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COMMUNITIES

Life in Cooperative Culture

Food and Community

Feeding Each Other

Farming on a Bicycle

The Sacred Violence of Eating

Cookin' Dinner for the Revolution

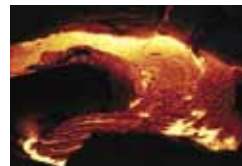
The Kitchen: Heart of a Community

Summer 2015 • Issue #167

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Best of COMMUNITIES Bundle of All 15 Special Issues

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In the Best of COMMUNITIES Bundle we've distilled what we consider the most insightful and helpful articles on the topics that you—our readers—have told us you care about most, and have organized them into 15 scintillating collections:

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| I. Intentional Community Overview, and Starting a Community | VII. Relationships, Intimacy, Health, and Well-Being | XIII. Cooperative Economics and Creating Community Where You Are |
| II. Seeking and Visiting a Community | VIII. Children in Community | XIV. Challenges and Lessons of Community |
| III. Leadership, Power, and Membership | IX. Community for Elders | XV. The Peripatetic Communitarian:
The Best of Geoph Kozeny |
| IV. Good Meetings | X. Sustainable Food, Energy, and Transportation | |
| V. Consensus | XI. Green Building, Ecovillage Design, and Land Preservation | |
| VI. Agreements, Conflict, and Communication | XII. Cohousing | |

Each collection is comprised of about 15-20 articles, containing a total of 55-65 pages. All are available in both digital and print format.

If you're hungry for information about cooperative living, we have a menu that will satisfy any appetite! If you're thinking about starting a community, this collection offers an incredible storehouse of practical advice. If you're thinking of joining a community, these special issues will help you discern the right things to look for, and how to be a savvy shopper.

While there are some classic pieces that date back to the '90s, the vast majority of the articles in The Best of COMMUNITIES Bundle have been written in the past dozen years, representing cutting-edge thinking and how-to explorations of the social, ecological, and economic aspects of sustainable living. We've gathered insights about what you can expect when raising children in community, and offer a wealth of information about what it's like to grow old there, too. For dessert, we have the collected wisdom of over 50 essays from Geoph Kozeny (1949-2007), the Peripatetic Communitarian.

Please support the magazine and enhance your own library by taking advantage of these new offerings!

ic.org/best-of-communities



COMMUNITIES

Photo by Brian Basor

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Fresh desert-grown vegetables are among the small and large miracles of life in community at Kibbutz Lotan (see p. 61). Photo courtesy of Alex Cicelsky.

COMMUNITIES

Life in Cooperative Culture

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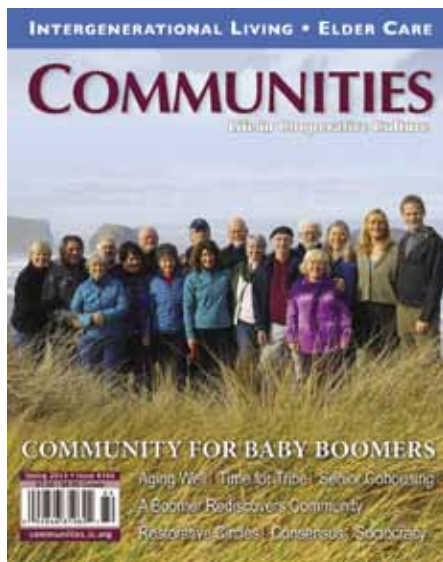
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Letters



Time for Tribe

Thanks so much for featuring Bill Kauth and Zoe Alowan's "Tribe" on the cover of your latest issue [#166, Spring 2015, "Community for Baby Boomers"]. I was so impressed with them in that photo I read the article inside, and have since experienced their training retreat on how to build my own Tribe, or "Gift Community." I came away with a heart full of love for everyone who participated there. Such FUN! It was the best workshop I've attended in years!

I believe their vision of a "non-residential" intentional community is *brilliant*, and so timely. Without having to deal with the real estate property issue in standard residential communities, the folks can focus more on their interpersonal relationships, learn how to get along with and love one another, which is the *Heart* of any community. And these folks do indeed have it down beautifully.

Now I'm excitedly working on creating my own Tribe. I believe this is exactly what our troubled species needs most urgently, a model for all of us to learn how to reclaim the ancient wisdom of Tribe. It's still not exactly easy, but what else is there to do? It's Time For Tribe!

Jackson Mayes
Sebastopol, California

COMMUNITIES' New Format

When I picked up the Spring Issue, my first reaction was "What's This?"—a mix

of consternation at the loss of the familiar and curiosity for the transformation. I was so glad to read your explanation of the changes and yes!!! it now looks and feels good—wow! 100 percent post-consumer recycled, that's fabulous. The color but not glitzy color photos add a lot too.

Good job y'all!

Gigi Wahba
Memphis, Missouri

I just picked up the recent issue, and wanted to weigh in that although the paper looks great and the colors are vibrant, the paper feels really lightweight and cheap.

I know all these things are hard to weigh against each other, but if at least the cover could be a heavier-duty paper, I think the magazine would feel more like a real magazine and less like a junk-mail freebie. Practically, it would also be more durable and long-lasting, as well as holding up in my hands when I lean back in my chair.

Sorry to bear possibly unwelcome feedback, but I felt this was worth sharing.

Thanks for all that you're doing!

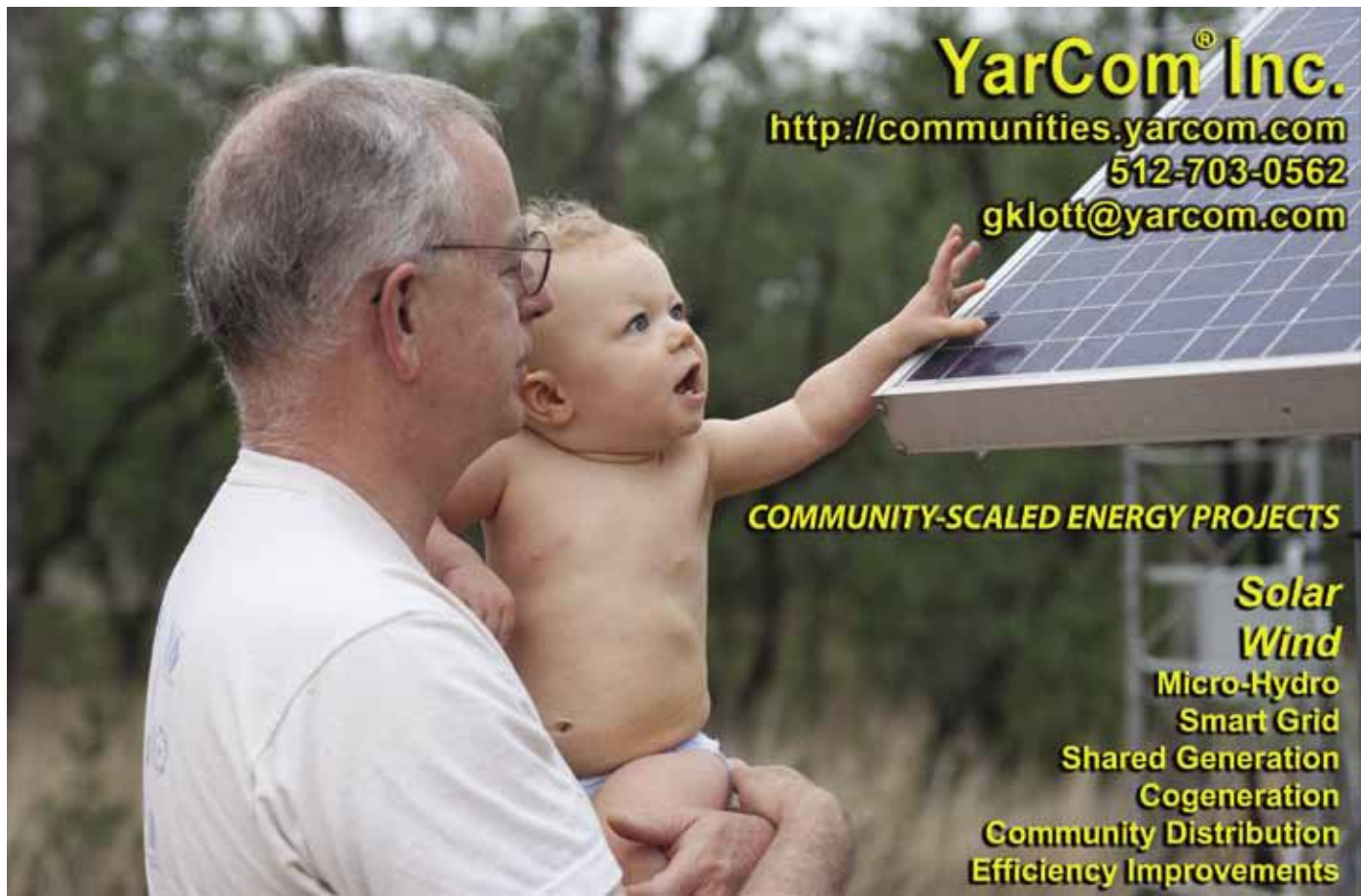
Alyson Ewald
Rutledge, Missouri

Editor's Note: We appreciate feedback from readers, and were especially glad to receive it in response to our recent format change. Our hesitations about the new covering method proved to be valid—a number of subscribers reported torn covers. On the other hand, we heard only positive reactions to our switch to printing all-color on 100 percent post-consumer recycled paper. We've decided that, despite the added cost, a sturdier cover is important for the magazine's durability, and this issue features a heavier cover stock. The inner pages are still printed on 100 percent post-consumer recycled paper, but the cover itself is only partially recycled (neither we nor our printer could locate a reliable source of all-recycled cover stock that would work for our purposes). In a world of compromise, this seemed a worthwhile one to make in order to serve the larger purpose of creating a magazine with lasting value to readers that will also last *physically*.

We welcome reader feedback on the articles in each issue, as well as letters of more general interest. Please send your comments to editor@ic.org or COMMUNITIES, 81868 Lost Valley Ln, Dexter OR 97431. Your letters may be edited or shortened. Thank you!

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Americorps Welcome!

COMMUNITIES Editorial Policy

COMMUNITIES is a forum for exploring intentional communities, cooperative living, and ways our readers can bring a sense of community into their daily lives. Contributors include people who live or have lived in community, and anyone with insights relevant to cooperative living or shared projects.

Through fact, fiction, and opinion, we offer fresh ideas about how to live and work cooperatively, how to solve problems peacefully, and how individual lives can be enhanced by living purposefully with others. We seek contributions that profile community living and why people choose it, descriptions of what's difficult and what works well, news about existing and forming communities, or articles that illuminate community experiences—past and present—offering insights into mainstream cultural issues. We also seek articles about cooperative ventures of all sorts—in workplaces, in neighborhoods, among people sharing common interests—and about “creating community where you are.”

We do not intend to promote one kind of group over another, and take no official position on a community's economic structure, political agenda, spiritual beliefs, environmental issues, or decision-making style. As long as submitted articles are related thematically to community living and/or cooperation, we will consider them for publication. However, we do not publish articles that 1) advocate violent practices, or 2) advocate that a community interfere with its members' right to leave.

Our aim is to be as balanced in our reporting as possible, and whenever we print an article critical of a particular community, we invite that community to respond with its own perspective.

Submissions Policy

To submit an article, please first request Writers' Guidelines: COMMUNITIES, RR 1 Box 156, Rutledge MO 63563-9720; 660-883-5545; editor@ic.org. To obtain Photo Guidelines, email: layout@ic.org. Both are also available online at ic.org/communities-magazine.

Advertising Policy

We accept paid advertising in COMMUNITIES because our mission is to provide our readers with helpful and inspiring information—and because advertising revenues help pay the bills.

We handpick our advertisers, selecting only those whose products and services we believe will be helpful to our readers. That said, we are not in a position to verify the accuracy or fairness of statements made in advertisements—unless they are FIC ads—nor in REACH listings, and publication of ads should not be considered an FIC endorsement.

If you experience a problem with an advertisement or listing, we invite you to call this to our attention and we'll look into it. Our first priority in such instances is to make a good-faith attempt to resolve any differences by working directly with the advertiser/listener and complainant. If, as someone raising a concern, you are not willing to attempt this, we cannot promise that any action will be taken.

Please check ic.org/communities-magazine or email ads@ic.org for advertising information.

What is an “Intentional Community”?

An “intentional community” is a group of people who have chosen to live or work together in pursuit of a common ideal or vision. Most, though not all, share land or housing. Intentional communities come in all shapes and sizes, and display amazing diversity in their common values, which may be social, economic, spiritual, political, and/or ecological. Some are rural; some urban. Some live all in a single residence; some in separate households. Some raise children; some don't. Some are secular, some are spiritually based; others are both. For all their variety, though, the communities featured in our magazine hold a common commitment to living cooperatively, to solving problems nonviolently, and to sharing their experiences with others.



We're Floating (Almost)!

Just as we bravely predicted a year ago, all of the work done to overhaul the rigging of our website and recaulk the hull of this magazine paid off in 2014. A fresh breeze in our sails produced revenues that carried us 16 percent further this past year. Even better, we tightened the screws on expenses, dropping them 15 percent, realizing savings across all categories. Those are obviously good numbers for economic buoyancy, with the result that we were able to reduce the gaping hole in the bottom of the boat in 2013 (\$17,015 in the red) to a mere trickle in 2014—just \$21 short. Huzzah!

As expected, we got our largest boost from developing the capacity to deliver digital products on our website (downloadable as PDFs), which tripled the sales of back issues—most of which came in the form of orders for one or more of our 15 completely updated *Best of COMMUNITIES* reprint collections, organized around themes. As these were only available the last four months of last year, we're expecting even better results in 2015, when we can enjoy 12 months of full *sails* sales. And they're now available in print as well as digital format.

While we've accomplished a lot in a year, we're not just sitting back with our boots on the taffrail enjoying the sunsets. We switched printers over the winter, allowing us to offer COMMUNITIES in our full colors (that means the inside pages, too), on 100 percent post-consumer recycled stock. For the first time, our flagship magazine is as green as our aspirations!

In an effort to maintain our forward momentum into the seldom-seen territory of black ink at the end of the year, we're taking two tacks:

- Increasing subscriptions. Though we ran closer to the wind last year—producing 10 percent gains over the distance covered in this area last year—we know we can do better. There have to be hundreds—if not *thousands*—more people hungry for the ideas and inspiration of cooperative culture out there who would love to have a copy of this publication drop anchor in their harbor every quarter; we just haven't found them yet on our navigational charts.

- Manifesting more sponsors for issues of the magazine. We've been fortunate enough to find one a year in each of the past three, and that's made an enormous difference to

the viability of our budget. If you know an individual or group that's interested in sailing tandem with us for an issue—where we provide the ship and crew and they supply a portion of the articles and bankroll—send them our way. There's something compelling about cooperating with others to produce issues of a periodical focused on cooperative living, and we'd like to do more of it.

We've kept this magazine afloat for 43 years. With reasonable care and a fair wind we'll keep holystoning the decks and scraping the barnacles for the Generations X, Y, and Z to come. We're glad to have you aboard for the voyage. 🌱

COMMUNITIES Magazine 2014 Financial Statement

Expenses

Printing	\$14,336
Office overhead	5,589
Production labor	23,804
Fulfillment	6,911
Marketing	1,849
Travel	0

Total Expenses 52,489

Income

Subscriptions	\$21,538
Single issues	634
Back issues	5,554
Distributor sales	4,486
Advertising	14,192
Royalties	604
Donations	5,460

Total Income 52,468

Net Profit (Loss) (\$21)



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Recipe for Community



Colin Doyle

As editor of *COMMUNITIES*, I don't like to play favorites, but I've enjoyed assembling this issue on Food and Community at least as much as any other we've put out over the last seven years. The theme elicited a cornucopia of high-quality submissions—I think largely because its two elements lie at the heart of each of our lives. Among human beings, food and community are almost entirely interdependent.

A community of people with no ability to ingest food is called a cemetery; a living community can't exist without physical nourishment. Community absolutely depends on food—though there is endless variety in what that food is, how it is produced, how it is distributed or acquired, how it is prepared and shared. The stories that follow give a taste of that variety.

Likewise, at least for us in the modern world, food absolutely depends on community. An infinitesimally small portion of the world's population may be solo hermits subsisting exclusively on wild food, without help or participation from any other human being. Everyone else, even a "self-sufficient" farmer or gardener, depends on a network of other people to do everything from breed plants and manufacture tools to supply fuel or lend a hand with physical labor.

Closely examining either food or community will shatter any illusion that human beings are truly independent of each other. We depend on one another in more ways than we usually recognize, whether in meeting our most basic physical needs or

in satisfying our requirements for emotional and spiritual connection and nourishment. Food is often at the center of our interdependence—it's no surprise that it's such a potent force in bringing us together and in helping us understand and define who we are together.

Whether in intentional communities, in neighborhoods, among networks of friends, or in any other form of community—at all scales up to the global—issues surrounding food provide a microcosm of the issues we confront in other areas as well. How we make decisions, how we relate to one another and to the earth, how we balance individual and collective needs and preferences, how we maintain health and well-being, how we reconcile ethics and economic exigencies, service and self-preservation, idealism and practicality—all of these come into play when we consider food. And like every aspect of our lives as social creatures, our relationship to food has unavoidable impacts and repercussions within the larger human community—whether those are understood and acknowledged, or not.


For all of these reasons and more (many of them both delicious and nutritious), food can be a pathway to greater consciousness and greater intentionality, both in our personal lives and in our lives together. Our authors suggest some of the ways this can happen.

Please enjoy this issue! 🐦

Chris Roth (editor@ic.org) edits COMMUNITIES.

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How the Kitchen Is the Heart of a Community

By Devon Bonady



Purple and pink potatoes grown and enjoyed at Fern Hill Sanctuary.

The music switches from soothing vocals to an upbeat tune reminiscent of a place a thousand miles south. Suddenly, voices rise and two dancers take the floor. They dance lively salsa in front of the dining room door. This could be a scene from Cuba, lovers in an outdoor patio, dancing the night away. Guess again. It's happening in the middle of our modest community kitchen! The salsa dancing, joyful and energizing as it is, can be grating to those of us who are in the middle of cooking a meal for 50 people. We sneak around them, cookbooks and measuring cups in hand, shouting instructions over the music. Although I am responsible for the meal, I love the energy of dancing in the kitchen. The head cook, my friend and boss, as well as other community members who cook at night, can get disgruntled by this. Even so, the dancing can help the dish crew finish their task more quickly and happily.

Before the dancing became a meeting topic at our 40-member rural intentional community in Oregon, someone took it in their own hands to express their feeling creatively. A "No Salsa Dancing" sign, complete with a universal "no" red icon, was placed on both of the kitchen doors. At first, dancers did not heed the sign, but eventually, after a few meetings, dancing moved through the door and into the dining room. At that point, I even took advantage of the chance for a free lesson.

Salsa dancing was just one of the things that drew people to the community kitchen to socialize. Cooks on duty also played lovely music of their choice and often joined in singing. Music was one way that the kitchen served as a social and emotional outlet for community members. In community, I believe that the kitchen serves as a place for meeting social, emotional, and physical needs of community members as well as a spiritual connection to life cycles through the food that we eat and prepare.

Preparing fresh food is an essential piece in the middle of a greater cycle. Before food can be prepared we must engage in planting, cultivating, and harvesting plants and raising, nurturing, and killing animals. These plants and animals experience their entire life cycle before they enter the kitchen. After food preparation, we eat the food, nourish our bodies, and excrete the remains, which, combined with excess plant and animal parts, can be composted and turned into fertile soil. This soil is the essential ingredient needed for us to begin planting seeds once again. Even if we are not involved in each of these pieces, as someone who cooks and eats, we are connected to the entire cycle. In some communities, we even incorporate growing food, raising animals, composting waste, and building soil into our daily lives.

In my experience, the more that I am connected to growing food and participating in the different parts of the life cycle, the more I appreciate healthy food and feel physically nourished from it. I am a plant person, and when I lived in the community mentioned above, I participated in food plant growing, cooking, and composting. We also had many community members whose joy and gift lay in other aspects of community life such as management, building maintenance, or healing arts. For these people, the kitchen was the first point of connection to the physical nourishment of food. The large daily salad from our garden, served twice a day to all members, helped keep everyone healthy and appreciative of what we accomplished and how we valued health.

While physical nourishment may be an obvious need met by a community kitchen, some may overlook the emotional benefits of the kitchen in community. As it tends to be a social hub, it is a place where people may relax and chat while preparing, eating, or cleaning up a meal. In this community, we usually had three or four people preparing each meal. During weekend personal growth retreats, participants in the retreat workshops were assigned to assist in food preparation. They had a chance to switch their focus from intense interpersonal communication to voluntary labor. Some people,

myself included, found kitchen time to be a great opportunity for deep discussion while hands are busy. More often than not, at this time, emotions ran high, and tears could fly, especially if onion chopping was involved. With the cooking and crying came connection in community. At times, the emotions grew out of the cooking experience, such as stress related to burnt food. Other times, the soothing music and quiet tone of the cooking team created a meditative environment.

When I lived in this community, all members were involved in food preparation and cleanup. It was the only task that was divided somewhat equally, with the exception of two people whose job was to work as a kitchen manager and assistant. The kitchen was the first place that I would go to find someone I was looking for. The kitchen is where we would plan to meet before our work crew headed to the garden, before a group went offsite on carpool, and on Friday mornings for chore time. It was in the kitchen that I would see members and guests that I rarely saw elsewhere. In this way, the kitchen was the central meeting place, the hub. I have yet to visit a community, be it a hundred members or one shared household, where the kitchen does not become the hub. At times, it may not seem to be the ideal physical location for a hub, but it is where people gather. For instance, my dear friends at Heart and Spoon (see article, page 12) bought a community house together, knowing that the kitchen would be their hub. And the kitchen happens to be the smallest room in the house (besides the bathroom), yet remains the community hub, even when you just can't get through the bodies to the other side.

I used to get frustrated when the kitchen was crowded and I found it difficult to get dinner ready on time. Why do people continue to enter the kitchen and leave another mess for me to clean? Why do people keep distracting me from keeping my eye on the

oven? Yet more often than not, people came into the kitchen for some food and nourishment, and I could help them meet that need, and so they left me feeling helpful and fulfilled in my role as cook and nourisher. Before I became a mother, this was my chance to feel like a mother, caring for my family and friends by growing, preparing, and serving food.

Even though my community is different now, I still find much fulfillment from growing, preparing, and sharing food. Community and food are constantly connected. I find much joy in preparing meals for the folks who come to stay with us and help us on our farm, for friends and family who visit, and for friends to whom I travel. Dinner time, which happens close to the kitchen, is the one time of day when we are all together. In my community, local food and homesteading are encouraged and appreciated. Every meal we eat at home is full of connections that remind me of my community. For example, a recent meal included broccoli and potatoes from our garden, shiitake mushrooms that we grew on oak logs from our forest, cheese we made from the milk of our neighbors' cow that we milk when they are away, and pork sausage from our friends' pig that my son watched grow and graze. As I continue to strive towards creating community in my life, I have learned that one of the best ways for me to connect with others is through a shared appreciation for local food and a shared joy for growing food, and often that happens in a kitchen.

The kitchen is a place that we all need to go since we all need to eat. In some communities and families, it may be the only place where you see everyone at once or at all. The kitchen is a place where we can find social, physical, and emotional nourishment as well as a sense of connection to the greater biological life cycles on our planet. Even when the kitchen is mutable and changing, just as community changes, the place where food is prepared and served becomes the tie that keeps us together.

I was part of a portable and temporary community on wheels when I traveled with 40 "superheroes serving others" by bicycle through Arizona. I pulled a trailer behind my bike with up to 100 pounds of food, including a 40 pound bag of shredded coconut, generously donated to us. We set up our kitchen each day, in a new place, and proceeded to prepare three meals a day for our large group while also volunteering in the community and coming up with creative ways to add coconut to everything. At one point in our travels, we had a long day that included freeway riding. Five of our members who brought up the rear reached the freeway at dark and instead chose to camp alone, 20 miles from the rest of the group. This was the day that I had cooked beans in a pot and wrapped them tightly in my sleeping bag to cook as I pulled them in my trailer, so they would be ready at dinner. Luckily, they were ready, because we did not have much else for dinner, as the five folks in the rear had most of our ingredients. They did not have a stove, however, so they ate raw oats for dinner and breakfast. Thus, we had no breakfast but a few leftover beans, and we were in a food desert in the middle of the desert with only a gas station to feed us. Luckily, the food was reunited when those riders met us midday.

This experience reminded me that a kitchen, like community, when divided, cannot fully nourish us. When healthy and strong, kitchen is the heart of community. 🌿

Devon Bonady is a gardener, mother, and teacher who loves to cook local food, eat local food, and share it with her community. She is especially excited about native edible plants from the Pacific Northwest and the past and present culture and community that surround them.



Abundant fall squash harvest.



Calzones made with love by friends in our cob pizza oven.



A bountiful garlic harvest.

Photos by Brian Basor

Cookin' Dinner for the Revolution

By *Jesika Feather*

Our community first began cooking together in Waveland, Mississippi in 2005 just after Hurricane Katrina. We made our separate ways to a disaster relief kitchen called The New Waveland Café, which was started by the Rainbow Family. We spent the next nine months living in a tent city while we cooked breakfast, lunch, and dinner daily for an average of 400 hurricane survivors and volunteers. That December we moved our kitchen to St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana, renamed it The Made with Love Café, and created a non-profit, Emergency Communities.

We woke up each morning at 5:30 to crack eggs, fry bacon, mix pancake batter, and chop fruit salad. As we stood in our outdoor kitchen before dawn in January, our fingers throbbed and froze peeling boxes of oranges pre-soaked in bleach water to combat the post-Katrina toxins.

We cried together over vats of too-lumpy gravy, and prayed to about 17 higher powers that our spice cake (sans baking powder) might defy chemistry. We shared elated glances as we handed out fried chicken, bowls of cheesy grits, and mounds of fresh salad to people who'd eaten nothing but MREs and Vienna sausages for months.

It is true that we nourished thousands of survivors of Hurricane Katrina but, just as importantly, we created a safe space—inside a huge, dome-shaped dining room tent—where people could come together over red beans and rice or butterscotch pie to recreate their culture, ignite friendships, and rebuild faith in the idea that life could be worth living.

As we established that space for hurricane survivors, we inadvertently created a place for ourselves to become a family. Because each day was concentrated with intense experience, we built a rich history in only nine months. In that short time we grew to trust each so deeply that, when our kitchen closed, many of us moved forward as a team. We bought a house together in Eugene, Oregon and created The Heart and Spoon Community.

Nearly 10 years have stretched between our formation on the Gulf Coast and the present. A decade of new experiences has diluted those disaster relief memories so that they feel more

like legends than reality. Most of the original founders of this community have moved out of the house and new people have become deeply invested in The Heart and Spoon. The overall personality of this community has mutated dramatically, though we've maintained one ongoing through-line: a combined commitment to human service and dinnertime.

Our full community is a rich blend of current household members, past housemates, and a general barrage of friends and family who feel comfortable showing up at any time, usually unannounced, and who frequently stay for dinner.

