

## **Economics as if People Mattered; Farming for Quality of Life**

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Presented at 2000 Midwest Small Farm Conference and Trade Show, sponsored by Sustainable Earth, Noblesville, IN, November 17-18, 2000.

What will the world be like fifty years from now? Will it be better, or worse? There is no way of knowing for sure. But there are two things about the world of the future that we know with relative certainty; first, it will be different than the world of today, and second, the world of tomorrow will be affected by what we do today.

The world is always changing. Regardless of how much we might like for it stay the same, it won't. If we can't keep it the same, we would like the future to at least be somewhat predictable, but it isn't. Our expectations for the future most often are nothing more than extensions of what we see happening today – and, those expectations are usually wrong. If the stock market is booming today, we just know that stocks will be a good investment for the future – only the foolish keep their money in Certificates of Deposit. But only a few years ago, interest rates were high, stock prices were going nowhere, and CDs were the only place for the smart investor to have their money. In 1976, farm commodity prices were high, export markets were growing, and farmers wanted “freedom to farm” – they wanted to get the government out of agriculture. So, farmers were given the freedom to produce as much as they wanted. Today markets are flooded with surpluses, farm commodity prices are in a three-year slump, and farmers want the government to “restore the safety net.” Our problems of today are almost always the result of decisions we made in the past, based on expectations that things in the future were going to be pretty much continuations of whatever we see today.

The things we do today help to shape the future. Certainly, many things are beyond our individual control – even beyond our ability to influence. We can't change the economy, we can't change the weather, and we can't change people so that they will care about each other – at least not all by ourselves. But, we can change how we respond to the economy, we can change how we react to the weather, and we can choose to care about other people – regardless of what else happens. And when our choices are combined with the choices of everyone else, our collective choices certainly can change the world – the economy, society, and maybe even the weather. We can at least help shape our future by the things we do, and don't do, today.

### What Kind of World Do We Want?

So, if we know the world fifty years from now will be different from today, and if we know what we do today can help shape the future, why shouldn't we try to help create the world as we would like it to be? If we can help make the future better rather than let it get worse, shouldn't we do it? We can't necessarily create just any sort of world we might choose. There are plenty of other people who might choose a different kind of world. Our hopes and dreams may be different.

But, surely we can agree on some things we want, and some things we don't, and together we can help to make a world that will be better for us all.

If the world fifty years from now is to be far better than it is today, what will it take to make it so? Our common sense tells us that “better” will not mean that we have “a lot more cheap stuff.” Perhaps having more stuff – particularly food, clothing, shelter, medical care, etc. – made life better at some time in the past. But, what about today? How much more food do we need? Most Americans are already overweight, and more food won't feed the hungry unless they have the money to buy it. How many more clothes do we need? Most of our closets are already so crowded we can't find what we want to wear. How much bigger house do we need? Many of us have rooms we rarely use, and hardly have time to live in the rest. How many more cars do we need? We can only drive one at a time. What about computers, cell phones, the Internet – information technologies – but for what? Are we going to use these technologies only to build more sophisticated “things?” How many sophisticated things do we need?

What about personal services – recreation, things that make our chores less tiresome, make leisure time more relaxing, or things that take the hassle out of everyday living? This is not just more cheap “stuff;” these things will allow more of us to really “live the good life.” But then, what would life be about? Where would our pursuit of “the good life” actually lead us? Perhaps one day in the future, a person could be born, could be hooked up to a “virtual reality machine,” could take capsules for hydration and nourishment, eliminating the unpleasant matter of human waste, and could be entertained “virtually,” all day every day, until they eventually grow old and die. Or perhaps, we could devise means by which no one would even have to grow old and die. Maybe we could do it, but why? What would be the purpose of it all? What difference would it make to anyone or anything whether we lived or died or whether we had even existed?

