

*Sustaining the Common Wealth of Rural People and Places*ⁱ

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The focus of this conference is on rural life in the Atlantic provinces of Canada. I am not a Canadian and certainly do not claim to be an expert on Canadian rural life, either on farms or in rural communities. I was born and raised on a small farm in the U.S. and I have spent more than three decades working with farmers and residents of rural communities. I have also made three or more trips to Canada each of the past several years to speak at various events on issues related to sustainable agriculture. I see many similarities between U.S. and Canada, particularly regarding the challenges and opportunities confronting rural people. But you will have to decide the extent to which my conclusions regarding “rural America” are actually relevant to rural Atlantic Canada.

To understand the challenges and opportunities in rural communities today, we need to understand why people historically have chosen to live in rural places. The indigenous people of North America lived in rural areas because that's where they hunted and gathered their food and materials for clothing and shelter. Indigenous populations in specific areas reflected the local availability of food and other essential materials. European immigrants brought a distinctly different culture, but they settled in rural America for the same basic purposes, to realize the inherent value of natural resources located in rural areas. Those resources included wildlife, timber, and minerals, but perhaps most important, fertile farmland. European settlements in specific areas reflected locally available resources, as new communities sprang up to support fur trading, logging, mining, and farming. Unlike earlier hunting and gathering cultures, the agricultural and industrial culture of the Europeans allowed rural people to produce surpluses of fur, lumber, minerals, and food. These surpluses supported growing urban centers, which were linked economically, but not geographically or socially, to America's rural areas.

People in rural communities, however, remained dependent upon the productivity of their *local* resources. As the fur bearing animals were killed off, the timber logged off, and the minerals mined out, the most persistent of America's rural populations have proven to be in its farming communities. A few logging and mining communities remain and some rural communities today are supported by recreational or residential developments, linked to local natural attractions or a nearby urban center. However, most rural communities in America today are the remnants of farming communities – rural centers of economic and social activity, which still support and are supported by families on nearby farms.

I refer to farming communities as *remnant* communities, because like the fur trading, logging, and mining communities before them, the remaining farming communities are being used up, or “farmed out.” The productivity of the farmland and farming people is being extracted and exploited for the benefit of American consumers and outside investors, leaving the local people

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with no sustainable source of economic development, or in many cases, even economic survival. As agriculture has adopted the industrial strategies of mining and manufacturing – specialization, standardization, and consolidation of control – agricultural productivity has increased dramatically, but rural communities have been left in decline and decay – used up, farmed out.

Once thriving rural communities have withered and died as farm families have been forced off the land by chronic production surpluses that have depressed prices for the things they sell, as costs have risen relentlessly for the things farmers must buy. Under comprehensive contractual arrangements, many surviving agricultural producers have become little more than corporate hired hands. It takes people, not just production, to support rural communities, and as farms have become larger and fewer, rural economies have suffered. The light industries that were recruited by desperate communities to offset the loss of farm employment are now moving to other countries, where people are willing to work even harder for less money.

Many of the people who still live in rural communities no longer work there and no longer support local merchants with their dollars. They buy their groceries, clothes, and gasoline at a discount super center in another town, or in a nearby city where they work. It's cheaper to buy things elsewhere than locally. Many rural people have lost any sense of common commitment to the economic good of their communities. Rural communities that have survived the economic ravages of the past are still searching desperately for a new economic reason for being.

The once pristine rural environment has been plundered and polluted, both by industry and by the industrialization of agriculture. As industries have left rural areas for other countries, many left behind legacies of pollution as well as unemployment. Now, the industrialization of agriculture, with its reliance on agricultural chemicals and large-scale confinement animal feeding operations, are fouling the clean air, streams, and aquifers that the earlier industries missed. Many people have chosen to stay in rural areas or to move to rural areas because historically they have been clean, healthy, pleasant places to live.

The current initiative to combine industrial agriculture with ethanol and bio-diesel production promises only to accelerate the process of ecological degradation. How can we justify mining the soil nutrients that will be needed to feed the people of a hungry world to produce fuel the automobiles of wealthy nations, particularly as global energy supplies decline and global population rises? The common wealth of rural America is being flushed down our streams and burned in our SUVs.