Right now our in-house community holds 12 people: four single adults, four parents, and four kids (two five-year-olds and two seven-year-olds). The adults range in age from 20 to 38. This variance in age and lifestyle is one of my favorite elements of The Heart and Spoon, though the practice of merging our diverse group in a way that keeps us feeling like a family requires a lot of work and communication.

Maintaining a consistent dinnertime for the whole community is the primary way we connect. Between planning, shopping, cooking, and cleaning, the entire routine can easily span from 4:30 until 9:00 every evening. Most of the time, we parents assume the responsibility of meal planning and preparation. Nearly everyone enjoys cooking, but the parents' demand for a solid schedule causes us to initiate before others are usually ready. We feel that a timely dinner is mandatory to help the kids feel stable in a household that is otherwise prone to fluctuation.

As a rule, we Heart and Spooners don't make a huge distinction between residents and regular guests. All visitors are encouraged to help out by cooking, cleaning, or playing with kids. Due to our eternally changing population of housemates and our ongoing stream of visitors, it's become almost instinctual to view The Heart and Spoon as a home to whoever happens to be present at the time, whether or not they pay for a bedroom. The kids have been known to ask our regular visitors, "Do you live here?"

Generally this "open home" philosophy has positive results. Our informal approach helps visitors feel more accepted and more invested in the community. It isn't uncommon for peo-



Tara Whitsitt



The Heart and Spoon Together Hug.

Photos by Valisa Higman



Frequently music accompanies dinner.



Heart and Spoon kids on Pi(e) Day.



Erin Grady occu-pies the kitchen.

ple who don't actually live here to facilitate a meal, help with a household project, or host an event at our house.

White Bird is also a notable fixture in our community. White Bird is a 24-hour, collectively run crisis clinic in our town. Right now, half the adult population of our house works full-time at White Bird, and nearly everyone in our house has contributed to White Bird in some capacity. Because we're accustomed to feeding large numbers, our home has become a common dining stop for CAHOOTS. CAHOOTS is White Bird's mobile crisis unit. Their van is staffed by both a medic and a crisis worker. They respond, through police dispatch, to nonviolent 911 calls.

About three nights a week the CAHOOTS workers use our house as a dinner stop. Their presence in uniform, complete with police radio, is another regular reminder of our ongoing fusion of food and human service.

While it generally feels like an honor to live in a house that is home to so many, the responsibility can feel overwhelming. There are stints when our community is very aware that it's valued and cherished by an astonishing number people, but for those of us who keep it going, the daily maintenance can become staggering and downright stifling.

Our commitment to a daily communal dinner is a titanic assignment. Though the amount of food is minuscule compared to my disaster relief experience, this obligation is far more difficult. Cooking all day for hurricane victims under a circus tent with dozens of garishly dressed hippies and anarchist punks felt kind of glamorous and badass.

Dedicating large portions of each day to feeding one's own large family, along with the physical and emotional upkeep of the community, is not nearly as romantic and does not illicit a lot of recognition. It isn't uncommon for me to feel exhausted and wonder... *Why are we doing this?* Immediately followed by the next question... *What exactly are we doing?*

After nearly a decade of wondering whether I'm just working way too hard to get a bunch of hippies to eat together, I'm finally zoning in to the truth. The reason it's so taxing, and the reason we do it anyway, is because our dinners aren't only dedicated to creating "family time" for our household. This community is a hub for numerous, overlapping cooperatives dedicated to revolutionary social change.

Our job at The Heart and Spoon is to

hold a space that feels safe, fun, and nourishing for the people who work on the front lines of organized social transformation.

Though holding a space is a grueling process, the work is so subtle that we've spent years not even realizing that we're doing it. It is subtle because it is based in daily routine, and it is arduous because it requires relentless consistency.

Holding a space is actually a work of art, like writing or painting. When you do it well, it appears effortless. I'm sure there are people who visit The Heart and Spoon who imagine that all this dinner-making and family gathering flows as easily as the flatulence from your drunken uncle.

In reality there are uncomfortable house meetings regarding food cost, hours of accounting, and lots of time invested in respecting individual food preferences.

There are evenings when we expect 15 people for dinner, and then find only us parents and kids in front of two baked chickens and a stockpot full of mashed potatoes. After three hours of food prep, we're left to clean it all up ourselves, while also getting the kids ready for bed and packing their lunches for school the next day.

And of course there's the frequently awkward, occasionally contentious, but primarily incessant communication involved in blending parents, children, and single individuals into a stable, intimate family.

Holding this space is like a marriage. It requires ongoing effort even when the work feels unwanted or superfluous. This type of labor embodies every hippie and anarchist's greatest aversion: monotony. It means cleaning messes that come right back and cooking food that's about to be eaten. Consistency is vital. Without the monotony, the magic doesn't happen.

In February 2015 we were all given an unexpected, reality-based pop quiz, testing whether we could still work the magic.

We cook for holidays, birthdays, theme parties...any ol' reason to spice up our lives. These gatherings usually leave us feeling proud of our community and generally inspired. But it wasn't until we catered our first tragedy since Katrina that I felt my most solid reminder of our true purpose.

On February 14th, one of our solid, long-term community members disappeared while in a paranoid and delusional mental state.

Within 48 hours of Noah's disappearance dozens of his friends and family members began gathering at The Heart and Spoon. For two weeks we met each night to have dinner, discuss search methods, work on media outreach, and share information from the day. People who lived out of town stayed at our house. People who weren't available to search donated us boxes of food, coffee, and wine. We received letters, texts, Facebook messages, and financial contributions from people who couldn't travel. We had long, intimate conversa-

tions with Noah's childhood friends whom we'd previously never even heard of.

The weeks following his disappearance were surreal. Many evenings I sat at the table looking around at all the characters who'd woven the plot line of Noah's life. His sister sat next to his best friend from kindergarten, who sat beside his ex-girlfriend, who ladled soup for one of his journalist buddies from the college newspaper. Across the table, Noah's current sweetheart passed the salad bowl to his aunt and uncle.

People arrived from every nook and cranny of Noah's history, and the most healing thing any of us could think of to do was to bake three quiches, roll enchiladas, chop radishes, and simmer pots of soup.

More than at any other time since our community's formation, I've become acutely aware of the importance of a physical space where people can share ideas, make plans, and create a common culture. Life is unpredictable and it's important for people to have a few fundamentals they can depend on.

At The Heart and Spoon, dinner happens at 7:00 and we have one dinnertime ritual: The Together Hug. It's our non-dogmatic equivalent of a blessing. It doesn't happen at any specific point in the meal. We usually make the kid plates first, and then the adults serve themselves. We attempt to have a Together Hug sometime after the last adult is served, but before the kids escape. Really it happens whenever we remember. At that point we all reach out to "hug" the

friend on either side and we sing "1...2...3...TOGETHER HUG!"

It takes only a few seconds, but it's a refreshing moment of solidarity. With all the ruckus of people retrieving condiments, filling last-minute water glasses, and cleaning spills, it's good to have a moment for pause and appreciation of the group who has gathered around the table.

Due to our number, our diversity, and the nature of the people we attract, maintaining consistency at The Heart and Spoon will always be a challenge, but finally learning to define the service that our community provides has helped me significantly. I hope we can help more activists recognize that a healthy, vibrant, reliable home-base bestows a feeling of sustainability to the general effort. Whether we're facing off tragedy, reveling in celebration, or scrubbing at the scum of the mundane, we're still gonna keep on makin' dinner. 🍷



Kids table on sushi night.

Jesika Feather is a mother, writer, teacher, and community organizer who lives at The Heart and Spoon Community in Eugene, Oregon. She blogs about living communally and parenting at jesmamasmusings.blogspot.com.

WE GOT AN EGG! A Study in Scarcity

By Heather Barnes

“Hey!” Thirteen-year-old Jayden yells as he races across the yard to the Asian stilt-house. “*Sawasdee*,” he adds breathlessly, rushing through the required greeting. He looks up hopefully at Olivia, waiting for him on the Thai house’s steps. “Do you have any rice?”

“No,” she says. “But we have water. Do you need water?”

“Yes!” He holds up the potato and onion clutched in his hands. “I’ll trade you these for some water, please.”

But Olivia hesitates, regarding the vegetables with the discerning eye of a rural matriarch at market. She shakes her head. “That’s not much for a whole gallon of water. Two onions and two potatoes.”

Like most American kids, Jayden has never bartered for anything before in his life. He knows that two onions and two potatoes is a very steep price to pay—it will nearly wipe out his allotted vegetable stores—but, without the water, he and his fellow housemates can’t cook anything at all. He considers the offer carefully for several minutes, not sure how much risk to take. Finally, he decides on a counter-offer, one that is still very expensive. “One onion and two potatoes.”

“Fine,” Olivia agrees. The trade is done.

Jayden, Olivia, and their seventh-grade classmates are on a school trip to the Global Village at Howell Nature Center in Michigan. After most of a day exploring the disturbing details of hunger and poverty, the kids will spend the evening getting a taste of what it’s like to be desperately poor. They’re assigned to one of the model houses in the Global Village, each with its own food supplies, limitations, and rules for interacting with the “residents” of other houses. Their goal tonight is simple: make dinner. The food they are given is good, but success is not guaranteed.

Representative of some of the world’s poorest regions, the houses in the Village don’t have electricity, phone lines, or driveways. A few don’t even have doors. Some are made of wood, others of mud, clay, or even recycled trash. All of them are accurate, and all of them represent the desperate living conditions of millions of people around the world right now.

Hunger is just part of the problem. Lack of clean water causes its own maladies. Poor soil conditions, natural disasters, war, government corruption, fluctuating market prices, and lack of education all contribute to the circumstances which prevent otherwise capable, intelligent people from escaping an overwhelming string of challenges. Without money and education, it’s virtually impossible to do. Many organizations and NGOs specialize in aiding residents of

these areas by providing access to things like education, clean water, health care, and small business loans, all of which help poor families improve their own circumstances.

Some 12 percent of the world’s seven billion people do not regularly get enough food to lead normal, active lives, according to the United Nations’ Food and Agriculture (FAO) annual report in 2013. That’s 842 million people. This number is down from a few years ago, but it’s still way too high.

Iron deficiency, for instance, is rampant in poverty-stricken areas of the world, along with every other kind of conceivable illness. You don’t find iron-rich foods like red meat or fresh kale lying around in sun-baked tropical regions choked with trash. Iron feeds the blood, and most importantly, it feeds the brain.

Earlier in the day, we played a quick game to demonstrate what working while iron-deficient can feel like. It’s pretty much impossible to succeed, and the kids laugh at the silliness of their efforts.

And yet, I ask them later, imagine if I were your boss and I just asked to you to go do a simple task for me. How well did you perform that task?

“We failed,” they moan. “We are so fired.”

“Do you think I’ll be hiring you again tomorrow?”

“No.”



Students bartering for food at the Thailand house.



Photos courtesy of Heather Barnes



*Food you cooked yourself
always tastes better!*

“So you’re out of a job now because you couldn’t follow directions. You have no income. What are you going to do?”

The kids are silent, watching me with flat, wary gazes. They have no idea.

In the United States alone, 14 percent of our population is food-insecure, which means they don’t know where their next meal will come from. The world produces more than enough food for each of its citizens, yet one in eight goes to bed hungry every night. The reasons for this are manifold, from theft or accident, disaster, overly strict governmental regulations, or the logistical inability to get the food where it needs to go.

But at this point, early in the afternoon before the role-playing begins, I’m just another teacher and that was just another forgettable academic question that stumped them. It’s not life-size yet, and for most of them, it will never be a reality. Right now, this stuff only happens to distant shadow-people called “Them.”

Fast-forward to dinner preparations.

In our model village, the Urban Slums are a collection of rough shacks frequently mistaken for chicken coops. Unlike real life, ours are not crammed into a trash dump at the edge of a huge metropolis and don’t come with the standard malaria, rats, violence, and floating sewage. But try telling that to their current residents. I wander into the Slums to find the kids huddled around their plastic food bin, looking shell-shocked.

“We have nothing!” cries Laura, on the verge of tears. “This is all we get to eat tonight?”

I can’t answer that. Since they haven’t even started discussing all their options yet, I have no idea what they’ll end up with. Her teacher and I both shrug helplessly.

Still very much in disbelief, she and the others gape for a few minutes longer, as if expecting us to pull a hot pizza out from behind a bush and laugh the whole thing off as a joke. But there is no punchline. The possibility that they might not get something they really need has never occurred to them before. Dawning horror is plain on their faces.

I leave the Urban Slums group to chart their own destiny. Either they’ll get it together or they won’t.

While high school students and adults can take the sudden threat of no dinner as the eye-opening opportunity that it is, younger kids often have a harder time not taking their disadvantages personally. Some, like Laura, give up immediately, shutting down or pleading with me to make things easier. Others, however, are galvanized by the challenges presented here, as if I’m daring them not to eat, and rally themselves to prove me wrong. Success seems to depend on their attitudes and expectations as much as their imaginations.

Among the privileged—and I use the term loosely here; simply being an American from an urban or suburban region qualifies as very privileged on the world stage even if they are considered poor or disadvantaged by American standards—there is a pervasive assumption that chronic hunger or poverty is somehow easier for those forced to live with it, as if they have some built-in resistance to pain and indignity. What visitors to the Global Village don’t realize is how authentic their own reactions are: anger, frustration, fear, or contempt toward those who have more (or are perceived to have more). Rarely does this connection emerge as conscious thought during the program, but for some it begins to manifest as

uncomfortable feelings.

Slowly, “Them” begins to feel like “Us.”

In the rural Appalachian house, Jayden has returned to face the music. His housemates are not very pleased about the exorbitant price he paid for the water.

His housemate, Christopher, has set himself up as head chef in the run-down American house. “What?” he explodes, brandishing a wooden spoon. “Wonderful! Now we’re left with a couple of vegetables, a couple of eggs, and cornmeal? What kind of crap-cake is that supposed to make? It’s disgusting!”

“Hey, what was I supposed to do?” Jayden flares up, defending his business decision. “Say no to the water? You couldn’t even fry this stuff because we don’t have cooking oil!”

“I don’t think we have to mix all of it together,” volunteers Amy from the porch. “We could still trade some things, you know. How about an egg for some cooking oil?”

“Who would want just one egg?” Christopher snaps at her.

Unlike the Slums, it seems the Appalachian house has too many chefs with their own ideas. While they glare at each other, I head back to the Urban Slums.

It seems they’ve made some progress: two have left to trade food, and another one is kneeling on the ground coaxing some sparks to life in the fire pit.

“Do you have a plan?” I ask them.

Laura shrugs dismally. “We’re just going to try and see what we can get.”

She doesn’t have to wait long. Suddenly the two traders come racing back, shouting with glee. “We got an egg and a carrot!” one of them yells, waving it over his head. “We’re saved!”

(continued on p. 74)

Why I'm a Locavore

By Megan Kemple

I'm a dedicated locavore. About 90 percent of the food I eat is grown by farmers I know. I can walk through my pantry and tell you the first name of the farmer who grew everything there. Dried peppers from farmer Charles, squash from farmer Ted, hazelnuts from farmer Linda, and on and on. I go to the grocery store about once a month for things like olive oil, peanut butter, and salt. I visit the farmers' market every weekend, pick up my Community Supported Agriculture box on Tuesdays, and just before winter fill up at Fill Your Pantry, our bulk buying event for locally grown beans, grains, and storage crops. I don't buy bananas and I don't eat fresh tomatoes in the winter.

I support the people who I hope can feed my community when bigger systems fail.

My diet changes with the seasons. In summer, I enjoy fresh fruits and vegetables. In fall, I preserve fruits and veggies like crazy and stock up on local beans, grains, and storage crops. In winter, I eat my dried, frozen, canned, and stored food. In the spring, I finish off the food I have stored from the winter and enjoy foods that are coming on in spring, eggs and greens. And then the cycle begins again.

My locavore diet is about building a strong and resilient local food system and a healthier community. (I use the word community broadly here to encompass everyone in my geographic area including people, plants, animals, and the land.)

I eat this way because it connects me with the source of my food and the people who grow it. I experience the connection with every meal. It's a relationship and it's an important one. Beyond the personal connection, there's a financial connection, which contributes to community food security. When I support my local farmers I hope I'm helping to provide them with the resources they need to continue farming. When they have what they need, I hope they'll be able to grow food for me and my community into the future.

The farmers who grow my food are supporting a healthy planet. The personal relationship I have with them allows me the opportunity to learn about their growing practices. I can intentionally choose to buy food from farmers who grow food using the most sustainable practices. By supporting them and those practices, we are promoting environmental health together. This is another part of the relationship.

I'm concerned about climate change and associated disruptions to our food system now and in the future. I want to help create a future where my local farms are able to feed our community when food system infrastructure like semi-trucks traveling up the

interstate from California aren't an option. So I support the people who I hope can feed my community if and when bigger systems fail. In addition to being close by, my local farmers are more likely to grow crops which are well adapted to our local climate and those that are more likely to survive climate extremes. I support farmers who are developing crops that can weather extremes. I want them and their crops to be around in the future.

All of these pieces together—the opportunity for me to support farmers financially, in turn being sustained by the food they provide, being connected to each other, and knowing about and supporting their sustainable growing practices—mean that I am helping to create a strong and resilient local food system and a healthier community. 🌱

Megan Kemple is a dedicated locavore living in Eugene, Oregon. She is the Farm to School Program Director for Willamette Farm and Food Coalition, a community-based non-profit working to create a secure and sustainable food system in Lane County, Oregon.



Megan Kemple's pantry, February 2015.

Megan Kemple

Hot Topic, Raw Emotion, and the Spice of Life: Chewing over Food Choice in Community

By Tracy Matfin

Deep breath in, deep breath out. I sit on one of the twin beds in our upstairs meeting room, leaning against the wall, with a steaming cup of freshly harvested and brewed turmeric ginger tea, mildly sweetened with honey from the bees on the farm. A small smile of contentment and anticipation plays across my lips as the drumming of the rain on the roof fills the room and individuals start appearing at the top of the staircase. A wet morning rewards the choice to spend time with chosen family, discussing important issues and fostering our common vision.

I am a founding member of La'akea Community (Big Island, Hawaii), which, formed 10 years ago, has 11 adult members, two kids, and one trial member. Our years of success stem from a shared belief that people must continuously connect with one another and the land to live sustainably. A primary way we connect is around food.

Business meetings at La'akea follow a format designed to encourage the honest sharing of minds and hearts. We begin with "check-ins," then move on to "appreciations" and "withholds," followed by "announcements," "homework," and then finally the "agenda." Some of these processes I will describe further on.

At the meeting today, our facilitator starts by calling for check-ins. These are typically brief reports where individuals share their current emotional state and any plans for the day. One community member—a tall, dark-haired man, a strong presence on the land and loving father—speaks first. "I feel refreshed, well-rested, and happy the weather is complicit with our need to stay in this morning. I do not relish being soggy."

As others take turns sharing, I appreciate the wisdom and intelligence of our most senior members, the patience and joy of several of the women, and the peaceful energy of several

others. Our group is diverse and eclectic, ranging in age from 32 to 84, in education from high school to Ph.D., and in financial status from enough-to-get-by to established-retirement-fund. We are all fit and healthy within our varying body types. More than half of the group initially connected through the Network for a New Culture.

I take a turn at checking in. I begin by sharing an appreciation: "I am incredibly grateful for our daily experiment in how to live together. I appreciate every one of us for our commitment and dedication to each other and the land we steward." I then share that I feel anxious that there are food-related items on the agenda. Food has been



Photos courtesy of Tracy Matfin





Author Tracy Matfin brings in the harvest with her daughter A'i'ala.



Tropical fruit abundance.



Abundant fruit from the land at La'akea Community.



Eating local, eating well: taro, sheep stew, green papaya salad, and a garden salad.

at the center of many energy-filled discussions throughout La'akea's history. I am going to share several episodes from that history to provide an insight into our community processes.

Since our inception, we have been a partial income-sharing community. We take in money through collective endeavors (like events and guest fees) as well as through monthly membership dues. We use that money for a variety of group needs—for example, for our truck and tractor, tools, garden amendments and supplies, household and office goods. We use that money to buy food.

Early in our history, members used La'akea money to buy whatever food they wanted, with the exception of: foods deemed "luxury items" (coffee, chocolate), fruit over \$2.50/lb., and any other items over \$8/lb. This system was too vague and had to be changed within a year and a half. We devised a "food list"—a list of items we agreed were OK to buy. We made this list by starting with basic staples that were always in the kitchen, then added items we each liked to eat regularly. Faced with the daunting project of getting everyone to agree on every item on the list, we agreed (through consensus) to scratch consensus in this instance and use a voting system instead. If at least three people wanted an item on the list, we kept it. About two hours later, we had our first "food list."

Moving forward in La'akea's history, the dance around food came to include not just what we bought with La'akea money but also what we didn't buy—what we chose to grow, harvest, prepare, and eat from the land.

"Did anyone harvest the cacao?" I heard this question within a year of the exultant cry, "The cacao is fruiting!" The answer: "Well, no. The last time I made a chocolate cake I used the cocoa powder from the store. It was sitting right there on the shelf and I chose what was easier."

"For dinner tonight we have wild pig and taro stew, taro with pesto, heart of palm salad, and a kale salad." Most of the items were grown on the farm, harvested and then prepared. This meal took most of a day to prepare, the reward being to eat food grown and harvested from the land.

"For dinner tonight we have tortillas, black beans, rice, grated cheese, avocado, and salsa." One, maybe two, of these items is from the land: the avocados and the salsa (if freshly made). Everything else was pur-

chased. This meal took only a few hours to prepare, the reward being ease.

The tension around the foods we bought and foods we grew and harvested eventually, about two years ago, led the topic back to the business meeting. If the general idea was to grow our own food and eat locally, why was our “food list” so big? Time had arrived for revision. We began by airing our concerns through a go-around. Each person in turn shared their thoughts and feelings around food in our community. This time we shared a strong desire to motivate change in our eating. We removed from the list (to name just some of the items) cocoa powder, dates, cashews, yogurt, cheese, and mayonnaise. A new list was born.

We now return to the present day. The rain continues to patter against the roof as I take another sip of sweet, nourishing tea. “Food list” has made it to the agenda yet again.

“Does anyone wish to share a withhold?” our facilitator asks. A withhold is a feeling or judgment that someone has kept to themselves—something that they are holding on to—that keeps them from being present. They share to be more present, to connect with the person or people to whom their withhold is directed.

“Yes,” hisses one of the members. She continues in an audibly irate tone, “this is for the whole group. Last night when I went to make dinner, I was disgusted by the mess on the counter. I went to put my collards down next to the sink and I saw a

spattering of blood. I know a pig was slaughtered yesterday morning and to find this was beyond tolerable.” After hearing this withhold, we chose to make it a business item, to discuss raw meat and cleanliness in the kitchen at greater length.

Are you vegan? Vegetarian? Omnivore? Do you eat only raw food or prefer ayurvedically-prepared meals? La’akea’s mission statement welcomes such diversity: “We embrace processes which work to bring us into unity, while respecting each person’s autonomy.” Take a poll at La’akea and you’ll find one raw vegan, two vegetarians, four gluten-free, and several serious carnivores. Now let’s share a kitchen and make community meals together.

We decided to address the issue of the bloody counter by using an abbreviated version of the Hawaiian ho’oponopono. Each member shared their story:

“I assisted in the harvesting of the pig. We were very careful to do most of the work out in the slaughterhouse. We only did the final packaging for the freezer in the kitchen.”

“I remember wiping the counters very thoroughly.”

Then each shared how they were responsible for the blood on the counter.

“I could have gone over all the counters once again after everything was put away.”

“I could have been more careful to use only one area.”

“I could have wiped up the blood when I saw it.”

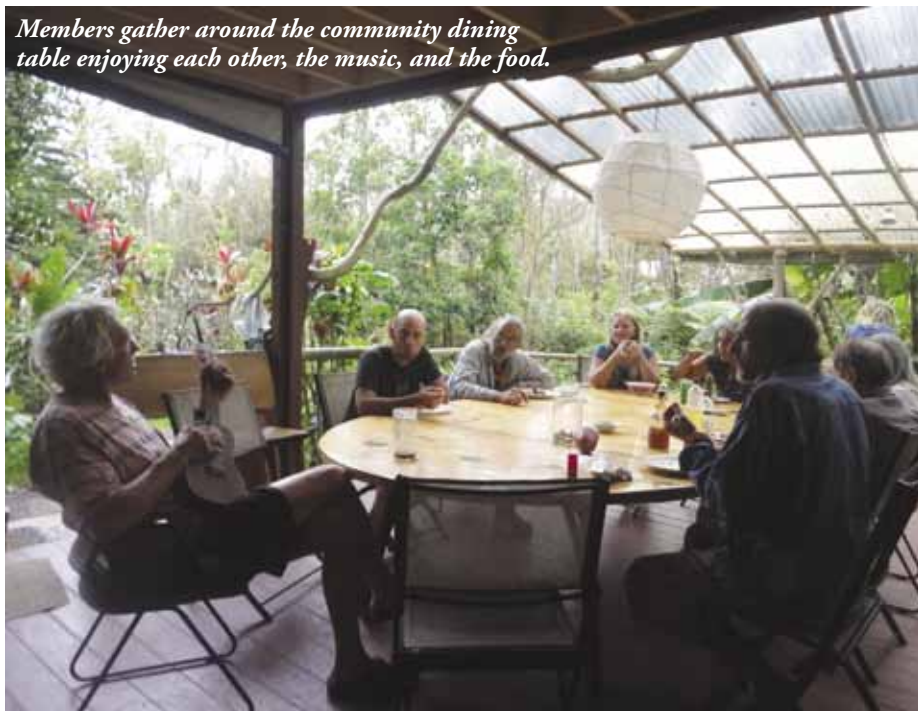
“I could have helped when I saw the process going on in the kitchen.”

After everyone, including the angry community member, took responsibility for their actions and feelings, the ho’oponopono was complete. We decided to move forward with a renewed consciousness around meat: to be more thorough in cleaning up, to use only the red cutting board, and to use the counter to the left of the first sink.

As we go on to address the topic of the food list, it’s obvious that food stirs our emotions. Culturally-influenced food choices, personal dietary needs, and sustainability ideals swirl together in a potential maelstrom. Every community, regardless of size, addresses these issues. Some communities come together around food. I’ve seen vegan communities, primal-diet communities, and 80-10-10 groups.

Sustainability is difficult to measure; there are many perspectives on what it is. From a land-based permaculture point of view, we could study the climate zone and research the crops historically grown in the area, especially those grown by the more indigenous cultures. Taro, breadfruit, turmeric, and sweet potato exist at the top of this list for Hawaii. Other tropically-oriented foods found here come from Central America, Brazil, Thailand, and the Philippines, such as cacao, palms, ginger, pumpkins, and spices. These plants grow well here and are easy to propagate; many are perennials that hardly ever succumb to insect or other plant pests; if you put them in the ground and walk away, these plants will do

Members gather around the community dining table enjoying each other, the music, and the food.





Celebrating Thanksgiving by picnicking together at the beach.



Putting love into the food as Dona makes community ferments.



