate change. The quest for clean and renewable energy—solar, wind, geothermal and biogas digesters—can include agrofuels if we face the complexities of

competing demands. The most basic human need is to receive this day our daily bread; after that, we can work to repair our broken connections with one another and creation. The type of economy and technology created by us to do that is at a crossroads: the old energy must be replaced by a new energy. Therefore, we need an “ethos of sustainability” for a new energy era:

-  Reclaim an understanding of the **carrying capacity of our planet**.
-  Learn again the qualities of **conservation and efficiencies**.
-  Accept **limits of consumption** in the name of our children and future generations.
-  **Consider both renewability and sustainability.** A sustainable agricultural system protects the integrity of ecosystems so that natural resources can be regenerated indefinitely.
-  **Viable renewability takes time and care.** All parts of the land—soil, water and biotic species—are important because they contribute to the whole.
-  Ensure that **sustainable agrofuel production means farmers and rural communities thrive**.
-  Envision the **natural balance between local food systems and sustainable energy**: just as fossil fuels made possible an ephemeral global industrial economy, agrofuels will make possible sustainable community economies everywhere around the world.

In the approachable distance, there is a crossroads of agriculture and agrofuels, as long as the common good points the way. ~

Would You like Some Externalities with those Fries?

Michael Schut

Except perhaps for economists, the word “externalities” does not enter our everyday lexicon. It should...for externalities are part of our everyday life. An externality exists whenever an individual’s (or organization’s) actions affect the well-being of another individual—whether for better or worse—in ways that need not be paid for.

A positive externality exists when, say, the value of your property increases because the run-down home a couple doors down gets a facelift; your property value goes up.

Classic examples of negative externalities, this article’s focus, are the waste streams produced by our economy: contaminated water, air pollution, toxics embedded in our bodies, soil erosion, and oil-soaked birds. The very word, externality, reveals our misguided hope: that these waste products are somehow “external” to the economic system and therefore we can let someone else deal with them.

Practically speaking, “someone else” most often means those with little voice—poor communities and communities of color—and

there is no “away.”

The following story from a delightful little book titled *Stuff: The Secret Lives of Everyday Things* describes just what it takes to get french fries to our plate. The industrialized agricultural economy has its own externalities. See if you can identify them as you read:

“The potato (for my fries) was grown on one-half square foot of sandy soil in the upper Snake River valley of Idaho...the growing season was 150 days; my potato was watered repeatedly...from the Snake River...Eighty percent of the Snake’s original streamside habitat is gone, most of it replaced by reservoirs and irrigation canals. Dams have stopped 99 percent of salmon from running up the Snake River...

“My potato was treated with fertilizers and pesticides to ensure that its shape and quality were just like those of other potatoes... These chemicals accounted for 38 percent of the farmer’s expenses. Much of the fertilizer’s nitrogen leached into ground water; that, plus concentrated salts, made the water unfit even for irrigation. Some of the fertilizers and pesticides washed into streams when rain fell...

terparts...My fries were frozen using hydrofluorocarbons, carbon coolants which have replaced chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) that harm the ozone layer.

“Some coolants escaped from the plant. They rose 10 miles up into the stratosphere, where they depleted no ozone, but they did trap heat, contributing to the Greenhouse Effect. A refrigerated 18-wheeler brought my fries to my hometown. They were fried in corn oil from Nebraska, sprinkled with salt mined in Louisiana, and served with catsup made in Pittsburgh of Florida tomatoes.”¹



Ultimately, we must realize that we are all—humans, animals, plants and ecosystems—in this together. There is no “away.” The pollution our consumptive habits create today shows up tomorrow as increased cancer rates, birth defects, and oil-soaked birds. What we throw away comes back to harm us, Earth and her other creatures. Finally, to the extent that we see God as not only transcendent but also immanent, our waste, our pollution, damages that part of God’s image that we see in God’s creation. ~

¹ From *Stuff: The Secret Lives of Everyday Things*, by John Ryan and Alan Durning, Northwest Environment Watch. Used with permission.