Common sense tells us that the next step in human progress will not come about as a result of having more “stuff” or through more personal services. We already have more “stuff” and more services than we need. What most of us really need goes beyond our narrow self-interests. What most of us need is an ability to get along better with other people – within families, among friends, within communities, within nations, and among people of all nations. We need to learn to build positive human relationships. We need to learn to build each other up rather than tear each other down – and to receive something in return that builds us up as well. We need to learn that relationships can have value in and of themselves – not just in terms of what they do for us as individuals. We are rewarded when we treat another person as we would have them treat us – caring is not a sacrifice, but an opportunity.

A world with less conflict – fewer fights, fewer lawyers, fewer broken families; that would be a better world. A world with less crime – fewer prisons, fewer policemen, fewer judges; that would be a step forward for humanity. A world without war would truly be a giant step toward human progress. All of these things are possible, but only if we break free of our destructive patterns of focusing only on today and only on ourselves. We must be willing to devote our time and energies toward building positive, interdependent relationships.

Another thing most of us really need is the ability to lead lives of purpose and meaning. Purpose and meaning can only come from some higher level of understanding – from some higher order of things of which we are but a part. We cannot gain purpose and meaning from our relationships with other people or things – no matter how strong or positive they may be. We are at the same level of organization as all of the tangible things we can see and feel; we are all part of the same whole. We can never expect to fully understand the meaning of our lives without seeing them from the perspective of the whole of everything else. We can never understand the purpose of the heart, for example, by exploring its relationship to the brain and the lungs. The purpose of the heart can be derived only in relation to the whole of the human body. We are but parts of the whole biosphere of the earth. Our lives take on meaning only when viewed from the perspective of the biosphere – from a higher level of organization.

We must rely on the spiritual dimension of our being for insight into the unique purpose and meaning of our lives. Through this spiritual dimension we are rewarded when we practice stewardship – when we take care of the other living things of the earth and take care of the earth itself. Through spirituality we are rewarded for treating those of future generations, as we would like to be treated by them, if we were of the future and they were of the present.

A world in which people respect and take care of other living things – accepting that plants and animals provide food for people as people give live and sustenance to them; that would be human progress. A world in which people cared for, nurtured, and restored the environment for the benefit of themselves as well as for those of the future; that would be a step forward for humanity.

### The Need for New Economic Thinking

If we are going to build this new and better world, we are going to have to have new ways of thinking about the decisions we make today – beginning with a new way of thinking about economics. Our current economic system is designed and programmed to provide humanity with “more cheap stuff.” That is all it was ever meant to do – to use the scarce resources of the earth more efficiently in giving people, as consumers, more of what they want.

In times past, more cheap stuff may well have been what humanity needed most. A couple of hundred years ago many people lived lives of drudgery – many starving, freezing to death, or struggling day-to-day with pestilence and disease. But those times are long past – at least for most of the world. The system of competitive capitalism gave people food, clothing, and shelter and helped people lead longer, healthier lives. But, in the process of producing more cheap stuff, it has depleted the resources – people as well as nature – upon which its future productivity must depend. It is destroying itself as it destroys human society and destroys the natural environment. It has evolved from a system of competitive capitalism to a system of industrial corporatism that has become a cannibalistic system for reckless resource exploitation rather than rational resource use. The corporatist economic system of today cannot possibly support another fifty years of human progress. It is destroying the very things that must be restored before humanity can take its next step forward.

We must find a new, shared vision for the future of humanity, and it must be built on a new economic foundation. Our focus on short run, self-interest and our worship of economic materialism is a major contributor to, if not the sole cause of, nearly every major problem we face in today's society. Nearly every incident of environmental degradation and destruction is a consequence of economic rationalization that the earth's resources are ours for the taking. Hunger and disease in the world are not consequences of a lack of food or medicine, but of our acceptance of the economic logic that only those who are willing and able to pay are deserving. Our blind faith in free-markets has caused us to surrender both the private and public sectors of our society to corporate control. Our political campaigns are planned and paid for by the corporations who then have access and influence, if not outright control, of the politicians who are supposed to represent the people. Any positive vision for the future of humanity must be based on a new and different vision of economics – as E.F. Shumacher said, an “Economics as if People Mattered.”