Derek and Ruben in the La'akea kitchen, playing around during the preparation of a group meal.



Beautiful banana guilds at La'akea Community.

fine. Our need for ease will clearly be met by choosing these plants.

Yet there are other ways to view sustainability. Most of the members at La'akea did not grow up eating these foods, so... "What do we choose to eat?" "What do we choose to harvest?" This emotional angle asks, "Which foods bring us comfort? Which foods are linked to years of memories?" Our taste buds know these foods, as do our digestive systems. So we continue to grow the vegetables that need more care, more fertilizers, more protection from hungry insects, and require the purchase of seed shipped in from the continent. Balance, harmony, and sustainability are not just questions of physical reality.

I consider myself and many others at La'akea "opportunistic locavores." As we open to the opportunity, we eat locally. We grow and purchase foods we know and love and foods we are learning to love.

The anxiety I felt earlier fades away as I realize it's not all about the food list after all. It is about the connection that listening and understanding brings. Our community continues to thrive because we choose to take the time to connect with our chosen family. We choose to remember that to live sustainably we need to practice compassion, understanding, acceptance, and our consensus process. 🌱

Tracy Matfin is an educator turned farmer, mother, and permaculture instructor. Tracy cofounded La'akea Community (www.permaculture-hawaii.com). Sharing the community's living experiment through tours and internship programs brings her great pleasure. She loves sitting with trees, communing with the "weeds" she is removing from the garden, and laughing with her daughter, friends, and family.



Ai'ala, one of the children growing up at La'akea, tending to the garden.

My Journey with Food in Community: A Banquet, in Five Courses

By Gigi Wahba

Food has always occupied a revered place within the many communities of my life. I have come to appreciate that food isn't just about sustenance. Rather, it has many roles and provides a critical context for the functioning of a community.

I. Food = Identity

Like many people, I find my first community in my nuclear family, and having meals together is our most basic ritual. My parents were first-generation immigrants to America. They had grown up in Egypt, enjoying proximity to their extended family and a close-knit community. However, due to political unrest in the '40s and '50s, their family was forced to leave ("expelled" was the official term). Their property and assets were seized and they became scattered across the globe with the few possessions they were able to carry with them. My parents emigrated first to England and then, five years later, to America.

As a child, I quickly learned that our family identity and our heritage were intricately tied to the food we ate.

Unlike my American-born friends, we didn't have soda, ketchup, or TV dinners in our fridge. Instead, every meal was made from scratch and only reluctantly did my mother allow processed food such as cereal, pre-made cookies, and pop tarts. It was absolutely obligatory to be at the table for the dinner meals and we never skipped meals. In fact, we rarely skipped high tea. Sleepovers were seen as an odd practice, breaking up the family mealtime. My parents also had different patterns of shopping from other families; they had a personal relationship with every vendor and visited numerous grocers, butchers, and ethnic markets throughout the week.

Sunday afternoons we often ate stewed fava beans, affectionately called "fuul." These beans are a staple food from their homeland, packed with protein and a very satisfying flavor, especially in the traditional form—mashed together with olive oil, cumin, sea salt, freshly ground pepper, and boiled eggs. Often pita bread was available to scoop up the last of the mash. Other traditional dishes included hummus, chicken soup seasoned with melokhiya (an herb rich in calcium), and, of course, many desserts and appetizers made from filo dough layered with butter. We ate what has now become known as the "Mediterranean diet" with all its healthful and varied flavors.

On the somewhat rare occasions when relatives came from distant towns, the baking and cooking began days ahead with special dishes with French, Spanish, and Arabic names. For these events, my mom would often invite local friends who also came from Egypt or other Sephardic areas. I remember sitting on the top steps of our split-level home, looking down on the exotic faces, hearing unique accents of the three languages we spoke at home, and feeling the heat of the crowded living room rising. This, I could wistfully imagine, would have been the scene at my grandmother's home each Sunday were the politics different and my family able to stay in Egypt.

II. Food = Camaraderie

Fast forward to college, to eating on the "meal plan." I have to say, at first I felt a kind of liberation to be able to eat or not eat at any time and with whomever I chose. While my mom's food was gourmet by any standard, I was ready to drop all the fuss about cooking and eating. I savored the typical, buffet-style American food which included French fries, cream pies, pizzas, etc. This change of diet had a deeply sedating effect, contraindicated for intense

study, but still satisfying to my quest of finally becoming a true American.

By my third year, when most of my friends were living off campus and out of proximity, we realized that we missed the social aspect of eating together. A friend of our household came up with the idea of a weekly potluck, late morning Sundays. We asked people to bring food or drink and help clean up. It was a fabulous success and soon people started asking other people to come. There was always something to enjoy—good food, animated conversation, a little music, a little gossip, etc.

Food was not so much about who we were but what we had to offer each other.

This same group of friends decided, one year, to stay in our college town for the Thanksgiving break. Again, we had a potluck for the festive meal but that year we had a couple who came and brought a curious casserole made with tofu. Most of that evening's conversation was about the environmental impact of food choices. We talked about how all that corn we saw in the fields was for animal consumption and that crowded stockyards were the norm. I remember noticing that while this information was disturbing and a call to action of some sort, learning about it in the context of a celebration made me feel hopeful.

Each week that we had the potlucks, the camaraderie offered by sharing meals was a great touchstone, helping ground everybody and providing opportunity to develop ideas. It also made clear the notion that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. We always had a feast of food and ideas even though we were only students with limited resources.

III. Food = Love

After college I was without community for a while. I traveled, explored my new career, fell in and out of relationships. Eventually, I followed my passion for modern dance to study in Amsterdam for a summer. While the dance school was a community of sorts, I connected more with a sub-community interested in spiritual growth. At the close of the summer session, I was invited to travel to an “intentional community” in the northern part of the Netherlands—there, spiritual practice was developed in everyday farm life.

After a weeklong visit, I decided to return to this vegetarian, nonviolent community after my summer lease was over. Since I knew nothing about farming but did have experience growing produce in a community garden, I quickly volunteered to help out in the garden. It was late summer and the garden beds were brimming with greens, tomatoes, peppers, etc. The work was very peaceful and included taking care of three ewes who were living out their old age. By the next spring, I joined the woman who mentored me to become the garden team. We had three garden plots: one at home, two at locations about five kilometers away. We would commute by bicycle six days a week and spend full days



Gigi with giant cabbage from CSA.



Spring at Valentine CSA.

Photos courtesy of Gigi Wahba

at the gardens.

In that intentional community, as in my nuclear family, we would eat all three meals together. However, unlike at my childhood home, there was often some kind of sharing and discussion of personal-growth issues at mealtimes. With about 20 members sitting at three long tables arranged in a horseshoe pattern, there was one facilitated discussion at a time. While occasionally I would be a protagonist in a discussion for something I

erations. For them, an intimate connection with place—land, water, microbes, climate, etc.—is what defines food.

All my discussions and research about “terroir” (the critical role of local conditions in the final outcome of a food product) got me wanting to get back on the land. When I was 34, I traveled through the Midwest and had the chance to visit Sandhill Farm, a well-established intentional community, having gotten its start in 1974. There the population ranges from four to nine members who grow most of their own food including vegetables and fruits, wheat and beans, maple syrup and sorghum, and some livestock. Everyone who visits is almost instantly awed by the product of this effort—root cellars chock full, many kinds of homebrew available, meat off the land in the freezer, and several bushels of produce available for the cook of the day to choose from.

As it turned out, I moved to this community and grew some very deep roots there both in lasting friendships and starting a family. Again I worked in the gardens but this time I learned the next level of food self-sufficiency—not only eating fresh during the growing season but also storing food for winter and early spring consumption. Food storage took the form of canning, freezing, dehydrating, wine making, and fermenting. Everyone played a role in the agriculture and we took turns

I rarely cooked the same meal twice because there were vast combinations of available homegrown foods throughout the year.

had done well (or not so well), I was mostly an observer, feeling that my life experiences thus far had given me little wisdom when it came to human dynamics. Still, I longed to contribute and appreciate fully what others were sharing.

After a while, I realized that my work in the gardens—bringing fresh food to the table—was what I could best offer while I learned the more subtle art of personal engagement. I have delightful memories of hauling our garden harvests in a bike trailer with the satisfaction that this produce was grown and delivered with love for all to enjoy.

In that almost monastic environment, I gave deep thanks to my mother for her many, many years of channeling her love through her cooking.

IV. Food = Place

After four years abroad in this remote farm and healing center (without internet!), I was ready to put my new skills and positive outlook to action back in my home country. I moved to Eugene, Oregon to join my sister and I found work at one of the natural food markets. I became the cheese specialist and enthusiastically learned and shared the intricate flavors and processes of making cheese around the world. I was fascinated by the importance of local yeasts, caves, dairy breeds, etc. Though we are a global culture, each society has its farmers and crafters who have been cultivating specific food and animal varieties for gen-

preparing meals. I rarely cooked the same meal twice because there were vast combinations of available foods throughout the year.

Often too, we were busy with a food-related task such as shelling beans or cleaning herbs during our regular community meetings. While I was there we formalized our intern program to share what we were learning about food self-sufficiency and group dynamics. We, of course, also wanted to widen our social circle by opening up our home (also without internet at that time). I think it was fascinating for visitors to see how much food production defined our daily lives and our sense of well-being. For example, our biggest party of the year was a May Day celebration, complete with lots of food, a May Pole, live music, a sweat hut, games, and a full day of visiting with friends and neighbors too.

If one word could describe the feeling, it would be “abundance,” as we welcomed in the new growing season and appreciated our land and our many connections with it.

At Sandhill Farm, we not only grew garden and field crops but we also cultivated pe-



Activism: instating a Health Ordinance.



Activism: public meeting on cafes.



Making apple cider at Sandhill.

rennials, wildcrafted mushrooms, tapped maple trees, and got most of our meat from hunting deer from our land. These ties to the land all had their season and their rituals. It was always exciting to find the first morels or see the bluebells return for their brief spring show. Maple season required buckets and taps and driving the little tractor up and down icy paths.

We also took our farm products to local harvest fairs: handcrafted sorghum, salsa, garlic braids, beeswax candles, and other unique offerings. It was clear to me that these same products produced anywhere else would have different qualities. As an organic farm, we had been inputting wholesome nutrients onto the land for over 30 years. We also had been harvesting trees for our wood needs, planting new trees, and restoring prairie.

V. Food = Activism

To continue with my personal story, I did move away from communal living three years ago in favor of buying a house in the small town where my daughter is finishing up high school. I have continued to grow much of my food and have the only front yard garden and rainwater catchment system in town. (It's just what I do, but it turns out to be a pretty big statement in this conservative town.) Well, as long as I was making statements, I decided to write a monthly garden column in the local paper to talk about organic vegetable gardening and delve into some of the broader sustainability issues.

I had some earlier exposure to this town community. A few years back, we had an influx of confined animal feed operations (cafes) move into the surrounding farmland. Somehow I got pulled into the forefront of the confrontation with these operators and got involved with negotiations between them and the county. At the same time, I had been working with two other women to build up a farmers' market at our downtown, courthouse square. We did petition and win a countywide vote to instate a health ordinance to control the impacts of the feed operations. I'm glad I've been able to put my energies toward the farmers' market as a positive alternative to industrial agriculture.

The farmers' market, while still very small, is a sweet scene with five to eight vendors. About half the vendors are from the Mennonite community in our area. We have a few crafters as well. Sometimes friends come by to play music or one of the service groups in town will set up to promote an upcoming event. So we create opportunity for some mixing of social groups at the market and I get to socialize and sell a few vegetables from my garden.

Two years ago, I started the first Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) in our area as a way to do the work I love while also building the local food options. Each subscriber to my farm pays in advance for weekly delivery of fresh produce during the garden season. So far I have extended the shares to like-minded friends. This year I may get bold and

advertise to the general public.

It seems each year there is more that can be done to promote access and diversity in our food system. A few years ago, I connected our elementary school with FEDCO's seeds fundraiser and talked with the elementary kids about seed diversity, local economy, and the great feeling of fresh tomato squirt! Last year, I took up two plots at the community garden. We are lucky that one of the pastors in town is also an avid gardener and he converted a portion of hayfield to community gardens. I grew potatoes and green beans there as well as the lesser-known okra and celery, just because I thought it would be fun for other gardeners to see and wonder about—and it was. This year, I am helping organize a local seed swap and expect to continue to grow seed for the Southern Exposure Seed Exchange catalog. I will also need to drop my monthly columns and my work as farmers' market manager so that my life does not become unbalanced with food growing and activism.

When I think about it, all my activism around food issues is a sort of invitation to create community in my new town. 🐦

Gigi Wabba lives in Memphis, Missouri and maintains ties with the northeast Missouri intentional communities: Sandhill Farm, Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage, Red Earth Farms, and the Possibility Alliance. She also serves on the board of the Missouri Southern Iowa (MOSI) artists' guild.



Place: carrots grow here.



May Day at Sandhill.



Keren and Geoff: interns at Sandhill.

Make Food, Make *Hygge*, Make Happy

By Jane Moran

The hefty, six-burner, commercial-grade, propane-ready stove floats invisibly, glowing with promise, just above the newly laid kitchen tile.

“Just think of all the sunchokes we can cook!” exclaims Nick, laughing at the prospect of huge “fartichoke” spreads we can boil, simmer, and sautee—all at once!—on the giant new stove. (Giant relative to the two-burner camp stove we’ve been sharing for the last seven years!)

“And one person could stand on one side of the stove, and somebody else on the other side, and other people could be over here hanging out on this couch, and other people eating at the table!” Fantasy carries me into a not-so-distant future when the stove will be a real object—one that we’re driving a few hundred miles to pick up this weekend, for a great price—and the couches and tables and chairs and counters will all take their places in the room, transforming this spot from a construction project into real infrastructure for community. Infrastructure designed, specifically, for *hygge*—a funny-sounding word that exemplifies, to us, one of the fundamental intentions of any community.

Hygge, pronounced “hyoogah,” is a Danish word with no direct English translation. Helen Dyrbye in *Xenophobe’s Guide to the Danes*, writes of *hygge*, “It is the art of creating intimacy: a sense of comradeship, conviviality and contentment rolled into one.” Wikipedia explains: “*hygge* is a concept that evokes ‘coziness,’ particularly when relaxing with good friends or loved ones and while enjoying good food. Christmas time, when loved ones sit close together on a cold rainy night, is a true moment of *hygge*, as is grilling a *pølse* (Danish sausage) and drinking a beer on a long summer evening.” To me, learning the word “*hygge*” was like discovering a name for my favorite color—I knew I liked all those things in the definition, but I had never been able to congeal them so succinctly into one spot-on, concrete label and say, “This. This is what I want. This is what we are doing.”

In Denmark, tourism billboards advertise *hygge* as a basic tenet of the national culture. Danes claim that their value of *hygge*—which they consider more important than material wealth—explains the nation’s top rankings in international happiness surveys. Many of us drawn to intentional community all over the world share this value; even when it seems at odds with aspects of American Consumerist Capitalism, in which we’re meant to believe that money is the “bottom line.” Naming our community’s value of *hygge* feels empowering, as

Inside the Hygge Hall
with woodstove blazin’!



Photos courtesy of Jane Moran

the word helps focus our intention on what we want to create. Even though our village is geographically remote—surrounded by wilderness on all sides and almost an hour’s drive from the only incorporated city in our rural county—residents and visitors alike revel in the spirit of hygge that we cultivate by prioritizing human interaction and care. A lack of internet and cellphone reception also means that we’re all forced to notice the people, plants, animals, and physical world around us instead of “connecting” to a virtual world. .

In our little community, we’ve finally reached a tipping point where we can shift our resources from the creation of basic survival infrastructure into focusing more directly on making space for hygge.

Seven years ago, our founding member, Dan, arrived in this undeveloped patch of forest and lived for a year in a tent with his dog, bathing in the cold river and clearing trees to make space for buildings and gardens, envisioning the village we live in today. Since then, dozens of others have come and gone, lending their energy to the project, building several small cabins and a bigger community center, creating and cultivating acres of gardens, and more recently completing a greenhouse and two ponds. The newest building, christened the “Hygge Hall,” represents a lot of luxury for us, including an indoor storage area, kitchen, and living room.

It’s hard to imagine that the village infrastructure might ever be “finished,” since there’s always something else that would be fun to add. But until this spring, all of the cabins where we live have shared a year-round outdoor kitchen—which is great when the weather is nice, but challenging in storms, snow, and even mosquito-clouded summer evenings. The Hygge Hall means a place to gather even in inclement weather, a place to prepare food and share meals, to enjoy each other’s company without needing to retreat to private cabins. Nothing describes our intention better than the simple word, hygge.

I suppose a Hygge Hall by any other name would smell as sweet—whether it’s a kitchen, a mess hall, or a fire pit, the place of food and sustenance tends to become the center of any home or community. It’s a place of respite and nourishment, of heat and good smells and the sweet relief of a good meal after hard work; a place to share the rewards of being human.

To us, sharing the challenges and rewards of survival, from growing and preparing food to providing shelter, heat, and human connection, *is* the experience of community. We help keep each other alive, and we help keep each other nourished. When we grow our own food, our community consciously extends to include the land that we care for and from which we are fed. Tacking the final touches onto our beloved new Hall, with space for storing, processing, and sharing our precious bounty from the land, we reverently name and celebrate the value of hygge in our lives and community. 🍷

Jane Moran is a member of Maitreya Mountain Village (www.maitreymountainvillage.com), where she toils and eats communally in the Northern California wilderness. She is also an organizer for Transition Del Norte and the local timebank, Del Norte Hour Exchange, and sometimes writes for publications about experiments in community building.



Hygge Hall construction. Right top: Hygge Hall almost done outside! The old kitchen (a camping stove, picnic table, and sink) is in foreground.



View through the outdoor kitchen of a muddy clearing that will soon hold the Hygge Hall!



Discovering the Joy of Communal Food: Camaraderie and Work at Maitreya Mountain Village

By Dan Schultz

In 2008, when I began carving what is now Maitreya Mountain Village out of the raw, densely forested, rugged Siskiyou landscape, I brought my work ethic with me. I wrote the charter, posted the project online, and some really great people came to be a part of it. I found much to be learned from taking on this kind of vision, none more meaningful than the lessons I learned from the nourishing, even spiritual, relationship with food.

While our permaculture and sustainability aspects moved forward, I tended to want to work independently on separate tasks. It seemed more efficient, partly because multitasking had never come nat-

urally to me and working *with* other people could be distracting, even frustrating at times. It slowed me down.

My dietary habits were similarly independent. I was set on listening to my body to take meals when and only when I was hungry. I ate to the beat of my own internal drum and had come to altogether ignore when others convened for their “meal times” (much to the chagrin of my family when Thanksgiving dinner was served). So it was the rule, with few exception, that I ate separately from our newfound community.

These initial community members were WWOOFers and volunteers who came from Vermont, Australia, Germany—all over the country and globe—along with a few locals. Mostly they were Millennial generation, hippie kids, for lack of a better general description: 18-25-year-olds imbued by culture that valued communal practices of all sorts. Unlike me, they tended to want to both work and break bread with one another. I think my ways threw them off a little. Sometimes I could see how I rubbed off on them—and then, sometimes, them on me.

In the first few years I was keen to observe certain patterns of

community morale, especially as it related to the pace of work. I was (and still am, to a degree) about getting the job done. I noticed that when meals were shared (by chance timing, convenience, or invitation) camaraderie went up. Increments of enthusiasm became more present. More consideration and creativity entered our project realm. My unflinching internal work-o-meter told me so!

As the infrastructure and number of buildings grew, I more often engaged in communal gardening, food preparation, and the community ritual of meal sharing. I was raised with a dearth of such practices, but soon gained a deeper appreciation for the primal cohesiveness

When meals were shared, enthusiasm increased, and more consideration and creativity entered our project realm.

of gathering around something as elemental as food. Cooked or raw, food warmed the conversation. As we shared our sustenance, I felt the humanness we shared as well. It made nourishment more about thriving than surviving.

As I look back and currently appreciate it, discovering and embracing the joy of communal food allowed me to also find more joy in work. I slowed down (which actually often makes things go faster—what a concept!) and working in togetherness with others brought an alchemy to our projects overall, whereby 1+1+1 often equaled 20.

This has affected me deeply, in ways I will not expound upon in this writing, and I often take a reverent pause to give thanks for all the gifts that the living fruits of earth have brought me. 🐦

Dan Schultz is co-director of Maitreya Mountain Village (www.maitreyamountainvillage.com), which creates intentional, caring community and farming in an off-grid, wilderness setting. Dan hosts and produces a talk radio program called New Culture Radio focused on sustainability, and together with his partner Jane leads Transition Del Norte in Northwestern California.

Feeding Each Other

By Iris Sullivan

When we share food, something very good happens. It is possible to see this even with chickens. Last September, a mother hen in our flock hatched out a late brood. She was joined in her efforts to care for the clutch by another hen, and the two of them co-parented. Both utilize the special “Food is here!” call of the mother hen, which hails the chicks to come over to any food source the hens have identified. The second hen’s willingness to find food for the chicks has bonded them all together. This spring their small clutch are grown, and integrated into the flock. The two mother hens still peck and scratch next to each other; they have become fast friends.

Food is Love, and human babies know this instinctively. Just as soon as coordination and food can collaborate, babies seek to feed others. They reach out for connection, their offers of half-chewed graham crackers an expression of pure love. Studies about oxytocin, the love hormone, show that eating together is a means of creating more oxytocin. More opportunities for a rise in your oxytocin levels leads to better health and happiness. Babies are so smart!

Over the years I have found that food acts as a kind of social glue. The many potlucks, summer cookouts, lunch dates with friends, and tea parties are at the heart of where we connect. Preparing meals for others is a kinship ritual well-established in many places, especially when a baby is born, a hardship has occurred, there is a serious illness or a death in the household. In these times the use of online food-sharing websites can make coordinating a meal train for someone in need of support very easy even in the midst of a crisis.

There is a big payoff in terms of social capital for the small effort of making a larger batch of supper to share with someone in need. And the very action of feeding others has a lasting positive effect, both for the person eating and for the cook—in part because the act of giving also raises oxytocin levels. This one simple act of kinwork has great power. Kinwork is an anthropological term. I define it as the unpaid labor that propels culture forward—or the gift economy that connects people to each other emotionally. Kinwork is the give and take that ensures that we feel like we belong. I have experienced the benefit from both sides, as the person preparing the food as well as the one receiving it during times of intensity.

The kinwork of feeding each other is still common in close-knit communities. In fact, as society becomes ever more secular and our traditions unravel, our traditions around food may be the last remaining threads of the once tightly woven fabric of community that held us secure. In these changing times we risk losing bits of ourselves when we abandon all of our traditions around food. The prayers of gratitude that once graced every meal are largely absent. We can take back our power by honoring that food is culture, and that food is not mundane—it is sacred. If we find new rituals of thanksgiving when we sit down at the table we reweave the threads that link us to one another more closely. There is an old parable of heaven and hell both being represented as a room with a table overflowing with food, and only long spoons available to eat with. Hell is represented as people starving because they can not reach their own mouths, and heaven is depicted as happy people feeding each other with the long spoons. By feeding people we have the opportunity to be in heaven on a daily basis.

Following are some examples of this kind of kinwork from my world of friends, fam-



Sharing with chickens.

Photos courtesy of Iris Sullivan

ily, and neighbors, showing how we can and have improved each other's lives during times of need or transition.

1998

When my first son was born at home, it took a long time. So long in fact, that friends had time to hear that I was in labor, go home to bed, get up the next day, make food, and then drop it off at our house—all before he was born. The midwives were fueled by lasagna love. After he arrived people brought us many more meals to ease our entry into parenthood. Sixteen years later I still feel gratitude for the delicious high-nutrient muffins my friend Kathy gave me to keep in the freezer, specifically to support my breastfeeding. At the time I couldn't seem to eat enough, and those muffins felt like little miracles when I was hungry and I had a fussy hungry baby to nurse. Those meals and muffins welcomed us into the land of parenting, and acknowledged the hard work we were undertaking for the next generation.

2001

My neighbor Jim is an artist and musician. His home next to the Columbia River was a magical little fisherman's float house built 100 years ago. We attended many potlucks at his place. At the tail end of strawberry season in 2002, we spent the day making strawberry jam with Jim's niece, Elizabeth, who was visiting from Michigan. The next day Jim brought her to the airport, and was out of town when a stray firework caused a fire. We smelled the smoke before we heard the fire truck. After the fire there was nothing left of his sweet little house—his cello and organ, all of his art and sculpture, his studio filled with special tools: all gone. My belly and heart were filled with shock and sadness. I had to do something, so I made food. I brought it down, including a replacement jar of strawberry jam, because the case of jam we had walked down the day before was lost to the fire. Even amongst the wreckage of life's tragedies we all need to eat. Ten years after the fire, someone said to me, "One of the few things I remember about that terrible day was how delicious the food you brought down was."

2003

When Kathy, the baker of muffins, died suddenly, all of the mamas of our little circle made food for her family when they arrived in town for the memorial and to clean out her house. We mamas had been feeding each other since our babies were born in 1998; now we reached out to feed Kathy's parents. They came from a different world, affluent and urban; at first they were confused by the food. Later her father told me, "I had never understood the references to funeral food until now. It is humbling, the way it makes us feel loved and cared for, to be fed by people we don't even know. I am grateful that my daughter had this community around her."



2014

Last year I learned personally the incredible power of food to be a force of healing. While I was going through treatment for breast cancer, our community of friends and neighbors fed us four days a week for five months. Fresh Chinook salmon, homemade tortillas, curry with rice—each time a beautifully prepared gift on the front porch. All of us were reminded that we are cherished. Even when I couldn't eat due to nausea, I could soak up the care and regard those meals represented, and my husband was freed from having to coordinate every meal—a welcome respite to his increased responsibilities while I was ill. We were told over and over that preparing food for us felt like a gift to those cooking. Each bite felt like the most wonderful medicine to me.

Eating away from Home

Each household creates their own rhythm for meals, which delineate our days. The social aspect of eating together feeds us on many levels. But what does this mean in an age in which many people are eating outside of the home more frequently than they are eating at home? Where once eating out was reserved for special occasions, to celebrate birthdays and anniversaries, in many instances it is now a daily habit to eat a "Grab and Go" meal. I believe that by seeking the convenience of corporate food we are losing precious opportunities for connection. When we speak about "cheap"





food it is also cheap in the sense that it lacks richness of meaning, and even nutrition. Corporations are motivated to make us identify with their brand, because manipulating us furthers corporate profit. That this is often at the expense of our health is of little consequence to them. The loss of authentic connection to those we love is not part of the corporate equation. Marketing a cookie as being “Just like Grandma made” does not in fact mean it contains love. Is it

local as possible, and most importantly prepared with love. Strong community refers to our internal tribe of workers and to our effort to hold space for our greater community to flourish.

As workers we have a lot of meetings to maintain our democratic process. Early on we realized that we like eating a meal together while we meet. We have found that it is harder for things to get tense when we are sharing food. A group that shares food can negotiate conflicts more effectively. To break bread is emblematic of coming together in peace, of setting aside conflict and acknowledging our mutual humanity. These meals help us to strengthen our relationships with each other, and create an atmosphere of warmth and welcome for those who arrive at our door hungry.

