

**Food and Ethics: Sustained Ethical Eating**

**For the Greenfield Group, Spring 2008**

**By Joel Miller**

## Introduction

After losing over 75 pounds in a few sudden weeks 4 years ago, I discovered that I inherited a genetic condition called “Celiac Sprue.” As a “celiac” I have a strong immune response to a protein found in the grains wheat, rye, barley, and the odd kamut and spelt. The offending protein, customarily called “gluten”, causes a severe immune response in me and disables my digestive tract. I lost 75 pounds because I was malnourished.

The “cure” for a Celiac is technically simple but requires a huge change in lifestyle: don’t consume gluten. But gluten is not simply in bread or noodles – avoiding gluten required me to learn food chemistry: wheat is processed into omni-present chemicals like “modified food starch,” and wheat is often put into food-processing equipment later used to process non-gluten foods.

So for the first few months my available menu of “gluten-free” foods was sparse: rice crackers, tofu, fresh vegetables and fruits, fresh meats (but not sausages), eggs. It was bland and boring – I continued to lose weight because rice crackers and salad, while healthy foods, really are a dreary diet.

But after two months and some research, I discovered gluten-free pizza crusts, cheeses, herbs, and even pepperoni. When these ingredients

arrived by various delivery services, I took an afternoon off and made myself a pizza. I'll never forget the first bite – the old, familiar tastes and textures and the sensual joys of eating. I literally cried, tears on my face as I chewed.

I have learned a wonderful spiritual lesson from being a Celiac: I find myself constantly grateful for the food I eat, overriding the cultural message surrounding us, shrieking at us to consume without thinking.

The everyday ethics of eating erupted into my consciousness as an immediate issue of life and death (my grandmother died from the complications of having celiac sprue). After a lifetime when eating both nourished and poisoned me, I was finally forced into a different relationship with my food, my body, and this earth. As change looms with forceful change for us humans, I am searching with my community of colleagues for a practice of eating, a way to become more deeply a Unitarian Universalist while nourishing myself. My primary and only spiritual identity is as a Unitarian Universalist, so I'm basing my proposal for a shared UU practice of ethical eating on what I know as a UU.

We live in this interconnected web of being, so a lived ethic of eating is inseparable from spiritual practice. But a lived ethical and spiritual practice is very difficult to sustain against economic challenges to survival.

So I begin my thought-journey to a practice of ethical eating first through a reflection on sustainability in the economic sense: what economic limits and necessities will limit any practice we might establish? After economics, I briefly address the obligatory obeisance to the primacy of the individual, and then, as I reflect on the spiritual issues of eating meat, consider our obligations as we are nourished by and are part of the web of existence.

### **The Economics of Ethical Eating – Ought We be “Localvores?”:**

An environmental activist coined the word “locavore” as a way of describing a person who eats only food produced within a 100 mile radius from their home.<sup>1</sup> I prefer a slightly different term: localvore. I am both compelled by and wary of the localvorism that Barbara Kingsolver proposes in her recent book, *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral*. I initially felt as her oldest daughter did when Kingsolver proposed her localvore food project: this localvorism would be a sacrifice of access to fresh fruits and veggies in the winter. Kingsolver gets around this sense of deprivation with some creative and thoughtful planning, but there are larger economic issues she fails to address.

---

<sup>1</sup> Burros, Marian, Preserving Fossil Fuels and Nearby Farmland by Eating Locally, in the *New York Times*, April 25, 2007.

The economic complexity of ethical eating reveals the complexity of contemporary life. So, for example, most people in the world live in cities (more than half, now, according to recent news reports). Nearly all Americans live in cities. The size of many of these cities simply requires an agricultural base way bigger than the term “local” can cover. In the history of cities and technology, the rise of large cities was concurrent with the growth of technologies that allow agricultural products to be shipped with some economic efficiency. The largest cities through most of human history were quite small compared to even a modest city in this post-modern world – and the 10 million people of New York City would quickly starve or else starve all the other nearby cities if its citizens had to eat locally.