The economy of the future must focus on people rather than production and profits. To achieve such an economy, we must challenge the economic assumption that people are best served by ever-increasing production and profits. Economists argue that since people invariably prefer more money to less, more money obviously enhances our quality of life. Thus the more we produce, spend, and consume the higher will be our quality of life. Economists argue that any means we might choose to address the ills of society invariably costs money, and more money comes only from increased production. Production creates jobs from which people pay the taxes, and those taxes support various social services. Economists argue that only the affluent can afford to protect the environment. So, we must continually increase production if we are to have the wealth from which we derive the means of caring for the natural environment. To economists, the well being of people is simply some linear transformation of production and profits – the greater the production, the greater the profits, and the higher the level of human well being.

However, the foundation for contemporary economic thinking is based on observations of the world of 200 years ago, not the world of today. Adam Smith's observations in his 1776 book, The Wealth of Nations, are simply not relevant to the society of today. None of the assumptions needed to ensure that the pursuit of short run, self-interest is transformed into long run, societal benefits – as if by an “invisible hand – are present in the world of today. There are no longer large numbers of buyers and sellers, but instead a few giant corporations, which make a mockery of the concept of competitive, capitalistic, free markets. It is not easy to get into enterprises that are profitable or to get out of enterprises that are unprofitable, and thus, to give people more of what they want and less of what they don't want. Patents, specialized equipment, and large capital requirements represent formidable barriers to entry and exit. Consumers do not have accurate information concerning the value they will realize from whatever they buy, but instead are confronted with disinformation by design, in the form of persuasive advertising. Finally, the consumer is no longer king. Consumer sovereignty went by the wayside when advertising agencies began hiring Ph.D. psychologists to warp and bend consumer tastes and preferences to fit the desires of corporate producers.

There is absolutely nothing in existing economic theory to support the proposition that today's economy is performing for the benefit of society as a whole. There is far more support for the

proposition that today's economy is functioning solely for the benefit of giant corporations and that any net benefits for people are but a side-effect of the pursuit of corporate profits and growth.

Economists have all sorts of rationalizations for continuing to worship at the altar of “free-market economics” during an era of corporatist reign. But none of them stand up to the ultimate test of common sense. The concept of “workable competition” is not workable in a corporatist economy – there quite simply is no longer an “invisible hand” of impersonal competition to transform greed into good. The simple fact that people have jobs and make money doesn't necessarily mean that they are willing to pay higher taxes – or that higher taxes and more social services necessarily translate into greater societal well being. We need a society in which people recognize their interdependence, understand that they are all part of the same whole, and truly care about each other. More jobs and more money simply don't translate into acceptance of social responsibility. Our social responsibilities will be met through understanding and compassion, not through the pursuit of greed.

Stewardship of the environment is not a luxury of the rich but a responsibility of all people. The poor of the world cannot attain a higher quality of life by exploiting their natural environment or exploiting other people. Whatever they gain in material wellbeing will be more than offset by the loss of cultural and moral values, the degradation of their society, and the destruction of their natural environment. The rich degrade and destroy far more resources in their pursuit of material wealth than they have ever been willing to give back in terms of protection or restoration. “Ecological economics” is a contradiction of terms, because the economics of selfishness and greed simply can't accommodate the principle of true stewardship. In general, contemporary economics is fundamentally incapable of addressing the social and ecological dimensions of life that are essential in sustaining human progress. We will need a *new* economics to build a sustainable human society.

### Toward an Economics of Sustainability

Sustainability is the foundation upon which the new economics must be built. Sustainability requires that we find ways to meet the needs of the present while leaving equal or better opportunities for those of the future. We need an economy that will sustain human progress on earth – not an economics that exploits the very resources, both human and ecological, upon which the future well being of people depends. We need a new economics of sustainability.

