



Marketing for sustainable mountain agriculture

by Michael Best, Assistant Professor of Agriculture and Economics, Berea College

Agriculture in the mountains has always been capable of subsistence production; however, the ability for farmers in Appalachia to make a living comparable to those farmers outside of this region has been reduced in recent decades. As the marketing system in the United States has matured, the smaller mountain producer has been left out in the cold. The system is driven by a scale of production that is not possible for farmers in our region.

Marketing can provide the solution for many farmers who seek sustainability in Appalachia. To be sustainable and to meet the financial requirements of agricultural production, farmers need the additional income generated from successful marketing. Our region has a valuable marketing asset—its location. Two-thirds of the U.S. population lives in states that are 650 miles or less—just a day’s drive—from southern Appalachia. Farmers in our region have the opportunity to market products with reduced shipping costs and less product damage.

The marketing process takes many forms. Popular marketing methods among farmers who have an interest in sustainable agriculture are: niche market-

ing, community supported agriculture, farmers’ markets, mail order marketing, on-farm markets and tourism, value adding and marketing cooperatives. These practices have both benefits and drawbacks, and a method that works for one farmer may not work for another.

Niche marketing

Niche marketing involves selling a product with characteristics that a group of people find important. In most cases the product’s price is higher than similar goods that don’t have that characteristic. Consumers might prefer these products for their higher quality, better variety, improved nutrient content, or because they are “organically” grown or vine ripened.

Studies by the University of Tennessee’s Agricultural Economics Department have shown that Tennessee consumers prefer locally grown produce to that which is shipped in. The same study showed that they would be willing to pay up to fifteen percent more for it. In time and with more marketing studies, the consumers’ preferences may become clear to store managers.

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On a class field trip this January, I saw a good example of niche marketing in Avery County, North Carolina. The farmer, William Cable, produces trout, rabbits, quail, and watusi cattle. Physically, the trout operation was the most impressive, with water tanks stair-stepping straight down a mountain. However, this farmer didn't just talk about how he produced the trout, he discussed how he **marketed** his trout.

Technically speaking, he does not direct market all his fish, but he does perform many profitable marketing functions. In a USDA-inspected fish processing facility, he cleans and filets fish to sell to restaurants in the cities surrounding Avery County. He also cooks fresh trout during group functions, serving hundreds of people at a time. William Cable's local marketing methodology could be used by farmers throughout central Appalachia.

Marketing [builds] relationships and comradery. . .

Community supported agriculture

Community supported agriculture (CSA), another marketing method, has the advantage of reducing risk that producers face. In particular, farmers face risk associated with price variability and production loss due to weather, disease and insect damage. CSA operations eliminate a great deal of this risk because consumers buy shares in the producer's operation.

The share is paid up front to the farmer, so producers have the capital in hand, eliminating the risk associated with price. Purchased shares allow the consumer to get a portion of the harvest every week during the growing season. The amount of product could be less if a crop failure occurs; thus, the consumer actually takes on some risks that the producer used to face entirely.

Farmers' markets

In recent years, farmers' markets have been growing in popularity. In 1988 there were 1,700 farmers' markets in the United

States. That number grew to 2,746 in 1998. Farmers' markets allow the producer to cut out the middlemen and sell directly to the consumer.

Consumers enjoy meeting, talking and building relationships with the people who produce their food. Producers enjoy having more control over the price they receive, thus reducing price variability. They can also sell produce that might not be as marketable through the wholesale system. The biggest drawback of farmers' markets is that not every producer is cut out to be a salesperson.

Mail order marketing

Mail order marketing for agricultural commodities may seem a little far fetched at first thought, but it is a thriving business for some producers. A broker who sells to many high scale restaurants in the Cincinnati, Ohio, area once showed me a mail order pricing list. This list had exotic tomatoes like the German Yellow for anywhere from six to twelve dollars a pound. The tomatoes were coming from Washington state. A Pennsylvania sheep producer gets \$68.00 to \$80.00 for two legs of lamb in a mail order business and can't produce enough lamb himself.

On-farm markets/agricultural tourism

On-farm markets and agricultural tourism are two marketing avenues that bring the consumer onto the farm. On-farm markets and tourism allow people who don't farm for a living to see how it's done. It connects them with the land and the past, and can be used as an educational experience for children and adults. Although I have heard several producers talk about how successful this strategy has been for them, it does have some drawbacks. The biggest is that the farm must be in a good location—one that allows easy access. The population around the farm must also be large enough to support the grower.

Value adding

This decade's biggest buzzword in marketing for agricultural producers has been

“value adding”—a very simple idea but one in which many producers still don’t see merit. If a producer grows grapes or berries, why just sell the berry? Adding value to a commodity might take additional work and different management techniques, but there is usually a reward waiting at the end. This reward might be a more profitable farm or a reduction in the risk faced by the producer.

For example, number two yellow poplar fresh from the sawmill has a value of \$.30 per board foot. Red River Hardwoods in Powell County, Kentucky, takes the rough sawn lumber and increases the value to \$1.50 to \$2.00 per board foot. The wood is kiln dried, the knots are cut out and the boards are finger-jointed back together. The result is a paint-grade material that is the contractor’s choice for moldings in new homes.