But even feeding large cities with our current practices grows difficult: we humans grow too numerous for the earth to feed us.<sup>2</sup>

A transition lies ahead of us: populations continue to grow, but the 20<sup>th</sup> Century’s growth in agricultural yields have gone flat and technology now proves itself an unreliable way for humanity to borrow from the future to feed the present.<sup>3</sup> Yet, if we were to instantly return to being localvores in the way of our great-grandparents, the human population would have to

---

<sup>2</sup>Pimentel, David, and Pimentel, Marcia, Population Growth, Environmental Resources, and the Global Availability of Food, in the journal *Social Research*, March 22, 1999

<sup>3</sup>Brown, Lester R, Can we raise grain yields fast enough? in *World Watch*, July 1, 1997

decline precipitously. There are several reasons we cannot make a sudden change: much of the world currently shifts agricultural production to different regions based on weather patterns and political upheavals; large cities simply can't be local; the intensive production done by a few to feed many also requires an ability to ship across distances. And the level of current agricultural production is heavily dependent on oil-powered technologies.<sup>4</sup>

Kingsolver's localvorism is gentle, but harsher versions of the localvorist trend are the survivalist dreams we heard about as the calendar rolled-over into a new millennial digit eight years ago: the dream of becoming hunter-gatherers again, living off the land like nomads. Such a dream is folly for humanity, however: the earth currently sustains us through agriculture, which is far more productive per acre than hunting. As an economic plan, the Survivalist vision sustained in human history perhaps a few as 50 million people. The global change we face if we would live as hunter-gatherers would require a massive relocation of about 6 billion of us to some other planet... or require that about 119 out of 120 of us die, and quickly, too.

---

<sup>4</sup>Pimentel, David, and Pimentel, Marcia, Population Growth, Environmental Resources, and the Global Availability of Food, in the journal *Social Research*, March 22, 1999

As oil reaches it's highest cost ever (even with inflation is taken into account), now over \$100 a barrel, the cost of fertilizer (made from oil) increases as well. The economics of intensive industrial farming is going to change, and the economics of a global economy will change, too, as shipping costs rise and per-acre yields remain flat. Living as localvores may become attractive out of sheer economic necessity.

On the one hand, I am wary that localvorism would become an ideology, a meta-method rather than the personally-lived ethos Barbara Kingsolver describes in her book. I dread a localvorism that mutates into an ideology, morphs into a new "command" for our economy, overrides local relationships as the priority of a spiritual ideology overrides all considerations of the local marketplace.

We have, in our own religious history at Unitarians, some prior experience with the problems presented by imposing any sort of distant structure onto local relationships: our Separatist spiritual ancestors in Plymouth struggled during their first years of farming, failing to grow enough food to survive.<sup>5</sup> It's important to note that for their first two growing seasons they operated as a single farm belonging to the corporation that funded their emmigration.

---

<sup>5</sup>Philbrick, Nathaniel, *Mayflower*, Viking, New York, 2006. p. 165

William Bradford, as governor of Plymouth Plantation, realized after two years that the settlers of the colony were not successfully feeding themselves because they were not about to put their heart and souls into more profits for distant London investors. So in their third year, he granted each family their own plot of land for their own sustenance. The localized system worked – and the colony was thereafter able to feed itself.<sup>6</sup>

There is an astounding historical revisionism at work in contemporary historical commentaries on the Pilgrims: in truth, the original system was a corporate “plantation” and the land was, in European practice, “owned” by the company of investors (none of them Pilgrims) that obtained the patent (license) for the settlement in the first place. When Bradford, concerned that the colony wasn’t able to feed itself, ordered a change, the colony adopted sustainable production practices that he felt he could justify to his overseas shareholders. Present-day revisionists claim that the Pilgrims were trying out some kind of “socialism” (which today’s historical revisionists forget hadn’t even been invented yet). It was never a “socialist” experiment, but a change from the requirement requiring the colonists to produce food only for the “common” stores, which, being under the rule of English law, were owned