“Someone else” most often means those with little voice—poor communities and communities of color—and the ecosystems on which all life depends.

the ecosystems on which all life depends...rivers, soil, air, and the species therein. The same belief that lets us refer to our wastes as externalities allows us to say “throw it away.” We know now

“Freezing the potato slices required electrical energy which came from a hydroelectric dam on the Snake River. Frozen foods require 10 times more energy to produce than their fresh coun-

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Is the Color Green Sustainable?

Carol B. Thompson

The Alliance for a Green Revolution of the Gates and Rockefeller Foundations proposes to increase food production on the African continent, “eliminating hunger for 30-40 million people and sustainably move 15-20 million people out of poverty,” according to the initiative’s press release.¹

DID YOU KNOW. . .?

- Of all our daily activities, only our transportation choices outweigh food choices in terms of environmental impacts.
- In the United States, the average morsel of food travels 1,500 miles to reach our plates.
- In 1911, one third of Americans lived on farms; today, there are more full-time prisoners in America than there are full-time farmers (less than 1% of the population).
- When Rudolf Diesel demonstrated his new-fangled engine in 1898, he used peanut oil.
- Over a third of the energy in the U.S. food system goes to processing, packaging, and transporting food.
- Frozen foods require 10 times more energy to produce than their fresh counterparts.
- Currently, food for African consumption comes from about 2,000 different plants, while the U.S. food base derives mainly from 12 plants.

But can Africa afford this proposed “green revolution” in terms of human health and environmental sustainability? The foundation goals require resources that the continent does not have while derogating the incredible wealth it does possess.

Similar to the green revolution of the 1970s, increasing yields to provide food for the hungry remains the central justification for this proposed African green

revolution. However, increased yields of one or two strains of one or two crops (“monoculture within monoculture,” as stated by a Tanzanian botanist) will not solve Africa’s food problems. Africa’s diverse ecological systems, and even more diverse farming systems, require multiple initiatives, from intercropping to permaculture, from using traditional ecological knowledge to training and equipping African geneticists.

The key to ending hunger is sustaining Africa’s food biodiversity, not reducing it to industrial monoculture. Currently, food for African consumption comes from about 2,000 different plants, while the U.S. food base derives mainly from 12 plants. Any further narrowing of the food base makes us all vulnerable because it a) increases crop susceptibility to pathogens, b) reduces the variety of nutrients needed for human health, and c) minimizes the parent genetic material available for future breeding.

Seeds are a key element in the equation. One figure not often quoted among the dark statistics from the continent is that African farmers still retain control over this major farming input: of the seed used for food crops, 80% is saved seed. Farmers do not have to buy seed every season, with cash they do not have. They possess a greater wealth: their indigenous seeds, freely shared and developed over centuries. The very best food seed breeders in Africa, the “keepers of seed,”

are women who often farm less than one hectare of land.

The proposed green revolution would shift the food base away from this treasure of seed. Instead, African farmers would have to purchase seed each season, thus putting cash into the hands of the corporations providing the seed.

Instead of food security, African voices articulate the goal of food sovereignty.

Is there a way of developing new varieties without further enriching Monsanto or DuPont by removing genetic wealth from African farmers?

Corporate development of new seed varieties, as promoted by the foundations, raises other questions. Will the new varieties be patented or protected by farmers’ rights? Who will own and control the seed? One major reason for the decline of the World Trade Organization (WTO) is the global South’s resistance to patenting life forms. In 1999, the African Union, representing all African governments, asked that its unanimous resolution rejecting any patenting on life be put on the agenda at the Seattle WTO meeting. The United States refused the request.

The African continent also uses different terminology from that of the green revolution. Instead of food security, African voices articulate the goal of *food sovereignty*. Food sovereignty expresses resistance to the notion that food security can be provided by reliance on global markets, where price and supply vagaries can be as capricious as African weather. African governments work to defend local, small-scale farmers

from highly subsidized farmers in the United States or Europe.

Should the green wealth of ecological and farming knowledge among local small-scale farmers be destroyed for the cash wealth of much fewer large-scale farmers buying all their inputs from foreign corporations?