As another example, a hog and cattle producer in Monticello, Kentucky, uses direct marketing to keep his pork operation profitable in a time where many hog producers are going out of business. Hog prices are currently around \$28 per hundred weight and break even for most producers is around \$43 per hundred weight. This producer takes his product directly to the consumer, adding enough value through processing to cover the costs of production, processing and delivery, and to leave a little for himself.

For \$180 a consumer can purchase a 250 pound hog that is packaged and ready for the freezer. After slaughter, the yield from that hog is 155 pounds of pork. This producer has used value added marketing to insulate himself from wholesale market risks. Direct marketing keeps this relatively small hog producer in business today.

Cooperatives

Cooperatives are another technique that can lead to marketing success for the small farmer, but some farmers have a hard time participating in cooperatives. In my opinion, most farmers in America today are indepen-

dent by their nature. This independence gets in the way of many being able to see the big picture. They feel that they are still competing against their neighbors and that somehow if they work together they only stand to get lower returns for their commodities.

The Capper-Volstead Act of 1922 gave producers the right to jointly market their products. Under this law, cooperatives were actually developed to help farmers market their crops without being taken advantage of by larger buyers in the marketplace. For example, small cattle producers could benefit greatly by being able to market their cattle together in 50,000 pound loads.

Cooperative marketing works with vegetables too. In Monticello, Kentucky, the Cumberland Farm Products cooperative has successfully helped vegetable producers for the last 30 years. Larry Snell operates the cooperative, which has done so well positioning its product that the Cumberland Farm name now represents quality to consumers.

“ . . . for farmers to be sustainable, they must see long-term profits without subsidy.”

Economic viability is critical to any sustainable agriculture system in the southern Appalachian region. Production methods have some ability to change costs for producers, but I feel more progress can be made in increasing income for farmers through effective marketing. It is important to remember that for farmers to be sustainable, they must see long-term profits without subsidy. Subsidized production is not sustainable because the entity providing the subsidy can’t be depended upon indefinitely. Marketing methods like those above build relationships and comradery, helping to sustain farmers and whole communities in the mountains.

Heirloom fruits and vegetables

A return to traditional sustainability

by Bill Best, farmer and professor of Health and Physical Education at Berea College

Sustainable — Support, bear the weight of, esp. for a long period

Agriculture — The science or practice of cultivating the soil, raising crops, and rearing animals

—1998 *Illustrated Oxford Dictionary*

In the long history of language, sustainable agriculture is one of the latest buzz-phrases to inhabit (or perhaps infest, to use an agricultural term) the academic marketplace. I have found no one who can confidently define it and few who actually wish a definition. My definition, currently, is that it is “head” agriculture—a group of fuzzy ideas thrown around by individuals who may have little or no background in agriculture.

Not long ago I was visiting one of Berea’s sister liberal arts institutions and found myself waiting in the cafeteria line with some senior students majoring in sustainability. When I asked them what they had learned about their major, they were genuinely surprised and fumbled around for an answer. One volunteered that they hadn’t really learned anything concrete but had spent many hours in discussion. Another stated: “We talked a lot.”

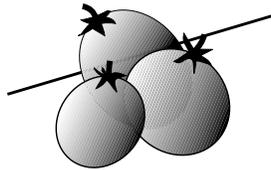
When I described my own fifty-plus years of work in what many now call “sustainable agriculture”, the students seemed surprised that someone was actually practicing what they had read in books. To move “sustainable agriculture” beyond the buzz-phrase status, individuals with substantial real-life experiences need to analyze their agricultural practices and share philosophical and practical insights. With this essay, I volunteer to help initiate the process.

For most of my sixty-three years I have been involved in farming. I helped my family subsist on a small mountain farm in the Rogers Cove area of the Upper Crabtree Community in Haywood County, North Carolina. I was active in vocational agriculture and 4-H and FFA clubs, winning many prizes in both.

My family simultaneously practiced modern and ancient agriculture, raising purebred hogs and hybrid corns while farming with mules and horses. My mother continued saving vegetable seeds passed down through generations of mountain families. Both Mother and Daddy listened with a healthy amount of skepticism to agricultural and home-making agents, sometimes taking their advice but often not.

Today, over forty years later, I propose an even more skeptical approach than I learned as a child. I propose that we are in danger of being overrun, not by the military-industrial complex Dwight Eisenhower warned about, but by the international seed and chemical company-land grant university complex of the present. Some of the most far-out survivalists warn us of this, but because most of them have no real life experience in agriculture, their warnings fall on the same deaf ears as the warnings of the “sustainable agriculture” buzz-phrase crowd.

I am quite aware that the efforts of seed companies and researchers result in a purposeful and calculated decline in the breadth



of the gene pool of our major food crops. This increased homogeneity leaves plants vulnerable to plagues, leading to massive-scale plant loss. One need only remember the southern corn blight of a few years ago which played havoc with a number of hybrid corns. Homogeneity among food crops also leads to loss of flavor variety and quality. The ancient practice of saving seeds, which I continue to practice for both practical and scientific reasons, provides an answer to the homogeneity problem.