---

<sup>6</sup> *Of Plimouth Plantation*, Bradford, William, p. 233-234 of the 1898 edition printed by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, digitized by Ted Hildebrandt, March, 2002 @ [http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/Ted\\_Hildebrandt/NEReligiousHistory/Bradford-Plimoth/Bradford-PlymouthPlantation.pdf](http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/Ted_Hildebrandt/NEReligiousHistory/Bradford-Plimoth/Bradford-PlymouthPlantation.pdf)

by the investors and holders of the colony's license.<sup>7</sup> Survival was the reason that our Separatist Pilgrim ancestors adopted an economy like the localism we are now considering.

Today our struggle is just as acute, with distant economic decisions made by profit-seekers who have no obligation for distant consequences of their decisions;<sup>8</sup> and in current economic practices, morality and business operate as separate realms.<sup>9</sup> How can we bring the two back into a workable relationship? It's not so easy. There are severe long-term costs that result from imposed non-economic restrictions on economic activities. And in an era when economic power is wielded as a weapon just as routinely as troops and espionage, it's very difficult to keep economic behavior within bounds of healthy and sustainable moral principles.

The challenge in creating a spiritual practice of eating begins with the issue of economic decisions -- they precede spiritual questions on food and

---

<sup>7</sup> *Of Plimouth Plantation*, Bradford, William, p. 58 of the 1898 edition printed by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, digitized by Ted Hildebrandt, March, 2002 @ [http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/Ted\\_Hildebrandt/NEReligiousHistory/Bradford-Plimoth/Bradford-PlymouthPlantation.pdf](http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/Ted_Hildebrandt/NEReligiousHistory/Bradford-Plimoth/Bradford-PlymouthPlantation.pdf). Plymouth is remembered for its religious questing... but to read Bradford's account one cannot ignore that this story came about as a business venture.

<sup>8</sup> Berry, Wendell, *The Idea of a Local Economy*, in *Food and Faith*, edited by Schut, Michael, published by Living the Good News, Denver, 2006. P. 125. Wendell Berry, I confess, gives me the creeps even as he succinctly and brilliantly convicts our so-called "free market" of not being at all free. He quotes a writer with his alternative to the system he convicts: "...Each member of the community should perform the task for which he is fitted by nature...." I'm too much a Transcendentalist to surrender to Marx's ideology.

<sup>9</sup> As Frances Moore Lappe points out in *Food, Farming, and Democracy* on p. 151.

ethics. Starving people will quickly set aside spiritual concerns in order to obtain food. How can we come to a spiritual practice that is sustainable through hard times?

Current Economic practice in our global agricultural system functions aggressively with a short-term-outlook – and in the long-run, is completely unsustainable as evaluated either economically or biologically. Our current system of production has put humanity and the world in grave jeopardy: with no structural way to account for long-term costs to the environment and a system of production that cannot be sustained as oil reserves are depleted, the next generation of Unitarian Universalists will eventually confront a profound shift in the experience of eating.<sup>10</sup>

What is the relationship between ethic and survival? As a spiritual policy imposed over the economic structures of a market, I have to argue against even Kingsolver's gentle localvorism. Experience shows inevitable and severe problems in a market dominated by an idealized spiritual agenda. I think spiritual agendas must be imposed with great caution, since the distortions such impositions cause cannot be fully predicted, yet are certain to cause significant inefficiencies – and given the changes coming our way, such inefficiencies would be very unpleasant, and probably not even close to

---

<sup>10</sup>The citations for this could be numerous, but there's Lappé, already cited, and my footnotes citing Pimentel and Brown could cover this, too.

economically sustainable. I am not arguing against giving our spiritual goals precedence over economic ones, necessarily. There are some spiritual agendas that are sustainably imposed on markets: the spiritual practice of justice lead to laws allowing bankruptcy forgiveness for those folks with really bad luck or just a lot of plain stupidity; many western nations have a mandatory “insurance” and “retirement” program to ensure a minimal standard of living for the elderly via social security.