When we opened the bakery we made many decisions about how to best fulfill our vision of being an effective Third Place. We wanted the dining room to be a cauldron of community,

where people gathered not only to feed their bellies, but to nurture their hearts. One choice we made was to not have waiters. We wanted the oxytocin to rise up freely as people ate together without being interrupted. But simply having deli service is not enough. In order for a business to step outside of the Cash-for-Calories equation those cooking and serving food need to be centered in a sense of sacred

When we witness strangers enjoying eating at the common table we know we have succeeded.

possible for food prepared by professionals to still be a gift of love?

2006-Present: Blue Scorcher Bakery Café

So many meals take place in cafés, restaurants, or pubs now. Is it possible to get the oxytocin flowing in a public place? I have been feeding people as my livelihood for many years. For the last 10, I have done so at a Blue Scorcher Bakery Café, operated as a worker cooperative. Our mission can be summed up as Joyful Work, Delicious Food, and Strong Community. It is joyful for us to be working together for our common good. We define delicious as organic, sustainable, as

service, to seek authentic connection to those we feed. We strive to prepare each plate as a gift. We know people by name, and we often know how they like their coffee or food more clearly than their families do. Even when we make a meal for a tourist passing through we do so in a way that upholds ancient laws of hospitality. The bakery dedicated about 30 percent of the customer floor space to a children’s play area and a nook with comfortable couches. Many have stated that they feel at home. When we witness strangers enjoying eating at the common table we know we have succeeded in helping people make connections. We have created a space where all ages can gather and our community feels a sense of ownership.

Periodically we have hosted dinners for the farmers and wildcrafters who supply us with berries, vegetables, eggs, and even our flowers. We “pay” for delivery with bread or pastry. We also do a lot of barter with the growers at the farmers’ markets we attend. All of these acts further develop our connections with those who grow the food we prepare and serve. In turn these relationships with our farmers deepen the embedded meaning in the meals we create. We can gift the diner with a direct connection to what is on their plate. “Our wildcrafter, Veronica, brought in some beautiful nettles which we used in today’s soup

(continued on p. 75)



The Community's Garden Orchestra

By Chris Roth

In the modern world, many people generate music by flicking a switch, pressing a button, turning a dial, or tapping a keypad or touchscreen. And many of us obtain food by swiping a card or lightening a wallet.

Others, however, create music by picking up instruments or using their own voices. And some people grow at least a portion of their own food too, by participating intimately with its creation in a garden or on a farm.

Likewise, although the feeling of community may be instantly available to us by tuning into a sports game or visiting a Facebook page, we can also choose to take a deeper plunge into the process of growing more intimate real-world community with others.

When an intentional community—or group of committed friends or neighbors—also makes the choice to grow some of its own food together, it challenges both the culture of purchased food and the modern culture of individualism (a culture very much related to that in which the push of a button can bring someone with adequate credit almost anything, whether for entertainment or sustenance).

My own experience in community tells me that getting involved in food-production, especially in a group setting, is like making our own music: it's not necessarily the easier choice, but the ultimate results can nourish us and our communities in ways much more profound than a pre-packaged product ever could.

• • •

There are as many ways to grow food together as there are to create music together. My brother, a classical violinist, has performed both in conventionally-run orchestras and in an innovative conductorless orchestra called Orpheus, in which participants

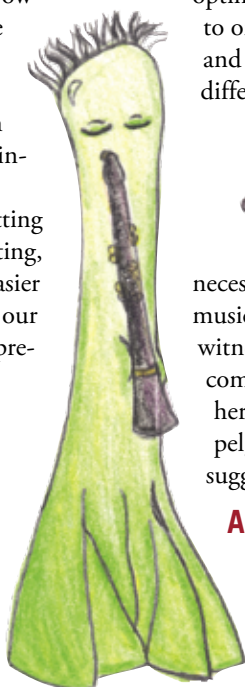
share in leadership and can find themselves simultaneously more individually empowered and more connected with each other. Collective gardening projects can adopt either approach or anything in between or even beyond this spectrum. While some groups emulate the hierarchical structure of a traditional orchestra, the more egalitarian, participant-run approach of Orpheus more closely matches what many communities engage in or aspire to.

In the diverse instruments of an orchestra, opportunities for cacophony abound—so too in a “garden orchestra” made up of diverse communitarians. Not every instrument belongs in every orchestra—some end up being simply incompatible, especially when their populations are not in proper proportion with one another. Whether in collective music-making or collective food-growing, optimal results come when players learn to cooperate, listen to one another, engage in give-and-take, achieve attunement, and find a balance of tension and harmony among the very different, potentially clashing voices and positions they bring to the endeavor.



This kind of creative alchemy isn't always easy, considering the wide variety of approaches, temperaments, and preferences quickly manifested in any group of do-it-yourselfers—yet it is necessary if you want to have any hope of producing your own music or food together. Listed below are some of the parts I've witnessed—individuals who may join, or wish to join, your community's garden orchestra (each assigned a vegetable or herb name, for the purpose of keeping their real-life dop-pelgangers anonymous). This list is incomplete—feel free to suggest additions:

Amaranth: First trained in the French-intensive biodynamic method of gardening, and then attracted by permaculture's more natural approach, Amaranth values a combination of order and wildness in the garden.



Amaranth leaves volunteer vegetables and edible or useful weeds to grow, while tenaciously removing less desirable plants. Amaranth likes to garden well in relatively smaller areas rather than garden sloppily in larger areas, and prefers to encourage the native ecosystem except in the focused high-production growing areas. Amaranth values both the process of growing—the experience—and the product—the food grown—and how those things are done matters a lot to Amaranth, who uses hand tools almost exclusively. Every choice expresses a value, either supporting or working against the kind of world that we want to live in and/or create, both in the garden and outside of it.

Artichoke: Artichoke is a strict utilitarian whose main goal is to maximize food production. Time and efficiency are central factors. Artichoke will happily use a rototiller, mower, or tractor for tillage or weed control, if that will save time over more labor-intensive methods. For Artichoke, gardening is less a spiritual, aesthetic, interpersonal, community-building, or natural-history experience than an economic one, intended to meet the needs of humans for physical nourishment.

Arugula: Arugula takes Artichoke's perspective a step further. Whereas Artichoke may hold the group's needs as the highest priority, Arugula is an entrepreneur who has learned, and brings to the garden, the philosophy that the priority for each individual must be to meet their own needs—and the results of the individual's success or prosperity will then ripple outward. Arugula will not think twice about enlisting leased garden space for the highest-income use, even if, for example, that is not growing food for consumption by the community, but instead growing vegetable starts for the local farmers' market.

Basil: Extensively read in permaculture before ever getting involved in a garden, Basil brings the perspective that growing food shouldn't be hard work—we can set up systems that will eventually feed us almost effortlessly. Basil resists getting sucked into work that appears to be monotonous or “drudgery,” instead preferring to design food forests, plan swales, and create hugelkultur beds.

Bean: Bean, on the other hand, is acutely aware of the working conditions of most farmworkers around the world. Bean considers “let nature do the work” and “lazy gardener” approaches to be escapist, elitist fantasies of the privileged, and uses gardening as a way to become a “world citizen,” aspiring to work as hard as any campesino. Bean will create extra work, even dig a bed twice, simply as a way of staying true to the vision of being an equal world citizen, allied with those who have no other choice but to work tirelessly to feed themselves and others.

Beet: For Beet, gardening is most importantly a way to get to know other people. Beet loves working alongside others, having conversations, singing, finding a common rhythm. Beet

would rather spend twice as long in the garden to achieve the same amount of physical work if it means having quality human connections while doing so.

Borage: Borage, on the other hand, thinks talk and socializing are distractions. For that reason, Borage prefers to work alone, and sees gardening almost as a workout, a sport in which the competition may be with self rather than others, but in which there is no room for lack of focus.

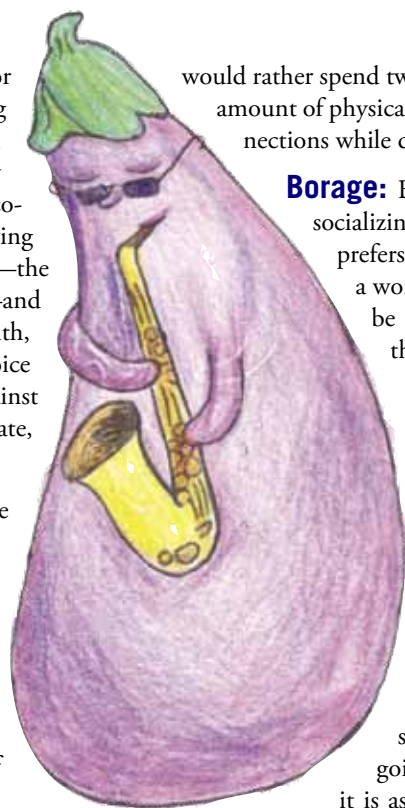
Broccoli: Broccoli also likes working alone, but as a form of meditation and spiritual attunement. Like Beet, Broccoli would rather spend twice as long in the garden to achieve the same amount of physical work—if it means that Broccoli's soul is nourished by slowing down to connect with the larger natural and spiritual worlds.

Brussel Sprout: Brussel Sprout is a spontaneous, intuitive gardener who prefers going to the garden each day and seeing what it is asking for rather than mapping out most activities in advance. A large number of variables, from current weather to soil moisture to recent plant growth to insect presence, can tip the scales in one direction or another. This can be either illuminating or frustrating to others working under Brussel Sprout's leadership or tutelage—illuminating if they are able to learn how Brussel Sprout does it, frustrating if they just want to know and prepare for what is going to happen that day in the garden.

Cabbage: Cabbage loves planning, scheduling, and record-keeping. No activity occurs in Cabbage's garden without first being written down and perhaps illustrated in the garden planner. Meticulous records of the history of every bed are a natural accompaniment to the crop labels adorning every planting. Those working under Cabbage's leadership will always know ahead of time what to look forward to—with excitement or not—in the garden that day.

Cardoon: Cardoon likes to keep things simple: one crop per bed. Interplanting complicates things. Any plant out of place is considered a weed—and, ideally, eliminated. Paths are scraped clean and/or mulched so as to prevent unwanted plant growth. Cardoon also likes to weigh every ounce of vegetable production, and record its place of origin within the garden—a process made easier by this “zero-tolerance” monocrop method.

Carrot: Carrot likes to “mix it up,” and sees conventional rows and single-crop plantings as boring. Every gardening season Carrot seeks to expand the known horizons of companion planting and garden bed geometry, with (as expected) mixed results.



Cauliflower: Cauliflower saves seeds from almost everything. In fact, at any time at least half of Cauliflower's garden seems to have gone to seed. Paths become nonnavigable, and harvestable crops more difficult to find, but fellow gardeners also appreciate the savings in financial outlay and the flourishing of homegrown vegetable and herb varieties.

Celeriac: Celeriac can't tolerate plants gone to seed, and instead may crank out twice as many crops per year as Cauliflower does—all out of purchased seed packets. Pollinators prefer Cauliflower's garden, but Celeriac wins the prize for neatness and ease of harvest.

Celery: Celery believes that if some water is good for plants, more is better. Every day all garden beds receive several hours of water. Roots tend to stay near the surface, and mildew and disease can take hold, but at least the soil feels moist most of the time, and nothing dies of thirst.

Chard: Chard likes to dry-farm whenever possible. In fact, the only plants that survive in Chard's garden are ones that can tolerate dehydration. To be fair, Chard has developed several methods for conserving water in the soil that may come in very handy when irrigation is less available or when drought sets in.

Chicory: Chicory is a strict no-digger. Chicory encourages the soil ecosystem by never disturbing its layers, but instead only plucking from the surface and top-dressing with organic matter left to break down there.

Cilantro: Cilantro is a double- and even triple-digger, who likes nothing more than going deep down into the soil, loosening it up, and adding organic matter into it, while still attempting to maintain its previously-existing layers as much as possible.

Collard: Collard likes digging too—except Collard turns the soil upside down while doing so, to bury stuff that might have been growing on the surface and “give the other soil a chance.”

Corn: Corn loves plastic, whether in the form of plant pots, seedling trays, row covers, or greenhouse plastic—citing its convenience and low cost.

Cress: Cress detests plastic on both environmental and aesthetic grounds, and uses alternatives whenever available (and whenever they will fly with other community members).

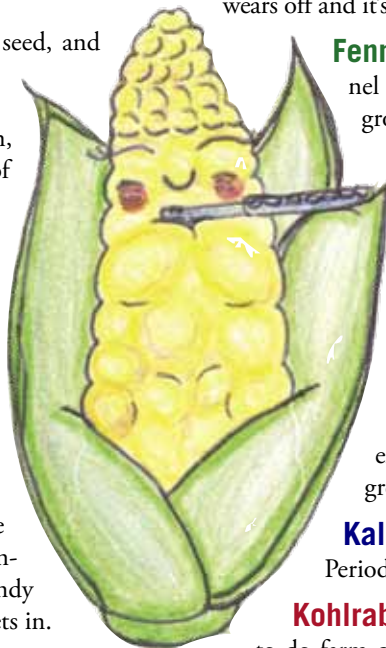
Cucumber: Cucumber gets up early every morning, and likes to “beat the heat” by working hard before taking a midday break.

Dill: Dill would by preference sleep until late morning, and start gardening no earlier than noon.

Eggplant: Eggplant is a novice gardener already disillusioned by the fact that we are growing almost exclusively crops from Europe and Asia, rather than native crops,

here on North American soil. (Ironically, Eggplant is a transplant from Eurasia as well.)

Endive: Endive is a new garden apprentice who is excited to try anything (be it digging a bed, weeding, sowing vegetable starts, thinning beets, building compost)—once. After that, the novelty usually wears off and it's drudgery.



Fennel: By contrast, fellow garden newcomer Fennel rarely voluntarily tries a new activity, once a groove is found on a now-familiar activity. Currently, Fennel seems unlikely to put down a shovel to learn how to save seeds unless the shovel is taken forcefully from co's tightly-clenched hands (an act which would violate community nonviolence agreements).

Garlic: Garlic is comfortable when it's clear who is in charge. Garlic can adapt to being on either end of a hierarchy—making decisions and giving direction, or following someone else's decisions and direction—but does not like group decision-making or lack of clear structure.

Kale: Kale doesn't like it when *anybody* is in charge. Period.

Kohlrabi: Kohlrabi grew up rurally, and was made to do farm chores throughout childhood by parents with a deeply-ingrained Protestant work ethic. Kohlrabi doesn't want to do any more gardening, ever.

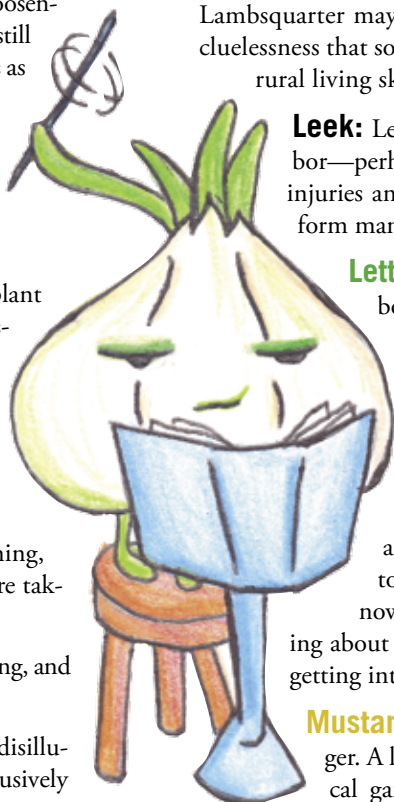
Lambsquarter: Lambsquarter, on the other hand, appreciates the back-to-the-land childhood that has made gardening and farming as comfortable and familiar as eating and sleeping. Lambsquarter may or may not feel discouraged by the apparent cluelessness that some fellow communitarians possess about basic rural living skills.

Leek: Leek also has a lot of background in physical labor—perhaps too much. Leek now suffers from chronic injuries and conditions which impede the ability to perform many gardening tasks.

Lettuce: Lettuce has no background in physical labor, but leaps into a full-time gardening apprenticeship wholeheartedly, only to discover that a lifetime of sitting at desks in climate-controlled environments proves ill preparation for spending anything more than an hour or two a day doing physical work outside.

Melon: New gardener Melon has read a lot about gardening—including so much contradictory information that doing it the “right” way now seems like an insoluble puzzle. Melon is thinking about switching to the construction crew, or perhaps getting into bookkeeping.

Mustard: Mustard is a photographer, writer, and blogger. A little actual gardening goes a long way on a typical gardening day—especially when Mustard has a



macro-lens-equipped digital camera, a notebook, and/or a smart phone in hand.

Onion: Onion loves gardening, but hates kids...or at least kids in the garden. “One step forward, two steps back” is Onion’s wry comment every time one appears to lend a hand.

Orach: Orach loves both gardening and children, believing that, together, they’re our only hopes for the future. To Orach, a little backwards progress is a small price to pay for helping raise the next generation of gardeners.

Oregano: Oregano is rarely seen without earbuds—either listening to internet radio or having cell phone chats with friends or family. This lends itself better to peaceful coexistence with other gardeners than did Oregano’s previous practice of toting around a blaring boombox—but communicating with Oregano in “real space” can still present challenges.

Parsley: Parsley is a strict vegan, and carries that philosophy into the garden. Parsley avoids the use both of animals and of animal manures in the garden, relying instead on the vegetable and mineral realms to return nutrients to the soil.

Parsnip: Parsnip believes the cycle of life is not complete without including animals in the gardening mix, and happily makes use of both trucked-in manures (for nutrients and organic matter) and on-farm animals (for soil improvement, pest control, egg and meat production, entertainment, etc.).

Pea: Pea is an ex-gardener, now massage therapist, attending to the needs of the current gardeners (future massage therapists) still active in the field.

Pepper: Pepper starts every day in the garden with a ritual attunement, and usually asks permission of vegetables before harvesting them. Pepper also blesses seeds while planting, praying for improved germination and growth.

Potato: Potato is skeptical of everything Pepper holds sacred—and in fact of anything that can’t be proven scientifically. In a side-by-side trial initiated by Potato, seeds that Potato had cursed actually outperformed seeds that Pepper had blessed—not only in germination but in growth rates and in harvest produced. Third parties were left to wonder, “Is Potato’s curse actually a blessing?”

Pumpkin: Pumpkin is the ultimate taste-tester. In the same way that grazing deer leave unmistakable marks on the landscape, Pumpkin’s trail through the garden is easily spotted.

Purslane: Purslane, by contrast, never snacks in the garden at all. “I just brushed my teeth” is Purslane’s most common explanation, but an irrational slug-slime phobia may be at the root.

Radish: Radish’s main reason for being in the garden is that it’s a socially-approved form of incessant nature-study. Hearing

40 different bird species’ songs and calls in a morning will excite Radish much more than an unexpectedly doubled yield of, for example, radishes.

Rhubarb: Rhubarb grew up believing that the outdoors is boring, and that physical work and rural life are to be avoided at all costs. Unfortunately, despite Rhubarb’s best efforts to overcome prejudice through total immersion, these deeply ingrained beliefs are proving hard to shake.

Rutabaga: Rutabaga is about public service. Any excess garden production goes to the local soup kitchen. Public tours and education are a central part of the gardening activity. Volunteers from the local community, and even from within the criminal justice system, are welcomed into Rutabaga’s garden.

Spinach: Spinach resents Rutabaga’s exporting of organic matter (excess produce) from the community’s gardens, since it could be used to create compost to grow next year’s crops. Spinach is not eager to have paroled prisoners hanging out in the gardens either.

Squash: Squash is one of the community’s kitchen managers. Having gardened for many years, Squash welcomes anything the gardens produce and encourages cooks to incorporate it in meals, even if it is blemished, irregularly shaped, more difficult to clean, or more unusual than purchased produce would be. Why order broccoli from off-site when various brassica plants in our own gardens are sending up many smaller broccoli-like flower bud clusters?

Sunchoke: Sometime-kitchen-manager Sunchoke, by contrast, prefers to order more standard produce from off-site—especially for meals served to visitors and outside groups—rather than mess with what seem like sub-optimal crops from the community’s gardens. Why use random brassica flower buds from the garden when big, familiar, *actual* broccoli is available from the local organic wholesaler?

Tomato: Tomato arrives at the community ready to help heal the relationship between people, food, and the land. What will Tomato learn?

Turnip: Turnip recognizes that there are many possible parts to play in a garden and in a community, but that the single most important thing is simply to be there—to engage—and to see what unfolds. Something beautiful and nourishing, Turnip knows, will eventually grow out of it, despite and even because of the hardships and challenges. 🌱



Chris Roth edits COMMUNITIES, and, in another lifetime, was a garden coordinator and organic gardening teacher whose Beetless’ Gardening Book: An Organic Gardening Songbook/Guidebook (Carrotseed Press) formed a unique entry into the 1997 garden-book canon. Please send garden orchestra member additions to editor@ic.org.

How Do We Eat As If We Plan to Be Here for Another 10,000 Years?

Cultivating Food Culture in Stewardship of Place

By *Olivia Rathbone*

More than anything, food brings us together. The eco-crisis, or the “crisis of home,” can and must be addressed at home, and what better place to start than around the dinner table?

The Occidental Arts and Ecology Center (Occidental, California) has been cultivating food culture since 1994; and our farm, which we call the Mother Garden, provides the foods around which we build and sustain our community.

Food is an expression of the land that we steward, and truly vibrant food is proof that the more closely we can understand and emulate nature, the more abundant our lives become. We are the direct beneficiaries of the ecological services that a living, breathing ecosystem such as the Mother Garden provides.

The Mother Garden has been on the forefront of the organic agriculture movement and has served as a renowned demonstration farm, nonprofit educational retreat center, intentional community, and eco-think-tank since the early 1970s, first as the Farallones Institute, next as the Center for Seven Generations, and now in its current incarnation as the Occidental Arts and Ecology Center and Sowing Circle Community. The Mother Garden was one of the first farms to be certified organic in California, and in 1994, forged one of the first organic agriculture easements in the US, preserving the land’s status as an organic garden into perpetuity. The legacy lives on

today as the Mother Garden continues to feed and inspire activists, biologists, educators, and artists seeking innovative and practical approaches to the pressing environmental, cultural, and economic crises of our day—all while having fun and eating well.

Since the beginning of the 20th century, much of the genetic diversity of our food crops—the backbone of ecological resilience—has been lost and continues to be threatened by industrialized agribusiness. A main goal at OAEC is to educate visitors about sustainable food production and the array of plant species, particularly food crops, thankfully still available to us. OAEC’s Biodiversity Program focuses on curating and propagating a plant and seed collection of more than 3000 varieties of heirloom, open-pollinated annuals and more than 1000 varieties of edible, medicinal, and ornamental habitat-friendly perennials. Over time, the garden has become something of a cradle of plant and animal diversity. We have collected and evaluated thousands of varieties, chosen our favorites, planted those that do well here again and again, and shared them with others. Sometime in the late ’80s this land’s stewards started calling its gardens the “Mother Garden,” referring, even at its relatively young age, to the fact that the garden was providing a wealth of seeds, plant material, and wisdom to other gardens and gardeners and figuratively giving birth to daughter gardens.

The happy byproduct of this endeavor, of course, is that the Mother Garden and orchard provide organic fruit, vegetables, herbs, and flowers for thousands of meals prepared on-site each year.

In our workshops, the lessons taught in the classroom and out in the garden come together on the plate. Food becomes both a centerpiece for meaningful conversation and an unspoken, cellular avenue for learning. So much of our mission and work is tied into the promotion of eco-literacy through gardening, and our guests get to experience on a gut level, “Oh,



Photos courtesy of Occidental Arts and Ecology Center

THIS is what sustainability TASTES like! Food grown in healthy soil from locally adapted seed in a biodiverse ecosystem prepared by happy people tastes great!” Class dismissed.

As an intentional community, OAEC and Sowing Circle venture to model the kind of cooperation that offsets the high cost of healthy food. We are pooling our resources to make healthy food a financially affordable reality in the face of agricultural policies that subsidize industrialized junk food instead of locally grown fresh fruits and veggies. Sharing food costs and cooking responsibilities means that we can afford to buy high quality, whole, unprocessed ingredients in bulk because we ourselves are doing the processing. Pooling of resources makes sense in terms of equipment too. Each of us doesn't need our own personal Vitamix or set of cookbooks (or table saw, tractor, copy machine, etc. either). Common ownership allows us a level of infrastructure and a quality of life that most of us couldn't afford on our own.

Of course, all of those reading this magazine realize that sharing comes with a level of compromise that most people have not been raised to accept in a culture that emphasizes individualism over cooperation. We all have different food preferences, likes and dislikes, diets and food philosophies, but have come to accept that living in community and committing to consensus-based self-governance means that when we do what is best for us as a whole, in the long run, we do what is best for us as individuals. Consensus decisions are often made at a snail's pace and take longer than a quick vote, but are completely in line with our move away from a culture of instant gratification. In our commitment to self-governance through practicing the democratic arts, everyone can have a seat at the table.

Many of us in the eco-ag movement champion the “food theory of everything” with a belief that fixing the food system can be a solutions generator for a host of our nation's ecological, economic, health, and psycho-spiritual problems. Yet sustainability is a misnomer—we don't want to sustain mainstream America's current system, which is obviously deeply flawed, but rather are working on the ground to move towards food systems and models of community that heal environmental and cultural degradation.

As Brock Dolman, Sowing Circle member and OAEC Senior Biologist, has said: “This is a thrivalist movement, not a survivalist movement. Participating in activities that are regenerative to the cycles of life—watershed cycles, soil cycles, food cycles—can also be simultaneously regenerative to the human spirit and to human connectivity. Contributing to the health and vitality and betterment of the planet can and should also be invigorating for us. As David Orr would say, ‘Hope is a verb with its sleeves rolled up.’ And so let's do



Spring Salad Mix

excerpted from *The OAEC Cookbook*, p. 19

- Baby heirloom lettuces: Akcel, Forellenschluss, Merlot, Red Speckle, Pablo, Little Gem
- Baby beet leaves: Chioggia and Golden
- Cress: Wrinkly Crinkly Curly and Upland
- Green mustard leaves: Golden Streaks, Golden Frills, and Old-Fashioned Ragged Edge
- Kale leaves and flowers: Redbor, Winterbor, Dinosaur, Russian Red, Russian White
- Sprouting broccoli leaves: Purple, Spiagariello
- Baby Swiss chard leaves: Rainbow, Golden, Rhubarb, Flamingo Pink, Oriole Orange
- Arugula leaves
- Sylvestra arugula leaves
- Japanese red mustards: Osaka Purple, Giant Red, Garnet, Red Feather, Ruby Streaks
- Mache rosettes and flowers: Verte de Cambrai, Coquille des Louviers
- Baby amaranth leaves
- Baby spinach leaves
- Fava bean leaves and flowers
- Pea shoots, tendrils, and flowers
- French sorrel leaves
- Sheep sorrel leaves
- Plantain leaves: Buckhorn, Wild
- Dandelion leaves
- Mallow leaves
- Miner's lettuce leaves and flowers
- Chickweed leaves and flowers
- Red-veined dock leaves
- Salad Burnet leaves
- Shungiku leaves and flower petals
- Nasturtium leaves, buds, and flowers
- Chive leaves and flowers
- Wild radish flowers and young pods
- Yellow mustard and tatsoi flowers
- Society garlic leaves and flowers: Variegated and Green
- Chervil flowers
- Bronze fennel fronds
- Fenugreek leaves
- Dill leaves
- Garlic chive leaves
- Parsley leaflets
- Mint tips: Spearmint, Peppermint, Lemon Balm
- Sweet violet leaves and flowers
- Runner bean flowers
- Forget-me-not flowers
- Johnny jump-up flowers
- Cecil Bruner rose petals
- Abutilon flowers
- Calendula petals
- Anchusa flowers
- Tulip petals



this, but let's have fun while we're doing it. Let's find pleasure in the pursuit."