Heirloom beans and tomatoes

Most anyone over fifty remembers plump, tasty and tender beans. Seed companies started convincing us with their slick catalogues that beans should be thin and straight without “lumps”. (For those who don’t understand “lumpy beans”, the lumps are the beans inside the bean hulls.)

Seed companies also started inserting “fiber” (toughening) genes into beans to prevent them from breaking down during machine harvest. Growers are advised to pick these beans while they are “young and tender” instead of letting them mature on the vine. Fiber genes make mature beans too tough to be eaten—tough enough to use for weaving sandals or some other yet-to-be discovered purpose. The seed companies don’t dare tell growers that beans should never become tough, regardless of how “lumpy” or plump they are.

Having a decided preference for plump and tender beans, I have collected and grown over fifty types of heirloom beans from most Appalachian states. Almost all of my beans are cornfield beans—running beans traditionally grown in corn. More often than not now they are grown on strings supported by wires strung across poles. Sometimes they are grown on bamboo poles stacked in teepee fashion—hence the word “pole” bean is often heard instead of cornfield or running bean.

I also have many “cut-short” beans, which are so tightly packed in the hulls that they cut one another off on the ends. I also have many types of “greasy” beans, the most prized beans grown in the mountains. These exist in many varieties, sizes, lengths, and colors. Lacking the fuzz of other beans, greasy beans shine as if they were greased. (For a full discussion of heirloom beans, consult the Spring 1998 issue of Berea College’s *Appalachian Heritage* magazine).

Most anyone over fifty also has pleasant memories of tasty and tender tomatoes. Plant breeders working for major seed companies and universities have managed to remove most of the pleasing flavor and texture from tomatoes.

The resulting fruit withstands the stress of being picked green and shipped thousands of miles by train or truck. Such tomatoes are gassed to “de-green” them (their terminology for adding color to them) prior to being sold in a supermarket.

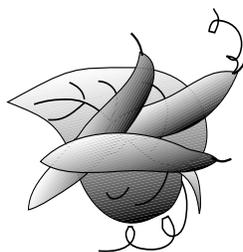
These tomatoes, with their flavor of wet sawdust and toughness add

little but color to dishes.

As I started growing more heirloom tomatoes in order to regain the flavor choices I grew up with, I was surprised to find them to be more disease resistant than most commercial tomatoes. Currently I grow over 150 varieties of many types, shapes, flavors, colors, and textures. (For more information on heirloom tomatoes, see the fall 1998 issue of *Appalachian Heritage*.)

Marketability of heirlooms

In the early 1970’s, my involvement in forming the Lexington Farmers’ Market and the Berea Farmers’ Market spurred my interest in growing heirloom vegetables for sale. The customers, especially at the market in Lexington, continue to buy as many heirloom beans and tomatoes as we can grow. Consumer preferences have resulted in fewer



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Community supported agriculture

Re-connecting with our food

by Sean Clark, assistant professor in the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources at Berea College

Most Americans know very little about the food they eat. Milk comes from plastic jugs and bread from plastic bags; and miraculously they can always be found on the shelves of the corner mini-mart or friendly neighborhood mega-mart. What more is there to know?

In a way, our society's ignorance of food and agriculture is a sign of success. After all, food is cheap and abundant—why worry? A closer look, however, reveals causes for concern and suggests the need to give some serious thought to the food system and our place in it.

With continuing industrialization and globalization, consumers are literally and figuratively much further from their food sources than they were several generations ago. Consequently, few know where their food was grown, who grew it, how it was grown, where and how it was processed, or how far it traveled before reaching the dinner plate.

This fundamental transformation in the relationship between society and its food has taken place quietly and with little notice. But the effects it has had on our health, the environment, agriculture, rural and urban communities, and the control and power of multinational corporations in our lives have been dramatic. For example:

- Instead of worrying about getting enough to eat, many Americans worry about eating too much (of the wrong foods).
- Pesticides in the diets of children have become a major health concern.
- Agriculture is now considered the most important source of ground and surface water contamination in the country.

- The number of farmers continues to decline while average farm size increases.

- Prime farmland in many parts of the US is rapidly being lost to suburban sprawl.

- Multinational corporations continue to increase their share and control over production, distribution, and marketing of farm supplies (inputs) and food (outputs).

- Fruit and vegetable production today in the US is increasingly dependent upon the labor of illegal immigrants.

What do these trends mean for the future? Can anything be done to reverse them and create more sustainable food and agriculture systems for our health, communities, and environment?

Fortunately, there are alternatives and they're gaining momentum. For example, local farmers' markets are making a comeback nationwide with communities starting new ones each year. Sales of organically-grown foods (grown without synthetic fertilizers and pesticides) continue to increase annually at rates that astound even the skeptics. And, more and more consumers are making arrangements directly with local farmers to raise their fruits, vegetables, grains, and meats in subscriptions for community-supported agriculture (CSA) programs.