Each African government will answer the above questions about a green revolution differently. The

diversity of policies matches the diversity of the continent. Yet they all reject patenting of life forms and strive to attain food sovereignty. High-tech answers to Africa's food crises are no answers at all if they pollute the environment with fertilizers and pesticides, destroy small-scale farming, and transform the genetic wealth of the continent into cash profits for a few corporations. ~

For a longer version of this article, see "Africa: Green Revolution or Rainbow Evolution?" in *Foreign Policy in Focus*. www.fpif.org/fpiftxt/4398

For a more detailed analysis of how Africa's food biodiversity provides alternatives to chemical industrial agriculture, see Andrew Mushita and Carol B. Thompson, *Biopiracy of Biodiversity* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007).

1 www.africancrops.net/news/sept06/agra.htm

THE ANCIENT FUTURE

by Andrew Mushita and Carol B. Thompson*

"If someone asks you for seed, you cannot refuse her."

A poor Zimbabwean farmer in tattered clothes—standing in front of a mud house, using the river as the source of water, and having lost two of her four children to preventable diseases—states the problem and the solution.

The essence of seed exchange is sharing, for plants reproduce themselves without human intervention—no intellect, no dollar, no prodding is needed. One amaranth plant reproduces 50,000 seeds—what wealth! Because seeds are a gift to each one of us, they are a gift to all. Ancient cultures increased this wealth by sharing seed, by *giving it away*. Such an action, reflecting nature's example, increased biodiversity across the globe. It brought families together who have shared their beliefs and customs about seed. Giving seeds away assisted the plants in adapting to new environments, as they circumnavigated the globe thousands of times with migrating peoples. Adapting to an alien environment created new species, new strengths. Seed endows: One small seed procreating thousands more, most to die, some seeding new hopes, creating new environments.

Yet the terrible other side of this story is that all this richness, beauty and wealth—germinating from

sharing—is now threatened. It is being destroyed by refusal to share, by hoarding for a false, ephemeral prosperity. It is being destroyed in the name of science, of law, and "just reward," in the name of innovation, power, and of profit.

The open palm offering seed to share is received by a clenched fist, symbolizing enclosure of the global gene pool.

This study [*Biopiracy of Biodiversity*] gives voice to those who know better—who are willing to help others see the aberration of transforming freely producing plants into private property. The voices do not seek revenge for the destruction already done, but simply

want to be heard, to be considered. They do not offer a formula nor a linear, staged response but rather a picture, a history (really a "herstory") of sharing. Many traditions of sharing endure; local peoples, some highly educated as PhDs and MDs, others highly educated in indigenous knowledge, are working to build the ancient future—one that

increases wealth by sharing and avoids destruction by opening the enclosures.

**From Andrew Mushita and Carol B. Thompson, Biopiracy of Biodiversity (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007). Reprinted with permission.*

Local peoples are working to build the ancient future—one that increases wealth by sharing and avoids destruction by opening the enclosures.

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Farming: No “One-Size-Fits-All”

Chad Kruger

What Determines Farm Size

Consolidation and concentration of markets are key drivers of the U.S. food system. Bill Hefernan and Mary Hendrickson¹ of the University of Missouri have documented these trends for more than a decade. Their research shows that much of the U.S. and the global food system now face effective control from just a few transnational companies. These companies control critical “bottle-necks” in the food system, such as processing, distribution, and retailing. They even have substantial control “from seed to shelf” for many of our staple foods.

The increasing concentration and globalization of the food industry have resulted in constant downward pressure on the prices that U.S. farmers receive for their commodities, as well as increasing costs for production inputs. Falling commodity prices, coupled with rising input costs, place immense

Falling commodity prices, coupled with rising input costs, place immense economic pressure on farmers to “get bigger or get out.”

economic pressure on farmers to “get bigger or get out.” This has led to the consolidation trends we also see in farm size.

In spite of these trends, approximately 80% of farmland in the U.S. is still controlled by independent, multi-generational family-owned operations (Kirschenmann, et.al.). Fred Kirschenman,

et. al. describe this phenomenon in their White Paper entitled *Why worry about the agriculture of the middle?*² They argue that the traditional, mid-scale “family farm” unit may actually cease to exist in the near future—because these farms will not be able to compete locally or globally. This is a concern because these multi-generational farms play a critical management role in our ecosystems.

A lesser understood set of factors that dictates farm size is dependent on the environment—or on human capabilities to manipulate the environment. For example, a very large farm (in terms of acreage) in one location may be a very small farm in another location simply due to the availability of water.