Most of the staff and resident cooks in the OAEC kitchen came to cooking through a combination of farming and communal living and have little to no formal culinary training. We take for granted our instinctual relationship to growing and cooking food, knowing from experience that **what grows together, goes together**. You could say we've acquired a high level of "vegetable literacy," as chef and author Deborah Madison calls it. Recipes are rarely used in the OAEC kitchen—not only is it extremely hard to find accurate recipes that are scaled up to feed a crowd, but we have mostly cooked by feel, improvising and teaching one another our tips and tricks, and collectively developing a style of treating vegetables rather than an actual body of hard and fast recipes.

We hire cooks from our team to prepare food for large workshops, but most nights of the year, especially during the winter slow season, the residential community of around 20 people shares dinner together by taking turns with the cooking. Like most American households with full-time jobs and busy schedules, each of us individually does not have time to make a healthy dinner from scratch every night. But with rotating kitchen duties, we each have to cook dinner only once every two or three weeks, if that. So when your night rolls around, it's like throwing a dinner party! We have time to plan ahead and take great pride in preparing something delicious and wholesome for everyone, each one trying to outdo the other with an over-the-top creation that we could never otherwise pull off on a daily basis.

Preparing a community dinner at OAEC usually starts with the question "What do I feel like eating?" Chances are, that's what everyone else wants, too. Is it time for an outdoor BBQ or a cozy dinner by the woodstove? Then comes a stroll through the garden to harvest the requisite salad plus whatever else is abundant and looking vibrant. What's in the "up for grabs" section of the walk-in cooler that needs using up? Check the chalkboard for a head count—who has signed out for dinner or is anyone expecting extra guests? Once all the variables are accounted for and a plan is made, it's time to dig in. Start to finish, most people take around three hours to pull it together, from harvest to dinner bell, plus another couple of hours for the cleanup—sounds like a lot, but the payoff is that for the rest of the month, it's simply a matter of showing up to the feast!

In the regular practice of breaking bread together, we cultivate a deep sense of commitment to the land and to one another. Because so many food cultures and traditions have been gobbled up by colonization and capitalism only to be regurgitated and sold back to

us in a processed, packaged form, Americans are ravenous for authentic food and authentic food culture.

So, in the spirit of Carlo Petrini's slow food "protest of pleasure," we resist the industrialized food system not only through voicing our resistance to pesticide use, factory farming, and other unsustainable food practices, but by living out the solution pathway and co-creating the kind of

We resist the industrialized food system by co-creating restorative, celebratory, land-based culture.

restorative, celebratory, land-based culture we want to see thrive.

As Sowing Circle member and OAEC Executive Director Dave Henson puts it: "Without art and celebration, the revolution is no fun!" 🍷

Olivia Rathbone, lead author and project manager of The Occidental Arts and Ecology Center Cookbook: Fresh-from-the-Garden Recipes for Gatherings Large and Small (Chelsea Green, 2015), currently manages the dynamic kitchen at OAEC and has tended the vibrant hearth of the community from the garden to the table for more than a decade. A lifelong farmer and cook, she orchestrates the inventive meals inspired by seasonal produce from the Mother Garden. See oaec.org.



Fours Ways to Grow at Heartwood

By *Sandy Thomson*



Beth Walker's garden.

Here at Heartwood Cohousing, growing food is an important part of our community mix. We live in southwest Colorado, in the high desert. Growing food is a little harder here than in other places. We have to maintain faith that things will work out. The rains will come, the grasshoppers won't eat everything, and we need to help each other out—you never know when an early freeze will hit. We own a lot of land, 365 acres. Seventy of those acres are irrigated pasture or farm land and another five are irrigated around the housing cluster.

We have four different ways to participate in growing food on our land. The first and simplest is choosing to grow your own garden in your own yard. In permaculture speak, this is a zone one endeavor.

Beth Walker is one of our home gardeners. She loves her garden. It brings her joy and connects her to the land. It is a private thing to her—personal. It is only a step from her back door and she is fond of telling people that she just throws her leftover food scraps out her door into her garden. She enjoys watching them decompose and turn back into dirt. She feels satisfied when she is able to harvest food for her family and sometimes even enough to share with her neighbors. It is her sanctuary, a meditative space, a place of beauty and wonder. It is important to her and to her place in the community.

I remember the joy in her voice when she was telling me of the day she spent with Niema (a little neighbor girl) planting seeds. I know the sense of calm that comes to her face when she steps outside to enjoy her little garden. I am glad Beth has her garden and believe it is an important part of her experience of living in Heart-

wood. When I interviewed her, another important aspect that she shared with me is that it is a place where she can just do whatever she wants when she wants to. Oftentimes living in community can involve thinking of others a lot and asking permission and running projects by teams for approval, but in Beth's garden, she's the boss!

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A zone two gardening opportunity is to be a member of the garden and greenhouse team. This team manages our 33-foot-diameter Growing Spaces growing dome and the raised beds surrounding it. I asked Rob Quinlin, one of our newer members, why he chose to be part of the garden and greenhouse team and this is what he shared with me:

“There's a feeling I get when I am eating a meal that was 100 percent produced from the land on which I live that allows me to feel a connection that I don't get from even eating in local restaurants where most of the food is locally sourced. I support the local food movement and applaud those businesses which strive to source ingredients locally. I vote with my dollar to keep those practices a possibility for the owners and encourage their dedication to further support local farms and have a connection with the surrounding land. There is something about eating food that is grown near to where you live that helps you feel like you are connected because you and the food are respiring the same air and growing with the same nutrients.

“When it's possible, cultivating the food yourself is a magical endeavor that puts yet another factor into the equation: sweat equity.

When I am eating a salad that was 100 percent grown in our community growing dome, I can taste the powerful Colorado sunshine. Each bite brings up memories of the beginnings of each ingredient. I remember preparing the soil, planting the seeds, thinning the plants, transplanting, tending, and watering them on my assigned days. I share the responsibility of tending to the needs and tasks of our community.

“One day a week, I get to spend anywhere between an hour to three hours in the sunny warmth of the dome tending to the plants and fish. Our dome is an oasis in the winter months where I get to give my time to the plants that give themselves to sustain me. It’s a beautiful cycle that brings much more meaning to each meal. I value the fruits and vegetables of my labor, as someone who spent his childhood growing up in the kitchen and eventually working in kitchens. Having grown the ingredients I mix together is a very special opportunity to see a meal from start to finish. Sharing the responsibility of the growing dome with others is a convenient way to be involved in growing without feeling overwhelmed with the daily needs.

In the Harmony Garden, you can see and feel the beauty of Nature.

“I believe that the cooperative approach makes the experience even more meaningful, as it also builds the relationships amongst the members of my community. We get to learn from the wisdom each brings to the process, and thus cultivate our relationships alongside our plants. Aside from the joy of spending time with the plants and fish that live in our dome’s water tank, and having the variety of food to harvest daily for a meal, we as the Greenhouse team also get thanks from our community members, who also get to harvest food for use in their meals at home. Knowing we are also sustaining our neighbors outside our family brings us all closer together, and hearing praise from our community at having such a bounty to harvest is another part of the reward for our work.

“I have learned so much about the care of plants during my time on the Greenhouse team, from both the plants and my team mates. The connection to what I eat, the relationships that our collective work has fostered, and the meditative time spent watering and caring for the plants has provided so much for me physically and mentally. There is no better way to find connection with both the land and the people than growing food.

“This work has brought me into sync with the things I used to see but didn’t feel any connection to, like the seasonal movements of the sun, rainfall amounts, the temperature and humidity, and the slow but steady growth of the world of plants around me. It has also brought me into sync with the people around me as we collectively work toward producing healthy food to grow our bodies and spirits. Knowing that others also value the process of investing time and energy into the cultivating of both food and relationships provides a link that connects us above even the common value of healthy food for our families.

“To readers of your article, I would say: I encourage you to plant a garden, invite neighbors to help and grow food there, and offer what you harvest to friends. Even when animals eat your vegetables, and some unseen blight or frost damages the plants, or when you just get unlucky with the season, it will still be worthwhile when you stand back and look at what you have planted, the love and energy you have invested, and the harvest you get to enjoy. Get your hands dirty and spend some time tending to the soil that is underfoot all around you. It makes our time on this planet, spinning around the sun, more meaningful, and each meal a reward.”

• • •

A little further away, but a bigger endeavor, is the Harmony Garden. This is roughly a two-acre deer-fenced area that contains fruit trees and bushes, a spiral garden full of perennial herbs and flowers and medicinal plants, and an old goat shed that has housed

goats, turkeys, and now chickens and also has a place for tools and an area to relax out of the sun. It even has a small swing set and play structure for kids to enjoy. And bees. This is my favorite place to garden alone and with community members. It is always evolving, ever changing depending on who wants to participate and how much energy they have. Next year the upper half with the fruit trees in it will have about 50 chickens rotated around it to control weeds and grasshoppers and fertilize around the fruit trees. The lower half will be gardened by whichever families, couples, or singles want to have a bed or two to care for there.

We have work days to get everything ready, we share in the cost of manure, straw, tiller rentals, and even share seeds. Heartwood has an extensive seed bank that we are all welcome to take advantage of and contribute to. I see the Harmony Garden as a place for ceremony, for children to explore growing food, for anyone who wants to see how everything is connected, how beautiful nature can be. This garden is down in our irrigated pasture land. From there you can see the sun rise and set. You can hear the birds sing and see the eagle or hawk circle overhead hunting for mice or rabbits. I have seen coyotes





Enough to share.



Rachel, the farm manger for Grace Gardens.



Beth Walker and Niema.



The Harmony Garden: Cole helping to harvest pumpkins.

from that garden. Rattlesnakes live there, along with skunks, squirrels, wild turkeys, and red-winged blackbirds. The sight of a mountain bluebird sitting on one of the fence posts silhouetted against a clear blue sky is an image I carry in my heart. To me the Harmony Garden is the heart of Heartwood. It is the heart of our land and it provides an almost spiritual connection to the land we are committed to stewarding. Not only does it provide food but it creates community. It provides a place away from the cluster of homes where you can see and feel the beauty of Nature. You can take a short walk and be alone with the plants and animals or you can go down with a group and experience the camaraderie of doing something enjoyable together.

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Rachel, one of our members, was an intern here when we had a thriving farm and intern program. She learned to love the land and the community. She left but is now back running her own business

growing food for Heartwood members—the fourth way to participate in food growing here. This is what she has to say:

“The mission statement of my little business is ‘caring for the land, nourishing the neighbors.’ I really enjoy working with the land that is stewarded and loved by our community. Equally so, I really enjoy nourishing my friends and neighbors at Heartwood. I am a strong believer in the importance of building local economies, and the little food system we have going here feels great to be a part of. I love that I can sell a lot of my products right here through our store. I can stock the store any time of day, and likewise, members of Heartwood can shop here whenever they want. It’s the most convenient and socially responsible shopping I’ve ever heard of! We have had challenges with the store... mostly involving clear communication, expectations, and trust. But I think that we are getting better and better at making it work smoothly and sustainably.

“One of my favorite things about the design of Heartwood is the ease of helping each other out with little things. I have received farm tools, business information, chore favors, advice, and emotional and physical support...all for the benefit of my small farm business and personal well-being. Members of Heartwood hold a wide variety of talents and skills. I am so grateful to be able to lean on and bounce off of the members of my community in order for my business to thrive.

“I can’t imagine trying to start out all alone as a farmer.”

To sum it up, I would say that growing food plays such an important role at Heartwood that I could not imagine what life here would be without it. We have celebrations around the seasons as a result, we have amazing common meals that feature many things grown here on our land, and we have a deep appreciation for each other through the sharing of tasks and knowledge. 🌸

Sandy Thomson is one of the founding members of Heartwood Cohousing in Bayfield, Colorado (www.heartwoodcohousing.com). She and her husband Mac have raised three children at Heartwood. Sandy created and ran a homeschool co-op when her kids were little, helped create an organic farm on Heartwood’s property, and is passionate about food and education. You can reach her at sandykthomsonrisk@gmail.com.

Urban Flex Farms: Farming on a Bicycle

By Sylvan Bonin

This is a story about a farm, about two people brought together by common passions for community and farming, and about the friendships and community created along the way. It's a story about the structural challenges facing urban farms and how one farmer is meeting them. It started, appropriately, at the Twin Oaks Communities Conference, where we met in 2003. We laugh that we—both Seattle residents—had to travel clear across the country to meet the person who would become our best friend.

In 2010 Kirsten Leetham refocused her career on the local food system. She selected possible farms to apprentice at and asked me to write introduction/application letters. That was our first co-writing experience and we've found it suits us well. When I saw the theme for this issue I asked Kirsten if I could tell her story. She was excited to share this amazing unfolding experience. Though written by me, this is Kirsten's story, her voice as much as possible, her point of view.

When I (Kirsten) started my apprenticeship I wasn't sure exactly what my farm would look like, but I knew that I wanted to be right in the middle of the city rather than out in the country. I didn't want the environmental benefits of sustainable farming saddled with a burden of fossil fuels. For me the choice is obvious between an organic apple from New Zealand and a conventional apple from Washington. We can't keep moving food and other goods around the world, chasing low wages (and exploitation) and burning oil as if it is infinite.

Finding Land

The biggest hurdle for young farmers with few assets is usually land. I decided on a "distributed model," where a farm is made up of multiple small spaces: back yards, vacant lots, park land, planting strips. There is so much under-used land in cities! Turning this

land into gardens improves soil and reduces runoff pollution. I originally wanted to use city-owned property, thinking a lease would be more clear-cut than providing a CSA share. I learned that the city didn't allow anything grown on public land to be sold, including produce from community gardens and private gardens in planting strips. Some of those regulations have since been relaxed. Ironically, as I was installing my first garden, representatives of the city, county, and public were discussing ways to encourage urban food production.

With the route of using city-owned property closed, I focused on under-used yards. I thought I would easily find land within a short bike ride of my home in West Seattle, but people are surprisingly closed to anything new. The yards needed to be just right: full sun, a slight slope for drainage, enough space, an enthusiastic homeowner. They had to be fairly close together since I wanted to do this entirely by bicycle. (I had met a landscaping company, Garden Cycles, that worked from bikes, so I was confident it could be done.) Other factors I considered: books assume that my garden is right outside my door where I can open and close vents on greenhouses twice a day, turn water on and off, etc.—but this is not as easy in someone else's yard. I didn't know if there would be space to store my tools. I had to decide if I would invest in multiple copies of large tools or haul them around on my bike trailer. I wanted a fence to keep out dogs. Aggressive neighboring dogs can scare volunteers and children. Since part of my mission is public education and community involvement, I





need a place where people can stop by, shop for veggies, bring their kids.

Aesthetics and perception are considerations, especially if I add animals. Compost piles don't smell bad, but there is a common expectation that they do. Chickens and goats do smell, and having animals is a much different consideration than a garden. I'd like bees eventually but many people are afraid of them. I'm often told that farm animals will "cause trouble," but well-cared-for animals bring neighbors together more than they cause conflict. Passers-by, especially kids, love to visit animals over the fence. People aren't used to seeing tools, bare earth, and piles of wood chips. These issues can be overcome with education and conversation. A working farm isn't "tidy" like a showy front-yard flower garden, but that doesn't mean it's not beautiful. There is beauty in usefulness. I often discuss the beauty of local sustainability, the dream of someday seeing my city covered in food.

I was fortunate in finding my first farm plot. Suzette has been a huge champion of what I'm doing. I have the entire fenced back yard for garden, and garage space for storing tools. She appreciates the vegetables I grow for her, isn't super concerned with tidiness since it's a back yard, waters occasionally in hot weather, and has cooked food for volunteers at work parties. I have access to a bathroom with a utility sink, which she doesn't mind volunteers using. I have turned down yards that were otherwise well suited because the owner didn't seem as supportive. When I started I thought the space would be more important than the relationship with the homeowners. I have found the reverse to be true. If someone "tries it out" for a year and decides this isn't for them I lose a HUGE investment of time and money. Now I get to know the people at least as much as I know their yard.

From Suzette and other homeowners I've learned how strongly people here care about local sustainability. Early on I was told that I needed to "sell" the idea of using someone's yard, that I would be welcome primarily for what I could give them. Now I have more yards offered than I could possibly develop at once, even before saying that the host gets a CSA share. Other people see the wasted space and opportunities but don't feel like they can do anything about it. When I say they can help simply by letting me be there, people get very excited.

Having found my land, I encountered

my second hurdle. The soil in West Seattle is contaminated by cadmium and lead from the smoke of a long-gone smelter. I lost an entire growing season learning to solve this problem. There are no regulations or even published guidelines on how many ppm can be in the soil for it still to be safe to eat the veggies grown there. There is little information on bioremediation except mention of some non-food species of mustard that I can't find seeds for. (I imagine they're not a popular crop if they selectively uptake heavy metals!) The solution I found after much research and experimentation is to buffer the soil with organic matter, which binds to the metals and reduces uptake. I turned in heaps of compost, planted various crops, and had them lab-tested. They came in way below 2ppm, the threshold for drinking water.

City Land Use Policies

"Urban Farming" is *en vogue*, with several magazines, dozens of books, and classes in every large city. I dislike this terminology. The distinction I see between a farm and a garden is selling farm products. There is a blossoming of "urban *gardening*," which is wonderful and essential. Cities that promote "urban farming" often don't support small commercial farms. I see this as elitism: not everyone can or wants to grow their own. These muddled terms and policies hamper sustainability by continuing the dependence on long-distance food.

Seattle is better than many cities at prioritizing urban food production. Most of that still focuses on people growing their own. In 2010, then-mayor Mike McGinn announced a "year of urban farming" to focus on those issues. I'm so idealistic that I see less real effects than I'd like. It's hard to be patient. I think a fundamental understanding of the urgency and the major systemic changes that are needed is still lacking. There is an effort to coordinate programs and goals between governments, universities, and nonprofits. One of those is the Regional Food Policy Council (RFPC). I've been to several meetings and I'm looking forward to joining the RFPC to represent small start-up farmers. They aren't addressing some of the issues that I think are important, their vision isn't big enough, but they're an important ally with resources the movement needs. The board is mostly government people who spend a lot of time on bureaucratic stuff, talking about meetings, liaising, reports, and who chairs what.

I know that all that is important, especially working with other groups to coordinate efforts, but I want to know how it works on the ground, how new farms are created.

I really had to dig to find local food and sustainability programs, and they constantly change. It's hard to find programs that you don't know exist! I've found resources too late, after deadlines, after I found another way. Networking has been more effective than research. Often people I meet point me to groups or programs I wasn't aware of. I learned about the Seattle Farm Pilot Project (SFPP) from someone I met at a Northwest Intentional Communities Association (NICA) gathering.

Seattle purchased two farms to preserve open land and have space for classes. The SFPP made three sections of these farms available to small farmers on affordable leases. The 1/10th-acre spaces are tiny as farms go, but twice as big as my current space. The application was long and convoluted, with many requirements that didn't make sense from a farming point of view (having been written by bureaucrats). I consider it a win even though I wasn't selected. Applying put my name on their radar in case of future additional openings and showed the city that farmers want to engage with them. I'm glad that there were many applicants, demonstrating high interest.

Customer Expectations and Shopping Habits

Demand is rapidly rising for healthy local foods but I've noticed an expectation barrier, a disconnect between what consumers want and how they think it will look. Promoting local foods is an uphill battle against the convenience of grocery stores, worldwide shipping, and disposable packaging. Americans are used to one-stop shopping, buying tomatoes and berries all year, produce that is perfectly clean and uniform. Farmers' markets carry out-of-season produce from elsewhere, bought to supplement local in-season crops. This skews peoples' perceptions. My homeowner even wants lemons and limes, which *don't* grow in Seattle!

My first two years I did only on-site sales, no CSA or farmers' market. People came, bought veggies...and came back once if at all. Farm stands rely on repeat customers spreading the word. When people don't come back I get no feedback, no idea what did and didn't work for them: Selection too limited? Open the wrong hours? Not happy with the quality? Or did they like everything, intend to come back, then forget because it wasn't part of their regular habits?

My dedication to principles may have set my business back by those two years. Instead of using disposable packaging I sold handmade cotton bags or asked customers to bring containers. Since I'm a farmer with a bike instead of a truck, delivery to restaurants, customers, or farmers' markets was impractical. I wanted to sell only to my immediate neighborhood, bringing "local" to walking distance and using no fossil fuels at all.





This season we're offering CSA shares, including local delivery. (This only works for me because Sylvan will be here with her car once a week anyways.) I have conceded that some plastic bags are needed for now. I will encourage reusables while acknowledging the difficulties: I still store some veggies in plastic in the fridge because they wilt in fabric and hard containers take up space. I will be purchasing out-of-season fruits for CSA boxes as a convenience for customers and to support other organic farms.

Operating a farm alone also raised barriers. I had regular hours but couldn't be there every day. I can't run a farm stand in the front yard and work in the back yard at the same time. Signs directed people to the back entrance, but a sign isn't as enticing as an overflowing garden and a farmer digging in the dirt. There's a tourism aspect that I can't capture here. My next site will be a front yard so I can be seen by passers-by.

Veggies were "picked to order" to avoid waste and ensure freshness. I harvested only a few things in advance to display as teasers. Farmstands mounded high with food look great, but much of that won't sell. This is another area where I wonder if my ideals deterred people from coming back. Those extra five minutes seem worth it to me, both for freshness and to connect farmer to eater, but people are often busy. Many people shop on their way home in the evening. In Summer plants have wilted a bit by then, and in Spring and Autumn it's dark early. For reasons I don't understand, people seem more interested in a farmstand in Summer, turning to grocery stores and farmers' markets as soon as the weather starts to cool.

Growth and expansion will hopefully reduce these issues. A reputation for fantastic food, a front yard farmstand, and a CSA program will increase volume, convenience, and visibility. I'm adding another location this year, bringing exposure to a new set of neighbors. I've already chosen the neighborhood and am getting enthusiastic responses from the neighborhood association. Sylvan is now handling marketing and outreach. She has done fundraising and marketing before, both for business and nonprofit.

Creating Community

One of the wonderful things about gardening where people can see you is that they stop to watch and talk. People ask about things I do, how to grow particular plants, or compliment something they enjoy. I usually invite people in to taste, touch, smell: gardening is such a multi-sensory experience.

Early in my second year a neighbor admired my raised beds held in place by branches. He invited me to come see his newly installed, first-ever garden. I walked over to see his handiwork, gave some advice on thinning...then we talked for two hours about sustainable living, urban agriculture, and other common interests. Over the Summer Steve and I shared resources and tools, helped in each other's gardens, did two-person projects together. We split a delivery of compost, eliminating the extra truck trip. Working together and walking around the neighborhood, we noticed many chicken coops. I wanted chickens but had nowhere to keep them; he wanted eggs and to learn a new skill. It was a perfect win-win arrangement since I mostly wanted them for turning vegetable waste into fertilizer

and tilling fallow beds. We built a chicken coop together in his yard and shared the joy of raising chicks, teaching them to eat worms and forage. He frequently called me for advice but did all the day-to-day chores. When a chicken was injured by a dog, we nursed it back to health together.

Another farm-inspired partnership has been with Sylvan, my coauthor. We were both busy with gardens, work, and family and had little time to spend together. She suggested that we work together once a week, alternating between her garden and mine. We get more done together and have help for some of the two-person projects. (Ever try to put up a seven-foot-high trellis alone?) This has led to other networking opportunities, shared resources, carpooling to events, and sharing of tools. Sylvan brought un-sold produce to the food bank with her car. Our conversations in the garden while working together led to this article.

Work Parties

I talk to everyone I know or meet about farming and sustainability, so when I have a work party *everyone* gets invited. Alice was a Fitness Training client of mine with three little kids. We had some concerns about kids at work parties but agreed that it was important to let kids get dirty and learn where food comes from. We discussed safety hazards, including sharp tools and exposure to dust that might contain heavy metals, and provided safety precautions. One sunny June day we had a work party full of children! Their "help" was a mixed blessing, inspiring indulgent smiles and building as many messes as garden beds. The older kids there moved a *lot* of dirt. We are organizing a public "Kids in the Garden" event this Summer, with a bit more planning and lots of soapy water.

There was a memorable work party near the beginning when we moved a tall pile of "fill dirt" (mostly rocks) that the homeowner had gotten for free. We built raised beds, filled them with fill dirt, and topped them with compost and better soil. The homeowner cooked for everyone, opened her house and played hostess, even let the older kids play inside when they got tired of helping. Someone I had met briefly at a volunteer ecological restoration event came and worked hard in the sun for hours, not out of personal friendship but just because

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Belfast Ecovillage Produces Farm

By Sarah Lozanova

Sunday mornings at Belfast Cohousing and Ecovillage begin with Swiss chard, green onions, and piles of kale. Once a week, neighbors harvest veggies from Little River Community Farm, the three-acre on-site community supported agriculture (CSA) farm at the ecovillage. It is a worker-share arrangement, so neighbors dig in the dirt, snip, wash, and bundle the farm bounty together, while discussing recipe ideas.

Belfast Cohousing and Ecovillage is 36-unit multigenerational community in Midcoast Maine that has attracted members from all walks of life, including musicians, gardeners, educators, and naturalists. The 42-acre property was formerly a dairy farm, but is slowly turning into an ecovillage, with gardens, walking paths, bird watching, and many more ideas for the future.

Despite being a rural property, the homes are clustered to preserve open space and the built area is limited to six acres. Many of the super-energy-efficient homes are near net zero, with solar panels powering and heating the homes. The construction phase of the project is nearly complete, and only two units remain unsold.

“To me, a really important part of being a member of Belfast Ecovillage is the farm, where we raise food and work together,” says Jeffrey Mabee, an avid gardener. “The CSA has really answered my prayers about that. Having young farmers using the land in such a responsible way feels right. The farm feels like the heart of any intentional community. It has a much greater significance than merely producing food.”

The farm cofounders, Brian Hughes, Jenny Siebenhaar, and Amy Anderson, are all members of the ecovillage, and founded the farm last year. Hughes and Siebenhaar were farm apprentices in Europe in the early '90s, where they learned about permaculture and organic methods. They have managed three other CSA farms in recent years.

The farm at Belfast Ecovillage is unique because the current 22 farm members collectively own the land as members of the ecovillage, reside at the community, and contribute to maintaining the farm. An additional share purchased by community members is donated to the Belfast Soup Kitchen weekly.