CSA is particularly promising because it directly addresses many of the problems of food and agriculture listed above. In CSA, consumers become shareholders in a farmer's harvest throughout a growing season, reaping the bounty and sharing the risk.

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Community support agriculture at work

Plotluck at Snug Hollow Farm

from an interview with Barbara Napier, farmer and operator of Plotluck

Tucked among the knobs in rural Estill County, Kentucky, lies Snug Hollow Farm, the home and gardens of Barbara Napier. Through certified organic methods, Barbara offers a cornucopia of produce to people who subscribe to her “Plotluck” service, a community-supported agriculture program.

In a one-acre garden, Barbara grows a variety of vegetables for about 20 subscribers to the service. For a set price, the participants receive a 1/2 bushel basket filled with an assortment of produce and fresh flowers. Customers receive the baskets about every two weeks, delivered directly to their doors. The return rate of patrons demonstrates the demand for the service.

Barbara started “Plotluck” four years ago because she saw a need for it. “I discovered that people don’t necessarily search out organic food, but they will choose it if offered,” she notes.

She successfully markets a wide variety of vegetables. Her salad mixes include lettuces, green onions, arugula, mizuna, chicory, mesclun, and radishes. She grows herbs such as basil, thyme, cilantro, dill, parsley, and peppermint. During the summer subscribers enjoy sweet corn, beans, peppers, okra, peas, potatoes, squash, tomatoes, turnips, kale, mustard, melons, pumpkins, gourds, broccoli, cabbage, beets and many other vegetables.

Barbara grows all her produce using organic techniques certified by the Kentucky Department of Agriculture. “I really don’t need anything non-organic,” she points out. She waters her garden from her nearby pond and fertilizes with compost and manure tea.

Her isolated location helps with insect problems because she does not get pests from other gardens. Those pests that occur naturally she finds easy to handle. “Insects have a

season, just like anything else,” she says. She notes that a long growing season allows her to replant some crops during times when pests are less of a problem. A visitor in the early morning or evening might find her hand-picking bean beetles or other pests from her crops.

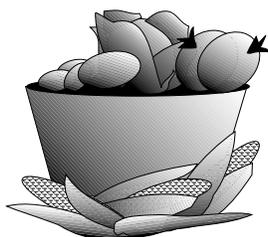
When selecting the variety of seeds to plant, Barbara chooses those to which her patrons are accustomed. “People want to have what they’re used to,” she says. Communication with her customers is a vital part of Barbara’s business.

“I love it when they call,” she smiles. She welcomes input from her customers on everything from how much to bring in a basket to what new varieties she might introduce. “We must understand each other’s needs.” Her continuing customers form a special community as the farmer and consumer work together on planning the garden.

To help customers maintain a connection with the farm, Barbara holds a “Day on the Farm” in late summer. She also sends out a monthly newsletter that relates activities on the farm. She would like to see her customers become even more involved with the farm, moving beyond just “people eating food” to people using the garden as a learning tool.

“Community-support agriculture can be as big as you want to make it,” Barbara proposes, but she advises gardeners to start small. She recommends having a partner, particularly if the farmer must work off the farm.

A look at her day demonstrates how assistance is always welcome. On a typical summer day, Barbara is in the garden by 5:15 am to pick and wash fresh greens, veggies and flowers for her baskets. She packs four or five



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Aquaculture: a sustainable enterprise

*Reprinted with permission from
Center for Economic Options newsletter Alternatives Winter 1999*

There are several forest-related business opportunities for West Virginians. In this new column, the Center will introduce you to the many available options.

West Virginia is blessed with an abundance of fresh water ideal for the development of sustainable aquaculture enterprises. While aquaculture includes both animal and plant production, the term primarily applies to fish farming. The eastern third of the state, with its higher elevation, is excellent for trout and Arctic char production. The rest of the state is well suited for numerous more temperate species such as hybrid bass and ornamentals.

Aquaculture is very well suited for West Virginia landowners and can play a key role in both the economic and ecological futures of the state. Aquaculture can be accomplished on relatively small areas of space at a

lower cost than traditional farming practices and with very little impact on the land. It can also be implemented in conjunction with other sustainable enterprises.

Growing fish is not complicated, and the Center can assist those interested through the Forest Enterprise Network. If you have clean water source—small or large—we can help you set up an aquaculture enterprise. In addition, the Center can assist you in determining water quality and potential production capacity and also connect you with resources for system design and other business resources you may need. The Center can also help you explore the production and economic potential of different species options for your facility.

For more information about the Center's Forest Enterprise Network or aquaculture, contact Fred Hays at the Center at (800) 780-5652 or 345-1298.

Community supported agriculture

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Shareholders pay for their shares at the beginning of the growing season and pick up or are delivered a basket of produce on a regular basis over a given period. Such a system gives consumers access to fresh, locally-grown food while simultaneously allowing them to directly support local farmers. Small, local farmers can then focus on producing healthy, quality food and being good stewards of the land without the constant worry of the market.

The CSA concept was introduced into the US in the mid-1980s on a farm in Massachusetts and has since expanded to over 1,000 CSA programs throughout the country. The benefits of this grassroots movement extend far beyond food.