The concept of sustainability is far broader than economics – at least as economics currently is conceived. Daly and Cobb, in their book, For the Common Good, refer to the economics of today as “chrematistics” -- the “manipulation of property and wealth so as to maximize short-term monetary exchange value to the owner.” Sustainability is also broader than ecology or sociology because sustainability includes contemporary economics. However, sustainability is quite consistent with the root-word for economics, “oikonomia” – meaning “management of the household (community, society, humanity & biosphere) so as to increase its value to all members over the long run” (p. 138). Oikonomia includes the management aspects of sociology and ecology as well as economics. Daly and Cobb suggest that we address “oikonomia” through an “economics of community,” which would be accomplished through new government policies.

However, it will take more than public policy to implement “okonomia.” First, the people must embrace this new and different concept of economics. They must understand the necessity for *managing* the whole of human society, the environment, and the economy if we are to sustain human life on earth.

People will embrace the concept of sustainability only if they understand that sustainability is fundamentally about sustaining a desirable quality of life for people. Some find fault with this anthropocentricity or people-centered interpretation of sustainability. They contend that other forms of life may be just as important as human life in the longer run scheme of things. However, if we are not concerned *uniquely* with sustaining the human species, there is no “economic” issue to be addressed. Economics is about managing resources to meet the needs of humans. If we weren't particularly concerned about humans, we could simply depopulate the earth or otherwise reduce human claims on resources to a point where the sustainability of other species would no longer be in question, or at least not threatened by humans. However, our nature as humans is not unlike the nature of other species, in that we humans have an innate instinct for survival, reproduction, and self-gratification.

We will not reduce our claims on earth's resources for the sole purpose of ensuring the sustainability of other species or of the earth. But, we will protect other species if we perceive it to be in *our* best interest to do so. The fact that we are concerned *uniquely* with sustaining the human species does not imply that we are concerned *exclusively* with sustaining the human species. Contrary to what the economics of “chrematistics” might imply, *our* best interest is not exclusively individualistic in nature. Our interests as members of society and as members of the human race are linked with the integrity of the rest of the biosphere. Thus, *our* interests may well be served best through sharing and stewardship, including preservation of other species, rather than through expressing our individualistic human greed. Our interests are best served through “oikonomia” rather than “chrematistics.”

The new sustainable economy must be multidimensional – having social and ecological dimensions, as well as the conventional individualistic dimension. The three dimensions must be considered as interdependent aspects of the same whole, but makes distinctive contributions to a sustainable economy. The new economics must deal with ways of managing the ecological, social, and individual economies to increase their value to all members of society over the long run.

First, conventional economics will continue to play an important role in society – in meeting the needs of individuals. There will continue to be a large and legitimate private sector in a sustainable economy. However, in order for the private economy to function in the “collective” interests of society, economic competition must be restored. This is not an impossible task. The people broke the corporate monopolies of the early 1900s. When the people learned and understood the implications of a corporately dominated economy, they rebelled. They started the Progressive Movement, the “trusts were busted,” and competition was restored. They didn't do the job perfectly, and corporate monopolies have emerged again.

This time we have far larger, multi-national corporations. The job may be more difficult this time, but the consequences of failing to control corporate power may be far more severe. People

still have power over corporations – people grant corporate charters and people can take those charters away. Corporations are not people, and it's people, not corporations, that matter. When the people become convinced that competition must be restored to the private sector of the economy, it will be restored. In the process, the people will come to understand the limitations of the private sector in meeting the social and spiritual needs of people, and will come to embrace the social and ecological economies as means of meeting their needs and wants.

The social economy will not be directed by dollars and cents, but instead will be directed by the will of the people. In the private economy, the ability to get more if you earn more is a powerful motive for production and growth. However, in the social economy, everyone must be given an equal voice in the decision making process, regardless of income or wealth. In the public economy, all people are equal, and each person has but one vote. This is the only means of maintaining and building the social capital needed to support positive, productive relationships among people of differing abilities and means. The social economy includes the legitimate institutions of government, but also includes all of the other private, nonprofit institutions that are committed to building a more civil society.