Many rural communities are so desperate for new jobs and a new tax base they will grasp at almost any economic opportunity. Rebuilding an economy from within is a long, slow process and many rural people are simply unwilling to invest the necessary time and effort to develop from within. Unfortunately, outside investors see rural communities, with their open spaces and sparse population, as ideal places to locate things that urban people simply won't accept in their neighborhoods. Some rural communities compete for prisons, while others are willing to settle for landfills or toxic waste incinerators. Those who miss these “opportunities” are almost certain to be courted by agribusinesses looking for places to locate their giant contract confinement animal feeding operations.

Nearly all rural development strategies from outside the community allow a few local people to benefit, but only at the expense of others who live nearby, downwind, or downstream. Actually, those who benefit most are the outside corporate investors who need some place to dump the wastes from their profit-making enterprises. It seems to be okay in rural communities for some people to benefit even if others do not, but when some benefit at the expense of others, it seems to violate an important rural ethic. This ethical offense inevitably leads to social conflicts among community members, which eventually rip the social fabric of the community apart. Many rural communities are rapidly losing their ability to work together for the common good.

When we consider the historic purpose of rural communities, we begin to understand that the increases in unemployment, poverty, and public dependency in rural areas are all symptoms of the continued extraction of economic wealth from rural areas. Erosion of soil, degradation of landscapes, and pollution of air and water are all symptoms of the continued extraction of natural wealth from rural areas. Increasing conflict, physical abuse, drug use, and crime in rural areas are all symptoms of the continued exploitation of common civility or social wealth of rural areas. Rural areas are being robbed of their common wealth – the economic, social, and natural resources needed to sustain future generations of rural people. The younger generations, sensing intuitively that something is deeply wrong, are abandoning rural communities, and thus robbing rural communities of their most precious resource. It is intuitively obvious that the continued extraction and exploitation of rural resources quite simply is not sustainable.

Intuition is important in understanding rural decline, but intuition is no longer enough. It will take courage to confront the forces that are ravaging rural America; the people who confront those forces will need to have confidence in their convictions. They will need to know that their instincts regarding the lack of sustainability of current trends in rural America are supported by some of the most fundamental laws of science, the laws of thermodynamics. Farmers, consumers, rural leaders, and policy makers at all levels of government need to understand why it is critically important to sustain the wealth of rural people and places, not only for individuals but also for society as a whole.

People need to understand that sustainability ultimately depends upon our use of energy, because anything that is useful in sustaining life on earth ultimately relies on energy. All material things that are of any use to us – our food, clothes, houses, automobiles, – require energy to make and energy to use. Actually, material things, such as food, gasoline, wood, plastic, and steel actually are concentrated forms of energy. All human activities that are of any use to us – working, managing, thinking, teaching, – require human energy, which is extracted from the things people use. Physical scientists lump all such useful activities together and call them “work.” Thus, all *work* requires energy.

In performing work, energy always changes in form – from more-concentrated to less-concentrated forms. In fact, this natural tendency gives energy its ability to perform work. Matter can be changed into energy, as when we eat food or burn gasoline. Energy also changes in form, as when heat is used to produce electricity and electricity used to produce light. However, the total energy embodied in matter and energy always remains the same, unchanged. When the energy stored in matter is released in the process of performing work, it becomes more dispersed and disorganized, but no energy is lost. This is the law of energy conservation, as in Einstein's

famous $E=MC^2$. At first, it might seem that we could simply go on recycling and reusing energy forever. If so, sustainability would be inevitable.

However, each time energy is used to perform work, some of its *usefulness* is lost. Once energy is used to perform work, before it can be used again, it must be reconcentrated, reorganized, and restored, but it takes energy to reconcentrate, reorganize, and restore energy. The energy used to reconcentrate, reorganize, and restore energy, is simply no longer available to do anything else. It has lost its usefulness; meaning it has lost its ability to perform work. This is the law of entropy; the tendency of all closed systems to tend toward the ultimate degradation of matter and energy; a state of inert uniformity of component elements; an absence of structure, pattern, organization, or differentiation.¹ Since this loss of useful energy is inevitable, it might seem that sustainability is impossible. And in fact, life on earth would not be sustainable without the daily inflow of solar energy, which could be used to offset the usefulness of energy lost to entropy.