CSA strengthens the local economy and supports local farmers and farms while encouraging farmers to be good stewards. It provides consumers with more information

about how their food is grown so they can make informed decisions and ultimately helps to preserve the integrity and promote the self-determination of communities.

This year, Berea College will begin a CSA program, offering a diverse array of fruits and vegetables from June through September. The goals of this project are to give interested students the opportunity to learn and experience sustainable production and marketing practices while stimulating community interest and involvement in agriculture and food.

The produce offered will be grown at the garden and greenhouse area of the Berea College Farms on ground currently being certified for organic production by the Kentucky Department of Agriculture. To find out more information about the CSA program, contact Sean Clark in the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources at Berea College, CPO 298, Berea, KY 40404; (606) 986-9341 extension 6008.

Compromising for a better crop

Organic versus conventional farming

by Don Cassidy, Brushy Fork Associate from Letcher County, Kentucky

A veteran farmer and freelance writer shares his research and thoughts on the use of pesticides and other chemicals in our food production.

Whom or what to believe about human health issues is often a major question for the consumer public. Popular mediums of communication know that news about health and environment are attention-grabbing items. The same is true in agriculture and environment, especially related to food production.

Cutting through special interests, distortions and skewed statistics is a challenge when dealing with the broad subject of farming. It might be understandable that irate but conscientious citizens would like to throw up their hands and seek a simpler lifestyle.

But when confronting mechanized farming, special interests, and lobbyists for power over farm legislation, the desire to escape may not be best. The wisest course seems that of caution and skepticism. The consumer must take time to consider claims and counterclaims between conventional and organic farming.

Farmers and governments credit organic farming as a safer alternative than conventional farming under certain conditions. Although production figures for this alternative are not clear, Lori Ward Bocher in "Brave New World in Crop Protection" notes that mostly-organic farming proved cost-effective.

But in certain cases, considering the extraordinary cost of production, the price would be prohibitive. Though a survey revealed the public's desire for organic produce, a large majority of plant scientists caution against the assumption that organic methods are safe. "Indeed, some products, such as nicotine sulfate, are more toxic to humans than many traditional pesticides," cited the February 1991 issue of *Cooperative Farmer*.

To the surprise of some activists for safer food and environment, sickness can grow out of too little use of chemical pesticides. One USDA study showed that personal illness expense reached \$4.8 billion annually from lack of pesticides. Bob Brackett, food scientist at the University of Georgia, said that viruses and bacteria are far more prevalent when pesticides are not used.

But health hazards can come from over-use of chemicals. The Union of Concerned Scientists journal reported that over-medicated livestock threatens the effectiveness of antibiotics for human beings. There is a clear correlation between the use of fluproquinolone, an antibiotic drug used in animals, and the rise of microbe resistance to these medicines in humans. While further tests are needed to prove these linkages, the evidence thus far warrants caution.

The answer to the organic/conventional debate seems to lie in a compromise. Despite the confusion of contradictory reports on synthetic substances versus natural ones, it seems clear that we have to settle for some chemical pesticides and fertilizers.

The opposite of this compromise is that "the consumer must settle for a few bug holes in the lettuce." If it were that simple, there would not likely be many objections in the first place. But in my experience of approximately 30 years of gardening and about 25 years of fruit growing, I must say your produce won't make it to maturity without some impact from pests.

Produce may look sound enough, but a bucket full of apples from the littered ground



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Organic certification pursued

Organic agriculture production recently got a boost in East Tennessee and Southwest Virginia as efforts have begun in both states to promote certification of small farms. Approximately 30 local farmers turned out at two different meetings in December. One focused upon certification in Virginia, the other upon certification in Tennessee.

Much of the interest was driven by a promising market opportunity that Appalachian Sustainable Development has been cultivating with a local grocery store chain. Such a market would provide the first substantial outlet for organic produce in our region, beyond that already being sold

through community supported agriculture and local restaurants.

Certification efforts will be underway through the winter and early spring in both states. Additionally, training in various elements of organic production will be offered throughout the growing season, and began with the Sustainable Agriculture Conference on February 26-27 in Kingsport.

Anyone interested in pursuing organic certification, or anyone who knows of a local farmer who may be, may contact Anthony Flaccavento with Appalachian Sustainable Development at (540) 623-1121 or Jennifer Arnold at (423) 636-8171.

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baskets a day and delivers them on her way to work. Her evenings after work are spent weeding, hoeing, staking plants, and picking beans, tomatoes and other vegetables.

Barbara describes her work as a labor of love, something she does in addition to a full-time job. "My garden is an expression of my personality," she says. She finds it very satisfying to carry through the planting process from start to end and share it with other people.

"The work is worthwhile," she notes, "but it's not necessarily a money-maker." She went on to say that she doesn't calculate per-hour pay for her time, but that she can't place a price on the joy of her garden and the

satisfaction of getting a product from her farm. The satisfaction is personal and the product is basic.

While Barbara is starting small, she has big dreams for Snug Hollow. She wants to share her gardens, woods and mountains through a conference and retreat center. In her snug little hollow surround by greenery and wildlife (including a cougar that lived nearby for a summer), she sees a product to share beyond the food she grows there.