“Little River Community Farm is the coolest CSA out there,” explains Hughes. “Because the members also own the land and will have a long-term relationship to it, we can plant perennial crops like asparagus.”

In the fall months, Belfast Ecovillagers start to notice the scarcity of cool storage space for fall crops. With slab-on-grade construction, the homes do not have basements. The common house, however, will have a root cellar, helping to alleviate this limitation. For now,

many members can or freeze surplus vegetables.

It is common to see children at the farm workdays and harvests, where they develop a deeper relationship with their food and find an opportunity to learn. “I didn’t learn where food comes from growing up,” says Hughes. “I grew up in the suburbs and I was in my 20s before I knew what potato, beet, or carrot plants looked like.”

Because Belfast Ecovillage is just completing the construction phase, farm projects have given members the unique opportunity to connect with the land and do physical labor together. Until this point, much of the community work has occurred in meetings—in planning and setting policies.

Some community members really appreciate how Belfast Ecovillage helps promote a healthy lifestyle. The weekly harvests help keep members active as they pick and haul the veggies. The community farm promotes culinary exploration and a high content of vegetables in the diet. Of course there is also a challenge associated with using a new vegetable such as kohlrabi or consuming all the kale that might arrive with a share.

“It is as fresh as you can get, like getting it from your own garden,” says Hughes. “That impacts nutrition and taste. We’re avoiding most of the carbon footprint of the food and we don’t use packaging except for recycled bags.”

In addition to the farm, there are several other multi-family farming initiatives in the community. There are two multi-household egg clubs, where members raise hens, while sharing the eggs, labor, and expenses. There have also been three multi-family flocks of meat birds during warmer months. Many Belfast Ecovillagers dream of having an orchard and then canning the harvest in the common house that is currently under construction. There is also interest in having livestock in the community, but the visions for the land are limited to the 36 acres available.

There is a widespread passion at the ecovillage for homegrown food. “Somehow when you are part of growing food, it feeds you more than just physically,” explains Siebenhaar. “It feeds your soul and spirit and there is a beauty to this. It goes beyond calories, vitamins, and minerals.” 🍷

Sarah Lozanova is an environmental journalist with an M.B.A. in sustainable management from the Presidio Graduate School. She has lived in several intentional communities and now resides in Belfast Cohousing and Ecovillage (mainecohousing.org) in Midcoast Maine with her husband and two children.



Photos courtesy of Sarah Lozanova

The Balancing Act of Farming in Community

By Coleen O'Connell

Cedar Mountain Farm's hay barn at Cobb Hill Cohousing.



Today started with sun but the sky has clouded as a major February northeaster blows into New England, promising a much-needed snowfall to deliver us from paths coated with treacherous ice. The children of Cobb Hill are anticipating a snow day and the best sledding conditions they have had yet this winter of 2014/15. A foot of new snow on our steep hillsides will delight not just the young, but a few of us old ones as well.

Meanwhile the cows, horses, sheep, and llama are nestled warmly in the barn. Calves are due so we'll see if any of them make their way into the world during the storm. The chickens probably won't venture out of their hut on wheels, but they will lay their eggs as usual. The car ballet (moving cars from lot to lot) will begin when the plow guy arrives to clear us out. We'll be in trouble if the electricity goes down and we can't chatter back and forth on our listserv advising where to move cars and when. The hustle and bustle of life on "the Hill," as we call it, will not be stopped by a mere snowstorm.

In 1991, Donella Meadows, coauthor of *The Limits to Growth* (1972), wrote in her nationally syndicated *Global Citizen* column, "Though I didn't grow up on a farm, I've been attracted to them all my life. When in 1972 I finally came to buy my own home, it was a farm. My psychological roots grew instantly into its cold, rocky soil. I have tried several times to leave it, reasoning that I could write more if I didn't spend so much time shoveling manure, that I need to be where the political action is, that I'm not a very good farmer anyway, that New Hampshire is a terrible place to farm. But I've always come back. Something deep in me needs to be attached to a farm."

She would eventually leave that farm in New Hampshire and move across the Connecticut River to the rural Upper Valley of Vermont, buying two adjacent dairy farms. With friends, she set out to found a "farm-based" community that would integrate principals of sustainability into all aspects of design and practice. The cohousing movement provided a useful model to help self-organize rather than re-invent the wheel. One of the original farmhouses became the headquarters of The Sustainability Institute, now the Donella Meadows Institute in Norwich, Vermont, and the process of planning and developing a cohousing community on the side of Cobb Hill went into full motion.

Moving with her to Vermont were her farming partners, Stephen Leslie and Kerry Gawalt. Choosing the rocky hillside to plant the homes left the prime agricultural fields available for farming. Kerry and Stephen and Donella would arrive on the property in the fall of 1999 with seven Jersey heifers, two Norwegian Fjord workhorses, and a draft pony named Bill. More people joined the development, moving closer to the community as the homes were being built. Stephen and Kerry began milking in 2000, and a group of Cobb Hill members began making cheese shortly after.

Farming Enterprises at Cobb Hill

Cobb Hill residents are co-owners of 270 acres of forest and farmland. Early in the development of the community, an enterprise system was started, allowing members to use common resources of land and buildings to bring sustainable agriculture and forestry

products not only to the Cobb Hill community but also to the surrounding community and beyond. It is a free lease system with the idea that best practices will result in continued productive farmland and forest, with sustainability at the forefront of everyone's products. Money from sale of the development rights to the Upper Valley Land Trust and funds from the Vermont Housing and Conservation board were contributed to help make one of the homes qualify as an

rooms, and Frozen Yogurt (six flavors). Pigs and broiler chicken enterprises are in hibernation and might emerge again in the future. There are dreams of adding a few more enterprises. Local food is booming in Vermont and Cobb Hill is proud to be part of this movement.

Of the 23 families (40 adults, 16 children) living at Cobb Hill, few make their living through the enterprises at Cobb Hill. Most are hobby enterprises that might net participants a small profit in any given year. Most enterprises are co-operated by various members of Cobb Hill, which can change membership from year to year. Some have investment capital that can be put in or taken out; others are standing operations that need labor only. At last count, there were 18 adults involved in the enterprises of Cobb Hill, and one high school student who oversees the Community Chicken enterprise.

Your first impression upon turning into the drive of Cobb Hill is that you have entered a working farm. The large red barn with a Farmstand sign greets you, the silo stands tall against the sky, and the machine shed yawns at you showing off its riot of tools, farm equipment, pails, fencing, and countless miscellaneous gadgets. Once past the barn you have only to look up the hill to see the passive solar homes perched solidly on the shale

At Cobb Hill, you quickly discover that you are not on a typical working farm.

“affordable” housing unit. It was written into the Land Trust Agreement that an affordable unit should always be available for a farm family.

Gathering momentum, the enterprise system has operated at Cobb Hill for the past 15 years now boasting many enterprises—CSA Market Garden, Jersey Dairy Milk, Cobb Hill Cheese with two Artisan cheeses, The Farmstand, Hay, Maple Syrup, Icelandic Sheep, Chickens, Honey, Shiitake Mush-

bedrock hillside. You know you are not on a typical working farm.

Cedar Mountain Farm is the enterprise started by Stephen and Kerry when they first moved to Cobb Hill with Donella. They produce sustainably grown vegetables, fruit, hay, flowers, milk, beef, and Jersey heifers. They use the Community Supported Agriculture system to market their vegetables, along with direct sales of their products through the Cobb Hill Farmstand (open every day for the passerby or local Cobb Hill or Hartland residents), private sales, mail order, and local farmers' markets. Wholesale accounts are set up with Cobb Hill Cheese and Cobb Hill Frozen Yogurt, Dairy Farmers of America Coop, area restaurants and farms, and 12 gallons a week of direct raw milk sales go to residents of Cobb Hill and the surrounding community. The Jersey heifers are sold through Jersey Marketing Services to supply the national milk market.

Making artisan cheese at Cobb Hill.





Plowing with Fjords at Cobb Hill.



Halloween harvest at Cedar Mountain Farm.

Cows grazing at Cedar Mountain Farm.



A fall day on the farm.

The farm business demonstrates the viability of using horses for traction power on the farm and to educate the public about the value of local-sustainable agriculture. The farmers have 17 acres in hay, 35 in pasture, and the balance in garden and greenhouses...altogether about 60 acres of Cobb Hill land. They feed an average herd of 50 young stock, steers, bred heifers, and milking cows, plus four working horses. (Cobb Hill Enterprise report, 2013.) Stephen is also an author, having published *The New Horse-Powered Farm* through Chelsea Green Publishers (2013); another book specifically on market gardening with horses is due to the publisher in a few days. He's not your typical farmer either.

Value-added products have enhanced the opportunities for this small-scale farm to gain recognition. Award-winning Cobb Hill Cheese and Cobb Hill Frozen Yogurt are products of the raw milk, rich in butterfat, of the Jersey cows. Owned and managed separately by other Cobb Hill residents, the cows are fed specifically to elicit the kind of milk needed to make the artisan cheese. A symbiosis is in play—without the quality Jersey milk, the award-winning alpine cheese would not be possible. Without the cheese, and the frozen market, the farmers would have to sell their milk on the larger volatile milk market.

Dairy farms in America have been on the decline for the past century. Vermont continues to support a small cadre of small-scale farms, but in the agribusiness world that has taken over, doing agriculture is a rare thing these days. Less than two percent of the US population now makes any of their income from farming and less than one percent makes all their household income from farming. Stephen and Kerry are committed farmers, loving what they do, doing it the best they can with what they have, yet struggle to support themselves and their daughter.

Struggles, Tensions, and Conflicts

So from all that you have read so far, you might conclude that the experiment at Cobb Hill is not only successful, but is a model for how one can do community and farming cooperatively. To some degree that is true, but taking off the rose-colored glasses, there have been struggles, tensions, and conflicts that have plagued this farm/community system over the years and continue to do so.

In the larger economic world of agriculture, as mentioned above, there is little sup-

port for the small-scale farmer. When Cobb Hill set out to do farming and community together, they devised what seemed like a wise and cutting-edge system to support a small farming enterprise. Fifteen years later, we are learning and growing from the conflicts and tensions that have surfaced time and again over the course of the community. The community support has come in the form of lease-free land, use of existing farm buildings, maintenance of those buildings over the years, and help with major tasks of hay and some field work.

As a newcomer to this community, I experience a lack of physical participation of the community in the farm for various com-

(without the investment expenses that keep many young farmers from fulfilling their dreams), they also have to contend with market prices for grains, hay, supplement, as well as the unstable prices for milk. They are too small to qualify for the subsidies that larger corporate dairy farmers might enjoy, but in truth most of the subsidies these days are going to mega farms growing soy and corn. So they must make their way through the small Vermont-focused agriculture grants that come through the state, and scale back any investments in infrastructure or stock to just those that they can afford from year to year.

Even though the Cobb Hill cheese and yogurt enterprises pay above-commodity prices for their milk, when you add vet bills, machinery, vehicles, gas, pasture upkeep costs, and other items to the list, you shortly begin to see that a 24-head milking herd and several acres of vegetables do not net you much in the end. A seven-day-a-week regimen of milking twice a day means the farmers must hire farmworkers in order to not exhaust themselves completely. By the time they are finished paying all the bills, there is little money left for Stephen and Kerry's salary.

Income variations among those who live at Cobb Hill can make farming among a cohousing community socially challenging. While Kerry rises at 5:00 each morning to milk, I personally work only half-time, and online, so I can pretty much do my work whenever I want

during the day and week. I hear her crunch through the snow outside my window each morning as I turn over and thank my lucky stars I am not needing to milk in the dark at -21 degrees F, as was the case for Kerry this morning. I make a very modest salary but it is still more than what Kerry and Stephen make working 16-hour days on the farm. How

Income variations among cohousers can make farming socially challenging.

plicated and complex reasons. Some have to do with people's busy schedules and commitment potential for tasks, some have to do with insurance and what the farmers can invite people to do, some have to do with personalities and how communication happens. Ultimately this lack of participation remains a source of stress in the community that needs tending to on a regular basis.

From my interviews with residents it seems that most were attracted to Cobb Hill because of the farming aspect of the community. What a great place to raise kids and have fresh homegrown food! Most people at Cobb Hill know little about farming, however, and less about dairy farming, and have little knowledge of the market forces that drive agribusiness in this country. It is difficult to escape the larger economic systems that control agriculture in our country and world.

Though Kerry and Stephen can feel grateful and blessed to have lease-free land to farm

does a community manage and deal with income inequality? How do we talk about this without being whiney or eliciting guilt or shame? It is a conversation we are due to have.

Managing 270 acres, 125 of which are forest and a maple sugar bush, plus trails, and the infrastructure of maintaining 20 households plus a common house with three apartments, takes the time and energy of the larger Cobb Hill community. Tensions in the community can arise because there is much work other than farming to be done in a land-based cohousing community, and Stephen and Kerry have little time for anything beyond keeping the farm going and raising their young daughter.

How does a community that prides itself in the working farm balance its desire for broader community engagement, while accepting that farm life may not make community involvement possible? How do we accept that Kerry and Stephen are adding a great contribution to the community even without showing up? This stress is one we spend a good deal of time talking about and grappling with. Kerry and Stephen are beginning to see that though they are stretched for time, showing up makes a huge difference. Life at Cobb Hill



and in any intentional community is a balancing act.

Many could argue that the community could be more engaged in the farm, allowing for shared workloads, thus relieving Kerry and Stephen of some of their duties. Many would love to do this, actually. But it's nice in theory, harder in practice. As is often the case, it is more complicated to have volunteers than just do the work yourself. Certainly large actions such as putting up hay bales or weeding the corn patch can benefit from volunteers. But when raising animals, you want only those trained well or those in training to be the ones who deal directly with your most valuable resource. These cows are not just taken care of, they are nurtured here at Cobb Hill. Kerry is proud of her Jersey cows and she runs a tight ship in the barn. She holds to high standards and will not compromise on many things. You want a farmer in your community farm to have this work ethic and commitment. Running a farm by consensus or volunteerism is a recipe for disaster...and not just for the humans. Yet people like myself can continue to romanticize how wonderful it is to be living in a community with a farm, while I plan my two-week upcoming vacation to Hawaii.

An Evolving Vision

Almost 14 years since her death, Dana Meadows' spirit resides here at Cobb Hill, as do her ashes. Her dying at the beginning of this experiment left a community of people, overtaken by their grief, struggling with the task of figuring this all out without her extraordinary vision and collaborative spirit. Her words continue to guide us as we begin to take stock of the system we have created here for farmers and community to be in collaboration with each other.

We still hold out a sustainable vision for our world...hopefully using the definition that she spoke of in a speech in Spain in the fall of 1993: "I call the transformed world toward which we can move 'sustainable,' by which I mean a great deal more than a world that merely sustains itself unchanged. I mean a world that evolves, as life on earth has evolved for three billion years, toward ever greater diversity, elegance, beauty, self-awareness, inter-

relationship, and spiritual realization."

Life at Cobb Hill continues. The car ballet went off without a hitch. We didn't lose power. We begin in 2015 to take stock of what has been created here. It is time to re-examine our assumptions, expose what isn't working, create some new dynamics, always looking for ways to intervene in the system. Dana would be proud to know that we are evolving this farm/community she loved. 🌿

Coleen O'Connell recently moved to the Cobb Hill community from Belfast Cohousing and Ecovillage in Maine, where she served on the leadership team in developing the project. Coleen is the Director/Faculty of the Ecological Teaching and Learning M.S. Program for educators at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Her professional and personal passion has been to explore ecological literacy and sustainability in the context of our personal lifestyle choices. She has traveled internationally with students living in and studying the ecovillage movement. She can be reached at oconnell@lesley.edu and welcomes your comments or questions.



Summer at Cobb Hill.



Cardboard, Control, and Catch-22s Community and the Food Production Dilemma

By Moss Mulligan

Editor's Note: *The author has requested pseudonymity, explaining: "This piece is intended primarily not as a critique of my community's gardening practices (gardening can be hard, often thankless work, even without random criticism in some magazine), but rather as an exercise in emotional release, self-reflection, and big-picture-assessment." We have honored this request.*

Cardboard. Not just a little cardboard—seemingly acres of cardboard. Cardboard topped by several inches of wood chips. A perfect formula for: suppressing annual weeds, yes, but encouraging perennial weeds. Tying up nitrogen in the breakdown of all that heavy-carbon material, so it is unavailable to growing plants. Creating a chunky and slivery woody-debris layer that, even when eventually mixed into the soil underneath, makes hands-in-the-soil gardening unpleasant if not impossible. Thwarting attempts to remove rhizomes of plants like quackgrass and bindweed. Voiding the garden of green living things, like cover-crop in the “off”-season, and introducing a barren, imported landscape dependent on (and reflecting the energy of) large-scale paper-product production, petroleum-fueled wood processing plants and/or wood-chippers, fossil-fuel-powered trucks and the roads those travel on, and the idea that we can just cover over what we don't like in life (such as those troublesome perennial weeds) and not have them come back stronger every time in reaction (which they do). We don't want to do the spadework, the forkwork, the hands-on work to address the problem in a more conscious, more effective, but more time-consuming way; we can cover over all those weeds in just a matter of hours, until all we see is: cardboard. And not just a little cardboard—seemingly acres of cardboard.

I myself have used cardboard to sheet-mulch many garden beds. Each time, I used the methods that I'd been taught, and that had proven effective. Cut down the vegetation underneath first. Remove all tape and staples from the cardboard. Be sure to overlap edges. Cover cardboard with a layered mixture of carbonaceous and nitrogenous materials (straw, grass cuttings, compost scraps, weeds, spoiled hay, manure), in effect creating a compost layer on top of the soil. Make this mulch *deep*—ideally at least six inches. And use this method only on an area that you are bringing into vegetable production for the first time or after at least several years of being fallow. This is a one-time conversion (of, for example, a lawn or a weedy disused area), to create or expand your usable

garden space. After this first sheet-mulching, it's fine to keep adding mulch every year, but cardboard should never again be necessary. Methodical attention to removing remaining perennial weeds that resprout through the mulch should obviate the need for any further choking of everything underneath. And, most important: leave wood chips out of the picture, or you'll have a very different, much less human-friendly animal for your vegetable garden soil.

Watching the transformation of garden areas that I once tended in my intentional community has been a lesson in letting go. Gardens that I used to spend hours in every day, filtering out perennial weed rhizomes from the soil in preparation for planting each bed, keeping the soil covered with green things throughout the year (the natural pattern in our mild mediterranean climate), giving plants individual attention, delighting in the beautiful, ever-changing artwork created by the diverse interplantings that I and those who joined me cycled through those beds—these have been turned into what look to me like cardboard-and-wood-chip-covered wastelands (and the parts that aren't cardboard-covered have no cover crop either—instead, they're being compacted and denuded by chickens and ducks that are allowed to free-range there). I would be very discouraged if I gave this situation energy—if I allowed it to matter to me still.

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But I need to be honest with myself. Other things became more important to me than the task of keeping those gardens going in ways that would help my soul sing rather than cringe. Life itself shifted my focus elsewhere, by giving me a debilitating physical condition that made gardening painful and/or impossible for several years. I had to let go of the gardens I'd cared for so ceaselessly for so long. And in the way of community, other people, with other methods, temperaments, and preferences, stepped in to tend those gardens. Not only cardboard and wood chips, but rototill-

ers (which I never used—I and my co-managers, interns, and apprentices gardened only with hand tools) now make at least annual appearances within every garden fence. Most of these gardens are empty of people most of the time, typically visited by work parties to accomplish big tasks. I no longer feel like going in there either—the wood-chip-laced soil, the clash with my aesthetic sensibilities, the foreign-to-me methods that I see creating only short-term (if any) advantages while contributing to longer-term problems, give me a desire to be almost anywhere else but in these places. The gardens used to be sanctuaries for me, but now I pass through them only quickly, if at all, usually accompanying children, who provide sufficient distraction that the distress I might otherwise feel isn't stimulated.

There's also more to this picture. Being free of the never-ending responsibilities of gardening has allowed me to open to so many previously neglected dimensions of life: in my own personal path and fulfillment, in my health and well-being, in interpersonal relationships, in community involvement, even in my sense of possibility, inner and outer evolution, and spiritual connection. Instead of constantly carrying an agenda, I feel more consistently able to be fully present in the "now." Time is now spacious enough to embrace the little and big miracles of life all around me (not just in the garden), and I find I enter easily into the wonder, curiosity, spontaneity, and joy of the community children that I now have time to give attention to. This ability to play a significant role in the lives of the young—and to make space for them to play a significant role in mine—feels easily worth the trade-off of no longer having any gardening responsibilities or even inclinations within my home community. Ideally, I'd combine these two elements—but given the choice, I'm happy to shift my focus to growing children rather than vegetables.

I'm obviously not a fan of my community's current food-production methods, but I don't think the practices that I used were actually sustainable or consistent with my deepest impulses either. I found a lot of joy in gardening—and still do, when I help friends in their gardens, away from the community—but in retrospect, my gardening efforts here were also fraught with contradictions. Whether in maintaining soil fertility (having chicken manure trucked in), in irrigating crops (using lots of grid electricity), in processing and storing food (ditto), in establishing work patterns that nourished rather than depleted those participating (I overworked and encouraged others to do the same), or in any of a slew of

other areas, my set of strategies often fell far short of something that, deep down, I could truly feel good about. Much of my continuing motivation depended upon a narrative of doing the best I could within an ethically and spiritually impossible situation, where every available choice was flawed, a Catch-22, when examined honestly. And in fact, almost every single modern approach I know to food production is fraught with similar, or worse, contradictions and problems—deleterious impacts on the natural world, on the people who participate and consume the fruits of the process, on future

In retrospect, my gardening efforts here were also fraught with contradictions.

generations confronting an increasingly depleted world, and on our own souls as gardeners and farmers.

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I would sum up these problems and impacts in a single word: control.

Most of our species' food procurement in modern times seems to be the result of our efforts to control the natural world—not to work with it. We decide what we will grow, and where we will grow it. We impose our



Moss Mulligan, 2009



Moss Mulligan, 2015

crops on the landscape. In order to make this happen, we also have to organize and in some sense control the people who will do the work. Virtually every cooperative gardening or farming situation that I have known of or been part of over the last 30 years—whether educational or production-oriented in focus—has encountered “control” issues among the people involved. I believe they’re directly related to the fact that our food production is an attempt to control the plant and animal worlds too. Almost every cell of our bodies is built from the products of this control-dominated food production system, and we’ve been steeped in its paradigm our entire lives. It’s no wonder then that we act it out in our relationships with each other, whether within or outside of the garden—but especially within, where the damage, the cultural wrong turn, may have originated.

Humans have always tended the land. But for most of our evolutionary history we were subtle gardeners, encouraging some plants and discouraging others within the palette of what grew naturally in the ecosystems we inhabited. We ate plants and animals but for the most part they were free, wild beings until we harvested and consumed them—and their relatives and offspring continued to live free and wild afterwards. And even after domestication started (as Michael Pollan has pointed out, this was a two-way process—we were domesticated by particular animal and plant species just as much as we domesticated them), our interactions with our “familiar” within those realms were for a long time much more nuanced, respectful, and equal than they are today. Only with the agricultural revolution was this order upended—something captured perfectly in one Native American’s comment when the plow first arrived on the North American continent: “Wrong side up!” Most of us (except those gardeners careful not to invert soil layers, and those covering the soil with, ahem, cardboard instead) have been turning over the soil ever since, damaging not only the soil but ourselves in the process.

So it doesn’t surprise me that whenever people get together to grow food, one person (usually he or she who takes most responsi-

bility) becomes the “problem” person, the one whose tendency to control (or sometimes, whose lack of the control needed to have any success in a control-based enterprise) rubs others the wrong way. I can likely count on the fingers of one hand the head farmers and gardeners I know, in communities and on farms, who have managed to avoid being labeled difficult or impossible to work with by some who tried to help—either for being a control freak or for not being in control enough. Even a hand that’s had a run-in with the wrong piece of agricultural machinery would likely suffice for this count.

Another way must be possible—but the first step is recognizing that we have a problem. No matter what reassuring stories we may tell ourselves, simply growing “organic” food (whether using tractors, massive stacks of cardboard, or any other product of a control-based society)—and even doing that in community—will not save us from the fundamental contradictions the control paradigm has

brought us. The words of Bob Dylan’s “Idiot Wind” come to mind: “We’re all idiots, babe; it’s a wonder we can even feed ourselves.”

Fortunately, it *is* a wonder, in a non-ironic way as well, that we can

feed ourselves—that this whole world of life-nourishing-life exists, and that we’re part of it. And as long as that’s true, and as long as we’re still managing to feed ourselves somehow, it’s still possible to find *better* ways to feed ourselves. I predict this will be one of the greatest challenges—and perhaps also greatest contributions—of communities and cooperative ventures in the next century, a century in which humanity will need to adapt rapidly rather than wallow in denial and delay. In the face of water shortages, soil depletion, climate weirding, peak everything, and massive social changes—and specifically, in transforming our relationships to food and most other areas of life—we will have to “shit or get off the pot.” I look forward to it, as we definitely *won’t* be in control, though the paths we choose will make a difference. 🐦

Moss Mulligan is a communitarian, naturalist, and former garden coordinator who still occasionally finds ways to scratch the gardening itch.

The plants and animals who fed us were free, wild beings until we harvested them.



Moss Mulligan, 2009



Moss Mulligan, 2009



From "Sketches of a life's last moments" by Claire Kerwin.

Glimpsing the Wild Within: The Sacred Violence of Eating

By Lindsay Hagamen

Editor's Note: *Vegetarian readers please be advised: this article contains graphic imagery involving animal slaughter and butchering.*

"People say that what we're seeking is a meaning for life...I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experience on the purely physical plane will have resonances within our innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive."

—Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth*

My hands, red with blood, are immersed in the still-warm flesh of the sow. With a knife sharp enough to take life swiftly, I cut through fat and muscle, trying to separate her head from the rest of her lifeless body. I'm struggling. With so much fat around her jowls, I cannot feel where to cut between the vertebrae. In my impatience, I resort to a saw, and with full-bodied strokes, push and pull the blade over the bone. It's neither elegant nor effective. But I need a way to ground myself—I'm in a state of exalted reverence.

We have just killed Willamena, a four-year-old sow we affectionately called "Willy." I helped raise Willy from a piglet, fed her nearly every day, and helped midwife her through three pregnancies. I learned from Willy new meanings of persistence, service, and love. I learned from her how far mothers will go to ensure the healthy survival of their strongest offspring. Willy inspired in me love, respect, and appreciation that created a powerful bond between us.

In the days following Willy's most recent pregnancy, I visited her pen regularly. On many of the visits, I found a limp piglet, so very peaceful, yet no longer alive. Willy's vision and hearing had been de-

teriorating and it had begun to impact her mothering. Currently, our land can only support one sow and her litter. So, with Willy's diminishing capacity to successfully raise healthy piglets, it was becoming clear that it was time to let one of her daughters succeed her. It was time to harvest Willy.