So what does this have to do with what's now happening to rural communities? Industrial production inevitably dissipates, disperses, and disorganizes the physical energy embodied in natural resources. Thus, the industrial economic development strategies that dominate rural communities today, by the logic and reason of the laws of science, quite simply are not sustainable. Industrial systems are very efficient in using and reusing both natural resources and human energy, but they do nothing to offset the inevitable loss of usefulness of energy due to entropy. There is simply no economic incentive to invest in restoring natural resources for the benefit of some future generation. That's why industrial systems are so efficient. Industrial farms, like other industries, are essentially resource-using systems; they use land, fertilizer, fuel, machinery, and they use people, but they do nothing to replace the energy that is inevitably lost when anything is used to do any kind of useful work.

Industrial farmers don't use the solar energy from the sun to restore the productive capacities of their farms; instead, they transform solar energy into crops and livestock that are sold off the farm to be used up elsewhere. In fact, our industrial food system uses about ten calories of fossil energy, in addition to solar energy, for each calorie of food energy produced, amounting to about 17% of the total fossil fuels used in the U.S.. An industrial agriculture invests in means of resource extraction and exploitation but invests nothing in regeneration or renewal for the use of future generations. It's simply not economically efficient to do so.

Industrialization not only uses up the natural resources required for sustainability, it also uses up the human resources. The law of entropy applies to social as well as physical energy. All human resources – labor, management, innovation, creativity – are products of social relationships. No person can be born or reach maturity without the help of other people who care about them *personally*, including their families, friends, neighbors, and communities. All organizations, including farms and businesses, depend on the ability of people to work together for a common purpose, which depends upon the civility of the society in which they were raised.

Industrialization inevitably dissipates, disperses, and disorganizes *social* energy because it weakens personal relationships. Maximum economic efficiency requires that people relate to each other *impartially*, which means, *impersonally*. People must compete rather than cooperate if free markets are to work efficiently. When family members work away from home, they have

less time and energy to spend together, and personal relationships are threatened. When people shop in another town rather than buy locally, personal relationships among community members suffer from neglect. Industrial economic development inevitably devalues personal relationships and disconnects people, dissipating social energy. There are no *economic* incentives for industries to invest in renewing or restoring personal relationships within families or communities for the long run benefit of society. Thus, industrialization inevitably tends toward *social entropy*.

Economies are simply the means by which we deal with relationships among people and between people and the natural environment in complex societies. There are simply too many of us to barter with each other and to produce our own food, clothing, shelter. Economies actually *produce* nothing; they simply transform physical energy and social energy into forms that can be traded or exchanged in *impersonal* marketplaces. All economic capital, meaning anything capable of producing anything of economic value, is extracted from either natural capital or social capital. Thus, when all of the natural and social resources of rural areas has been extracted and exploited, all of the energy in the system will be dissipated. Such areas can no longer produce anything of economic value; they have lost their wealth; they have reached a state of *economic entropy*.

So where is the hope for the future of rural areas? The hope is in restoring the health and vitality of the *living things* in rural communities – the wealth in the land and people of rural places. Sustainable economic and community development must mimic the processes of living, biological systems. Living things are naturally self-making, self-renewing, reproductive, and regenerative.² Living plants have the capacity to capture, organize, and store solar energy to offset the energy that is inevitably lost in the processes of performing work. All living things have a natural capacity for renewal and regeneration.

Obviously, an individual life is not sustainable because every living thing eventually dies. But, communities of living individuals clearly have the capacity to be productive, and at the same time, to devote a significant part of their life's energy to conceiving and nurturing the next generation, thus sustaining the life of the community. For example, people have the capacity and natural tendency to reproduce, even when there is little economic incentive to raise children. Living things – plants, animals, families, communities, societies – are clearly capable of permanence as well as productivity. Farms and rural communities, being living systems, need only utilize their inherent capacities for both productivity and regeneration.