Barbara welcomes calls for consulting on organic farming and community-supported agriculture or information on her "Plotluck" service. She can be contacted at Snug Hollow Farm, 790 McSwain Branch, Irvine, KY 40336; (606) 723-4786.

Next issue will focus on the Appalachian economy

Mountain Promise, the newsletter of the Brushy Fork Institute, is published quarterly. Our next issue will examine the changing economy in Appalachia. We encourage readers to submit articles, reports, photos, line art or story suggestions. If you have an article or a story idea, contact:

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Visit us on the World Wide Web at: www.berea.edu/brushyfork

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growers selling commercial seed-catalogue tomatoes and beans.

As the farmers' markets have developed, heirloom vegetables have taken an increasingly greater share of the market. We find ourselves selling to chefs at over thirty restaurants—seventeen of which are in Cincinnati. Restaurants buy produce through a broker who arrives early to get the pick of our crop. Occasionally, he comes to our farm to pick the crop if we are unable to deliver to him in Lexington. Additionally, we sell to at least fifteen restaurants in Lexington and Berea, including those recognized to be the best in both places.

These changes in attitudes toward vegetables in Cincinnati, Lexington, and Berea indicate that the public is ready to move toward quality foods, even if these foods cost more. This trend is also part of an increased health consciousness.

For decades the United States has had a cheap food policy. Both private and public food producers have been captive of governmental and corporate policies and processes designed to increase the production and ease the transport of food. What has always been left out in these processes is quality.

Saving our heirlooms

At one time I would have liked to have been able to turn over my lifetime work with heirlooms to an institution which would get serious about "sustainable agriculture" in Appalachia. However, with research grants and professional identity depending on multinational feed, seed and chemical giants, this isn't likely to happen.

My ideas are part of our culture, recapturing older forms of common sense and enlightened self and community interest. We must develop an alternative plan to continue and promote the saving of heirloom fruits and vegetables, not just for Appalachia but, by extension, for the country and the world.

1. Heirloom food plants in Appalachia must be identified, quickly before more are lost, collected at regional locations, and maintained by growers on a dispersed but centrally organized basis. My collection of beans, conceivably the best in the country and in private hands, has been developed through 35 years of contact with gardeners. For the most part these individuals are in their late sixties, seventies, eighties, or nineties. Few young people are systematically involved with heirlooms, though some are starting to demonstrate interest.

Throughout the world, there are many collectors of heirloom tomatoes but few of heirloom beans. Appalachia has a world of beans, almost all of which are vastly superior to commercial beans that are sold literally throughout the world. Again, I say thanks to the multi-nationals and their largely successful attempts to make everything as generic as possible.

2. Young people must be taught to appreciate, collect, grow, and market Appalachia's heirloom vegetables. My family has shown repeatedly that customers will patronize those who market the heirlooms. That trend will accelerate as people become more quality conscious. We need to offer young people summer programs that promote growing, marketing, and preserving of the region's heirloom fruits and vegetables.

3. Young people must become aware of the region's edible plant heritage. This heritage includes preserving vegetables and fruits for later use as food, gathering seeds and effectively preserving them for planting later, and using the most effective production techniques for growing such fruits and vegetables. Unfortunately, today's local agricultural leaders typically aren't trained or equipped to accomplish these tasks. Another institutional mechanism must be developed

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A sustainable answer for Appalachia?

Hemp considerations

by Al Fritsch and Paul Kalisz, Appalachian Science in the Public Interest

Editor's note: As tobacco becomes less profitable, does industrial hemp provide a sustainable alternative for Appalachian farmers? Legalizing industrial hemp is a controversial issue. The article below provides a brief look at some pros and cons and touches on the sustainability of this crop.

Appalachian Science in the Public Interest is never afraid to consider both sides of controversial issues. So it is in the case of industrial hemp—an illegal crop that has some strong points, and, like all things of this world, some weak points as well. The easiest way out of this controversy would be to not contest the current ban on production of industrial hemp. But this would be an unacceptable cop-out, given the rate at which our native forests and other ecosystems are being degraded in the interest of annually producing millions of tons of pulp to be made into paper products.

Pro-hemp people can tout a host of advantages of their wonder-crop:

- it makes rugged fiber that may be used for rope and twine;
- the fiber can be worked into an ultra-soft and durable cloth for shirts, trousers, and dresses;
- hemp out-produces trees to the extent that, calculated on a yearly basis, as much pulp may be obtained from one acre of hemp as from four or five acres of trees;
- the oil from hemp seed and pressed oil cakes have exceptional nutritional value and versatility;
- industrial hemp is non-toxic and non-psycho-active, having only 0.09% THC compared to the 7-10% found in drug-quality marijuana.

Furthermore, the rationale for curbing production of industrial hemp during the 1930s was, at best, spurious and apparently initiated by special interests in forest plantations or in the production of synthetic alternatives to hemp fiber.

This led to passage of a 1937 tax that made hemp taxable as a drug, thus removing economic incentive to grow hemp without actually outlawing the crop. In fact one of us (Al Fritsch) remembers the lifting of the tax during World War II when international sources of hemp were controlled by the Japanese.