Given my previous concerns, I also believe the seeds of a change to sustainability are carried in Kingsolver’s gentle thinking. There is no question that we’ll be making an inevitable response to the changes brought by rising energy and environmental costs. Our children face the inevitable accounting for the long-term costs of our behaviors on the environments around us, as well. As we adapt, we will, no doubt, find ourselves forced to practice some kind of localvorism. We are, I believe, obliged to plan a response for our people.

Our own spiritual principles and history offer an ethic for the kind of markets that could be sustainable: markets of actual relationships between people, markets that clearly respond to local conditions yet markets that can, if the expense is justified in a sensible context, make a global reach, as well. Actual relationships will literally and figuratively ground market conditions

– not ideologies. Conversely, distant market-forces must not have the right to override local practices that affirm the fragile web of local culture, economics, and environmental sustainability. The Pilgrims let themselves be used for a venture-capital project to escape violence and oppression – we, however, will not have this choice: we won't be colonizing another land. So when distant market-forces come to us with their customary violence, overriding our local systems, we will need a spiritual and ethical practice that will give us courage and endurance.

### **Unitarian Universalism and The Personal Economics of Ethical Eating:**

The spirituality and ethics of eating are quite complex, and clearly it will take an overwhelming personal investment for every individual Unitarian Universalist to adopt a personal Ethic of Eating.

I serve an urban congregation. I see the struggles of those people in my congregation who have fewer economic resources, and it's obvious to me every day that these members of my church sacrifice a great deal of personal resources just to show up on Sunday morning. They go to extraordinary efforts to keep their spiritual practice alive while working two or even three jobs and looking after their children. Their lives are testament

that spirituality is not a luxury, but a psychic necessity. Even so, some of the people I serve simply don't have time to read Kingsolver, Pollan, Lappé, etc., and then build their own practice of ethical eating from scratch.

So failing to offer ready-to-use models of healthy and balanced spiritual practice for everyday life appears to this urban minister to be immoral. Many of my people would gratefully accept a simple, right-now-workable model for eating well. They would receive it not only so that their spiritual lives can be well-lived in the daily struggle just to survive, but also because their nutritional practices, like so many lower-income folks in American cities, often are poor. Like Buffalo's Black churches, our models of ethical eating could also shape daily eating practices to our people who must struggle so hard with daily survival – and even take shape as actual investments by the religious community.<sup>11</sup>

### **Spirituality and Food Ethics: Soul, Sight, Experience**

The call to eat in good spirit begins with my memory of crying for joy at eating a pizza or when I have had to look my meal in the eyes.

---

<sup>11</sup> Christmann, Samantha Maziarz, Inner-city churches attempt economic development, in the *Buffalo News*, March 23, 2008.

I take my son every Summer on a camping trip to the wildest places I can. One Summer morning, camped beside a large lake in Northern Ontario, my then 11-year old son woke up early, took out our fishing gear, and dropped a hook into the water. He caught a fish. He woke me, in surprise and panic: “What should I do now?” he asked.

“Eat it,” I answered. And I struck the flailing fish’s head, and we watched as the life drained from the fish’s eyes. My thoughtful child nearly cried. Still, we gutted, cooked and ate that morning with a very different sense of what it means to be alive and to be nourished by this world. The fish’s body was delicious in a profoundly immediate way.

So many city-folks have don’t even know where their food comes from – or seem to think their chicken was manufactured from oil and was set on a shop-shelf shrink-wrapped just a few days after being boiled-up in vats. I’m not being at all facetious here: members of my urban congregation work every day with children who are disgusted by the idea of eating a carrot that actually “came out of dirt!”<sup>12</sup>

The practice of gratitude and mindfulness is hard for me: during the first few years of my ministry (almost 20 years ago), I was often shocked at

---

<sup>12</sup> The director of Buffalo’s *Massachusetts Avenue Project*, Diane Picard, oversees a program that introduces urban children to farming and growing food – I am referring to conversations I have had with Diane about this.