Agriculture is the living system upon which human society is most critically dependent. Food, along with air and water, are the common threads of all life. People are still as dependent upon food as when all humans were hunters and gatherers, and thus, we are still as dependent upon the productivity of farmland. In modern society, there are simply too many of us to return to producing our own food, so people are still as dependent upon farmers as people ever were. A sustainable society clearly must be built upon the foundation of a self-renewing, regenerative, sustainable agriculture because to sustain life we must sustain food production. Humans simply cannot eat the energy generated by wind, water, or solar panels.

The logical alternative to the energy-using industrial agriculture is an energy-renewing sustainable agriculture. A sustainable agriculture must use its physical and human energy to meet society's present need for food, while devoting a sufficient portion of its energy to ensure those of future generations will be able to meet their needs for food as well.

The sustainable agriculture movement in North America has been going on for more than two decades. It emerged during the 1980s from a merging of concerns about declining profitability, reliance on agrichemicals, and the viability of rural communities. The sustainable agriculture movement includes farmers who identify with organic, biodynamic, holistic, bio-intensive, biological, ecological, and permaculture, as well as many who claim no identification other than family farmer. These farmers and their customers share a common commitment to creating an agriculture that is capable of maintaining its productivity and value to society indefinitely.

Sustainable farms must be ecologically sound, socially responsible, and economically viable. A farm that degrades the productivity of the land or pollutes its natural environment cannot sustain its productivity. A farm that fails to meet the needs of a society – not only as consumers, but also as producers and citizens – cannot be sustained over time by that society. And, a farm that is not financially viable is not sustainable, no matter how ecologically and socially sound it may seem to be in the short run. Sustainable agriculture is the only known means of sustaining human society.

Sustainable agriculture embraces the historic principles of organic farming. Sir Albert Howard, a pioneer of organics, began his book, *An Agricultural Testament*, with the assertion, “The maintenance of the fertility of the soil is the first condition of any permanent system of agriculture.”³ He contrasted the permanent agriculture of the Orient with the agricultural decline that led to the fall of Rome. He concluded, “The farmers of the West are repeating the mistakes made by Imperial Rome.” J. I. Rodale, another prominent proponent of organic farming, wrote, “The *organiculturist* farmer must realize that in him is placed a sacred trust... As a patriotic duty, he assumes an obligation to preserve the fertility of the soil, a precious heritage that he must pass on, undefiled and even enriched, to subsequent generations.”⁴

Rudolph Steiner, the founder of Biodynamic Farming defined an organic farm as a living system, as an organism, whose health and productivity depended on healthy relationships among its ecological, social, economic, and spiritual dimensions. He wrote, “A farm is healthy only as much as it becomes an organism in itself – an individualized, diverse ecosystem guided by the farmer, standing in living interaction with the larger ecological, social, economic, and spiritual realities of which it is part.”⁵ To Steiner, organic farming was about mutually beneficial, interdependent relationships within living systems.

Sustainable farmers rely on green plants to capture and store solar energy and to regenerate the organic matter and natural productivity of the soil. They use crop rotations, cover crops, intercropping, managed grazing, and integrated crop and livestock systems to maintain the fertility of their soils. Sustainable farmers reflect a sense of ethical and moral commitment to preserve the productivity of their land – to leave it as good as or better than they found it. Even though many of today's *industrial organic* producers have adopted large-scale, specialized, standardized systems, *sustainable organic* farmers have remained committed to creating a permanent agriculture capable of supporting a permanent society.

While the forces of industrialization are strong, the forces of sustainability are even more powerful. The forces now pulling farmers toward sustainability are the unrelenting forces of human nature. We saw these powerful forces reconnecting people with the land in the growing popularity of organic farming, but we now see them even more clearly in the movement beyond organics to sustainably and *locally* grown foods. People are being drawn toward reconnecting with farmers, toward community-based food systems, by the natural attraction of human relationships.