As the weeks passed, I resolved myself for Willy's coming death. On this day when we planned to harvest her, I spent a few hours with her, resting my head on her back, rubbing her belly, and scratching behind her ears. As she grunted contentedly, tears rolled steadily down my cheeks, wetting her skin. I would soon be taking her life, as she had taken the life of her own piglets.

There's a foreboding symmetry to it all: life feeding on life. The years of living in a forest, on a farm, one hour from the nearest grocery store, have instilled in me this humbling awareness about the web of life in which I am immersed. I sow seeds and harvest trees. I midwife the birth of pigs and then take their lives as dictated by the needs of the land and the demands of the seasons. This land is my grocery, my doctor, and my security.

My own existence is a collaboration of sun and soil, muscle and bone. Every day is an ecstatic celebration and a stoic fight. I too am vulnerable to the biting cold and the pangs of hunger. Coming face-to-face with my own place in the web of life has increased the frequency of my tears, the potency of my anger, and the quickness of my response. It has also enhanced the power of my love, the authenticity of my joy, and my desire to seek pleasure. It has ushered me into a life that is human, animal, and wild.



Humans have created stories since time immemorial. Mythological stories go far beyond a form of entertainment as they help us find purpose and peace in this remarkably complex, beautiful, and tragic world. Down through the generations, myths help pass the wisdoms that orient us to the world in which we were born, and guide us through the phases and stages of life. Myths have the power to shape lives and guide cultures.

One of the common themes in myth is a cosmology that reflects the subsistence practices dictated by the local ecology, helping place human culture in accord with nature. Joseph Campbell, a professor of comparative mythology at Sarah Lawrence College for nearly 40 years, shares a myth that establishes a covenant between the buffalo and the Plains Indians. The covenant affirms that the buffalo will come every year and give their lives to feed the people and the people in turn will bring them back to life through the sacred rites of the buffalo dance.

In the telling of this myth, Campbell offers that “the essence of life is that it lives by killing and eating. And that is the great mystery the myths have to deal with.” These people, like most people the world over, were “living on death all the time, in a sea of blood.” [*The Hero's Journey: The World of Joseph Campbell*. Documentary. 1987.] So this myth served to reconcile the human psyche with the harsh reality that life survives by eating life.

Campbell goes on to suggest that if we are to celebrate life for the miracle that it is, we must celebrate it as it truly is. But as a modern culture we are losing the capacity to distinguish between the “sea of blood” that flows from living a life in accordance with life itself and the “sea of blood” that flows from acting out of ignorance, greed, and aggression. Regaining the capacity to discern between these two dynamic forces may well save us from ourselves.

Today we live in a world that is full of needless atrocities. We live in a nation without guiding myths. We live in a culture where comfort, convenience, and progress disconnect so many from the places, processes, and creatures that are the sources of sustenance. What remains is a cultural crisis that is profound and widespread, a crisis of the conscious and our core identity.

What should we eat? Organic? Local? Vegetarian? Vegan? Raw? What if the animals are free-range? Or if the food will be otherwise thrown away? Maybe the answer lies in the Paleo diet? Or in the practices of Sally Fallon's *Nourishing Traditions*? We appear to be losing our bearings on how to relate to the very thing that gives us life and nourishment.

Emphasizing the importance of understanding local ecology in understanding ourselves, Wendell Berry observed that “You don't know who you are, if you don't know where you are.” [Berry, Wendell. *Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community*. Pantheon, 1994.] I'd add that if you don't know the food you're eating, then you don't know who you really are.



Food is the most intimate connection I have with the Earth. When I eat, I am taking in the body of another being and making it part of my own. I am literally *incorporating* their cells into mine, their life into mine. I don't know of anything more intimate.

I can trace my life through the lens of trying to find right relationship with food. At the age of 10, I became vegetarian and pretended I was a calf at the dinner table. At 16, I became vegan, attended animal rights conferences, and recoiled at the horrors of factory farms, monoculture, and industrial agriculture. At 18, I started working on small-scale farms, helping to grow vegetables and fruit for local farmers' markets. At 23, I moved to Windward, a small land-based intentional community in southern Washington State, and started the process of integrating with this land—of consuming what this land provides at the nurturing hands of those who call it home. Seven years later, I am

now of this plateau. Squash and greens and eggs and bone. Potatoes, lard, cheese, and plums. My body is made of the Earth I walk every day. I am bonded with those who too eat from this

Humans, squirrels, deer, coyotes, owls, and hawks—we are made from the same living Earth.

land—fellow humans, squirrels, deer, coyotes, owls, and hawks. We are made from the same living Earth.

I know that this process of healing, of unlearning and becoming human, is one in which I continually have to confront my deepest conditioning. I am no longer surprised when I find myself thinking something that a few years ago I would have considered heresy. The journey I am on is one that asks me to shed the things I carry that are not mine, and to integrate the part of me that had been lost. Through this process, I am slowly revealed to myself. Some parts are beautiful, some are unsettling. Some parts I can leave behind. Others, I learn, I cannot.



After I sufficiently tire myself with the saw and have made no meaningful progress separating Willy's head from the rest of her body, I humble myself and ask for help. Andrew takes the knife as I move around to take hold of her head. I sink my hands into the flesh and pull, creating more space between the vertebrae for Andrew to place the knife and sever the remaining connective tissue.

Sinking my hands into Willy's warm, bloody tissue ignites a series of conflicting feelings inside me. I feel horrified and content. I feel powerful and vulnerable, sickened and satiated. I mourn the loss of Willy's life—her contended grunts, her smile, the way her ears flopped when she ran towards food—and I simultaneously fill with a primal sense of comfort in knowing we have nourishing food for the coming winter. With Willy's body laying limp and dismembered in front of me, I have a heightened awareness of my own mortality—I can feel my muscles

as they move and my lungs expanding with each breath—I know exactly what it would take for the life to flow out of my body as it has Willy's. Arising from the same primal place, I feel a heightened desire for my own flesh to engorge with blood, with life, and to surrender beneath the weight of a tender and impassioned lover.

Andrew looks up from where his attention has been focused on Willy's spine and our eyes meet. "Are you ready?" I nod. He swiftly separates the last of the connective tissue attaching Willy's head, and the full weight of her head falls into my hands.

At that moment, something shifts inside me: I stop fighting the part of myself that knows that these acts—killing, eating, living—are inherently violent. Holding her head dripping with blood, I feel like a monster. And I know I am. We just cut off Willy's head—an act that requires force, precision, and a desire to irrevocably damage something that was so meticulously (and miraculously) held together. I also feel intensely human. I feel alive and awake, captivated by my own physicality. I feel viscerally connected to Willy, to Andrew, to the grass underfoot, the trees at my side—to every creature who calls this land home. The weight of her head in my hands broke through another layer of the denial that had been keeping me from accepting the part of my humanity that is wild—the part of my humanity that is fighting for survival just like every other creature with whom we share this Earthly home.

We live in a violent world. I don't mean the needless atrocities that humans commit against fellow humans, against other animals, and ultimately against the land itself. I mean the violence of life feeding on life as a means of perpetuating itself. Of the lioness killing the zebra, of the brown bear catching the salmon, of the gardener pulling up carrots, of the deer eating the newly sprouted fir tree right down to the ground. A violence that I no longer want to deny and will perform with as much reverence as my body can muster.

For just as my body revolts against the experience of killing, so too does it find it deeply grounding. When my hands are immersed in another's flesh, every cell in my body knows I am alive. When my eyes catch sight of the beauty of the muscles or the intricate patterns of fascia and veins, I am mesmerized. When I am scraping the hide, a deep calm settles in. Even the first time felt familiar, like staring into the flames of a fire or feeling the beating heart of a beloved.

For me, harvesting another life for food—animals and plants alike—has become a sacred violence. I consider it part of the eternal dance of Life transforming itself from one form to another, and in the process infusing the transcendent into every mortal life form. It's a dance too complex for me to understand fully, but it's a dance that endlessly captivates me, and it compels me to engage wholeheartedly. And I do.

Walt Patrick



Welcoming new life.

ine. We do not declare intentions or call in elements. We do not sing organized song or stand in a circle.

The purpose, however, is clear. Blood, flesh, bone, and earth are present in their rawness and potency. If we are lucky, the wind and rain will spare us. Song is spontaneous, arising out of personal relationship with the animal. The connection between the humans is intensely palpable. The energy starts out solemn, grows reverent, sometimes becomes jovial, and ends in fatigue and cold fingers.

Earlier in the day the primary caretaker of the selected animal will prepare the space. By then, many will have already said their good-byes—feeding a special treat or scratching in the favorite places. Some draw pictures, others sing songs. Each person chooses what is most meaningful for them. Those who want to bear witness to the death arrive before the designated time. When that time comes, a sharp knife slits the jugular, or a bullet penetrates the brain. It's startling how quickly life can fade. My heart always sinks and my stomach tightens.

And the beauty of the crimson blood as it flows over snow, around stone, or under leaves, takes my breath away. A bond forever connects those who are present for the taking of life.

On harvest days, everyone lends a hand. With repetition, individuals grow into specific roles: the one who wields the knife, the one who operates the crane, the one who ferries meat to the kitchen. We endeavor to use as much of the animal as possible, from tanning the hide to rendering the fat, from preparing the organ meats to fer-

tilizing the garden with blood and bone. The parts we cannot use, we feed to other omnivores on the farm. Then there is processing the meat itself. For the larger animals, we gather in the kitchen to cut, sort, and package for freezing, sausage making, or dry curing. For a few hours we tell stories, make plans, or work in silence. It's a classic example of many hands making light work. And even then, making full use of all the animal can take weeks or even months.

Having many skillful hands becomes a necessity when we live with the raw elements of the land. When we rely on each other for our daily bread, community quickly becomes a viscerally felt network of security. Nurturing community is as much a necessity of living with the land as knowing east from west. Each of us here at Windward carries a deep understanding that we cannot do this—live with a forest, on a farm—on our own. We rely on each other to create that felt sense of integration that comes when we know our food, the life it lived, the ground it walked, its last moments. We live through partnership, with the forest, with the animals, and with one another. It is through these partnerships that we come to know ourselves and that we become fully human. It is in this violent harmony that I have come to find peace. 🍷

*Lindsay Hagamen lives, works, loves, and plays on the high plateau that descends off of Mt. Adams in Wabkiacus, Washington. She is a Steward of the Windward Community (www.windward.org), lover of the Wild, and co-editor of the recently released collection *Ecosexuality: When Nature Inspires the Arts of Love* (www.ecosexbook.com).*

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At Windward, we have, over time, developed rituals for killing animals. It's not the kind of ritual a modern pagan might imag-

Re-Imagining the Hunting Camp: Feminism, Huntresses, and Community

By Mary Murphy

I was raised by nonviolent vegetarians in a Hindu-inspired meditation community, so I'm not the first person you'd expect to become a deer hunter. I came to it in my late 20s, after a brief vegan phase, eight years as a wilderness guide, and a thru-hike of the Appalachian Trail. Backpacking in the mountains was a skill set I'd quite mastered, and I had a yearning to connect with the forest I loved in a new way. My desire to learn to hunt surprised me, but as soon as I admitted it to myself I found the perfect mentor and dove into learning about rifles, taking a hunter safety course, and climbing into my first tree stand. Soon I was standing over my first buck, filled with that mixture of awe and grief and elation that every hunter knows well, my enthusiasm for the path of the huntress solidified into flesh and blood before my eyes. The practical and spiritual work of hunting has been transforming my life ever since that day, and has become one of the pillars of my life's work.

Hunting is a culture of community. Our ideal of the hunter as a rugged individualist, strong and solitary, is very rarely the truth of it. Anthropologists believe our human ancestors hunted as a tribe, running down their prey together across the plains of Africa. While modern American hunters like to partake of the solitary frontiersman image, hunting is often still a community endeavor. As a female hunter I often find myself on the outside of the Old Boys Club, peering in. As I talk to the male hunters I know, and read books written by men who grew up immersed in the male hunting culture, I am struck again and again by how this is not something that one does alone. While the individual hunter may not have a companion at the time he takes his shot, hunters have a community that supports them every step of the way. Many men are mentored by their relatives when they first learn to hunt, and even those who are self-taught in adulthood usually find an outpouring of generous advice and support from the hunting community. Most male hunters I've met have a network of hunting buddies that support

each other throughout the season: everybody parks their truck in the same spot, they hunt in different directions, meet up at the trucks for lunch to trade stories of what they found, and head out again for the afternoon with many times more knowledge of the patterns of the deer than they could have gained scouting on their own.

The most cohesive form of community amongst modern North American hunters is the hunting camp. These cabins in the woods often stay in the family for generations, with a dedicated crew of male relatives and family friends who make the pilgrimage to that spot each November to hunt together. The master hunters teach the young boys the secrets of the deer. Ethical standards of sportsmanship are forged and upheld, camp chores are shared between all according to their ability, and at some camps everyone splits the meat at the end, regardless of who was successful and who was not. Among each hunting family, stories become mythical through yearly retelling. When you peer underneath the macho surface of the hunting camp, it begins to look a lot like some of our most idealistic intentional communities—shared work, free flow of knowledge from old to young, and a culture full of affectionate storytelling.

I don't find easy entry into this hunting camp community, and I'm not sure I want to be there anyway. While I'm sure some women have won themselves a place in traditional hunting camps, the culture is not a feminist one. I role my eyes at the sexist metaphors sprinkled throughout hunting books and the clumsy tokenism displayed by traditional hunting podcasts who invite women to speak on their broadcasts. Hunting TV shows featuring female hunters invariably select pretty, young, feminine women who are sure to wear some pink with their camo to reassure us that they are not threatening gender norms. As a butch lesbian hunt-



er, I transgress too many gender boundaries for many traditional male hunters to relax around me or take me seriously. I'm most often mistaken for a man in hunting stores, and when I'm correctly identified as female it's a crapshoot as to whether the clerk will treat me with respect or give me curt, clipped answers that fulfill only the minimum standards of civility.

So, while I yearn for the mentoring and moral support that seems so abundant in the traditional hunting camp, I'm not convinced that I actually want to join one. Instead, I've decided to re-imagine the hunting camp, taking what I know about egalitarian feminist communities and using that as a foundation for a gynocentric version of the hunting camp. This idea was born out of the women's hunting classes I teach each fall at the community farm where I live. While students would leave my "Huntress Intensive" weekends brimming with new knowledge and enthusiasm, many of them still experienced a barrier to actually hunting on their own. Whether it was a lack of expensive shooting equipment, lack of access to good hunting land, or just the lack of a support network to get them out the door at 5 a.m. each morning to hunt, a few of my students hunted, but many did not.

In November of 2014 my attempt to meet these needs came into being in the form of "The Huntress Expedition." I flew several aspiring huntresses to my hunting mentor's farm in North Carolina for the opening week of deer season. I knew we would have excellent hunting land, great equipment for them to use, and trustworthy mentors to guide their hunts. The magic trick of the endeavor would be to create our own culture in an intentional way, something that braided together the polar opposites of eco-feminism and the traditional hunting camp.

There are many ways to measure success. I could tell you that every new Huntress who came on the expedition got her first buck while she was with us. I could tell you that the expedition raised funds to support both my own eco-spiritual wilderness business and the fledgling organic farm that hosted our hunts. But what I am most proud of is the culture we created. Drawing from the traditions of feminist spirituality, we opened our week by building an altar to the deer spirit in our hunting cabin, and setting intentions for how

we wanted to experience the week. We gave our space a good scrubbing and smudged it with the smoke of purifying herbs, then we blessed each other for our hunts. We drew inspiration from the archetypes of ancient hunting goddesses like Artemis and Skadi, and learned about shamanic techniques for attuning with the deer and calling them to us. We talked about how our identities as mothers and sisters and wives affected our willingness to hunt does and yearlings. Once the women started shooting deer, we delved deeply into the complex emotional experi-

Our group braided together the polar opposites of eco-feminism and the traditional hunting camp.

ence that arises when one has respectfully taken the life of an animal for food. Several of us had been vegan in our past and we talked about what it means to go from abstaining from meat to actively participating in the cycle of life. And amidst all this we experienced the core elements of the experience at

(continued on p. 78)



Teaching aspiring huntresses at the Huntress Intensive in Vermont.



An altar to the Deer Spirit at the Huntress Expedition.



Leonore shot her first buck on the last morning of the Expedition.

Photos courtesy of Mary Murphy

Cool Pickles

By Albert Bates



Photos courtesy of Albert Bates

A recent post to one of The Farm's many Facebook groups included a page from an August 1981 internal newspaper, *The Weekly Beat*, that gave a tally of our canning progress that month—12,634 quarts of various fruits, veggies, sauces, and pickles.

As I described in the Fall 2013 COMMUNITIES (#153), the Farm (Summertown, Tennessee) has now become carbon-minus, net sequestering more than five times the annual greenhouse gas footprint of ourselves and our visitors. We accomplish this primarily with our forests, but to a growing degree we do it with good soil management, including key-line, compost teas, and biochar.

So how do these two things, pickles and biochar, relate? Biochar is both a miraculous store of organic carbon and a nutrient densifier in organic and biodynamic gardening. It has the potential to restore our climate to pre-Anthropocene. It has the potential to end hunger. And lately we've learned something else—the power of biochar as a nonalcoholic digestif.

Frances D. Burton, in *Fire: The Spark That Ignited Human Evolution*, dates hominid use of fire to 1.6 to 2 million years before present, and charcoal cooking to the beginning of that period. We don't know when the discovery of the gastric benefits of charcoal first arrived, but it may have come from the observation of the habits of animals, such as red colobus monkeys in Africa, who improve their diet by seeking out char from the forest floor after wildfires, enabling them to relieve indigestion caused by toxins in some leafy greens. Mother monkeys teach their young to do this, as indeed our own ancestors may have taught their young, even before we had speech and flint tools.

It may have been our ancient taste for charcoal that coded a segment of our taste receptors to favor foods cooked over glowing embers. Consider the popularity of the Hawaiian *luau*, Indian *tandoor*, Brazilian *rodizio*, Colombian *lomo al trapo*, Argentinian *parallada*, Japanese *yakitori*, and Indonesian *satay*. In Thailand and Korea, they use a small tabletop charcoal hibachi for thinly sliced meat and vegetables. While you cook, the meat and juices drip down into the second chamber, making the meat low in fat and giving you a rich broth to use as a soup or a savory sauce. Both meat and broth contain traces of biochar.

Biochar works in your digestive tract the same way it works in the soil—by providing habitat for the microbiome. By partnering with our own unique gastrointestinal fauna we can stimulate phage immunogenicity, fight off infection antigens, and reverse toxin-loading. Biochar gives us an immune boost.

At the Farm Ecovillage Training Center, mentors and apprentices gather to make biochar pickles, a year-round way to get tasty trace amounts into our diet.

When making food-grade biochar, we generally select for our substrate a woody-stemmed plant such as bamboo. We fine grind the char, using a coffee grinder at the last stage, reducing it to a feathery powder.

See our recipe for Biochar Shiitake Pickles (*sidebar*), and enjoy! 🍷

Albert Bates is author of The Biochar Solution, Pour Evian on Your Radishes, Climate in Crisis, and three cookbooks, among other titles. He was part of the founding of the Global Ecovillage Network and shared the Right Livelihood Award in 1980 for The Farm's work in preserving indigenous culture. See www.thefarm.org and www.thefarm.org/etc.

Biochar Shiitake Pickles

Makes 4 pints

We started experimenting with this right after we had harvested the last of our summer eggplant and hard rains brought us a bounty of shiitake. We finished making the eggplant pickles as planned, following my mother's recipe from *The Farm Vegetarian Cookbook*, and then we made shiitake pickles the same way, adding a sprinkling of biochar.

Ingredients

2 lbs shiitake mushrooms
1 qt cider or white wine vinegar
2 Tbsp pickling salt
2 Tbsp biochar
2 c extra-virgin olive oil
5 cloves garlic, peeled and sliced
8 jalapeño peppers, deseeded and quartered lengthwise
1 fresh chili habañoero, deseeded and chopped finely
Onion powder
Garlic powder
Sprigs of fresh thyme, rosemary, and sage

Preparation

Wash and stem the mushrooms and slice them across the cap in strips. Place the mushrooms and jalapeño slices and garlic cloves in a mixing bowl, layering in 2 Tbsp of pickling salt and 2 Tbsp of biochar and a few sprigs of fresh thyme, rosemary, and sage as you go. Compress under weight overnight. This will bring a salty brine to the surface that submerges the mushrooms.

The next day, prepare sterilized pickling jars and have them at the ready.

Drain off the brine. If you prefer reduced sodium in your diet, briefly rinse the mushrooms in a colander but try not to rinse away the herbs and biochar. Sauté the mushrooms in a wok of preheated olive oil, adding dashes of onion powder and garlic powder and the diced habañoero, about 5 minutes or until the mushrooms and garlic begin to brown. Using a slotted spoon, remove the pickled veggies and immerse in a bowl filled with vinegar. Immediately place the hot veggies and pickling marinade into the sterilized jars, filling them to the very top. Put the lids on tightly to heat seal, then set aside until cool. Clean the jars, attach sticky labels, and write the date and the contents on them. Store somewhere cool and dark—it's best to leave them for about 2 weeks before opening so the pickles really get to marinate well, but if you absolutely cannot wait, you can eat them sooner. They'll keep about 3 months.

—A.B.

Small and Large Miracles: Food, Land, and Community at Kibbutz Lotan

By Alex Cicelsky

“Welcome to this circle. I’m impressed by all the small and large miracles that had to happen in order for us to be here, at this time, in order to share this meal together. You’ve come from around the globe—Nigeria and Ghana; Taiwan and Thailand; Switzerland, Germany, and the UK; Brazil and Colombia; the US and Canada—to join us here in Israel because you want to learn together with us to build and grow food while caring for our earth and communities. On the table, made with earth plasters and recycled materials, is food that we’ve harvested from the garden.

“Look around. This food forest was only a few years ago a desert—one of the driest in the world; only sand. We’ve built soil from our composted food scraps, watered it with salty water that we cannot drink, and welcomed ever-increasing varieties of insects, bees, and butterflies that together nurture and protect most of the fruits. There are no industrial fertilizers, no herbicides or pesticides in this garden. The dates are organic—grown and harvested by our children. The marula beer comes from the fruits of these trees that shade us. What we haven’t produced ourselves is all local. We made the bread together and cooked it on rocket ovens, which we’ll learn more about—these energy-efficient ovens are fueled with the trimmings of our trees without deforestation.

“Some of you bless a meal by standing in silence together. Others express appreciation to the land and the cooks. It is normal at Jewish tables to say a blessing over bread. This is an unusual blessing which literally says Blessed in G-d who brings forth bread from the earth. All the other ancient Hebrew blessings over fruits are direct—fruit of the vine, fruits from the earth. I’ve never seen bread grow out of the earth. The intention here is for us to be a part of the miracle of food—harvesting the grains, preparing them, and cooking the bread. In this simple blessing we learn that in order to feed ourselves we are an integral part of the holy process of caring for nature and adding our creative input into supplying our most basic needs.

“So for this celebration meal let’s be intentional in our permaculture view as we begin our course by gleaning a blessing from the culture of this land, the local culture, and our community’s vision: *Blessed are we from the Source of Creation, as stewards of the earth from which we bring forth our bread and sustenance. Let’s all share in this bread as a symbol of how, when we share our wealth, we all benefit and there is enough for all.*”

Food production has been at the heart and economic center of Kibbutz Lotan since before we moved onto our site. We started as an agricultural cooperative. We were pioneers in our 20s in an unpopulated desert, growing melons, tomatoes, onions, and corn in sand using drip irrigation, spending 12 hours a day harvesting, sorting, and packing. We planted date trees and nurtured



Photo courtesy of Alex Cicelsky

them for years until they produced fruits. We welded the sheds for cows and opened a modern dairy. For us—city folk, Israeli and from the four corners of the earth—the ideal of the kibbutz was to return to the land, to be the workers, owners, and managers of our egalitarian and socialistic cooperative. Our life cycles were dictated by the climate and crops: seeding, harvesting, and land preparation. We were delighted to learn the ancient, agricultural roots of the Jewish holidays as the fruits and grains—the symbols of each of the festivals—ripened at the appropriate season from our trees or were harvested in our or neighboring fields. We paid our bills by turning salty water and modern agro-technologies into high quality fruits for the winter markets in Europe.

The date plantations now produce 460 tons of dates—half on brackish water and the other from processed waste water from the city of Eilat. Last year our dates were recognized as the best quality dates in the country. Our cows produce 3.6 million liters of milk a year. Those branches make up half our community's income. It is very hard to make a profit from field crops like garlic, potatoes, and watermelon, as we compete with Iberia, North Africa, and the Jordanian farmers we trained to meet European food production standards. The sandy fields receive tons of composted cow manure, solar powered computers measure every drop of water at the plant's roots, and open fields of crops are now covered with screen houses into which specific insects are introduced to manage the pests threatening the monoculture of peppers promised to the winter markets of Tel Aviv, Moscow, and London.

Our communal dining hall serves three meals a day from fresh produce, almost all locally produced (Israel is a very small country). Meat or fish appear on the menu only five times a week. Shabbat (the Sabbath) and holidays are welcomed with community banquets or potluck meals beginning with song and blessings over bread and wine led by community members with birthdays or celebrating a special life cycle event. On Pesach (Passover) and Tu B'shvat (birthday of the trees) we have Seders (literally "order") where food items representing fortitude, fortune, empowerment, rejuvenation, pain, slavery, and freedom are presented in poems, story, and song. The fall harvest festival of Sukkot is celebrated in a huge shed of our date palm branches, erected each year, under which we eat for eight days and nights. The spring harvest festival of Shavuot is a dairy products feast.

Our educational branch, the Center for Creative Ecology, is rooted in organic food production, nature conservation, and environmental activism. In 1996 we decided to begin separating our community's waste streams and composting food waste. This was revolutionary because there were no recycling industries in the country. Tourists and regional authorities were fascinated by our ability to take food waste and turn it into soil, and our use of non-biodegradable waste as construction materials. We remembered Rachel Carson's cry in *Silent Spring* and dedicated research into reinvented desert agriculture. The result was the Gan Bayit—Home Garden.

Having learned about the permaculture techniques of companion planting and forest gardens, we tried growing vegetables and herbs without pesticides, herbicides, or industrial fertilizers which are necessary in the commercial agriculture around us. Where there was once sand and a single Acacia tree, there is now a food jungle of lettuces, herbs (including mint from Mt. Sinai), sweet potatoes, tomatoes, broccoli and cauliflower, beans and eggplants, edible flowers and amaranth, onions and garlic, guava and olives and figs. Butterflies and many varieties of bees help us tell the story to visitors that diversity in nature nurtures stability, which is a message too for our communities and societies.

The Gan Bayit was the first CSA in Israel and served as the training center for many of the urban gardens and permaculture training centers across the country. Students of ours developed therapeutic vegetable gardening projects for handicapped inner-city children, mentally challenged adults, and women in prison. Our Solar Tea House, the second solar-powered grid-connected public building in Israel (the first was a school up the road from us), is a gourmet vegan and vegetarian restaurant at the edge of the Gan Bayit, serving produce from the garden and eggs from our free-range chickens. Waste water from the restaurant is treated and returned to the trees in the garden (and of course the guests love the classy no-water composting toilets).