Given that there are social and ecological advantages to hemp production, is it a panacea of hope for the tens of thousands of small tobacco farmers faced with losing their source of income? Hardly.

Value: Once hemp is widely cultivated and becomes less of a novelty, the per acre per year profitability of this fiber crop will likely be closer to that of corn than to that of tobacco. A family economy cannot be sustained by cultivating two to five acres of corn!

Capital intensity: The major hemp proponents are large farmers with hundreds of cleared acres ready for production. Heavy machinery and chemicals will almost surely be used on this land to replace the slaves and low-paid labor associated with hemp's earlier production in Kentucky. This means that hemp production will require big up-front investments affordable only by those with abundant land and capital.

Freezing out the little guy: Industrial hemp production is a golden opportunity for large landholders to make a killing with a product with good market prospects, while small farmers go broke. The glory of the tobacco cooperative combined with government regulations was that it guaranteed that even the little guy had a market share.

Lack of capital and land will keep the small farmer from competing in the hemp market. Unless strict regulations are enacted

prior to legalization of hemp production, the pro-hemp campaign plays into the hands of the fat cats.

Land stewardship concerns: Reliance on heavy equipment and chemicals to obtain a bottomline of maximum profit will cause hemp production to degrade the soil as much as any other monoculture. This means that a system of rotational cropping and soil protecting and ameliorating techniques will need to be devised and implemented before widespread initiation of hemp production.

Although production of paper and pulp from hemp is more efficient than production from trees, this is no guarantee that the amount of forest land dedicated to pulp

plantations would be reduced if industrial hemp were legalized. In fact, increased production of pulp could inspire a binge of advertising to promote increased consumption of hemp- and tree-based products.

We are pro-hemp. We feel that the prohibition against production of this useful crop is gross. However, it is necessary to recognize that hemp alone will save neither the world nor the small tobacco farmer. Ultimately, a mix of crops and endeavors are always better than a single wonder crop. Our greatest fear is that legalizing hemp will only benefit the rich at the expense of the poor and of the Earth.

This article is reprinted with permission from Appalachian Alternatives, autumn 1997.

Resource organizations for sustainable agriculture

Here are some organizations we found as we researched information for this issue of the newsletter. Each offers unique services in support of sustainable agriculture.

Appalachian Science in the Public Interest

Al Fritsch, Executive Director
50 Lair Street
Mt. Vernon, KY 40456
(606) 256-0077
web site: <http://www.kih.net/aspi>

Resources: special topic internships, technical library, solar and agricultural demonstration center, nature trails, Appalachian Sustainable Forestry Center, nature center, environmental assessments for non-profit organizations

Lightstone Foundation

Norma Propft
HC 63, Box 73
Moyers, WV 26815-9502
(304) 249-5200
e-mail: lfi@access.mountain.net

Resources: organic certifications and farming, logging with horses (Bob Brhel), welfare to work in specific areas of WV

Appalachian Sustainable Development

Anthony Flaccavento, Executive Director
Sharon Ewing, Community Outreach Coordinator
India Watkins, Farm Management
PO Box 791
Abingdon, VA 24212
(540) 623-1121
e-mail: asd@naxs.net

Resources: sustainable forestry, eco-tourism, community kitchens

Rural Heritage

Gail Damerow
281 Dean Ridge Lane
Gainesboro, TN 38562-5039
(931) 268-0655
web site: www.ruralheritage.com

Resources: information on farming and logging with draft animals, *Rural Heritage* magazine, seminars, mail-order publications

Kellogg funds LDP redesign

Funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation will make it possible for Brushy Fork Institute staff to review and redesign elements of the Leadership Development Program. In January, the foundation awarded Brushy Fork a \$45,000 grant.

In the summer of 1998, Brushy Fork staff and Brushy Fork Associates met to identify lessons that had been learned over the past ten years of the program. The group observed the following challenges to address:

- Participants often need more information about what is going on in their counties so they can design effective projects;
- Recruiting is extremely time consuming and doesn't always yield a large applicant pool with all the diversity we'd like to include on the team;
- It is difficult to recruit minority and low-income participants;
- Some groups fail in their projects, and participants feel bad about this even if they have had a significant learning opportunity;
- There is often significant attrition of team members attending the closing workshop;
- Some of the sessions originally designed for teams from counties in the region don't work as well for the Berea College teams which have been added to the program in recent years.

The funding from Kellogg will be used to address these issues in the 1999 cycle. Among strategies identified so far, Brushy Fork staff will hold additional recruitment meetings in the county, experiment with a "pre-workshop" session in the counties before the teams come to Berea, provide teams with additional technical assistance through two mid-term workshops instead of one, and redesign some workshop sessions to make them more inclusive of the Berea College teams.

If you would like to share your insights as a program participant or graduate, please feel free to call Brushy Fork. Our sincere gratitude goes to the Kellogg Foundation for making this redesign possible.

Appalachian Fund awards \$15,000

The Berea College Appalachian Fund has announced that it will provide \$15,000 in funding to Brushy Fork during 1999.

