

Things needed to rejuvenate rural America

An article that I read in the Land Magazine last year stated that the average food item on most Americans dinner plates travel 1518 mile to get there. The article quoted a 1998 Iowa State University research study. The study showed that that same food would have traveled only 1245 miles or 22% less mile in 1991. So the amount of energy to truck all that food around is growing each year.

It always amazes those of us in the sustainable, local foods movement that all that food can be trucked and shipped all those mile and then be sold in our super markets at a lower price that we can produce those same items for. How is that possible? Hint; it has very little to do with the scale of economics.

In 2005 my family of four spent \$3,600.00 on food. Now that number is probably not a realistic number for the average central MN family because we eat out seldom an our farm furnishes us with most of our meat, potatoes, eggs, milk and a smattering of other fruits and vegetables, but it is what we spent so we will use that number for my illustration on the value of buying local.

My town of Sauk Centre is populated by a little over 3000 people, so I will use that number to make my point on the value of locally produced foods and products to the local economy.

$3000 \times \$3600 = \$10,800,000$ that is 10 million 8 hundred dollars spent by the people of Sauk Centre on food. Hard to believe that there is that much money being spent by the local populace on just food and that number is very conservative. Most of that money is spent at the nearby supermarkets that get most of the food stuff from out of state. You would almost think that MN grown is poison by Supermarket standards, just needs to travel around a bit to give a little extra something. Wonder what that something is? something for who? I doubt that it is trucked around to enhance the flavor. Just think of the benefits to the local rural communities if that 10 million stayed here and circulated around the community. Just think of the benefits to the environment if all of that diesel was not being burned just to move food around.

Environmental degradation, especially the CO₂ emissions which are connected to global warming, are a major concern these days. A recent National Geographic article (I think Oct. 07 issue) on the carbon crises and the dangers we are likely to face if our carbon emissions are not controlled now, not soon, but now, is a good example about the rising awareness of the problem. This according to this article is not a sooner or later thing anymore, it is a now thing. By the way the author of the article was not real high on corn ethanol as the answer. He gives the impression that corn ethanol is a loser's game requiring more carbon emitting fossil fuel than it displaces.

How does it, (ethanol) affect those of us in the sustainable local foods market? Ethanol drives up feed prices and land prices making startup local food production out of reach for most beginners. We just can not compete with government subsidized corn and government subsidized ethanol for land. Ethanol is a numbers game. The more acres you have the more you gain. It is a get big or get out game at an accelerated rate. I have a neighbor with a nice piece of land next to but not adjacent to Sauk Lake with three artesian wells on it which flow into Sauk Lake. I can not compete with a local big farmer with his government subsidized big equipment and take that land out of the corn, soy rotation with its runoff and erosion problems and turn it into a lush pastureland grazing high quality dairy beef on it that would have next to nil runoff problems. An example of what that is like is after that 4" plus rain we had late this summer, my pond that got runoff from my neighbor's corn field was muddy brown in color while the pond in my south pasture had water so clear I had the impulse to bend over and take a drink.

How can you help promote a cleaner more ecological way of farming?

You need to make rules and regulations that give us in the local sustainable foods movement an unfair advantage. I am not asking for a level playing field, the time for that is past, we now need an unfair advantage over the big corporate farmers and their corporate supporters that have been feeding off the governmental programs way too long.

You need to remove roadblocks to youngest and brightest young entrepreneurs that have been set up and have been taken advantage of by the big corporations that control our food supply. One such example is the milk marketing order, for Pride of Main dairy, it serves no purpose and cost them many dollars just to be able to bottle and sell milk and yet they must pay into it. They can not come directly to my farm and pick up milk without going through a milk handler and paying into the milk marketing order. That little paper trail raises the price of the milk they need from \$22 to around \$26 and now they still need to bottle it and get it to the grocer's shelf. This is on the conventional side of the business. The organic side has many of the same issues. This makes it really difficult for POM to break into the existing markets. This does not take into account that the big corporate guys buy the shelves for the big and small supermarkets and control what can be put on the shelf and where on that shelf it will be displayed. We need a better than level playing field if you have any interest in revitalizing rural America.

A big problem for Whole Farm Coop has been the institutional bureaucrat; we have many times been approached by individuals that have wanted good sustainable high quality foods brought into nursing homes and hospitals, schools and other like institutions only to be thwarted by the bureaucratic red tape and big corporate food handlers that control that market. They have a sort of monopoly on those institutions and are very controlling in what is allowed into them. They are legally and financially ahead of the game. Looks to me like a bioterrorist dream come true, all food centralized and coming from one source. We can help keep America safe, just give us an unfair advantage and let our model of people working together for the common good grow, so that other communities can copy

and use this model to better America.

The inspection system USDA controlled. If I want to add value to the gizzards from my chickens by pickling them and selling them through WFC there is an expensive routine to be followed which is only doable if you are a big corporate conglomerate. I looked into it last year and was quickly advised to forget it. The gizzards are still in my freezer. The expense of pickling a few jars and the set up required for doing so was prohibitive. Why? It is not likely that a bad batch of gizzards would kill off a whole town as would a bioterrorist attack might on a centralized food handler even as that handler is being inspected and anything made in my kitchen I would probably sample to make sure that it was delight for my customers. I don't know of a governmental agency that knows what is right for every individual, then why are they so suffocatingly restrictive. If you really are here to help revitalize rural America than I would suggest getting the latest book written by Joel Salatin [Everything I want to do is illegal, war stories from the local food front](#). In it describes his long struggle with his states over zealous food regulators.

The next generation, what will there world be like? We at the Whole Farm Coop are trying to create and nurture a grassroots movement that will add and not detract from the air we breathe, the water we drink, the soil that grows our food, our environment. If the article from National Geographic is on the money, than we have no time to loose and need all the support we can get. We need an unfair advantage. We need you, the customer supporters of the WFC. You are our unfair advantage. As the new farm bill shows, we can not expect anything but token help from the government. This will be and has to be a grass roots fight to save America. A fight that builds communities of folk across the nations who care about the next generation, believe that there will be another generation, believe that we can save the earth from the dedegration of big corporate business. If you get and read the book mentioned above by Joel Salatin you will become very knowledgeable about what we are up against. This fight, we fight and must fight will not be an easy one. There is much money and greed stacked against us. Your support means everything to us.

Thank you much! Thank you so very much.