



## Enough is enough

by Robin Mitterthal

One classic definition of insanity involves doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. A twice-divorced friend of mine who recently married again seems insane in this way.

So, unfortunately, do most economists, policy-makers and pundits, who think the economy can -- must! -- grow forever. Whenever recession looms, as it does now, these folks seem to think the answer is for us all to make, buy and sell each other more stuff.

What's the problem with growth? There are several, not the least of which is the gradual transformation of our country into a coast-to-coast strip mall. In the long run, though, the biggest problem is simply that we've already bought, sold and buried in landfills an awful lot of the material goodies Earth has to offer.

The closer one looks at where we're getting the resources to grow with, the more the idea of perpetual economic growth starts to smell like yesterday's diapers. To get gold, copper and even common metals like iron and aluminum, we're mining ores today that companies 50 years ago ignored as inferior. In many cases we're so desperate for metal that we're actually mining the waste from ores previously mined.

Similarly, in Alberta, Canada, petrochemical companies have built giant facilities to produce oil from thick, tarry gunk that's bound to sand under much of the province. Short of liquefying coal, there's no less efficient source of oil. But oil is now valuable enough to justify the enormous expense.

Metals and oil are nonrenewable resources, but the picture is pretty much the same for resources that theoretically replace themselves. Between timber harvesting and agriculture combined, some scientists estimate that we now consume more than 40 percent of the earth's "net primary productivity," the total amount of energy accumulated by all plants everywhere. You might think that's OK -- 100 minus 40 leaves 60, after all. But the natural systems on which we depend for clean water and air and other useful perks seem to need just about all of that 60 percent to keep going. That's especially true as those systems are stressed by climate change, pollution and just plain abuse.

Economists have long answered this sort of argument by pointing to "resource substitution" -- the idea that scarce metals, for example, can be replaced in many situations with high-tech plastics. They also argue that we're good at figuring out how to use resources more efficiently, making cars and electronics and other doodads with less metal and plastic and whatnot than a generation ago. In general, they seem sure that our big brains will keep coming up with solutions when we need them.

Those things are all true at some level -- we're clever enough that many manufactured goods have been getting cheaper for years -- but sky-high oil and gas prices now make these claims seem increasingly hollow. There are no substitutes at all for products like nitrogen fertilizer, which can't be made on a large scale without natural gas and is now 30 percent more expensive than it was in 2000. Plastics, themselves the "cheap" substitute, now cost more for the same reason.

So what might our economy look like if it weren't based on more, more, more? It's hard to say, but a cornerstone of it would necessarily be the concept of "enough," as in "I have enough possessions" or "I have a large enough house."

This would be a profound shift for most of us. Some of us would have to be pushed there, perhaps by a Scandinavian-style system where the tax rate for the wealthiest was closer to 70 percent than 35 percent. But others of us might be attracted to this, maybe by the more-or-less guaranteed access to food, shelter, medical care, child care and education that the same Scandinavian system provides.

Would such an economy provide enough jobs for everyone? It doesn't seem that far-fetched. For starters, providing quality health care, child care and education to everyone would keep a lot of us busy. So would generating clean power, designing and manufacturing products that were really intended to be reused and recycled, and then actually reusing or recycling them as if our lives depended on it.

After all, eventually they will.

**Robin Mitterthal** has worked on farms, taught high school biology and now pursues a doctorate in entomology at the University of Wisconsin. He wrote this comment for the Land Institute's Prairie Writers Circle, Salina, Kan

### LEWES/REHOBOTH PICK-UP

Ted wanted you all to know that the last day of the Rehoboth Farmers' Market and Pick up will be October 14th. Beyond that day, as was agreed upon at the beginning of the season, it is the responsibility of the members to pick up their shares elsewhere. We welcome members to pick up Tuesdays at Salisbury's Asbury Church 4-6pm, Greenbranch Farm 3-6pm (located 1 mile from Rt. 13 bypass in Salisbury), or Fridays at the Berlin Farmers Market 10am-3pm. If none of these times will work for a pick-up, other arrangements can be made. Please let me know where and how you will be picking up your shares at [aliebman@comcast.net](mailto:aliebman@comcast.net).

Also, all newsletters are on our website. If for some reason they don't make it to the pick up site or you forget to get one, go to our website at [www.providentfarm.com](http://www.providentfarm.com).

Thanks, Amy

## In Your Share This Week:

### Surprise!

#### Spicy Kale

2 side dish servings

1 bunch	kale
1	onion (medium size)
2 cloves	garlic
1 T	white wine vinegar
½ t	dried chili flakes
--	salt and black pepper to taste

Wash the kale and discard the stems. Chop kale leaves coarsely. Chop onion and garlic and sauté on low heat in a skillet until translucent (about 10 minutes). Add dried chili flakes and stir for one minute. Add kale and cover for a few minutes until leaves begin to wilt. Add vinegar and stir for 2-3 minutes. Add salt and pepper and let cook for another 2 minutes.

### ATTENTION ALL CSA MEMBERS!

We're looking for volunteers to:

- 1) Coordinate a pumpkin party for the afternoon of 10/18 at Ted's farm. This will involve getting fall/Halloween crafts and activities together for the kids. Ted will have organic pumpkins for sale for CSA members to purchase.
- 1) Organize and coordinate the end of year pot luck. The date is **November 23**.

Please let me know – [aliebman@comcast.net](mailto:aliebman@comcast.net) or 410.860.9850

Thanks, Amy