Steven Covey writes in his best selling book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, “there are principles... natural laws in the human dimension that are just as real, just as unchanging and unarguably ‘there’ as laws such as gravity in the physical dimension.”⁶ We usually think of gravity as the attraction or pull of the earth. However, in a recent space experiment, scientists observed that particles of dust, when floating in a gravity-free vacuum, had a natural tendency to be attracted to each other, to form themselves into clumps. They obviously were attracted to each other by a gravity-like force. People likewise are drawn to each other by a gravity-like force that we might call “social gravity.”

Throughout history, people of all times in all cultures have yielded to this force of social gravity in a universal natural tendency toward forming relationships within families, communities, and societies. Certainly, examples exist of individuals who have chosen to live in isolation, defying the pull of social gravity. But the natural tendency of humans is to relate, personally and socially, with other humans.

The force of industrialization has dispersed and disorganized people within modern societies, leaving many of them much like the dust particles floating aimlessly in empty space. However, the relentless forces of social gravity now appear to be pulling people back together. As with the dust particles, disconnected people first reestablish personal relationships by forming little “clumps,” small groups of people attracted by common interests. These little clumps of people eventually form communities of people with common commitments, and eventually grow into cultural, social, economic, and political movements. Such movements reflect the natural tendency of people toward social connectedness, toward community, and society. Communities are stronger and more durable when people with common interest live in close proximity, but communities of interest can also become powerful political and economic forces. Today, a growing number of people – farmers, workers, consumers, and citizens – with common interests, concerns, and commitments are driving the new *sustainable/local* food movement.

Farmers first began to reconnect with their customers when sustainable/organic farmers found they simply couldn't compete on price with conventional farmers who were willing to externalize their environmental and social costs to reduce their economic costs of production. Many consumers shared the sustainable/organic farmers' concerns for ecological and social integrity of food production and were willing to pay the full economic, social, and ecological costs of sustainably produced foods. Admittedly, the new sustainable/organic niche included only a minority of all food buyers, but their numbers were more than sufficient to support the even smaller minority of sustainable farmers.

For the most part, farmers and their customers first met through farmers markets, roadside stands, community supported agriculture organizations (CSAs), and other forms of direct marketing. A doubling of the number of farmers' markets during the 1990s and persistent growth in CSAs and other forms of direct sales attested to the growth of this new niche market. A growing number of retail food cooperatives, health food stores, and even specialty organic food stores also provided important new market outlets for locally grown, organic foods.

Over time, however, organic foods began to drift into the industrial food mainstream. Potential profits from the rapid growth in markets for organic foods eventually attracted the attention of the large food corporations. Large food processors and retailers found it difficult to deal with the diversity of organic standards and certification programs that existed among different groups of farmers in different regions, both within and among nations. They encouraged organic farmers to adopt uniform standards for national organic certification and to harmonize standards among nations. On the surface, standardization seemed to offer farmers access to mainstream food markets and looked like a good idea.

Instead, uniform national and international standards simply facilitated the specialization, standardization, and consolidation of organic food production and marketing. Uniform standards allowed large-scale producers who could meet minimum standards and lower costs to produce and ship large quantities of organic products across nations and around the world. This has left smaller independent organic farmers again unable to compete with large specialized operations that deplete the natural fertility of soil and exploit their workers to reduce dollar and cent costs. The natural and social wealth of rural areas was now being depleted by organic production.

After the initial shock, sustainable/organic farmers realized that they again had to provide their customers with something different, something better than the food in supermarkets. They began to understand that their unique advantage always has been their ability to relate personally with their customers. Many organic farmers found that they didn't need to deal with the paperwork and expense of organic certification when they had developed personal relationships of trust with their customers. They also found that "relationship markets" were not limited to farmers markets, CSAs, or other direct markets. They began to connect with customers through higher-volume markets, including retail food stores and restaurants featuring *locally* grown foods.

By creating a *sense of connectedness* with their customers and between their customers and local farmers, some higher-volume retailers are beginning to gain a market advantage over the supermarket chains and restaurant franchises. In such cases, the connections obviously are less direct and less personal than in direct markets, but still the sense of connectedness may be significant for both consumers and farmers. On the other hand, any link between consumer and farmer becomes questionable when food products move through mainstream supermarkets, as is the case of most organic foods being sold today. In relationships markets, real people have a distinct advantage over impersonal corporations.