Butterflies and many varieties of bees help us tell the story to visitors that diversity in nature nurtures stability.

While upwards of 8,000 human visitors walk through the garden every year, uncounted thousands of birds, wintering on Lotan or passing through to Africa, stop in for

rest, food, and water. For them we let all the plants go to seed during the short spring migration, as the rows fill with bird watchers and researchers who know that the Gan Bayit (and all of Kibbutz Lotan) is a world-class birding hot spot (check out the movie *Bluethroats before Breakfast* filmed in the garden: wildlifevideos.net/israel1_new.html).

Our permaculture course is unique as it is seven weeks long. We need that time to give students practical, hands-on experience and full-cycle observation in food production from soil building and composting to seed, seedling, pollination, weeding, irrigation, harvest, seed collection, and food processing and storage. They harvest what they grow, cook in solar ovens, grind the food waste to feed the biogas system, and cook with its methane.

While most meals are with the community, the students living in solar-powered, strawbale (renewable agricultural waste) domes in the EcoCampus make their own food twice a week in mass ovens and rocket stoves fired from the limbs of trees in the neighborhood. Meals begin with "tuning in," as they have learned that food is a miracle, best prepared and eaten together, in celebration outside under a canopy of stars. 🌿

Alex Cicelsky is a founding member of Kibbutz Lotan, where his work at the Center for Creative Ecology includes research, teaching, planning new ecological infrastructure and development projects, outreach, and resource development. For more about Kibbutz Lotan, see www.kibbutzlotan.com and www.tinyurl.com/lotanvid3.

Celebrating the Local, Shared Bounty at Groundswell Cohousing

By Julia Jongkind



Author's daughter picking kale to eat. She now picks dandelions and asks her mom to make them into cookies.

Welcome to Groundswell Cohousing at Yarrow Ecovillage (British Columbia). We are a group of folks who love food: growing it, eating it, sharing and preserving it too. It has been what holds us together through thick and thin. At a fundamental level, sharing food is what sets the tone for our community.

Our cohousing group started out on the Yarrow Ecovillage with two new homes and two old farmhouses. One mom suggested a simple and low-work but high-benefits meal sharing plan. One day a week we would all eat together—a vegetarian meal. Each week a different family would cook for the others, showing their generosity, and the others would receive gratefully. We have a few vegetarians and we wanted to keep the cost low for all cooks. We also were not interested on calculating who owed what, as it seemed to divide the focus of eating together away from enjoyment into penny-splitting. This idea was enacted and a few changes made. Five years and 30 households later, we still do not have our common house finished, but we do have five meals a week and still cook for each other in turns. (Members of each household can attend as many as they wish; two to three meals per week is probably average.)

Without a common house, we have dined together in a variety of strange locales. We did start by eating in each others' homes, but we grew too large for that to continue. We then moved our meals to the bunker silo—which was great in the summer. In the winter we built a greenhouse-like structure inside the bunker silo and strung it with fairy lights. It was a bit cool and dim, but we all fit and ate many meals in that rustic setting. As we continued to build more homes, the bunker silo was dismantled and we moved into the Garage Cafe—better lighting and heat! Alas, we grew too large for even this grand space, and another locale was set up. Part of the old machine shed had been cleared out and set up for office space for a number of folks who worked from home. In the evening, it became our cosy dining hall. Notice that not one of these locations had a kitchen—we are all experts on one-pot meals.

Just recently we have changed again. With five meals a week available, each meal group got small enough to eat at each others' houses again, with some creative seating. For example, on Thurs-

days there are eight adults and 11 kids signed up for the meal. When we hosted that meal, we placed the coffee table in the kitchen and, sitting on cushions, ate around it next to the kitchen table.

What makes these meals so connective to the wider community are the stories of where the food comes from and how it is prepared. The chefs who describe their offerings when local—like from our organic commercial farmers on our land, or from this amazing farmer they know from our nearby farmers' market—have the most joy-filled tales to tell us about what we are about to eat. We all get a matching twinkle in our eyes as we look at the kale and potato soup, knowing it was harvested locally with love.

One typical summer meal was described as follows:

Today for your dining pleasure we have my nasturtiums stuffed with local goat cheese from across the river. In the salad we have fresh spring mix from Osprey Organics (standing right there) with roasted beets and fresh grilled zucchini. Here are a number of infused oils and vinegars to drizzle on your meal and of course rice and red quinoa. For dessert there are melt-in-your mouth brownies and fresh berries with cream.

By the end of this delightful and detailed description, we are all drooling and ready to rave about the amazing food as well. It also sets a happy and positive tone for our dining conversations.

In cooking for each other and having regular meals together with local and fresh ingredients, we all feel blessed to live with each other, surrounded by such flavourful bounty. This positive outlook seeps into our work in our community, making us all aware of how good we have it here and how fortunate we are to have generous neighbors who cook well.

I wish you the joys of great company and great food regularly. 🐦

Julia Jongkind is a mom of four kids aged 10 and under. She has lived in cohousing communities for the last nine years and currently is on the facilitation team at Yarrow Ecovillage (groundswellcohousing.ca). She chooses to homeschool her children and finds that living in an intentional community makes that a far richer experience. She also works from home as a Learning Consultant with a distance learning program and is just finishing her Masters.

Tribal Potlucks with a Mindful Twist

By Bill Kauth and Zoe Alowan

Last night as we opened the door, bowls and trays of beautiful offerings were carried in, one after another: kale salad, hazelnut-encrusted goat cheese patties, chicken squash casserole, roasted red cabbage with pears. As a non-residential tribe that gathers every week (see “Time for Tribe,” COMMUNITIES #166), we hold food time as a precious time together to consciously deepen our intimacy. We share food a lot. In this article we want to share one absolutely delicious food ceremony we created that binds our tribe and our other circle groups. Then we’ll offer you our amazing new Mindful Thanksgiving meal ritual.

In Ashland culture, our middle name is “potluck” as we most often share as a matter of course. However our personal tribe has taken the humble potluck meals to quite an art form, with simple ceremony and ritual. We began our learning process five years ago with our “gift circle,” which gathered every month and helped build a base for our tribe. There were often new people who did not know each other, so we wanted a way to connect them easily. Here is what we’ve learned.

The gathering, often on a Sunday evening, begins with people showing up around 5:00 or so, to mix and mingle, with some red wine or sparkling fruit juice. Each person places their potluck dish on a credenza with the plates and silverware. At 6:00 the group of 12 to 20 of us moves into the dining room to stand around the big table. Close to each other, shoulders touching, we begin gently holding hands. We each then check-in with something relevant to the season or a nearby holiday, but always including some heart-felt gratitude. The fun and delights of the personal sharing make us forget that we are actually touching each other for 10 or 15 minutes. What Bill learned 30 years ago from one of his group-work teachers is this: “If you can get people to make physical contact, it saves three hours of talking!” We drop into our hearts, and mostly stay there the rest of the evening.

The bonding is very deep and visceral, even though it appears that we were just standing around the table. Now here is the truly special detail: we each tell what food we brought to share. This may seem small and simple, but it serves so many functions. It gives a feeling that this food I have prepared will be lovingly received, which adds joy to the act of preparing my offering for my special people. Because we do it consistently before each gathering, everyone prepares their dish with loving attention.

Around the circle, as each introduces what he/she brought, these sharings also reinforce our common values. So we often hear, “I grew these veggies in my garden,” or “these came from a local farm or the Tuesday growers’ market,” and “I prepared it with all organic ingredients” (especially GMO-free please, in Oregon!). With this proud, loving sharing complete, we go through the food line knowing who brought what, the fine ingredients used, and how the dish was prepared. We are stretching our capacity to give and receive as we feel love in both directions.

We have done this for years and it is always a delight for each to offer their gift and for others receive the splendid gift being offered. Some of us have signature dishes, which over the years become sources of fun and laughs. Bill is known as Mister Kuchen, since he usually shows up at each potluck with his fine farm family favorite which goes back for generations all the way to Luxembourg. His kuchen (German word for cake) is a smooth, custard-based desert, designed originally for rhubarb, but also now lovingly adapted to plums, peaches, apples, cherries, and especially Oregon pears. It’s all part of the playful intimacy of our tribe.

Our tribe's Thanksgiving ceremony follows the same potluck process, but for two years in a row now we have added mindful eating. Eating mindfully is a simple skill brought forward from some of our spiritual training models. When it was first suggested that we eat our Thanksgiving meal mindfully, Zoe wasn't too sure. But we tried it and it worked—people loved it. So we repeated it again this year and the experience went even deeper.

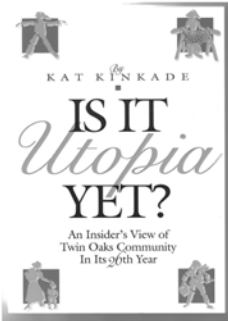
Here is our recipe for a Mindful Thanksgiving: after we have circled up, expressed our gratitude, and said what we brought, we gently agree to support each other in being silent, eating slowly—on very small plates, and even pausing to put the utensil down between bites. Imagine Thanksgiving, with all the special creations with their aromas and flavors, as a wonderful process of sustaining attention on beautiful food. Usually, after a half hour or so, a murmur starts, then it progressively gets louder, and by the time dessert is served we are in full noisy celebration mode. But indeed we are not too full for the desserts as we have been eating very, very slowly, with little bites.

These suggestions are ways of coming into “presence” with each other—they help us manifest our tribal value of being truly intimate. When we do this the joy becomes palpable and our value of long-term community is enhanced. It's easy to see how conscious potluck meals and mindful holidays reflect another tribal value we hold precious: generosity. 🐦

Cofounder of The ManKind Project in 1984 and author of A Circle of Men in 1992, Bill Kauth has launched literally thousands of support groups (mostly men), many of which have become communities. He met multi-talented artist Zoe Alowan at Burning Man; they married in 2008 and live in Ashland, Oregon. Together they have been working with men and women building long-term, committed, non-residential community. They wrote the book We Need Each Other (Silver Light Publications, 2011), and their new book, Toolbox for Tribe: How to Build Your Own Community, will be released in 2015. See giftcommunity.net.



Photos courtesy of Bill Kauth



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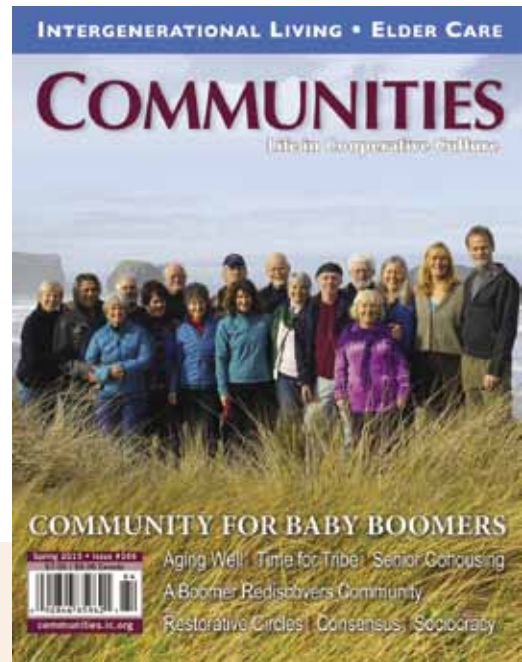
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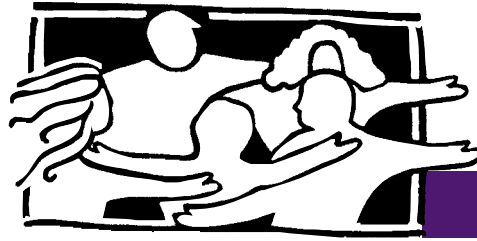


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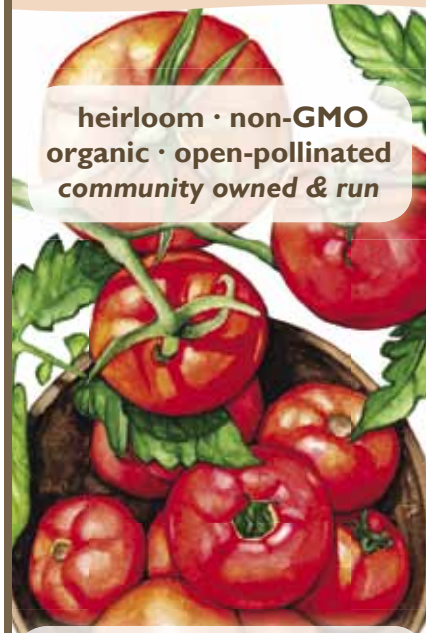
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WE GOT AN EGG! A STUDY IN SCARCITY

(continued from p.16)

Cheers erupt throughout the little shantytown: certain death has been narrowly averted. The girl building a fire looks up and chides him, "Well, don't drop it!"

Suddenly, the Urban Slums is abuzz with purpose and activity. Someone finds containers for these two hot commodities, and a hasty discussion of what to cook ensues. Everyone gets a job to do, and they all set to work as if this were their last meal on Earth. No one squabbles, no one complains, and no one is left out.

Of course, they wouldn't have been this enthusiastic, creative, or happy if I had told them what to do or offered them a safe way out. Ecstatic as puppies, they lay a place setting for me and proudly serve up the nameless concoction they've cooked on the fire. The meal they whip up is nothing like they've eaten before and probably nothing they'll ever voluntarily eat again, but there are big smiles and even kudos all around as they wolf down their hard-earned dinner.

The sun is going down. A smoky haze settles over the Global Village as cook-fires are lit and a fusion of delicious smells permeates the air. After dining in the Urban Slums, I head over to see how the rural Appalachians are doing.

Despite Christopher's earlier posturing as head chef, their fire pit is cold and no food is cooking, even though they have a gallon of good water and some great food sitting beside them. Five or six easy recipes come to mind, but they can't agree on a single one.

It's a funny thing, expectation. 🐦

*Heather Barnes is the Coordinator of the Heifer Global Village at Howell Nature Center in Howell, Michigan. In partnership with Heifer International, the Global Village offers hands-on programs for youth and adults on world hunger and poverty (howellnaturecenter.org/programs/heifer-global-village). Heather previously published "Community for a Minute: Discovering Nature, Group, and Self at Sixth-Grade Camp" in *COMMUNITIES* #157, Winter 2012.*

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FEEDING EACH OTHER

(continued from p. 31)

along with some Stewardship Farm potatoes.” It is simply more satisfying to eat a story with your supper.

Moving Forward

I have seen that when a group of people deliberately chooses to build community with food it can have tremendous positive impact. Over the years many community members have expressed gratitude for the work that we do at the bakery. Several of the folks that cooked for my family during my recent illness were people I first met as customers. We wield great power for good, both as individuals and within a business, with the simple act of making food with loving intention and sharing it. We must never underestimate that power. The best thing is we don't have to wait until tragedy strikes, or a holiday rolls around. We can invite a neighbor or coworker over for tea today, or gift a friend with bounty from our gardens.

To make the preparation and eating of food a meditation of love is accessible to everyone—even when you are preparing a meal for yourself. Intention counts, and love tastes better. Lovingly prepared food binds us together with happiness. I invite you to learn from the brilliance of babies—if we look for ways to feed each other as often as possible, our bonds will be strengthened just as surely as those two hens clucking over their charges. 🌱

Iris Sullivan attended University of Oregon, where she studied art and biology. She lives with her family near the mouth of the Columbia River, and is lucky to have over 75 bird species as neighbors. She blogs about nature, health, and human consciousness at pookaride.com.

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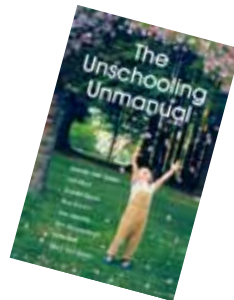


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URBAN FLEX FARMS: FARMING ON A BICYCLE

(continued from p. 45)

this *matters*. Supportive gestures like his inspire me!

My biggest challenge with work parties is organization and delegation. I have to plan multiple tasks in advance and have everything ready. The best way to explain something is to show it, rather than tell it, but I can't be everywhere at once. With volunteers I want to balance their desires to work, socialize, learn, and feel useful. Sometimes I think getting ready for a work party is more effort than just doing it all myself. Despite the challenges, I continue to have work parties as an important part of teaching as many people as possible about food and soil.

Networking

Events like the aforementioned ecological restoration serve a dual purpose: first to promote my farm and learn about resources that can help me, and also to contribute to my community. I've been involved with Community Orchard of West Seattle and Sustainable West Seattle, worked with Garden Cycles, gone to NICA meetings, tabled at neighborhood events for the Seattle Farm Co-Op, gone to lectures and classes by the Seattle Tree Fruit Society. I regularly volunteer with Seattle Tilth. I attend the "Meaningful Movies" nights and was asked to be on a discussion panel when they showed urban farming short films. I've volunteered with City Grown Seattle, which has a similar model to mine, and Alleycat Acres, a nonprofit urban farm that helped shape my own vision. I meet all these people at other events, like connecting links in a web, one leading to another, since Seattle lacks a central coalition for the urban farming and sustainability movements. When I meet other urban farmers at these events we share stories of success and frustrations, point out resources, encourage each other. Two other urban farms have gone under since I started, which puts a damper on new businesses. Even with increasing demand for healthy food, this is still more of a "calling" than a lucrative career.

As of February I have a new garden partner. Dale was referred to me by someone from the West Seattle Women in Business group, who had an acquaintance who sounded like a perfect match for Urban Flex Farms. Dale is a gardener and aspiring farmer who was looking for an opportunity to get involved. He is also bike-only, also a Fitness Trainer who advocates "real work" and outdoor exercise for building health and strength. He loves keeping records and statistics and is excited about increasing efficiency.

What's Next?

2015 is bringing big changes to Urban Flex Farms. With a second farmer, a promoter, and another farm-site being developed in time for Summer planting, we finally have enough size to impact the West Seattle local food scene. We launched our CSA program this year. Sylvan is planning two public events (including "Kids in the Garden"), local news exposure, and creative recipes for the Urban Flex Farms blog. I took a class from Curtis Stone of Green City Acres. I'm going to run our second site with his methods so I can compare them side-by-side.

When I'm not digging in the dirt I'll be working with the Cascade Harvest Coalition and the RFPC. Between them these groups could be Seattle's much-needed umbrella for food sustainability issues. I am passionate about doing activism and farming as two parts of a whole. I don't want future farmers to struggle the way I did to find information and programs. The easier it is to start urban farms the more we'll have. I know that other people like me are out there, people who want to farm, not just garden, people who want to make this be a real career, people who care passionately about both what we put in our mouths and the effects of how it's grown. I look forward to hearing their stories. 🍷

Kirsten Leetham and Sylvan Bonin live in Seattle, Washington, which is blessed with a climate that allows year-round gardening. Kirsten runs Urban Flex Farms and Sylvan is a Personal Assistant and Organizer. Sylvan, the realist, grew up on a commune, and Kirsten, the dreamer, grew up in a city. They have been balancing each other's talents and experiences for nearly a decade. Both have made sustainability, food security, and community the central focus of their lives.

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RE-IMAGINING THE HUNTING CAMP: FEMINISM, HUNTRESSES, AND COMMUNITY

(continued from p. 59)

any hunting camp: we got up painfully early, sat in the cold for many long hours, got frustrated when every rustling deer we thought we heard turned out to be a squirrel, and ate lots of incredibly tasty venison cooked a dozen different ways.

Not everyone's hunt is about food. Many people hunt for sport, seeking the challenge of taking a trophy buck. My own call to hunting is primarily spiritual rather than culinary. Yet food was the common thread that brought our community of Huntresses together. We all wanted to have a deeper relationship with our meat. We wanted to be fully accountable for our meat-eating, and know that we could handle every step of the process from hoof to plate. We wanted to feel connected to the land through our eating, not just to the farm fields but also to the forest. A combination of feminist spunk and culinary empowerment brought us together, and those common values enabled us to re-imagine the traditional hunting camp into something that wore its heart on its sleeve, where our huntresses didn't have to be tough and unemotional to win entry. On the Huntress Expedition, no one had to prove her right to be there. We could be ourselves and just get on with the business of hunting deer. I'm proud to have helped bring this community into being, and look forward to many more years of exploring the intersections of hunting, feminism, and ethical food with a community of thoughtful huntresses each November. 🍷

Mary Murphy is the founder of Mountain Song Expeditions, a Vermont-based company that provides transformational wilderness experiences for people who are ready to discover the power of their wild souls. She teaches ethical deer hunting classes for women and also for all-genders groups. She is a strong believer in the power of the wilderness to help people form strong relationships and a sense of community. You can learn more about her work at www.mountainsongexpeditions.com.



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MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT SOCIOCRACY

(continued from p. 80)

ences are not valid reasons to object to a proposal or to advocate for what they want instead if their preferences conflict with the aims of their circle. Also, people don't volunteer for a circle but apply to join it. Each member of a circle must be consented to by every other member, so the circle will consist of people who can work well together to help it fulfill its aims for the community. And in Sociocracy decision-making bodies are relatively small—perhaps four to six people in functional circles and maybe eight or 10 people in a General Circle.

In my opinion Sociocracy exists in a different paradigm than the one I believe Laird advocates—that most people join communities in order to have deep, personally satisfying relationships with other community members, and so it logically follows that consensus is the best choice for decision-making. And while for many people living in community personal relationships may be very important—especially with friends and neighbors one feels drawn to—a more important reason for their living in community may be to create a great neighborhood, as in cohousing, or to create a settlement where people learn and teach others about living in more ecologically sustainable ways, as in ecovillages. In my experience many members of communities founded since the early 1990s, like most cohousing and ecovillage projects, may prefer a governance and decision-making method like Sociocracy which favors moving forward toward community goals over emotional processing in meetings.

So while Laird sees addressing emotions that arise in meetings as essential, I see it as essential for some communities but not for others.

On another note, while Laird reports that a Sociocracy trainer assured him that all certified trainers are experienced in working with emotions in meetings, I don't believe this is true—in my experience Sociocracy trainers, certified or not, are no better and no worse than anyone else in working with emotions in meetings...and they don't need to be.

2. Double Linking of Circles

Laird's concern is that there may not be enough people to fill both the operations leader and representative roles in every circle. But when this is true people join more than one circle. And when a community is new or has few members, they can combine this role until they have enough members for both roles.

3. Sociocracy Elections Allow Criticizing Candidates on the Spot

The elections process doesn't do this. Before anyone is nominated, proposed, or consented to for a role in a circle, the group selects the term length and the tasks the person will do in the role, the requirements the person will need to carry out those tasks, and some desired characteristics for the role. These can include characteristics like "gets along well with others in meetings," "has good communication skills," and "has high skills in cooperation and collaboration." Circle members base their nominations, and any objections and resolutions of objections, on these factors, but not on any personality characteristics of the proposed candidate.

4. Objections, and Consent vs. Consensus

Laird writes that, if the concepts of consensus and Sociocracy's consent process are substantively different, then this difference makes sense only if using Sociocracy allows people to consent to a proposal sooner than people using consensus would approve a proposal.

Yes, people using Sociocracy would most likely consent to a proposal sooner. However, "to approve a proposal" in consensus and "to give consent" in Sociocracy are like apples and oranges, since objections in Sociocracy are not blocks (there are no blocks); they are more like concerns, but far more specific. And objections to a proposal and resolutions of objections are tied to the circle's very specific aims, rather than to the values or lifestyle choices of any individual circle member.

5. "Rounds Are Not Always the Best Format"

As noted above, other formats are used when proposed and consented to. Laird also said he believes rounds are slow and repetitive. Actually rounds in Sociocracy are quick and tend to give the circle energy; for example, clarifying question, quick reaction, and consent rounds

usually just involve a few words, although people say more when describing an objection, and in rounds to resolve objections. In my experience, the quickness of rounds and their "include-everyone" energy feels really good. Sociocracy trainer Gilles Charest in Quebec says, "Rounds build the group."

6. Starting with Proposals

Laird wrote that people start with an already-created proposal, but actually proposals are created through the multi-step proposal-creating process, and are almost always created by the same people who decide them, either a few minutes earlier in the same meeting or in a previous meeting.

7. Governance System or Decision-Making Structure?

Sociocracy is a governance structure with several parts, including consent decision-making.

8. "A Structural Response to an Energetic Challenge"

Laird wrote that some groups may want an alternative to consensus because they're frustrated by it, but they may not realize that using consensus requires a commitment to culture change for it to work well. He says Sociocracy appears to offer a structural approach, but the most important issues in meetings are energy issues, not structure.

In contrast, Sociocracy does not require a commitment to culture change nor must people aspire to a higher level of consciousness or behave more nobly than they usually do or possess exceptionally good communication skills. Sociocracy doesn't require a gifted facilitator or a high level of trust in the group. It only requires that the group understands and practices Sociocracy correctly, rather than trying to combine parts of it with consensus, which tends to create an awkward hybrid that doesn't solve old problems and generates new ones. 🐦

Diana Leafe Christian, author of Creating a Life Together and Finding Community, speaks at conferences, offers consultations, and leads workshops internationally. She specializes in teaching Sociocracy to communities, and has taught Sociocracy in North America, Europe, and Latin America. This article series is part of her forthcoming booklet on using Sociocracy in intentional communities.

Misconceptions about Sociocracy



Diana Leafe Christian

Participants in the author's ecovillage workshop in St. Petersburg, Russia, discussing governance issues in community.

Laird Schaub, Executive Secretary of the Fellowship for Intentional Community (publisher of this magazine), expressed eight concerns about Sociocracy in the Winter 2014 issue (#165, pages 80, 77-79).

Some of Laird's concerns involve Sociocracy; others address an inaccurate perception of Sociocracy—as if Sociocracy were an alternate but less effective form of consensus. However, in my experience it's quite different from consensus.

1. Sociocracy “Does Not Address Emotional Input”

Laird wrote that understanding and addressing emotions that arise in meetings is an essential component of group dynamics. He believes Sociocracy does not do this, which is a serious flaw. Fortunately this isn't true.

(1) Circle members have several ways to address emotions when considering a proposal, including open discussion, fishbowls, and other processes. They can do this if someone proposes one of these formats and the circle consents to it.

(2) Emotional distress is less likely than when using consensus in considering a proposal because there is far less pressure to “get it

right,” since proposals are measured and evaluated several times after they're implemented and can be modified to suit real conditions in real time. Taking this pressure off people in meetings tends to foster more peaceful, relaxed meetings.

(3) Communities using Sociocracy can create a Process Circle to specifically help resolve conflicts between members and assist with the emotional issues and challenges of individual members.

(4) Sociocracy is designed for a different set of assumptions and expectations about meetings and self-governance than consensus. More specifically in relation to Laird's concern about handling emotional content in meetings, Sociocracy is designed for groups in which a circle fulfilling its aims, performing its tasks for the community, and moving forward towards its goals is more important than the emotional upsets of any individual members during those instances *when the group cannot or is not willing to take the time to deal with both*. Methods for doing this are described in previous articles in this series (“Consent Decision-Making,” Fall 2014; “Why No Tyranny of the Minority in Sociocracy,” Winter 2014).

People well-trained in Sociocracy know that their personal prefer-

(continued on p. 79)



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