The funds will support the publication and distribution of *Mountain Promise*. The contribution also assists with the 1999 cycle of the Leadership Development program, Brushy Fork's work on the Berea College campus and involvement in collaborative networks throughout the region.

Our sincere appreciation goes to the staff and board of the Berea College Appalachian Fund.

Move planned for the fall

In late summer or early fall, staff at the Brushy Fork office will be packing bags and boxes for a move into new (to us) offices on the Berea College campus.

The Brushy Fork office will be housed in a common space with the Berea College Appalachian Center, *Appalachian Heritage* magazine, the Special Programs Office, various student service programs and a gallery of Appalachian artifacts.

The shared resources will strengthen each program and promote their activities on the Berea campus. Brushy Fork's phone numbers and mailing address are expected to stay the same. We'll keep you updated as the move develops!

1998 annual campaign

Brushy Fork kicked off its seventh annual campaign in the fall of 1998. Our appreciation goes to the following for their contribution to our programs.

Novella Chambers
John Cleveland
Bobbie Hauskins
Robert E. Hille
Carol Lamm
Bob Menefee
Francis E. Moravitz
Susan Sectorsky
Charolette Sweet
Molly Turner
John C. Willis
Help Us Help You of Morgan County, Kentucky



toolbox

On mentoring with grace

As a leader in your community, you may find yourself in the position of mentoring others. Leaders serve as mentors in many ways—as parents, teachers, friends, neighbors, co-workers or supervisors. How did the person who served as a mentor to you help you develop as a leader? This was a question posed at a recent meeting for mentors in the East Kentucky Leadership Network’s Youth Leadership Program. Their responses provide some pointers on mentoring with grace.

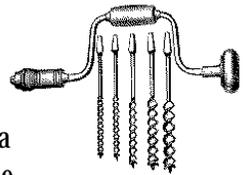
GUIDANCE



Taught me creativity . . . Instilled morals . . . Promoted education . . . He let me see his other side, outside work . . . Emotional support and guidance . . . Positive criticism . . . Taught me by example . . . Earned my respect

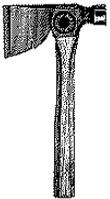
RESPONSIBILITY

Gave me responsibility . . . Put me in leadership roles . . . Appointed me to a position . . . Had high expectations of me . . . Tough love—made me toe the line



ASSISTANCE

Gave time generously . . . Helped me gain confidence through experience . . . Did things with me . . . Told me I could and showed me how

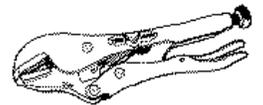


CONCRETE SKILLS

Got to practice . . . Got me into public speaking . . . Chores and skills . . . Helped me learn to organize, understand a problem and see what's needed . . . Gave the inside scoop, helped me learn the language

ENCOURAGEMENT

He believed I could do it . . . Patted me on the back . . . Said “You can do it!” . . . Planted the seed of confidence . . . Said “Don't give in; have courage and will power.” . . . Encouraged me to dream . . . Said “You can do better.”



HAPPY MENTORING!!



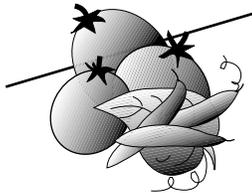
Heirlooms

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to educate the region's young people about the cultural, social, economic and scientific potential of the region's plant heritage.

There is much work to be done, and done quickly to maintain the plant varieties and strains which we are most in danger of losing. The educational task is a daunting one because the individuals needed to provide the education are few and far between and not well organized.

For "sustainable agriculture" to become a reality, we must return to our rootedness in the land. We must listen to those who have skills to teach us. We must observe those who have good attitudes toward "sustainability" and their life experiences to set examples for us. We must develop our skills in conserving the land, in growing plants, in food preparation, in food preservation, and in saving seeds. We must never allow ourselves to become dependent upon the good will of large corporations. Perhaps, we need most to return to traditional Appalachian values which underlie everything I have written about in this essay.



**Brushy Fork Institute
Berea College CPO 35
Berea, KY 40404
606 986-9341 ext. 6838**

Organic/conventional

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tells you these have fallen prematurely from worm rot. You can peel the whole bucket full and salvage a small bit.

Or you can carefully follow bulletins from agricultural experiment stations and harvest some sound fruit. You need not expect 100 percent success. But in my experience, I harvest apples that are so sound they have to be picked off by a firm pull.

Precaution is the watchword in using all pesticides. Whether in conventional or organic gardening, we deal with substances that merit careful handling and application.

East Kentucky Leadership Conference

The twelfth annual East Kentucky Leadership Conference will be held in Pikeville on April 23-24, 1999. Sponsored by the East Kentucky Leadership Foundation, the conference will take place at Pikeville College.

Conference sessions will include a Celebration of Women, hosted by East Kentucky Women in Leadership and East Kentucky Youth Flying Even Higher hosted by the East Kentucky Leadership Network. Other sessions will examine issues from education to agriculture to economic development.

For information on registration, contact Karen Harris or Sue Smallwood at (606) 437-5100.

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