In addition, emerging issues such as globalization, corporatization, confinement animal feeding, biotechnology, and food safety, health, and nutrition have expanded the demand for sustainably produced foods well beyond the certified organic market. Increasingly, American consumers want to know where their food comes from, how it is produced, and who produced it. *Local* is

becoming the *new organic*, as more people want food they can trust produced by someone they know and trust.

In spite of its past growth, organic foods still only account for about 2-3% of total food sales in the U.S. The potential market for sustainable/local foods is far larger. Various studies and surveys indicate that as many as one-third of Americans have core values consistent with the principles of sustainability.⁷ Thus, sustainable farmers today have an opportunity to help create a new food production and marketing mainstream by giving these like-minded customers foods that reflect their shared values. Sustainable farmers continue to find new allies as more independent food processors, distributors, and retailers realize they face the same kinds of challenges and have the same kinds of opportunities as do independent family farmers.

The future possibilities of a new American food culture can be seen in the emergence of a new kind of American food system. In some cases, the initiative is coming from the retail level. For example, *New Seasons Market* is one of the fastest growing retail food chains in Portland, Oregon, currently operating seven stores with plans to open at least nine. As Brian Rohter, co-founder and president writes, “Three families and about fifty of our friends decided in late 1999 that we wanted to create a business that we could be proud of – a company that had a true commitment to its community, to promoting sustainable agriculture and to maintaining a progressive workplace.”⁸

New Seasons supermarkets look pretty much like any other modern supermarket, with delis, bakeries, and other amenities American food shoppers have come to expect. Once inside the store, the most noticeable difference is that virtually every item in the store is labeled with respect to origin and there is an organic and conventional option for nearly every food item. They recently started a new “Home Grown” program to promote items produced in Washington, Oregon, and northern California and to procure as many items as they possibly can within this region. I have visited with Brian Rother on several occasions over the past five years, the last time being June of 2005. In my opinion, New Seasons Market is still walking the talk of sustainability.

Sometimes the initiative has come from farmers. For example, *Good Natured Family Farms* (GNFF) is a cooperative made up of thirty-some farmers in southeastern Kansas and southwestern Missouri. Diana Endicott, who farms with her husband Mel, was the moving force in gaining access to Kansas City supermarkets. Today, they market their products primarily through *Hen House Markets*. Hen House is a 13-store supermarket chain operated by Ball Foods Inc., a family corporation with a long history in Kansas City that is committed to maintaining its local connections. The cooperative owns and manages the GNFF brand, which now includes an expanding line of branded food products, including beef, chicken, eggs, and milk, with other products in various stages of development.

The GNFF website states, “We have three goals: Support local farmers by providing them with a market for the food they raise, provide our customers with fresh, natural foods raised humanely, without hormones or sub-therapeutic antibiotics, and raise our beef, chicken, eggs, and milk in a manner which protects and conserves the precious resources upon which they rely.”⁹ Diana also serves as marketing liaison between Ball Foods and a number of other local growers and

providers of a wide range of local products. At a recent growers meeting for their “Buy Fresh, Buy Local” campaign, I learned that Hen House markets sales of “local products” totaling more than \$4 million in 2005 and they are targeting sales of \$5 million for 2006.

Sometimes the initiative comes from nonprofit organizations, with an interest in promoting the common interests of farmers, processors, retailers, and consumers. FoodTrust of Prince Edward Island is such an organization, representing PEI farmers and participants in all other aspects of the food system in the province. More than 100 A&P Ontario supermarkets offer FoodTrust potatoes and spices to their customers. In addition to producing high quality potatoes of varieties specifically suited to different cooking methods, FoodTrust farmers are expected to meet a stringent set of standards for food safety, environmental stewardship, and even standards of social responsibility.

Their website states, “Today, people are increasingly concerned about where their food comes from and how it is grown. FoodTrust responds to this concern by providing an important link between you and a group of dedicated farmers and growers who produce and harvest high quality, safe and wholesome foods.”¹⁰ I am particularly impressed with the commitment of the FoodTrust people to developing meaningful standards of social responsibility, rather than simply stating a few platitudes about how people should be treated in a sustainable food system. I am convinced that they remain committed to the purpose and principles of sustainability.