If there is sufficient rainfall, or irrigation, farms can intensify the production on a smaller land-base, as well as produce a greater variety of more valuable crops. In regions where rainfall is low and artificial irrigation is either not possible or

too expensive, crop choices are limited to lower value, less productive staple commodities. Economically viable farming units are therefore naturally larger. This type of environmental factor contributes directly toward the diversification of farming types by region. Low rainfall regions produce cereal grains, higher rainfall/irrigated regions produce high yielding field crops, and fruits and vegetables are almost exclusively produced with irrigation.

Sustainability In Diversity

Both biological and economic

diversity are key factors in developing a comprehensive strategy for improving the sustainability of the region’s agriculture and food system. Small farms that provide produce to urban markets through farmers’ markets and community supported agriculture subscriptions play a key role in a future sustainable food system.

Enhancing the opportunities for small-scale, direct-market farms is critical because there are still stiff barriers facing this sector. These obstacles include complex regulatory barriers, the need for science-based knowledge of production systems, the high costs of land and labor, and training for immigrant and beginning farmers. The lack of regional small-scale processing, distribution, and marketing infrastructures is an additional obstacle. Currently, only a small percentage of our regional food supply is being supplied locally. Local markets could be expanded significantly through improved public support and awareness of the multiple benefits of a healthy local agriculture.

Focusing exclusively on direct market farms only gets us partway to a sustainable food system. The agro-climatic factors described above create economic conditions that favor different types of farming in different regions. For instance, in high-rent agricultural districts where fruits and vegetables are produced, we are not likely to see much production of low-value commodities that also are important for our diets. These low-value commodities will most likely still be produced in dryer regions further from access to

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A Lesson In Eating

Greg Speltz

It was some twelve years ago that I received instructions in proper dining from a Mexican lady. It is an instruction that has always remained with me. Sadly, I have not put it into practice.

While living in Alabama, I was part of a delegation to a sister parish in Temascalapa, Mexico and had occasion to accompany a catechist to a home in a rural wasteland. The catechist

carried a book of prayers and basket of food. What I remember distinctly were small loaves of bread, tortillas wrapped in corn husks and some kind of fruit.

Outside an old adobe hut, we found a couple, husband and wife both in their nineties, sitting beneath a tree on the dust-carpeted

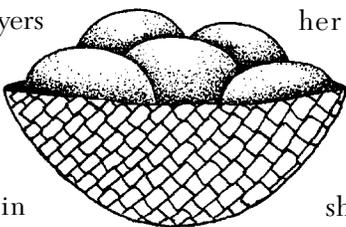
earth. They struggled to their feet and, bent with age, greeted us as most honored guests. They supported each other to two broken chairs and offered us chairs opposite.

The catechist put the basket in the lady's lap. I recall a reference to their not having eaten for more than a day. Reverently, the woman laid back the cloth that covered the food. Taking one of the loaves in both hands, she raised it and her eyes heavenward in a sacramental gesture. Then, as if it were the most ordinary thing to do, she raised her voice in song of blessing and thanksgiving. The language was foreign, its message was clear.

Then, lowering the loaf, she offered—no, insisted—that we join in their eating. We did so

with mixed emotions of admiration and humility. And when we finished, she directed us to take the corn husks to the small and patient burro tethered to a tree in a nearby grove.

It is all still present to me as I write, as clear as the day I sat there. It is perhaps the most deeply experienced eucharist I have known. It is the greatest unspoken homily I've been privileged to hear. To some degree, this may well be how we should regard the food we eat. It is those who are poor who may teach us. ~



urban consumers.

Building a robust, sustainable food system will require nurturing sustainable practices by farmers for all types of agricultural systems and nurturing informed purchasing decisions by consumers. The critical principles of sustainable production practices include improving soil organic matter, increasing biodiversity, and improving informed management by farmers.

There are a variety of sustainable agricultural practices that can be employed in many different agricultural systems, including organic production, "no-till," integration of animals with crops, etc. Many farmers in all types of farming systems have made strides

toward producing agricultural products with improved sustainability. What remains, though, is the emergence of more consumers and markets that reward farmers for sustainable production practices. Efforts to develop these market place rewards are taking place throughout the country via direct purchases from farmers through farmers' markets and CSA's (community-supported agriculture), as well as purchases of brand-identified sustainable products like *Shepherd's Grain* or *Country Natural Beef*. Consumers need to educate themselves on the consequences of their purchasing choices—and use their dollars to "vote" for sustainable production practices, regardless of the type of

food product they desire.

