



NEWS FROM PROVIDENT ORGANIC FARM



"Dedicated to a safe, just and sustainable food system."

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ALTERNATIVE AGRICULTURE ADDRESS

Laura asked me to speak to you tonight about alternative agriculture. As I thought about what I might say to you I realized that I don't believe there are any alternatives. I believe that humankind is at a critical juncture in our evolution and the time has come to re-develop a sustainable farming system that does not attempt to "feed the world", as some would have us believe our mission is, but enables the world to feed itself. A sustainable food system is not on a list of options from which we can make choices. It is an imperative.

The industrial agriculture model we call the most efficient food system in the world uses 8 calories of fossil fuel to deliver 1 calorie of food to the consumer. This can hardly be called a sustainable or efficient system. And has only been made possible because of cheap oil, poorly compensated farmers and distorted bookkeeping. We must work to develop food systems that rely on a regionally based network of farms producing all of the food needs for all the inhabitants, and not just those who can afford it

I would like you to consider a quote by Wm. McDonough, a systems designer and architect who gave the keynote address at the Pennsylvania Association of Sustainable Agriculture winter conference in 1999. He said, "Design is the first signal of human intention". The design of our systems is a reflection of our intent. I don't believe we intended to design a system of agriculture that pollutes our water, degrades our soil, enslaves our farmers and is incapable of feeding all of us. I do believe we are suffering from design failure and that failure is not the fault of well intentioned, hard working farmers but of farm policy designed to favor corporations.

We must ask ourselves some questions about what our food system has become.

Is there a connection between the epidemic of obesity and this country's fast food diet?

As we moved animals off pasture and medicated them to survive close confinement, is the overuse of antibiotics for them resulting in antibiotic resistance in bacteria that sicken humans?

When we genetically imbedded pesticides in our crops, were the long term health implications that affect humans considered or tested?

Our short term, profit driven thinking has disregarded the unintended consequences of our poor design.

Someone once said that farm bills should be called food bills because they affect all Americans, not just farmers. In a global marketplace, as we have now, the impact of U.S. farm policy is also felt worldwide.

Consider how farms receive public support. Farmers receive subsidies based on how many acres they farm and how many bushels they produce. When the price farmers receive falls below the cost of production, the subsidies cover the difference. This system creates an incentive to produce as much as possible causing surpluses that drive down prices and fuel the need for continued and ever increasing subsidies. This is a vicious cycle. The American taxpayer is funding a system that fuels the engine of commodity overproduction and farm expansion. The ramifications of this failure are felt locally and globally.

Consider these facts that have an impact on the local level:

In 1978, sociologist Walter Goldschmidt wrote a landmark study of agriculture's effects on economic and social conditions in neighboring communities. It found that communities surrounded by industrial farms display less economic development and more social problems than do rural communities set in the midst of small to medium sized family farms. Where do those costs get figured into the balance sheet?

Over 92% of all farmers rely on off-farm income, but we are looking for jobs that are no longer here and in many cases going elsewhere to seek employment. The Agriculture Department's Economic Research Service, in a report last year, showed a correlation between counties that received the highest crop subsidies and those that suffered the most rapid population decline.

Two-thirds of the nation's farmers receive little or no benefit from farm programs because they produce "non program" foods like fruits, vegetables, meat and hay. More than 78% of subsidies funnel to 8% of the nation's producers.

Over 400,000 farms have either gone out of business or been consolidated into larger operations since 1978.

IN YOUR SHARE
German Butterball potatoes
Valley Girl tomatoes
Cucumbers
Zucchini
Japanese and/or Classic Italian eggplant??
Bright Lights swiss chard
Italian Bull's Horn peppers
(sweet, good for salads or roasting)
Garlic (cured)
Yellow Wax or Italian Flat beans
Sweet Corn (grown by Ted Wycall)

if you do not pick up your share for 3 consecutive weeks without explanation, we will discontinue packing a share for you until we hear from you.