These are just three of many notable examples of people who are committed to creating a new sustainable food system. Others include restaurants, both upscale and family diners; institutions, such as public schools, universities, and prisons; and a wide variety of farmers' cooperative ventures. For example, more than 500 public school districts and 95 colleges and universities currently have active programs to provide U.S. students with locally grown foods.¹¹

Today, the sustainable/local movement stands at a critical stage of its development. If sustainable farmers can successfully restore the integrity of relationships with their customers through these higher-volume markets, they will have created a sustainable ecological and social foundation for long-run rural economic development. They will be able to sustain the natural and social wealth of rural people and rural places. Rural people again will have a purpose for living and working in rural places. It's too early to predict success, but neither is it logical to expect failure.

Regardless of our ultimate response to the challenges of sustainability, we simply cannot continue doing what we have been doing to rural areas. Industrial economic development quite simply is not sustainable because its productivity relies on extraction and exploitation; it does nothing to renew or regenerate either the natural or human resources that must sustain the future of humanity. Industrialization inevitably tends toward entropy.

Living things, on the other hand, have the inherent capacity to be productive, while devoting a significant portion of their life's energy to renewal and regeneration. Living communities, including human communities, have a natural tendency toward renewal and regeneration. The regenerative capacity of living communities depends on their natural capacity for positive, nurturing relationships. In our pursuit of economic self-interest, we have sacrificed personal

relationships; we have become a disconnected, dispersed, socially depleted society. But we are still drawn toward relationships with other people – as if by gravity.

The pull toward economic self-interest is still strong, but the forces of social gravity are more relentless, pulling people back toward family, community, and society. The sustainable/local food movement is a reflection of these forces of social attraction. As farmers build trusting, caring relationships with their customers and their neighbors, they are working against the forces of industrialization, but they are working with the irresistible urge of people to find ways to reconnect with each other, both within and across generations. As we find ways to sustain the common wealth of rural people and rural places, we are finding ways to sustain humanity.

End Notes

¹ For a more in depth discussion of entropy, see John Ikerd, *Sustainable Capitalism: A Matter of Common Sense*, Chapter 3 (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press Inc., 2005).

² For a more in depth discussion of living systems, see Ikerd, *Sustainable Capitalism*, Chapter 5.

³ Sir Albert Howard. 1940. *An Agricultural Testament*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, England. also in Small Farms Library <http://journeytoforever.org/farm_library/howardAT/ATtoc.html>

⁴ J. I. Rodale. 1948. *The Organiculist's Creed*, Chapter 8. *The Organic Front*. Rodale Press: Emmaus, PA, USA. <<http://www.soilandhealth.org/copyform.asp?bookcode=010133>>

⁵ Rudolph Steiner. 1924. *Spiritual Foundations for the Renewal of Agriculture*. Gardner, M. (1993) (ed). Bio Dynamic Farming and Gardening Association of USA: Junction City, OR, USA. <<http://www.biodynamics.com/index.html>>

⁶ Stephen Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 34.

⁷ *The Hartman Report*, a nationally respected source of market information for natural food products, estimates that two groups of consumers, the New Green Mainstream and True Naturals, represent prime markets for natural foods and make up approximately 28 percent of all American consumers. See Hartman Report: *Food and the Environment – A Consumer's Perspective*, 1999. <<http://www.hartman-group.com/products/reportnatsens.html>>

⁸ See *New Seasons Market*, <<http://www.newseasonsmarket.com/>>

⁹ See *Good Natured Family Farms*, <<http://goodnatured.net/>>

¹⁰ See *FoodTrust Prince Edward Island*, <http://www.foodtrustpei.com/about/>

¹¹ For more information see, <<http://www.farmtoschool.org>> and <<http://farmtocollege.org>> and for case studies, see *Agriculture of the Middle*, <http://www.agofthemiddle.org/archives/2004/09/case_studies.html>