The social economy simply recognizes the necessity for people to work together for the common good. The “collective” economy of the private sector treats society as a collection of individuals. The social economy recognized that families, communities, and societies are distinct wholes with characteristics not embodied in their individual members. The social economy is about pursuing the “common” good. The concept of a social economy extends and legitimizes many current functions of government – local, state, and national – by recognizing, explicitly that our relationships are valuable aspects of our quality of life. Through the social economy, we make deliberate, purposeful decisions to build each other up so that we may all share a higher quality of life by being part of something that extends beyond ourselves. The social economy recognizes that *communities* of people matter.

The ecological economy will be directed neither by dollars and cents nor by the vote of people, but instead by moral and ethical consensus. Eventually, we will realize that stewardship of the earth's resources is a spiritual matter. The natural environment is not a commodity to be bought and sold in the marketplace, nor is it a public good to be negotiated and compromised in the halls of Congress. The environment is a sacred trust – a gift that must be conserved and preserved for all generations.

However, stewardship is not a sacrifice but a privilege. We humans are not making sacrifices when we choose to protect other living species or natural resources that have no present nor anticipated market value. We people are inherently interdependent with the other elements of our natural environment, regardless of whether we understand the nature of these relationships. When we protect the other things of nature, we are protecting ourselves.

The ecological economy emerges from a process of consensus – a national and global dialog concerning what we people believe to be moral and ethical or right and wrong. Ultimately, the stewardship ethics of people such as John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and Rachel Carson must be folded into a shared-vision of our ecological future. Once a consensus is reached, it can be encoded into the constitutions of nations and into international treaties negotiated for the

expressed purpose of ensuring the long-run sustainability of human life on earth. But, such a consensus must first be achieved in the hearts and souls of people.

People must come to understand that we are not sacrificing when we choose to conserve and preserve resources for the benefit of future generations of people. Stewardship is a basic human responsibility, like caring for our children or our parents. We are caring for people of future generations, as we would have them care for us. Accepting the responsibilities that go with being human is not a sacrifice – it's a part of who and what we are, it gives meaning and purpose to our lives. Even in the ecologically economy, it's people that matter.

The necessary components of the new sustainable economy already exist. We already have a private economy that could be fixed to pursue our individual interests, a government that could be used to pursue our social interests, and a constitution that could be amended to more fully reflect our moral and ethical values. All we need is a shared vision concerning how the individual economy, the social economy, and the ecological economy should work together to support and sustain a more desirable quality of human life. We need a vision of economics as “oikonomia” (managing to benefit the whole) rather than “chrematistics” (manipulating to benefit the individual). With this shared vision to guide us, we people can begin to make the necessary changes to the parts so as to create a new and fundamentally different whole, a new economics of sustainability, an economics as if people mattered.

### A New Economy of Agriculture

The new sustainable economy will encompass nearly every aspect of our society – including agriculture. The industrial agriculture of today is a reflection of an economic philosophy that has supported and promoted the concept of industrialization – specialization, standardization, and centralization of decision making. The specialized, large-scale, increasingly corporate farming operations of today are a reflection of an industrial economic mentality. A new economics of sustainability will support a very different approach to farming and a very different kind of farm will be the result.

First, farms in a sustainable economy will be smaller than most farms today. Sustainable farming will require balance, or harmony, among the ecological, economic, and social dimensions of a farming system. A smaller farm lacking this harmony is less likely to be sustainable than a larger farm that is more in harmony. But there are logical reasons to believe that balance and harmony will be easier to achieve with, if not absolutely require, a large number of smaller farms rather than a small number of large farms.

Nature is inherently diverse. Geographic regions are different, watersheds are different, farms are different, and fields are even different -- both among and within. Industrial agriculture treats fields, farms, watersheds and even regions as if they were all pretty much the same. Certainly, industrial systems can be fine-tuned a bit here and there to make production practices of one region fit another. Each state has a bit different set of best management practices, and some further adjustments are made from farm to farm and field to field. But, the fundamental systems of conventional production are all pretty much the same.