how quickly so many UUs dismissed any experience of animals as inconsequential – or even dismissed the possibility of animals having experience – animals were simple “machines”, nothing more. Factory-farming justified treating animals thoughtlessly because the ideology of Logical Positivism dictates that animals simply don’t register experience, but respond only mechanistically to environmental stimuli.<sup>13</sup> Our colleague, Gary Kowalski, wrote eloquently against this ideology, describing experiences and consciousness of our animal neighbors.<sup>14</sup> Temple Grandin writes about her work in slaughterhouses, work guided by an assumption that animals have a lower order of consciousness.<sup>15</sup> I conclude that the practical success of Grandin’s work disproves the ideology that animals are mechanisms without consciousness. Really, all it takes in my human experience is mindfulness -- to be awake (in the Buddhist sense) to see that animals are obviously conscious, albeit at a lower order of consciousness than the typical human.

---

<sup>13</sup>Burgos, José E., Realism About Behavior, in *Behavior and Philosophy* January 1, 2004: this article, while ultimately supporting “realism”, also argues against the dismissal of internal phenomenon of behavior in 20<sup>th</sup> Century behavioral Sciences. Among UUs I debated, I found that the living practice of Logical Positivism justified a complete negation of concern for the experiences of animals – since they had no experience, it was impossible for animals to suffer in the first place.

<sup>14</sup> Kowalski, Gary, *The Souls of Animals*, Stillpoint Publishing, Walpole, NH, 1999.

<sup>15</sup> Grandin, Temple, and Johnson, Catherine, *Animals in Translation*, Simon and Schuster, NY, 2005.

Michael Pollan, in his book *Omnivore's Dilemma*, presents a chapter on the conditions in which our culture currently raises animals for consumption.<sup>16</sup> It is the horror of some of these conditions, conditions created without regard for the experience of the animals or the humans that kill them, that connect me personally to Barbara Kingsolver's writing and effort to be a localvore. I feel we are obliged to look dinner in the eye – and be a bit more thoughtful about the life we consume through our teeth.

I eat meat. I take nourishment from the bodies of animals (my home-cooked meals are usually organic, locally produced, and killed – they promise me! -- with some compassion). My experience of existence itself is that there is “soul” in everything. Thus my respect for my dinner doesn't require first that it have eyes. I find that process theology is that final spiritual push into a different way of thinking about the spiritual ethics of eating: some process-theologians have suggested that consciousness is not limited to animals, but is a condition of matter itself.<sup>17</sup> This is my intuitive

---

<sup>16</sup> Pollan, Michael, *Omnivore's Dilemma*, Penguin, NY, 2006; chapters 12 and 17.

<sup>17</sup> Dorrien, Gary, *American Liberal Theology: Crisis, Irony, Decline, Renewal, Ambiguity*, article found the journal *Cross Currents*, issue of January 1, 2006. This article has a nice, short history of Process Theology in the U.S. The pan-consciousness I take on faith isn't presented as a historical statement of Process Theologians, but it is implied, which so often seems to be the approach of Process Theologians as I've read them. Consciousness of matter, even at a very low level of complexity, is implied rather than presented as factual, probably because it's scientifically untenable. On the face of it, I find the idea of “pan-consciousness” far more logical and believable than the classic mind/body dualisms of most of the other Western systems of thinking.

assumption about the nature of existence, and so I try to act with an awareness and respect for all of the web of existence, rather than strike an arbitrary boundary of consciousness (ie: conscious entities gotta have eyes) that frees me to act mindlessly upon all the rest. Consciousness is a continuum of universal experience. To affirm the web of life, I think we must admit that even plants have some consciousness of what we do to them.

Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, in his article Does God Care What We Eat?, writes about animals as “bereft of a rational soul”, abiding by a hierarchy of value that can justify Jewish consumption of an animals’ body.<sup>18</sup> But this troubles me on several levels: in spiritual practice, I find my Transcendentalist and Universalist heritage calling me. Transcendentalism, in the words of the Seventh Principle, affirms the “interconnected web of existence” and the presence of soul in the way we live life. Universalism affirms life, a phrase signifying the fundamental root of our faith, implied in our First Principle. In my experience of our traditions, I arrive at a metaphysics that both life and soul dwell not in things, but in affirmative relationship:

soul is flowing life, the web itself,

---

<sup>18</sup>Brumberg-Kraus, Jonathan D., Does God Care What We Eat? from *Food and Judaism: A Special Issue of Studies in Jewish Civilization* Creighton University Press

its connections growing in complexity and affirmation,  
always changing, never a static thing.

So the possession of eyes seems too arbitrary a condition for granting ensoulment. Soul dwells in everything, as I see it... uh, as I experience it. This existence of dynamic ensoulment, created by and shared in connection and mutually affirming relation, means that no matter what I put into my mouth, I always have a spiritual obligation to remain in right relationship with all that I eat.

So I believe that vegetarianism is not inherently a better spiritual practice than being an omnivore. In my experience, even the plants are, in a very limited way, aware they give up some portion of life so I may live. I find it meaningless in my spiritual practice to specify in an ideological way what is “good” or “bad” to eat as a source of nourishment. Ideology requires that I use a hierarchy of value. But when I eat another being, it doesn’t matter if it has eyes, perhaps doesn’t even matter if my meal was ever alive. My spiritual practice requires judgment on *how* I eat – how my taking nourishment pushes and pulls on this web of existence I live in; how I take from other lives requires more from me than mindlessly opening a shrink-wrapped plastic package.

## **Ethical Eating:**

### **Establishing a Spiritual Practice for Unitarian Universalists**

I'm writing and just about to dash off and snarf-down another lunch... and wow: eating ethically is really difficult. It's harder than it was to learn to eat as a "Celiac" without poisoning myself. But with that inevitable global transition in agricultural production approaching sometime this century, we may as well prepare our communities to use that transition as a spiritual opportunity.

Our people need from their ministry a spiritual practice for eating – not, obviously, a "one-true" practice, but the offer of a shared practice evaluated, lived, ready and easy to adopt and adapt.

To begin this work, we need meta-criterion for a successful ethic for a collective Unitarian Universalist practice of eating, criterion that balance ethics in economic decisions and nurture our spirits and bodies. The meta-criterion: a simple set of core principles abstract enough to operate sustainably across time, cultural differences, different environments, and even different economic systems, yet promote creativity and diversity, especially during crises. To put it simply: the principles must support a spiritual practice that works under the economic stresses of survival.

**Core Principles:** Our Seventh Principle, combined with our First Principle, suggest a metaphysics which is very compatible with Process Theology, sustaining a practiced ethic judged in the context of life-affirming relationship. I propose 4 core principles of a UU practice – I’m only half-joking when I say we could use them to award a “Green Chalice” seal of approval to farmers, butchers, grocers, and restaurants:

- 1) Identity: Our thinking, our practices, our judgments grow from our Faith and Living Tradition.
- 2) Sustainable: Our relationships with future and past generations and with other forms of life would require us to establish an ethic and an economics that reliably turns us toward affirming both ourselves, our human and non-human neighbors, across both time as well as space.<sup>19</sup>
- 3) Life Affirming: Our relationships with each other and the other forms of life that give us nourishment require an ethic of “right relations” -- our relations must be mutually beneficial (as well as having that inevitable element of competition).<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Hogan, Linda, Department of the Interior, in *Wise Women: Over Two Thousand Years of Spiritual Writing by Women*, edited by Cahill, Susan Neunzig, W.W. Norton and Company, 1996. p. 275. Another source for the same point – Hogan’s a Chickasaw poet & novelist.