In conclusion, there are *real* ecological and economic drivers for the diversity of farm scales and marketing systems. Ensuring that agriculture becomes more sustainable in the future will require the engagement of consumers and producers through encouraging market-place rewards for good practices. ~

1 www.foodcircles.missouri.edu/CRJanuary05.pdf

2 www.agofthemiddle.org/papers/whitepaper2.pdf



Greg Speltz, a retired social worker and social activist from Wisconsin, has lived in Seattle for the past six years.

2007 FARM BILL

The Farm Bill significantly influences our everyday lives. It determines the kinds of lunches served in our kids' schools, the kinds of crops farmers choose to grow, the kinds of food that will be plentiful and cheap. The bill impacts how millions of acres of land are used each year and provides funding for the food stamp program.

The farm bill was to be re-authorized in 2007. As AMOS went to press, it was still not known if a final bill would clear the House and Senate and, if so, whether President Bush would sign or veto the final version. Therefore, by the time you receive this edition of AMOS, there may be time to join others across the country to advocate for the kind of bill that more closely honors the goodness of all God's creation and addresses the needs of the poor. Visit www.ncrlc.com or www.cfra.org for more information.



The Voice of Women Religious Makes a Difference!

There is a piece of light in each of us.
Each lone light makes us stronger
when we all stand together. —Joyce Rupp

Over 300 women religious and associates gathered in Portland, Spokane and Seattle November 1-3, to learn about the work that we are doing as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) at the United Nations. The issues which we are addressing internationally and at the grassroots level include HIV/AIDS in Africa, human trafficking, peace in the Middle East, and water.



Portland



Spokane



Seattle

Presenters:

Catherine Ferguson, SNJM—UNANIMA Intl.
Suzanne Golas, CSJP—WATERSPIRIT
Lucianne Siers, OP—Religious Orders Partnership

Stand Up for Farm Workers

Thanks to the efforts of socially responsible investors and the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), in the spring of 2007 McDonald's signed an agreement to pay an additional penny per pound to farm workers for Florida tomatoes supplied to its restaurants. This victory, which almost doubled their wages, is in danger of being canceled because of the actions of Burger King.

Stand Up! Read the letter below and then send it to Burger King.

John Chidsey, CEO, Burger King Holdings
5505 Blue Lagoon Dr, Miami, FL 33126

A penny probably doesn't mean much to you, Mr. Chidsey, but for the migrant farm workers who harvest tomatoes in South Florida, a penny represents their first real opportunity for a fair wage. Unfortunately, your Company stands in the way of migrant workers realizing their right to a fair wage. You can help these migrant workers by giving your attention to a mere penny.

In 2005, Florida tomato pickers secured their first significant pay raise in some thirty years when Taco Bell agreed to pay an extra penny a pound for the tomatoes it buys. Last April, McDonald's agreed to a similar arrangement. This was a significant victory for workers who work long hours for very low pay. Sadly, Burger King has refused to pay the extra penny and your refusal has encouraged tomato growers to cancel the deals already struck with Taco Bell and McDonald's.

Please give a thought to the lowly penny. Pay an extra penny a pound for your tomatoes so that migrant workers can have a decent wage.

Sincerely Yours,

Peace-Making Through Nonviolent Communication Workshop

Living in Harmony with Ourselves, Families and Communities
Presenter: Holly Eckert, Center for Nonviolent Communication

March 1, 9 am – 4 pm

Blessed Sacrament Parish Hall, 504 9th Ave NE, Seattle

Fee: \$35 by Feb. 9 payable to:

Adrian Dominican Sisters, 3693 High St., Oakland, CA 94619

Contact: Marian Castelluccio, OP: mcastop@earthlink.net

peace & justice center



Catholic Advocacy Day

Friday

February
22nd 2008

9:00am—3:00pm
Olympia, WA

FREE chartered
bus for registered
participants
(departing
from Seattle
& Tacoma)

Catholic Advocacy Day 2008 Inspired by Faith: Committed to Justice

AGENDA

9:00 am Arrival and check-in at the Columbia Room

9:30 Mass

10:15 Program and legislative briefings on health care,
housing, economic justice and the environment

Governor Gregoire—invited speaker

12:15 Lunch* and legislative visits

*Lunch is on your own. A brown bag lunch is suggested.