The same breeds and varieties, fertilizers and feeds, pesticides and antibiotics, machinery and equipment, and business and marketing strategies are used across fields, farms, and watersheds, in all regions of the country. The goal of research is to find universal solutions to common problems -- to find ways to twist, bend, and force nature to conform to some universal production and distribution process. Industrial, large-scale mass production requires this type of uniformity. Biotechnology is but the latest in a long string of futile efforts to force uniformity upon nature.

Large-scale production creates inherent conflicts with the diversity of nature – and inherently threatens sustainability. Farms that conform to their ecological niches avoid such conflicts. Some ecological niches may be large, but most are quite small. Current concerns for agricultural sustainability are based on strong and growing evidence that most farms have already outgrown their ecological niches and could be more sustainable if they were smaller.

Sustainable farms must also be of a size consistent with their markets. Conventional wisdom is that most markets are mass markets, and thus, farms must be large – or if not must market collectively. The conventional wisdom is wrong. Markets are made up of individual consumers, and as consumers – as people – we are all different. We don't all want the same things. In fact, each of us actually prefers something just a little bit different, and thus, values the same things a bit differently.

Mass markets are created by lumping together a lot of people who are willing to accept the same basic thing – even though they might not prefer them. If mass markets can be created, the food system can be industrialized, and dollar and cent food costs will be lower. The lower price is a bribe to consumers to accept something other than what they actually would prefer. Typically, they must be coerced as well as bribed to accept what the industrial system has to offer. That's why Americans spend more on advertising and packaging of food than they pay the farmer to produce it. It costs more to convince people to buy industrial food products than it does to produce them.

One key to economic sustainability of small farms is to capture a larger share of the consumers' food dollar by performing some and bypassing other marketing services. Eighty cents of each dollar spent for food goes for processing, transportation, packaging, advertising and other marketing functions. Of the twenty cents the farmer gets, they keep only about ten cents as a return for what they contribute to production, the other ten cents goes for purchased inputs. By tailoring production to consumer niche markets, and selling more directly to consumers, the farmer gets a larger share of total market value, and small farmers have an opportunity to make more profits while remaining small enough to conform to their ecological niches.

The conventional wisdom is that niche-marketing opportunities are limited and can support only a handful of farmers. Once again, the conventional wisdom is wrong. Since all people want something slightly different, the ultimate in niche marketing would be to give every individual precisely what they want. All consumer markets are made up of individuals – totally, not just in part. Thus, all markets in total are made up of niche markets. The question is not how many niches exist, but instead how many different niches does it make sense to serve? The relevant answer, at least at present, is that more than enough market niches exist to support as many small

farmers as might choose to direct-market to consumers. A lack of niche markets need not place a lower limit on the size of farms. Farms can be as many and as small as needed to accommodate the ecological niches of nature.

The most compelling argument in support of sustainable farms being smaller is that sustainable farms must be more "intensively" managed. Wendell Berry puts it most succinctly in his book, What are People For, "...if agriculture is to remain productive, it must preserve the land and the fertility and ecological health of the land; the land, that is, must be used well. A further requirement, therefore, is that if the land is to be used well, the people who use it must know it well, must be highly motivated to use it well, must know how to use it well, must have time to use it well, and must be able to afford to use it well (p. 147)." Intensive management is possible only if farmers have an intensive relationship with the land – if they know it, care about it, know how to care for it, take time to care for it, and can afford to care for it – only if they love it.

Industrialization has degraded and destroyed relationships between farmers and the land. Industrialization is management "extensive." Specialization, standardization, and centralization allow each farmer to cover more land, supervise more workers, and handle more dollars. Industrial management is "extensive" in that each manager is able to manage more resources. Extensive management makes it possible for each farmer to make more profits in total, even if profits per unit of production are less. But, as the attention of each farmer is spread over more land, more laborers, and more capital, each acre of land, each worker, and each dollar receives less personal attention. The relationship of the farmer with the land, and with the people of the land, is weakened. If the large farmer no longer knows the land, no longer cares about it, forgets how to care for it, doesn't have time to care for it, or can't afford to care about it, how well will the land be used? How can it remain productive? How can a large farm be sustainable?