<sup>20</sup> Michael Pollan has an earlier book, *The Botany of Desire*, in which he points out that our relationship with nature is not all competition – to study evolution honestly, one must

- 4) Progressive: Our shared relationship with God calls us to continue our spiritually progressive journey of development without degrading the lower forms of life we depend upon or the forms of life we are becoming.<sup>21</sup>

**Linked With a Model for Personal Spiritual Practice:** This is a sketch of a model of personal spiritual practice for daily life as well as eating. It's a recurring cycle of five deeds: gratitude (the practices of thanksgiving and appreciative inquiry), truth (the practices of not lying and nurturing a reasoning community of peers), compassion (the practices of affirming and caring for self and others), dedication (commitment to a spiritual practice and to right relationship), and pilgrimage (what is that First Nobel Truth – all is dukkha? As in “Change happens” so let's not stay mired in it, but journey toward wholeness.).<sup>22</sup> Eating is such a profoundly intimate

---

acknowledge that evolution happens more because of cooperation and connection between species and individuals rather than the unjustified metaphysical assumption that all evolution, thus all existence, is competition. In addition, there are those two great Commandments Jesus commended to us, as well.

<sup>21</sup>Wilbur, Ken, *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality: The Spirit of Evolution*, Shambala Publications, Boston, 1995. Wilbur's work was a grounding for a holistic, non-dualistic philosophical/spiritual thinking; he argues eloquently for a non-reductionistic approach to how we value the web of relationships in which we live, allowing us to put the needs of a human above the needs of, say, a mouse or a worm, but without having to negate the inherent worth and dignity of those life-forms that have lower forms of complexity.

<sup>22</sup>Actually, this paragraph ought to be a paper all by itself, but I can't not mention my thinking about a model of personal spiritual practice as I propose an Ethic of Eating.

act<sup>23</sup> that all personal practice and corporate-congregational ethical systems must be meaningfully interrelated.

**Food Ethics in Action:** If we were really bold, we could propose an Association-wide program of congregations investing in farmland and building communal systems of sustainable food production along with co-housing, UU schools, and a host of other, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Separatist activities. But most Unitarian Universalists are doing well enough in the culture of consumption that they simply won't be motivated to make a pilgrimage into such wilderness living.

Yet our people need us to offer concrete suggestions. We could start small – Kingsolver felt satisfaction at not consuming corn-syrup during her localvore-year.<sup>24</sup> Maybe that could be the start for our folks: Eating Green (and winning that coveted Green Chalice sticker) by not eating corn-syrup or eating modified food starch for one year. We could recommend having Green community meals at least once a week at church. We could recommend always saying a meditation or prayer of gratitude before eating.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Moore, Thomas, *The Interiority of Food*, in *Food and Faith*, Schut, Michael, Living the Good News, Denver, 2006. P. 63.



<sup>24</sup> Kingsolver, Barbara, *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral*, Harper Collins, 2007. P. 342

<sup>25</sup> I intentionally avoided mention of things organic – that's a label so badly degraded that it no longer has much meaning (Burros, Marian, *Eating Well; U.S.D.A. Enters Debate On Organic Label Law*, *New York Times*, February 26, 2003) and the

We could also lobby in the larger community: current tax-laws promote the wrong-related economy of unsustainable agricultural production. All of our reading clearly points us back to locally-owned and operated farming – local relationships sustaining local environments. We could, as an Association, take a stand against corporate farming; not out of that reflexive and mindless anti-business ideology so many UUs indulge in, but because corporate farming cannot ever be sustainable (it’s too distanced) and is unlikely to be life-affirming.

Changes are coming. We will all, I imagine, shed tears for our food in the decades to come. Our people need a response, both in our corporate faith and individual. I hope I have offered a useful beginning for how we can respond.

---

expense is beyond the reach of poorer UUs. The Jewish tradition has its rabbinical inspectors and institutions to support kosher practices, and these are sustainable because there is a market of supply and demand for this label: . It’s also a system that can be separated from government interference. I know that a lot of us really hate the little chalice-smiley-faces in the hymnbook (I like them – I just think we should add little Stars of David, little crosses, etc. for other folks, too), but I think we could borrow success by copying Jewish Kashrut: . Maybe put a little “G” in it, or make it green? Maybe a smiley-face in place of the flame?