To register contact Intercommunity Peace & Justice Center
ipjc@ipjc.org or 206.223.1138 **BEFORE January 22nd**

All parish members and staff, parish leadership, and Catholic service and justice organizations are invited to join us to ensure that the Gospel message to care for our brothers and sisters is heard loud and clear in Olympia.

Meet us at the State Capitol (Columbia Room) for Mass, program, and a legislative briefing before scheduled appointments with your local legislators. Spanish translation will be provided.

Catholic Advocacy Day is Sponsored by: Intercommunity Peace & Justice Center
Washington State Catholic Conference • Catholic Community Services • Archdiocese of Seattle

Spokane—Jan. 13, 4 pm, Friends Church, 1612 W Dalke Ave

—Feb. 16, \$15, 9 am—1 pm, Our Lady of Lourdes, 1115 W Riverside Ave

Yakima—Feb. 2, 10 am—1 pm, Holy Family Activity Rm 10, 5502 W Chestnut Ave

Justice Circles



Seattle



Sunnyside

Seattle—Members of the Women's Justice Circle at Christ the King are organizing on housing, including tenants' rights and government assistance for low-income housing. They plan to meet with the legislators in their districts on Catholic Advocacy Day, February 22, 2008.

Sunnyside—Women are addressing school system policies to insure that students are able to remain in school and get the support they need.

Come participate in a Winter Justice Circle! Circles will be held in Burien, Wenatchee, Quincy, Woodland, Spokane, Shelton and Toppenish.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Sustainability—The most oft-cited definition is the one created by the Brundtland Commission¹: sustainable development “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Sustainability requires attention to ecological, cultural, social, and economic consequences of a given action, with the goal of long-term community (human and other-than-human) well-being.

Agribusiness—A term that reflects the large, corporate nature of many farm enterprises in the modern U.S. economy (compared with the traditional, diversified family farm). Includes a wide range of activities: from food production, distribution, and sales to the manufacture of farm machinery and inputs.

Biodiversity—The variety of all forms of life, from genes to species, through to the broad scale of ecosystems.² The richest and most threatened reservoirs of plant and animal life on Earth are often referred to as “hotspots.” Conservation International currently lists 34 hotspots. See www.biodiversityhotspots.org.

Biopiracy—The commercial development of naturally occurring biological materials, such as plant substances or genetic cell lines, by a technologically advanced country or organization without fair compensation to the peoples or nations in whose territory the materials were originally discovered.³ Biopiracy often contributes to inequality between developing countries rich in biodiversity, and developed countries exploiting those resources.

Externalities—A situation in which the private costs or benefits of a good or service differ from the total social costs or benefits entailed in its production and consumption. An externality exists whenever one individual's actions affect the well-being of another individual—whether for better or worse—in ways that need not be paid for.⁴ Pollution is a classic example of a negative externality: for example, a factory benefits through the sale of their products, but the neighbors or local river system or species suffer from the pollution emitted by the factory.

Food Security—When all households have access to nutritionally adequate and safe food. The concept of *community* food security includes concern for sustainability, social justice, and democratic decision-making. It seeks to create local and organic food systems which tend to be much more sustainable and socially just than the current agri-business model. See www.foodsecurity.org.

Permaculture—the use of ecology as the basis for designing integrated systems of food production, housing, appropriate technology, and community development. Permaculture is built upon an ethic of caring for the earth and interacting with the environment in mutually beneficial ways.⁵

1 Chaired by former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland and convened by the UN. Their report from 1987, is *Our Common Future*.

2 Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

3 www.answers.com

4 A Glossary of Political Economy Terms, www.auburn.edu

5 From the Permaculture Drylands Institute, published in *The Permaculture Activist* (Autumn 1989)

A Matter of Spirit is a publication of the **Intercommunity Peace & Justice Center**

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