A small farm can be managed "intensively." Intensive management allows a farmer to manage less land, using less labor, while handling fewer dollars. By managing fewer resources more intensively, the farmer is able to make more profit per unit of output, and thus, make more total profits – even if total production or output is less. As the farmer has more time and attention to give to each acre of land, each worker, and each dollar, the farmer's relationship to the land and the people of the land is strengthened. The small farmer has an opportunity to know the land, to care about it, to learn how to care for it, has time to care for it, and can afford to care about it. The land on a small farm can be used well and can remain productive. A small farm can be sustainable.

The fundamental purpose of farming is to harvest solar energy – to transform sunlight into food and fiber for human use. It might seem that even God favors the larger farmer because a large farm covers more space, thus, catching more sunshine and rain. But, God also has given us a choice of making either wise or foolish use of the gifts of nature with which we are entrusted. Our industrial agriculture currently uses more energy from fossil fuels than it captures in solar energy from the sun. This can hardly be deemed wise and efficient use. But consequently, a small farmer can be more economically, socially, and ecologically viable than a large farm, simply by being a more effective harvester of solar energy. In essence, a more intensive manager is a better harvester of the sun.

Some ecosystems and farming systems are easier to manage effectively than are others, and thus, require less attention per unit of resources to manage sustainably. Those requiring less intensive management can be larger without sacrificing sustainability. Sustainable farms need not be small in terms of total acres farmed or total production, but they will need to be managed intensively. And intensively managed farms will be smaller than will otherwise similar farms that are managed extensively. Neither land nor people can be sustained unless they are given the attention, care, and affection they need to survive, thrive, and prosper. That attention, care, and affection can be more easily given on a smaller than larger farm.

### Farming as if People Matter

Sustainable farming is farming “as if people matter.” Our agricultural systems today reflect the old economic mentality that the only way to benefit people as consumers is to give them “more cheap stuff,” and the only way to benefit people as workers is to give them an opportunity to earn more money. The old economic thinking treats people as if they were consuming and producing machines, not living beings with hearts and souls. The old economics treats agriculture as the means by which natural and human resources are transformed into economic commodities for exploitation and ultimate human consumption. Agriculture as a way of life, as a lifestyle, or as a moral act, is treated with disdain by economists – a “touchy-feely” thing that has no relevance to real economics.

But an economic system is a creation of people for the benefit of people. An economic system that fails to meet the most pressing needs of people – physically, socially, or spiritually – is a failed system of economics. Our most pressing needs of today are not physical, although no one would suggest that physical needs are unimportant. Our most pressing needs of today are social and ethical in nature. We need an economy that helps to build personal relationships, not destroy them, and an economy that promotes an ethic of stewardship rather than exploitation. When we practice friendship and stewardship our lives are better – these things are not sacrifices. We need a new economy that will help us to meet the needs of the present, for others as well as ourselves, and will leave equal or better opportunities for those of the future. We need an economics of sustainability. We need an “economics as if people mattered.”

We need an agriculture that enhances the overall quality of life of people – as producers as well as consumers. We need an agriculture that respects the fact that farming is as much a lifestyle as a way to make a living – that life is about far more than just earning and consuming. We need an agriculture that works in harmony with nature so that people can eat well today while leaving opportunity for future generations of people to eat as well as we. We need an agriculture that respects the individual tastes and preferences of people as consumers and the individual abilities and passions of people as producers.

We need an agriculture that helps build strong relationships among farmers, among consumers, and between farmers and consumers. People eventually must come to understand that all of life ultimately arises from the soil; thus, we need to reconnect people with the land. We need an agriculture that will support more people in farming, because it takes people who love the land to take care of the land, and each farmer can only love so much land. We need an agriculture that

contributes to the quality of life of people – physically, socially, and spiritually. We need to learn to farm sustainably. We need to learn to farm “as if people mattered.”

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